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Henrik Lagerlund  
*Editor*

# Encyclopedia of Medieval Philosophy

Philosophy between 500 and 1500

*Second Edition*

 Springer

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Editor

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Philosophy between 500 and 1500

Second Edition

With 10 Figures and 23 Tables

 Springer

*Editor*

Henrik Lagerlund  
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ISBN 978-94-024-1663-3      ISBN 978-94-024-1665-7 (eBook)  
ISBN 978-94-024-1664-0 (print and electronic bundle)  
<https://doi.org/10.1007/978-94-024-1665-7>

1st edition: © Springer Science+Business Media B.V., 2011

2nd edition: © Springer Nature B.V. 2020

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## Preface to the Second Edition

The second edition of the *Encyclopedia of Medieval Philosophy* is substantially revised and expanded from the first edition, which was published 10 years ago. It was already at that time the largest reference work on medieval philosophy in English (or for that matter any language as far as I know) and continues to be with almost 500 entries in the new edition. The expanded material foremost consists of new entries on lesser-known figures in medieval philosophy. In all other aspects the *Encyclopedia* is the same as the first edition and includes entries on philosophers, concepts, terms, historical periods, subjects, and the cultural context of philosophy in the Middle Ages. Furthermore, it covers Latin, Arabic, Jewish, and Byzantine philosophy and includes entries on the cross fertilization of these philosophical traditions.

A unique feature of the *Encyclopedia* is that it does not aim to define what medieval philosophy is. It simply aims to cover philosophy between the period 500 C.E. and 1500 C.E. It is my belief that there is nothing that is distinctly medieval about philosophy between these dates. Instead, philosophers and theologians worked (as in other times) with the historically given material that they had access to and formed their own answers to philosophical questions, some of which were as old as philosophy itself, while others had emerged in the thinker's own cultural context. Their answers were sometimes restricted by the culture and political atmosphere, and sometimes not. Some of these answers led to the development of new ways of thinking and conceptualizing the world, which were contrary to the traditional. This makes it possible to approach medieval philosophy without any preconceived idea of what philosophy is or was, which allows the inclusion of all the facets of medieval thinking that make up philosophy of the time.

A new feature is also that the *Encyclopedia* contains a table of contents, which allows the reader to get a fast overview of the contents. The entries in the *Encyclopedia* are organized in an A–Z format for easy access, as in the first edition. Each entry begins with an abstract and ends with references to related entries and a bibliography divided into primary and secondary sources. All authors are experts in their topic, and their entries have been read by at least one member of the editorial board to ensure the highest quality and standard of scholarship.

I have reconceived the editorial board slightly for the second edition and I would like to thank the old board for their invaluable contribution. The new board, which includes some members from the first edition, have been equally invaluable in finishing this new edition. The *Encyclopedia* is now online as

well and exists as a live reference work, which means that it is continuously updated and expanded. In that form, I hope it will live on for many more decades. I also need to thank the staff at Springer Reference for helping me and for working tirelessly to make this work such a good resource.

Stockholm  
June 2020

Henrik Lagerlund  
Editor

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## Preface to the First Edition

Although there are many handbooks, companions and histories, this is the first encyclopedia of medieval philosophy published in English. It is, therefore, with some excitement that I present it here to you, dear reader. The aim of this book is to provide scholars with an easy access reference work that gives accurate and trustworthy summaries of the present state of research. It includes entries on philosophers, concepts, terms, historical periods, subjects and the cultural context of philosophy in the Middle Ages. Furthermore, it covers Latin, Arabic, Jewish and Byzantine philosophy, and includes entries on the cross fertilization of these philosophical traditions.

As mentioned in the first edition, a unique feature of this encyclopedia is that it does not aim to define what medieval philosophy is. It simply aims to cover philosophy between the period 500 and 1500. It is my belief that there is nothing that is distinctly medieval about philosophy between these dates. Instead, philosophers and theologians worked (as in other times) with the historically given material that they had access to, and formed their own answers to philosophical questions; some of which were as old as philosophy itself, while others had emerged in the thinker's own cultural context. Their answers were sometimes restricted by the culture and political atmosphere, and sometimes not. Some of these answers led to the development of new ways of thinking and conceptualizing the world, which were contrary to the traditional.

Although the scope of this encyclopedia is, with over 400 entries, considerable, it is of course not exhaustive. Practical obstacles precluded the creation of the reference work that I had in mind, and I had to revise and downsize my aim several times. However, I am proud of the work and hope that it will be useful for many years to come. A dream is to develop it into a web-based internet encyclopedia, which will come closer to my idea of an ideal reference work. Despite this it is nonetheless the most exhaustive reference work on medieval philosophy available.

The entries in the encyclopedia are organized in an A-Z format for easy access. There are short entries of about 1500 words, medium entries of about 3000 words and survey entries of about 5000 words. Each entry begins with an abstract and ends with references to related entries and a bibliography divided into primary and secondary sources. All authors are experts in their topic, and their entries have been read by at least one member of the editorial board to ensure the highest quality and standard of scholarship.

As with all projects of this kind, it is really a team effort, and this encyclopedia would never have been completed on time without the editor and

editorial assistants at Springer Reference. They have done a wonderful job and I am truly grateful for their knowledge and patience. I also want to thank the editorial board, especially Cristina D'Ancona, John Marenbon, and Stephen McGrade, for doing a fantastic job much beyond the call of duty. I would also like to thank Eliza Benedetti and Alain Ducharme for helping with some of the translations and I would especially like to thank Alain Ducharme for helping with proof reading. The encyclopedia is, however, foremost a product of the individual authors that have contributed towards it. I would like to thank all of them for their invaluable support and input.

London, Ontario  
June 2010

Henrik Lagerlund

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**Henrik Lagerlund** is Professor of History of Philosophy at Stockholm University, Sweden. He works primarily on medieval and renaissance philosophy, and has written several articles and books including the recent *Skepticism in Philosophy: A Comprehensive, Historical Introduction* (Routledge, 2020). He is also the editor of *The Routledge Companion to Sixteenth Century Philosophy* (2017).

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# A

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## ‘Abd al-Laṭīf al-Baġdādī

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### Abstract

Between the eighth and the ninth centuries, the production of original philosophical and scientific treatises became dominant with respect to the study of Greek philosophical and scientific literature in Arabic translation. This is due to the contribution of translators and al-Kindī’s thought, as well as to the experience of the teachers in the tenth-century Aristotelian circle of Baghdad, mostly al-Fārābī. All these teachers had the intention to classify the sciences, to return to a literal commentary of the Aristotelian text following the Alexandrine model, and to single out the nature of *falsafa* and the Greek-Arabic sciences and their relationship with the Qur’anic sciences – an approach that extends from the end of the eleventh, throughout the twelfth, and up to the beginning of the thirteenth century. It is enough to mention Avicenna to get an idea of this development in the Arabic-Islamic philosophy and medicine of these centuries. The

claim has been made that this generated a sort of “purist” reaction (Gutas, Greek thought, Arabic culture. The Graeco-Arabic translation movement in Baghdad and early ‘Abbāsīd society (2nd–4th/8th–10th centuries). Routledge, London/New York, 1998), best exemplified by Averroes and his program of going back to Aristotle and the Greek tradition. Such a phenomenon took place not only in al-Andalus but also in the East of the Islamic world: Muwaffaq al-Dīn Muḥammad ‘Abd al-Laṭīf ibn Yūsuf al-Baġdādī would be the best representative of this current of thought.

‘Abd al-Laṭīf al-Baġdādī has been considered a pedantic scholar, whose approach to science and philosophy was scholastic and legalistic rather than experimental and creative. Nevertheless, the labels of “purist” and “compiler” are not suitable for describing the intellectual life of this writer. ‘Abd al-Laṭīf al-Baġdādī cannot be considered as a supporter of a sort of coming back to Aristotle or Galen *sic et simpliciter*. True, he claimed in his autobiography the necessity to go back to the Greek sources. Still, the reader must go beyond this claim and try to see what corresponds to it in the historical reality of ‘Abd al-Laṭīf al-Baġdādī’s sources. In doing so, the reader will realize that ‘Abd al-Laṭīf al-Baġdādī’s sources are by no means the Greek scientific and philosophical texts in themselves – too far from him – but those



produced by the assimilation of the Greek thought in Islamic culture, that have been reworked by ‘Abd al-Laṭīf al-Baġdādī not without originality.

We possess two coeval biographies of him. The first is embedded in Ibn Abī Uṣaybi‘a’s biographical work, the *Sources of Information on the Classes of Physicians* (*‘Uyūn al-anbā’ fī ṭabaqāt al-aṭibbā’*). The second is an autobiography, survived in a manuscript of Bursa and its title is *Book of Two Pieces of Advice* (*Kitāb al-Naṣīḥatayn*). Finally, further information on ‘Abd al-Laṭīf al-Baġdādī can be found in the report of his journey in Egypt entitled *Book of the Report and Account of the Things Which I Witnessed and the Events Seen in the Land of Egypt* (*Kitāb al-ifāda wa-l-‘tibār fi-l-‘umūr al-mushāhada wa-l-ḥawādīth al-mu‘ayana bi-‘ard miṣr*). From these (not wholly concordant) texts, some elements emerge, that shed light on ‘Abd al-Laṭīf al-Baġdādī’s activity and philosophical and scientific doctrines, between the Ayyūbids’ and Mameluks’s ages. ‘Abd al-Laṭīf al-Baġdādī’s activity was often characterized by violent controversies, as well as by the independence of his convictions, slowly matured but passionately put forward in his writings, and, finally, by his dedication to diverse fields of research. We can follow his purposes and interests, the paths of his education – thanks to the names of the schools, of his teachers, of the travels done – the library he had at his disposal, his encyclopedic work on medicine and philosophy, and his attitude towards both the ancient philosophers and his contemporaries.

‘Abd al-Laṭīf al-Baġdādī was born in Baghdad in 1162 and died there in 1231, after 45 years of absence during which he traveled all over the Islamic world looking for a good teacher in philosophy, under whose guidance he could resolve the problems generated in him by his reading of the works of Avicenna and those on alchemy. As for his education, we know that he got a solid training in Islamic sciences such as grammar, lexicography, and law, and also that then he turned to natural sciences, medicine, philosophy, and alchemy, albeit in a critical vein. His spasmodic search for a teacher in philosophy brought him to meet, directly or through their writings, Avicenna, al-Ġazālī, and Suhrawardī. Many schools’ teachers weighed heavily on his

education and many different environments: Baghdad, Mosul, Halep, Damascus, the centers in Anatolia, and mostly Cairo. Cairo represented for ‘Abd al-Laṭīf al-Baġdādī the much-desired goal of his pilgrimage, the place where he finally met Aristotle and his philosophy, that of his commentators Themistius and Alexander, and where he finally met the greatest Arabic Aristotelian commentator of the East, al-Fārābī, who was for him the first to be able to integrate Islamic and Greek knowledge and to lay the foundations of a new system of sciences. The experience of Cairo also meant for ‘Abd al-Laṭīf al-Baġdādī the progressive abandon of Avicenna’s philosophy, which in the years of his education he had held to be the only possible one and which, after he gave allegiance to the Peripatetic tradition, he vehemently criticized.

He had many patrons and came into contact with many prime order men of his era: scholars, philosophers, physicians, and leaders including Saladin and his secretary ‘Imād al-Dīn al-Kātib al-Iṣfahānī, Maimonides, and Ibn Sanā’ al-Mulk. In his mature years, he taught Koranic and traditional Islamic sciences in the most important schools (*madāris*) of his time: at *al-Azhar* mosque in Cairo, *al-Aqṣā* mosque in Jerusalem, the ‘*Azīziyya madrasa* in Damascus, and finally in Aleppo.

He was one of the few Arab authors known in Europe at the beginning of the nineteenth century. As a matter of fact, the *Kitāb al-ifāda wa-l-‘tibār*, i.e., the description of one of his journeys to Egypt, which he undertook after 1189, preserved in an autograph manuscript (Oxford, Bodleian Library 1149), was translated into various European languages.

‘Abd al-Laṭīf al-Baġdādī was a versatile scholar and a prodigious writer: he wrote several medical and philosophical treatises, still little studied up to now. Many of his works were destroyed in the wave of religious fanaticism of the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries or are still in manuscript form, and in this case, the precise whereabouts of few manuscripts in the various libraries of the Near East, Asia, and Europe are known.

The oldest list of ‘Abd al-Laṭīf al-Baġdādī’s works is that given to use by Ibn Abī Uṣaybi‘a

at the end of his biography of our author. A later list is found in the *Fawāt al-Wafayāt (Omissions of the obituaries)* by Ibn Shakir al-Kutubī (d. 1363). The list presented by Ibn Abī Uṣaybi‘a numbers 173 works, including brief essays and treatises. The subjects are extremely varied and reflect the variety of the author’s interests. Thirteen writings are listed which deal with the Arabic language, lexicography, and grammar, 2 with *fiqh*, 9 with literary criticism, 53 with medicine, 10 with zoology, 3 on the science of *tawhīd*, 3 on history, 3 on mathematics and related disciplines, 2 on magic and mineralogy, and 27 on other themes. There are 48 works concerning philosophy: 19 on logic, 10 on physics, 8 on metaphysics, and 9 on politics. Two general works are also mentioned, subdivided into three sections: logic, physics, and metaphysics; one of these is in ten volumes and was completed by the author over a span of 20 years. Ibn Shakir al-Kutubī’s list numbers 15 discourses by ‘Abd al-Laṭīf al-Baġdādī which are not mentioned by Ibn Abī Uṣaybi‘a and 81 works, all mentioned, with one exception, in the previous list.

Among the works which have come down to us – or at least those contained in manuscripts so far identified – the following are really significant to comprehend ‘Abd al-Laṭīf al-Baġdādī’s approach to medicine, science, and philosophy: the *Commentary on the Advantages of Knowledge According to Hippocrates*; the *Commentary on the Aphorisms of Hippocrates*; the *Commentary on the Questions of Hunayn*, the *Book of That Which is Evident in Indian Mathematics*; the *Essay on the Senses, the Two Questions on Their Function and Natural Questions*; and the *Book on the Science of Metaphysics*.

In this metaphysical work, ‘Abd al-Laṭīf al-Baġdādī presents a synthesis of all the metaphysical knowledge of the past, which is, according to him, the result of an uninterrupted process from Aristotle’s *Metaphysics* to his times through the commentators Themistius and Alexander of Aphrodisias, and through the *Book on the Pure Good of Aristotle* – a selection from Proclus’s *Elements of Theology* – and the pseudo-*Theology of Aristotle* – a paraphrastic translation of *Enneads* IV–VI – a progression that was potentially compromised by Avicenna’s philosophy.

‘Abd al-Laṭīf al-Baġdādī’s project reflects the “theologizing” one elaborated in al-Kindī’s *First Philosophy* (Zimmermann 1986): the knowledge of the causes coincides with the natural theology that investigates the first principle. According to ‘Abd al-Laṭīf al-Baġdādī, the science of Metaphysics includes the knowledge of the truth, which is knowledge of the causes back to the spiritual causes and to the first, which is separate from matter and is the cause of all the others because it gives a limit to the multiplicity of the things which begin and spread out from it. God has such prerogatives. Following Themistius, ‘Abd al-Laṭīf al-Baġdādī states that He is the law of laws, the cause for the existence of the worlds and their ordering, organization, and beauty. His substance is his science and from him derives the order of beings and their organization. In the first divine principle, the substance equals his science.

‘Abd al-Laṭīf al-Baġdādī grafts the features of the Neoplatonic One onto the Aristotelian characterization of the first principle and the point of fusion lies in the doctrine of the self-reflection of divine thought, which for him, under the influence of Themistius and al-Fārābī, does not imply composition and multiplicity within the first principle, as was the case with Plotinus. ‘Abd al-Laṭīf al-Baġdādī assumes that the self-reflection of the divine thought does not cause composition and multiplicity within the First Principle, because in it there is the perfect coincidence of the thinking principle, the act of thinking, and the object of thought. The First Principle thinks its intelligible contents because they are one and the same thing with it. It is the Pure Good, the Absolute Simple, its essence is its attribute, and its attribute is its act. The First Principle is Pure Good and Pure Generous (*jawād*), and therefore, it thinks of itself in this way: the Good Generous is that from which everything emanates (*ṣadara*) and when it thinks of itself, it thinks at the same time of all that emanates from it. All the things have being because of the First Being by way of creation (*ibdā’*), which belongs to the First Cause pouring forth goodness over all things in one emanation and everything receives that emanation according to its own potentiality. The First Cause acts through its being alone (*bi-anniyya faqat*), without any intermediate – whether an instrument

or an additional characteristic – between itself and its effect. Yet the First Cause is true agent. ‘Abd al-Laṭīf al-Baġdādī’s explicit refusal of the handcrafted model of divine causality has its source in the pseudo-*Theology of Aristotle* where the First Principle does not need tools, rather creates according to the Neoplatonic model by only being itself.

Besides this work, other very important treatises are preserved – among which the *Kitāb al-Naṣīḥatayn* already mentioned – in the miscellaneous manuscript *Husayn Çelebi*, 823, discovered in Bursa in 1959 by S. M. Stern and described by him. These treatises are the following: the critique of the notes written by Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī, the *Khaṭīb* of Rayy, on several passages from the *Kullīyyāt* section of Avicenna’s *Qānūn*; the treatise *On the Quiddity of Space According to Ibn al-Haytham*; the *Dispute Between an Alchemist and a Theoretical Philosopher*; the treatise *On Minerals and the Confutation of Alchemy*; and the treatise *On Diabetes*.

From the analysis of ‘Abd al-Lal-L al-Baġdādī’s huge production, the conclusion can be reached that he never held Islamic knowledge to be in contradiction with that of the ancients; indeed, he thought that the critical awareness of the appropriate method for the science under examination came to the scholar of the Qur’ānic sciences precisely from the wisdom of the ancients. His criticisms of Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī can be explained in this sense: this latter was not only unable to undertake the study of the science of the ancients, and in particular medicine, because he did not have the correct use of language and method. Precisely because of this lack, he should not even set out to approach the sacred text of the Qur’ān.

‘Abd al-Lal-L al-Baġdādī constantly set authors defined by him as “moderns” against the ancients and he did not refrain from harsh polemic attacks against the “modern” works. His privileged targets were Avicenna and Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī. The writings of these authors, if compared with those of the ancients on similar themes, reveal to his eyes their low scientific level: they are confused, and lack detailed analysis, as it appears in the criticisms of Avicenna’s

logical writings. ‘Abd al-Laṭīf al-Baġdādī maintained therefore the need to return to the books of the ancients and in particular those of Aristotle, Alexander of Aphrodisias, and al-Fārābī in philosophy, and to those of Hippocrates and Galen in medicine.

During his stay in Cairo, he acquired a profound knowledge of the philosophy of Aristotle and his interpreters. From the list of his works, in fact, he seems to have written treatises which cover the entire Aristotelian corpus. There is also frequent mention of the treatises of Alexander of Aphrodisias, who was a benchmark for ‘Abd al-Laṭīf al-Baġdādī. The same is true for al-Fārābī, the only philosopher of the Islamic age deemed worthy of study by him. Al-Fārābī’s writings were often paraphrased by him and inserted into his own. The very notion of science which transpires from the work of ‘Abd al-Laṭīf al-Baġdādī, namely a systematic corpus capable of integrating Islamic and ancient knowledge, derives from al-Fārābī.

As far as medicine is concerned, ‘Abd al-Laṭīf al-Baġdādī’s attitude is analogous to that he has in philosophy. He criticizes Avicenna and Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī and wishes for a return to Hippocrates and Galen. He was an active promoter of this return: from the list of his works, he seems to have commented or summarized many of Hippocrates’ and Galen’s writings. Nevertheless, he was not a sterile compiler of the medical works of the ancients but merged the knowledge derived from them into his own talent at observation, as we can see from his treatise on diabetes, in which he completes all that has been written by ancient and Arabic authors on its cure by a description of the symptomatology of the illness. Another example of this attitude can be found in the last chapter of the *Kitāb al-īfāda wa-l-ītibār* where he discusses the structure of the lower jawbone and corrects Galen’s opinion that it was made up of two bones instead of one, and then discusses the sacrum-coccyx complex which, according to Galen, was made up of six bones, while ‘Abd al-Laṭīf al-Baġdādī held it to be formed by a point of reference a single bone.

Finally, ‘Abd al-Laṭīf al-Baġdādī was profoundly averse to alchemy, which was much in

vogue in his time. Alchemy can in no way belong in the system of sciences. Alchemy and its false presumptions must be distinguished from scientific knowledge which possesses a rational basis, such as that of mathematics, mineralogy, chemistry, zoology, and botany. Proof of this is that the ancients never spoke of it. Alchemy is guilty of having led astray generations of scholars.

## Cross-References

- ▶ [al-Fārābī, Abū Naṣr](#)
- ▶ [al-Ġazālī, Abū Ḥāmid Muḥammad](#)
- ▶ [Ibn Sīnā, Abū ‘Alī \(Avicenna\)](#)
- ▶ [al-Kindī, Abū Yūsuf Ya‘qūb ibn Ishāq](#)
- ▶ [Moses Maimonides](#)
- ▶ [al-Rāzī, Fakhr al-Dīn](#)
- ▶ [al-Suhrawardī, Shihāb al-Dīn Yahyā al-Maqtūl](#)

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## Abdurrahmān Bistāmī

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### Abstract

Abdurrahmān Bistāmī (d. 1454) was a polymath of the fifteenth century, who emerged as a towering figure in the Ottoman lands. His scientific production covers many areas in Islamic disciplines, mainly Islamic philosophy, Islamic theology (*kalām*), Islamic mysticism (*ṭasawwuf*), and secret sciences. While the scientific activities of many Ottoman scholars were within the borders of the classical *madrasa* curricula, Bistāmī was unique for his profound knowledge of the occult sciences. In fact, Bistāmī is particularly well-versed in the science of letters (*‘ilm al-ḥurūf*), a discipline which seeks to establish secret alphabetical and numerical relations between ontological and epistemological entities. In fact, he sees the science of the letters as the crown of the sciences, maintaining that the core teaching of this secret science was carried through a lineage of the prophets till it came down to the Prophet Muḥammad and then to Muslim scholars afterwards. Bistāmī’s magnum opus is *al-Fawāyih al-Miskiyya fī l-Fawātiḥ al-Makkiyya* (literally “Musky Fragrances in Meccan Revelations”), an encyclopedia and anthology of sciences.

This is a work which exhibits a mosaic of all Islamic sciences and disciplines that have come to the time of the author, along with many quotations from the classical Islamic literature. In *al-Fawāyih*, Bistāmī preliminarily presents a classification of the sciences, closely following the Epistles of the Brethren of Purity (*Ikhwān al-Ṣafāʾ*), a comprehensive and syncretic philosophical work which was produced in tenth century Iraq.

## Historical Background

Born in Antakya around 1380, Bistāmī made journeys to several parts of the Islamic world in order to seek his intellectual and spiritual education, places such as Aleppo, Egypt, and Khorasan. In these places, he also participated in many sufi circles, having gained *ijāzas* (educational degrees) from sufi masters. His scientific and political agenda brought him finally to the Ottoman lands, in which he lived till he died and was buried in the city of Bursa (the first capital of the Ottoman Empire) in 1454. According to his autobiographical work titled *Durra Tāj al-Rasāʾil* (*The Pearl of the Crown of the Epistles*), Bistāmī came to the Ottoman lands in 1408. This period in the history of the Ottoman Empire is known as “Fetret Devri” (Ottoman Interregnum), an era in which the Ottoman Empire faced harsh political rivalries and civil wars among the sons of Yıldırım Beyazıt (r. 1389–1403) after the latter’s defeat by Tamerlane in the Battle of Ankara. In such unsteady ground, Bistāmī began to spread his occult doctrines among the Ottoman elite. According to his own reports, many Ottoman scholars became his disciples and colleagues as they studied Bistāmī’s works with him, including his *al-Lamʾa al-Nūrāniyya* (*The Illuminative Glare*), *Qabs al-Anwār* (*The Catch of the Lights*), and *Ṣayhat al-Būm fī Ḥawādith al-Rūm* (*The Cry of the Owl for the Happenings in Anatolia*). Bistāmī’s activities in Anatolia triggered disputations among Ottoman scholars and statesmen as well, because some saw his highly occult writings in relation to the Hurūfī propaganda (the lettrist and heretical teachings of Faḍlullāh al-Astarābādī

al-Ḥurūfī, who died in 1394), which threatened the authority of the Ottoman scholars. There are also clues as to indicate that Bistāmī had some political agenda behind his academic activities. His writings frequently allude to some messianic prophecies and predictions. He believes that his time is about to see the end of the world, and that in that time, God’s caliph will come to the world in order to set up a just world order under one religion and one sovereignty. Bistāmī’s taking part in the cultural and political atmosphere of the Ottoman lands, together with his famous acquaintances such as Mulla Fanārī (d. 1431) and Badraddīn Simāwī (d. 1420) is meaningful in that it evinces Bistāmī’s purpose to constitute a web of scholars who would guide the ideological currents within the Ottoman and extra-Ottoman sphere. Bistāmī addresses his spiritual colleagues as “the Brethren of Purity,” a clear allusion to the Brethren of Purity of Iraq five centuries before. Just as Bistāmī’s corpus is grounded in the Islamic Brethren of Purity, his elitist philosophy with strong Hellenistic tones is also historically related to the philosophical activities of his Western contemporary Gemistos Plethon (d. 1452), who himself attempted to revive the Hellenistic tradition and alluded to an esoteric circle inside Byzantium and Ottoman backgrounds (Siniosoglou 2012).

## Philosophical Teachings and the Classification of the Sciences

In the introductory section of his magnum opus *al-Fawāyih al-Miskiyya*, Bistāmī sketches the classification of the sciences, and in doing so, he closely follows the classification which was done by the Brethren of Purity. Accordingly, the entire structure of sciences (whether they are religious or nonreligious) can be divided into three main parts: (1) Pedagogical sciences, which have nine subdivisions: writing and reading, lexicology and grammar, accounting, poetry and prosody, foretelling, magic and alchemy, arts and crafts, buying and selling, and biographies and history. (2) Religious-canonical sciences, which have six subdivisions: revelation, interpretation, transmissions and reports, laws and canons,



remembrance and mysticism, and interpretation of dreams. (3) Philosophical sciences, which have four subdivisions: mathematical sciences, logic, physics, and theology. Mathematical sciences comprise the *quadrivium*, that is, arithmetic, geometry, astronomy, and music. The other two philosophical sciences are defined in accordance with the Aristotelian corpus, as is seen in the traditional Aristotelianism of the Alexandrian School in Late Antiquity. Nonetheless, the idea of the science of theology exhibits much more religious underpinning: theology covers such noble subject matters as the knowledge of God, the science of spiritual beings (*rūḥāniyyāt*), the science of soul (*nafsāniyyāt*), politics and the science of the Hereafter. Bistāmī's originality lies in his depiction of this Ikhwanian classification as a "tree of sciences" (see image "the tree of sciences"). According to this schema, pedagogical and religious sciences are the roots, philosophical sciences and disciplines are the trunk, and the four subdivisions of the philosophical sciences, which are mathematics, logic, physics, and theology, are the branches. This idea clearly gives an "organic" setting to the idea of sciences, implying that philosophy, with all its contents, is actually planted and raised upon its religious and pedagogical roots.

The authority of the writings of the famous mystic and polymath Ibn Arabī is always present in Bistāmī's writings. Ibn Arabī's profound influence on Bistāmī can be seen in the latter's hierarchical perspective of knowledge in general. According to this perspective, there is not one level of knowledge to be applied to all human beings. Rather, human beings differ in the capacity of their share of the knowable things. The knowables which are the results of the perceptions of the five senses, are described as "necessary" (*darūriyyāt*), and they pertain to the level of common people. These people know things so much so that their five senses make it available to them. People who are at the higher level, called "the distinguished" (*khawāṣ*) by Bistāmī, are capable of knowing intellectual subjects by way of logical reflection and demonstration. However, there is a third level which is not achievable either by common people or the distinguished intellectuals: the level of the distinguished of the

distinguished (*khawāṣ al-khawāṣ*). Those who are in this level have only God in their hearts, and they have "revelational" (*kashfī*) and evidential (*shuhūdī* – depending on mystical observation) knowables pertaining to divine realities that no one else has. Such notion of Bistāmī is evidently imbued with his theory of the acquisition of knowledge, which posits three levels of knowledge (Kaya 2016, p. 208). The knowledge of reason is the one that is produced out of necessity or logical inference. The knowledge of the states (*'ilm al-aḥwāl*) is the knowledge that is beyond the reach of pure reason and can only be perceived via "spiritual taste." Last but not least, the knowledge of the secrets (*'ilm al-asrār*) is special to people who receive revelations from God, that is, the prophets and the friends of God.

According to Bistāmī, the science of letters (*'ilm al-ḥurūf*) is the crown of all human sciences. In fact, like his predecessor Abū l-'Abbās al-Būnī (d. 1225), he was the author of preliminary books on the secrets of letters, including *Shams al-Āfāq fī 'Ilm al-Ḥurūf wa l-Awqāf* (*The Sun of the Horizons in the Science of the Letters*). Bistāmī holds that the occult knowledge of letters had come down to his age via the chain of the holders of this secret science, having started from the prophets through the respected scholars. He includes the names of prominent figures such as al-Ġazālī and Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī among the masters of this science, depending himself on their works written in the subject. Bistāmī does not restrict the science to the Muslims only, contrarily, he traces back the roots of this secret knowledge to ancient Greece and Egypt, particularly referring to the hieroglyphs inside the pyramids in Egypt.

Bistāmī does not hide his owe for Greek philosophy and sciences whenever opportunity arises. In fact, he is of the opinion that the prophetic knowledge is disseminated throughout the nations which have had their share of an aspect of the *philosophia perennis*. Wisdom was bestowed from the skies onto the minds of Greeks, the hands of Chinese, the tongues of Arabs, an ancient saying quoted by Bistāmī in this regard. Greeks have special treatment in the writings of Bistāmī, for they had represented the peak of intellectual wisdom among other nations. In an interesting

sentence that appears in *al-Fawāyih*, Bistāmī states that his book “is written in Arabic by language, in Hebrew by implication, in Syriac by meaning, and in Greek by foundation and structure (*mabānī*)” (Kaya, p.198). This posits that he takes the Greek wisdom as a foundational base for his overall perspective in philosophy and sciences. In accordance with this, he essentially depends on the Late Antique Aristotelian tradition, as it was represented in the Graeco-Arabic translation movement in the second and third centuries of Islam. He describes Aristotle as “the first philosopher” in the true sense, praising his work on logic, which had set the introductory ground for all sciences. With his works on the five basic arts of logic, “Aristotle has guided us to the right path and enlightened our minds.” With his work on metaphysics, which consists of 13 books, Aristotle has walked through those who study this discipline to their goals (Bistāmī, *al-Fawāyih*, fol. 13b-14a) (Fig. 1).



**Abdurrahmān Bistāmī, Fig. 1** Bistāmī’s “tree of sciences,” from *al-Fawāyih al-Miskiyya* MS. Istanbul Suleymaniye Yazma Eser Kutuphanesi, Hamidiye, 688, fol. 12b

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## Abraham ibn Ezra

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### Abstract

Abraham ben Meir ibn Ezra (c. 1093–c. 1167), a native of Tudela, has been a key figure of medieval Jewish thought. He has played an



important role in the fields of biblical exegesis, poetry, grammar, astronomy, astrology, mathematics, and natural sciences. During his life, Ibn Ezra traveled all around Europe, settling in France, in England, and in Italy. He composed his works in Hebrew, in order to reach especially those Jewish communities that did not speak Arabic. His astrological and astronomical treatises were translated into Latin and were also greatly appreciated by medieval Christian thinkers. The popularity of his exegetical opus throughout the Jewish medieval world is testified by the great number of super-commentaries. Although Ibn Ezra's philosophical teachings are not systematically exposed and have to be reconstructed all along his exegetical, poetical, and scientific production, his thought is characterized by some distinctive features. In the field of philosophy, he was mainly interested in psychological and cosmological questions. He accepted – and often reinterpreted – some earlier Neoplatonic and proto-cabalist conceptions about the soul. His reflection mainly deals with the nature of the human soul and man's destiny after death, and with the effects of celestial bodies on the physical world. Some doctrines that he adopted in those fields have deeply influenced the thought of his successors.

Abraham ben Meir ibn Ezra (c. 1093–c. 1167) (known by Latin medieval thinkers as Avenezra) is one of the prominent medieval Jewish thinkers. A native of Tudela, in Al-Andalus, he grew up in the Arabic-speaking milieu of the *sefardi* Judaism. Jewish folklore reserved him a central place, and his life has been, under more than one aspect, a picaresque one. Ibn Ezra became a close friend, and may be a relative, of Yehudah ha-Levi (1180–1141), with whom he discussed exegetical and philosophical problems concerning the election of Israel among the peoples, as reported in his commentary on *Exodus*; he was also in touch with other Jewish philosophers, like Yosef ibn Tsaddiq and Abraham ibn Daud, and with the poet Moshe ibn Ezra. During this first period of his life, Ibn Ezra devoted himself mostly to writing religious

and profane poetry. In 1140, to escape the Almohades' persecution, Abraham ibn Ezra left Spain, possibly after the conversion of his son to Islam. He spent the rest of his life in traveling from one country to another, among the Jews of Christian Europe: he settled for short periods in Lucca, Mantua, Verona, and then, he moved to France's Provence: Rouen and Béziers. In the second part of his life, he composed the main part of his astrological, astronomical, and exegetical works. Exile and precarious conditions of life marked both his works and his personality: his permanence in Christian Europe forced him to choose Hebrew – instead of Arabic – to compose his texts, whereas his autobiographical poems relate to misadventures, difficulties, and misfortune, consequent, to some extent, to restless moving due to uncertain patronages and difficult circumstances. He died, perhaps in London, around 1167.

Abraham ibn Ezra's productions and interests were extremely large. In his *Sefer ha-shem* (*The Book of the Name [of God]*), he traces an ideal portrait of the perfect *Torah* scholar: in his effort to understand the true meaning of the holy text, the Jewish exegete combines and integrates many scientific disciplines: astronomy (*hokhmat ha-mazalot*), astrology (*mishpetey ha-mazalot*), arithmetic, geometry and ratios (*hokhmat ha-heshbon*, *ha-midot ve ha-'arakhim*), natural science (*hokhmat ha-toledet*), psychology (*hokhmat ha-nefesh*), cosmogony (*hokhmat toledet ha-shamayim*), and logic (*hokhmat ha-mivt'a*). This list represents just a part of the wide-ranging studies' curriculum of Ibn Ezra, whose interests also embraced grammar, poetry, and theology.

Even if it began late – that is, after his flee from Spain – Abraham ibn Ezra's activity in the field of exegesis was very intense. His works are extant in a great number of both manuscripts and ancient printed editions, and they received an exceptional appreciation in the Middle Age. Proof of the consent he had is the super commentaries, which play a part in diffusing his teachings, especially among Jewish communities. We possess Abraham ibn Ezra's commentaries to *Torah*, *Isaia*, the *Twelve Minor Prophets*, *Psalms*, *Job*, the *Five Megillot*,

and *Daniel*; we are also informed by Ibn Ezra himself about his writing the commentaries on *Joshua*, *Judges*, *Samuel*, *Kings*, *Jeremiah*, *Ezekiel*, *Proverbs*, *Ezra-Nehemiah*, and *Chronicles*. Both astrology and astronomy took a huge place in his reflection; he wrote, *inter alia* a treatise on the astrolabe (*Keli ha-Nehoshet*) and a polemical work on the theoretical fundamentals of the Jewish calendar (*Sefer ha-'Ibbur*). His astrological *chef-d'œuvre* is the *Reshit Hokhmah* (*Beginning of Wisdom*), which was translated in French and in Latin, and promptly became a fundamental reference in the field. Furthermore, he makes use of many important astrological arguments in his exegetical explications, especially in order to offer a rational interpretation of the biblical passages concerning the sacrifices of the animals. His astrological works had a deep influence on Christian medieval thinkers, and were a relevant source of information for Petrus de Abano up to Pico della Mirandola's *Disputationes adversus astrologiam divinatricem* (1493), and for later thinkers. Ibn Ezra devoted to mathematical speculation his *Sefer ha-'Ehad* (*The Book of the Unit*), a short treatise on the attributes of the number, and the *Sefer ha-Mispar* (*Book of the Number*), which deals with the different mathematical operations. His poems, both religious and profane, contain many philosophical ideas and were an important vehicle of transmission of psychological and cosmological doctrines' issues from medieval Islamic and Jewish Neoplatonic tradition. In addition to that, Abraham ibn Ezra translated from Arabic to Hebrew three books of the grammarian Judah ben David Hayyuj (c. 950–c. 1000) and composed himself some very popular grammars of Hebrew.

Indeed, Ibn Ezra's literary activity is particularly rich, and perhaps even somewhat disordered. Since he was not a systematic thinker, he did not compose specific philosophical treatises; his philosophical teachings are to be deduced from scattered material incorporated in his exegetical and scientific works. Moreover, his doctrines are often concisely expounded and do not form a consistent arrangement. Ibn Ezra's points of view may change according to different contests and they occasionally reveal contradictions and

lack of consistence. In spite of his nonsystematic approach – or possibly thanks to it – Abraham ibn Ezra has played a key role in the formation of a standard cosmological and psychological teaching among medieval Jewish thinkers, perhaps owing to the popularity of his exegetical work among Hebrew readers and to the conciseness of his account. His works have been an important diffusion channel for some doctrines concerning the human soul, the rule of the stars on the sublunar world, and the salvation of individuals. It is possible that his philosophical background was not a really wide one, even if he was familiar with some philosophical and mystical Jewish works. He openly cites Sa'adiah ben Gaon's *Beliefs and Opinions*, and uses pre-kabbalistic treatises, such as *Sefer Yetsirah* or *Shi'ur Qomah*; *kalām* tradition was doubtfully one of the sources of his thought, but he was also influenced by Ibn Gabirol's poetical production, though he does not seem to make references to Gabirol's *Fountain of Life*. Abraham bar Hiyya's astrological and astronomical teachings also influenced him deeply.

On the other hand, Ibn Ezra's philosophical interests are not homogeneous and equally distributed. He did not produce a real metaphysical or theological teaching and did not deal too much with the epistemological dimension of philosophy. Despite the fact that he develops some ideal *divisiones scientiarum* in his exegetical works, Ibn Ezra did not offer a major reflection on the relation between the secular sciences and the Torah. In fact, he limits himself to observe that the Bible concealed a certain number of secrets (*sodot*), whose meaning must not be revealed and which he precisely points out in his commentaries. Psychology is the only branch of philosophy to which he deserves an almost systematic reflection. Ibn Ezra detailed the doctrine of the human soul, both in his poetical and in his exegetical production, especially in his commentary on Ecclesiastes. His psychological system is similar to that of Jewish philosophers belonging to a Neoplatonic tradition, as Ibn Gabirol or Ibn Tsaddiq. He usually distinguishes between three different souls: *nefesh* (the vegetative soul, located in the liver), *neshamah* (the animal soul,

located in the heart), and *ruah* (the rationale soul, located in the brain). Rational soul belongs to human beings only; it is able to discern truth from falsehood, to formulate a correct reasoning, and to obtain an intellectual vision of the intelligible world. This soul originates from the supernal world and is composed of the same incorporeal substance; after the death of the body, it is supposed to return to its source. The soul yearns to return to its Creator, and during his permanence in the sublunar realm, has to oppose the violent appetites of the body, which is described, in a genuine Neoplatonic style, as a prison or a cage. Since man is a microcosm reflecting the structure of the creation and containing a trace of the divine substance in itself, the soul may gradually approach God through self-knowledge. The individual soul, his destiny, and his ultimate felicity, is one of the main concerns of Ibn Ezra's speculation, emerging also in his astrological reflection. In his opinion, the universe is composed of a celestial and a terrestrial realm; the stars and the planets rule over the sublunar world and over human beings. Nevertheless, man could escape to the astral influence determining terrestrial events, doing to the nature of his soul, which is made of the same substance of the supernal realm.

## Cross-References

- ▶ [Avicbron](#)
- ▶ [Giovanni Pico della Mirandola](#)
- ▶ [Judah Halevi](#)
- ▶ [Philosophical Psychology, Jewish Tradition](#)
- ▶ [Philosophy, Jewish](#)

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## Abū Bakr al-Bāqillānī

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### Abstract

Abū Bakr al-Bāqillānī is considered to be an important Muslim theologian, who significantly contributed to the development of Ash'arite teaching and its consolidation as one of the most influential schools of Sunni *kalām*. *Kalām* is a form of theology which – as opposed to scripture-based approaches – attempts to demonstrate its doctrinal claims by rational arguments and proofs. Al-Bāqillānī belonged to the third generation of Ash'arites,

and he studied with several disciples of the school's founder. He broadened the conceptual framework of Ash'arite theology, specifically under the impact of his debates with his intellectual rivals from the Mu'tazilite school of *kalām*.

## Life and Works

Abū Bakr Muḥammad b. al-Ṭayyib al-Bāqillānī was an Ash'arite theologian, Mālikite jurist, and legal methodologist. He was born in Basra, in most likelihood at the beginning of the 940s. The precise date of his birth is unknown. During al-Bāqillānī's lifetime, the 'Abbāsīd caliphs remained in titular authority only – in fact, they had lost their actual power. Significant territories of their former state had been ceded to regional dynasties: the Fāṭimids took control over North Africa and Egypt, the Qarmatians over the eastern coast of the Arabian Peninsula, and the caliphs in Baghdad delegated their political power to the Būyids, a dynasty of non-Arab soldiers. Although Fāṭimids, Qarmatians, and Būyids were all Shiites, these dynasties had no common agenda, but rather they were political rivals. Only the Fāṭimids and the Qarmatians were in fact religiopolitical movements with an explicit Ismā'īlī identity, whereas the Būyids were somewhat concerned with adopting a policy of denominational balance. This stance was also of some importance for al-Bāqillānī's intellectual career.

Al-Bāqillānī studied *kalām* theology with two disciples of the founder of the Ash'arite school, Abū l-Ḥasan al-Ash'arī (d. 935–6), namely, with Abū l-Ḥasan al-Bāhilī (d. c. 980) and Abū 'Abd Allāh Ibn Mujāhid (d. 980–1). In law, al-Bāqillānī studied under the leading Baghdadi Mālikite scholar Abū Bakr al-Abharī (d. 985). Al-Bāqillānī received his formation in *kalām* together with Abū Bakr Ibn Fūrak (d. 1015) and Abū Ishāq al-Isfarā'īnī (d. 1027). All three became leading representatives of Ash'arism and contributed to the consolidation and dissemination of the school. While both Ibn Fūrak and al-Isfarā'īnī moved to Nīshāpūr, al-Bāqillānī was invited around 970–971 to the Būyid court of Shīrāz to teach the son of

the *amīr* 'Aḍud al-Dawla (d. 983). This is remarkable because, on the one hand, al-Bāqillānī belonged to the Sunni community, and on the other hand, the Būyids rather tended to patronize Mu'tazilite theology, that is, the major theological rivals of Ash'arism. However, the administrative and intellectual elite at the Būyid court was a quite pluralistic environment and included an important number of Imāmī Shiites, Zaydīs, Zoroastrians, Nestorians, and Jews. After a couple of years in Shīrāz, al-Bāqillānī moved to Baghdad, where he gave lectures at the al-Manṣūr mosque. At some point, he was appointed judge, and in 982–983 he was even sent on a diplomatic mission to the Byzantine court in Constantinople.

Al-Bāqillānī had several prominent students, including the traditionist Abū Dharr al-Harawī (d. 1043) as well as Abū Ja'far al-Simnānī (d. 1052), a Ḥanafite scholar, who became judge in Aleppo and Mosul and an authority in Ash'arite *kalām*. Several of al-Bāqillānī's students, including Abū 'Imrān al-Fāsī (d. 1037 or 1039) and Abū 'Abd Allāh al-Adharī (d. 1031–2), transmitted al-Bāqillānī's teachings to the North African city of Kairouan, and their study circles significantly contributed to the dissemination of Ash'arism in the Islamic west (Idris 1953; Fórneas Besteiro 1977–1979; Ansari and Thiele 2018). Al-Bāqillānī died in Baghdad in 1013 (Allard 1965; Ibish 1965).

As compared to his two prominent fellow theologians Ibn Fūrak and al-Isfarā'īnī, comparatively much of al-Bāqillānī's work has survived to the present day (still, this means that the vast majority of his body of work is missing; see 'Abd al-Ḥamīd 1993–1994; Gimaret 2009; Schmidtke 2011). These texts include a comprehensive manual of theological polemics, entitled *Kitāb al-Tamhīd* ("The introduction"). It contains an important refutation of Christian beliefs, actually one of the most detailed that has survived from the earlier period of Islam (Thomas 2008). The *Kitāb al-Tamhīd* is dedicated to an *amīr*, in all likelihood al-Bāqillānī's Būyid patron in Shīrāz, and was consequently one of his early works, written around 970. The early dating of the book is coherent with its general style: it actually bears witness to al-Bāqillānī's attempt to systematically

organize the teachings of his predecessors. However, systematic coherence remains the main purpose of the work, while it does not contain the more independently minded theories that al-Bāqillānī developed in his mature works (Allard 1965; Gimaret 1970, 1980, 2009; Eichner 2009). A shorter theological treatise that focuses on disputed questions between Ashʿarism and the Muʿtazila circulated under two titles, *al-Risālah al-ḥurra* (“The excellent epistle”?) and *al-Inṣāf fī-mā yajibu ʿtiqāduhu wa-lā yajūzu l-jahl bihi* (“The just treatment of what is obligatory to know and what cannot be ignored”). Much more important and comprehensive in length is his main work in theology entitled *Hidāyat al-mustarshidīn* (“Guide for those seeking right guidance”). Originally, the *Hidāya* must have been a monumental work, comprising at least 16 volumes, but only four have as yet been rediscovered. It is in this text that al-Bāqillānī expounded his original teachings and sometimes revised or further developed a number of al-Ashʿarī’s positions, including some he had still defended in earlier works (Gimaret 2009; Schmidtke 2011). An additional later work in theology is a refutation of the doctrines of Ismāʿīlī and Hellenizing philosophy (*falsafa*), entitled *Kashf al-asrār fī l-radd ʿalā l-Bāṭiniyya* (“Unveiling of the secrets to refute the Bāṭiniyya”) (Ansari and Thiele forthcoming). Al-Bāqillānī also wrote works on the Qurʾān, in which he specifically addressed the scripture’s miraculous nature and its faithful transmission, namely, *Ijāz al-Qurʾān* (“The inimitability of the Qurʾān”) and *al-Intiṣār li-naql al-Qurʾān* (“The victory of the Qurʾān’s transmission”). A major work in the field of legal methodology, which has partially survived, is the short version of his *al-Taqrīb wa-l-irshād* (“The approximation and guide”) (Chaumont 1994).

## Teaching

Al-Bāqillānī did not follow a consistent teaching throughout his life. This is indicated by the reports of later Ashʿarite thinkers on the one hand and corroborated by textual evidence in al-Bāqillānī’s

surviving works on the other. It is specifically in his later works that he develops or even revises doctrines and arguments of Abū l-Ḥasan al-Ashʿarī, the founder and eponym of his school of *kalām*. In addition, al-Bāqillānī contributed to broadening the conceptual framework of the Ashʿarite doctrine.

To a significant extent, al-Bāqillānī developed the system of Ashʿarite doctrines in response to his debates with his intellectual rivals from the Muʿtazilite school of *kalām*. Yet, he also appears to have been preoccupied with the doctrines of Hellenizing philosophy – something that can be observed in his *Kashf al-asrār*. An additional indication for al-Bāqillānī’s engagement with *falsafa* could be the fact that he appeals to the notion of “necessarily existent” (*wājib al-wujūd*) that was to become a central element in Avicennian metaphysics. Al-Bāqillānī does so in his *Hidāyat al-mustarshidīn*. This work can be thus considered as an early example of a *kalām* text that applies the notion to God and equates it with the meaning of “eternal” (*qadīm*) (Thiele 2016b).

From his rival *kalām* theologians among the Muʿtazilite school of theology, al-Bāqillānī borrowed the so-called notion of “states” (*aḥwāl*). As we are told by later reports, he only came to adopt it in his later writings, while he expressed his categorical rejection of the theory of *aḥwāl* in his early works. This is actually echoed in his surviving treatises: the *Tamhīd* still contains an extensive refutation of the theory, whereas the later *Hidāya* and *Kashf al-asrār* both appeal to the theory (Ansari and Thiele forthcoming).

The notion of *ḥāl* was introduced into the ontology of *kalām* to conceive of the properties attributed to beings – and more specifically to conceive of the attributes by which God is described. With this concept, *kalām* theologians attempted to overcome an ontology that only admits the reality of actually existing “entities” or “things” (*dhawāt*, sing. *dhāt* or *ashyāʾ*, sing. *shayʾ*). Their understanding of “entities” or “things” included God, atoms (*jawāhir*, sing. *jawhar*) – that is, indivisible particles from which bodies can be composed – and accidents

(*aʿrād*, sing. *ʿarād*) that inhere in atoms and determine their changeable qualities. Yet, this ontology set significant limitations to the theologians' metaphysical system: since predications about beings, such as "knowing" or "living," were not believed to reflect any reality, their system did not provide any coherent framework that allowed to account for how properties of beings can be mentally conceived and known.

In his *Tamhīd*, al-Bāqillānī still considered that there is actually no need to posit that such predications as "being knowing" or "being living" express any reality in themselves. Rather, he criticizes the Muʿtazilites' concept of *aḥwāl* as self-contradictory. And, in fact, his objections were not entirely pointless. For the Muʿtazilites, a central idea behind positing the *aḥwāl* was to admit some form of reality that is not described by existence. This allowed for admitting that descriptions of God as eternally "living" or "knowing" reflect an actual reality, yet without positing the existence of some coeternal entity of "life" or "knowledge" in God – something that could be interpreted as positing multiplicity in Him and that would consequently violate the idea of monotheism. However, as a corollary of their doctrine that only "entities" or "things" can be known, the Muʿtazilites had to concede that these neither existing nor non-existing *aḥwāl* cannot be knowable. This opened the room for one of al-Bāqillānī's principal points of critique: how is it possible, he asks in the *Tamhīd*, to establish the *aḥwāl* as an ontological reality if they cannot be known?

The reason why al-Bāqillānī eventually revoked his rejection of the *aḥwāl* was what he must have considered as an incoherence in al-Ashʿarī's proof for the existence of coeternal entitative attributes (*ṣifāt*, sing. *ṣifa*) in God – a doctrine that Ashʿarite theologians defended against the Muʿtazilite denial of such entities. To support his theory, al-Ashʿarī had argued that predications such as "he is living" or "he is knowing" always express the same meaning or truth (*ḥaqīqa*), irrespective of who is subject to predication: if we affirm that man is living and knowing by virtue of entities, namely, "life" and "knowledge," the same must be true for God.

Consequently, we cannot describe Him as eternally living and knowing without affirming a coeternal entity of "life" and "knowledge" that subsists in Him. Now, al-Bāqillānī objected that this claim can only be valid if "being living" and "life" – and similarly "being knowing" and "knowledge" – express distinct realities. His reasoning behind this was that if "being living" referred to an entity of "life" and "being knowing" to an entity of "knowledge" that subsists in God, al-Ashʿarī's claim would be circular reasoning, because one would attempt to prove the existence of God's entitative "life" and "knowledge" by themselves.

Al-Bāqillānī describes the link between the reality expressed by our attributing properties ("being living") and the presence of entities in the object of predication ("life") as a reciprocal correlation (*taʿalluq*). Entities of "life" are the cause (*illa*) for somebody's "being living," and, vice versa, somebody's "being living" is evidence (*dalāla*) for an entity of "life" that subsists in somebody described as "living," such that they necessarily entail each other. Now positing that "being living" and "being knowing" on the one hand and entities of "life" and "knowledge" on the other hand are distinct realities raised the question of the ontological status of the properties "living" and "knowing." They could not possibly refer to entities, because this would mean that they are caused by other entities, and this would result in an infinite regress of causal sequences. Al-Bāqillānī therefore appealed to the Muʿtazilite conceptualization of the properties of beings as *aḥwāl*, that is, neither existing nor non-existing realities. He followed the Muʿtazilites' analysis insofar as he agreed that *aḥwāl* are not entities or things, but he nevertheless rejected the Muʿtazilites' conclusion that for this very reason, *aḥwāl* cannot be known. Al-Bāqillānī actually argued on the basis of the Ashʿarite school's epistemology: unlike the Muʿtazilites, the Ashʿarites denied that which can be known must necessarily be entities. Al-Bāqillānī could consequently conclude that *aḥwāl* are knowable and coherently claim that it was precisely by virtue of these *aḥwāl* that things can be distinguished, or, on the contrary, said to be alike (Thiele 2016a, d; Ansari and Thiele 2018).



It was not only in order to resolve problems related to the nature of God's attributes that al-Bāqillānī relied on the theory of *aḥwāl*. Rather, the concept was also part of his reflections on the human act, which he developed within the framework of al-Ash'arī's theory. This theory departed from essentially two principles, namely, that (a) God's power is absolute and man's acts must consequently be determined by Him and that (b) even in the absence of freedom of action, it can be rationally established that man is morally accountable for what he does. The latter claim was supported by appealing to our intuition that two types of human acts have to be distinguished: "necessary" acts like shivering, whose omission is beyond our capacity and deliberate decision and acts we do in accordance with our willing and wanting them to happen. These latter acts are denoted by al-Ash'arī as "acquisition" (*kasb* or *iktisāb*). Because "necessary" acts imply our weakness, he argued that the contrary must be true for non-necessary – or "acquired" – acts: they involve the agent's capacity or "power" (*quwwa* or *qudra*) to act. In some instances, al-Ash'arī tied acts performed on account of an instance of "power" to the agent's "will" (*irādā*). That is, only acts that involve our "power" occur in accordance with our will, whereas "necessary" acts like shivering happen against our will. Since both "necessary" and "acquired" acts are determined by God, it was completely irrelevant for al-Ash'arī's conception of moral responsibility that man does not cause his acts to happen. Rather, he considered that nobody can be blamed for his "necessary" acts such as shivering, but that man is responsible for his "acquired" acts, because he performs them voluntarily.

Al-Bāqillānī followed the major lines of this reasoning, but he revised some aspects of the theory of "acquisition." He thereby attempted to achieve a greater coherency of the theory and also to address a number of questions that remained unresolved by al-Ash'arī himself. For example, he explicitly rejects the assumption that our acting intentionally depends in any way on our will being involved. For him, this claim is established by the fact that we sometimes fail to exercise our will – which is always the case with "necessary acts." As a logical corollary, he goes on to argue that our incapacity to do what we want reveals a

lack of power. Consequently, the opposite must be true for all other acts: they occur by virtue of man's power.

It was specifically in the *Hidāya* that al-Bāqillānī eventually went a step further and asked about the precise function of man's power in his performing "acquired" acts. Al-Ash'arī had already posited its presence whenever we "acquire" acts, but he contented himself to affirm that there is only conjunction between man's power and his "acquired" acts, while he appears to have denied any correlation between that power and the "acquired" act. Against this claim, al-Bāqillānī posited that man's power really *has* an effect (*ta'īhr*). He even proposes three different approaches to explaining how our power affects our acting.

His first explanation as to the effectiveness of human power is in line with his conception of the reality that underlies our predications about beings: as mentioned above, he believed that they reflect a *ḥāl* – in the case of agents of "acquired" acts the feature of "being powerful" (*kawnuhu qādiran*). The *ḥāl* is, according to al-Bāqillānī, caused by the agent's power, and it is precisely this feature that distinguishes him from compelled agents, who have no power and are consequently not responsible for their doing. The mere distinction between powerful agents and others who are not did not, by itself, sufficiently explain why acts created by God should be considered as ours. Al-Bāqillānī addressed this issue by claiming that it is by virtue of their power that agents are related (*yata'allaqu*) to their "acquired" acts. He claims that acts do not have to be created by man himself in order to suppose a relation between his power and his acts. Rather, al-Bāqillānī describes the nature of this relation by drawing a parallel to sensual perception, which, as he argues, implies a relation between the one who perceives and the object perceived. This correlation does however not mean that perception causes the perceived object to exist. Finally, al-Bāqillānī adds a further explanation as to how man's power affects his acting. In this approach, he specifically addresses the question of man's individual moral responsibility. Here, he appears to be specifically concerned to resolve the logical problem that man can hardly be held responsible

for the *existence* of acts if he does not create them himself. Al-Bāqillānī therefore proposes an alternative solution as to what is subject to moral assessment in our acting. He suggests that man determines an attribute (i.e., a *ḥāl*) of his “acquired” acts by virtue of his power and that it is to this very attribute that God’s command, prohibition, reward, and punishment relate (Thiele 2016c).

## Cross-References

- ▶ [Abū Hāshim al-Jubbā’ī](#)
- ▶ [Kalām](#)
- ▶ [Metaphysics](#)
- ▶ [Philosophy, Arabic](#)
- ▶ [Theology Versus Philosophy in the Arab World](#)

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## Abū Bakr al-Rāzī, Muḥammad ibn Zakarīyā' (Rhazes)

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### Abstract

The most famous physician of Islam after Ibn Sīnā, Abū Bakr Muḥammad b. Zakarīyā' al-Rāzī (known in the Latin world as Rhazes) was also a philosopher and a chemist, and before being a physician, he is said to have been an alchemist. Although al-Rāzī's name is mainly related to his medical works, his masterpieces *Kitāb al-jāmi' al-kabīr* (*The Great Comprehensive Book*) and *Kitāb al-ḥāwī fī l-ṭibb* (*The Comprehensive Book on Medicine*), he wrote also on cosmology, theology, logic, mathematics, and philosophy, as he believed, just like Galen, that an outstanding physician must also be a philosopher. Among his philosophical works are a commentary on Plato's *Timaeus*, a criticism of the Mu'tazilite doctrine, and a polemical writing against the Ismā'īlīs and their idea of the infallible Imam. As he believed in independent thinking, although he did not exclude the cumulative value of knowledge, he thought that every man could think by himself and did not need any guide teaching him what to think or what to do. Starting from this, al-Rāzī carried out his criticism against religion in general, and against prophecy (that was considered an imposture and a trick) in particular as, according to al-Rāzī, reason is sufficient to distinguish good from evil. Although al-Rāzī was not imprisoned or executed because of his ideas on religion and prophecy, he was censored for his opinions, so that his philosophical and theological works were destroyed. Anyway, thanks to some fragments that had survived in later sources, it has been possible to reconstruct al-Rāzī's cosmology, which was

based on five eternal beings: Creator, Soul, Space, Time, and Matter. In this system God, considered a kind of "maker," does not create from "nothingness," but He molded a preexistent matter, which was conceived of in an atomistic way.

Al-Rāzī was the most liberal and independent Islamic thinker who believed in the authority of reason, the universal gift that God gave to all men without any distinction.

Abū Bakr Muḥammad b. Zakarīyā' al-Rāzī was a philosopher and a chemist, and well versed in musical theory and practice too (according to some traditions he played lute very well). Born in Rayy (near the present-day Teheran) in 850, he is said to have been an alchemist before being a physician, as testified by his *Kitāb al-asrār* (*The Book of Secrets*), translated into Latin by Gerard of Cremona.

Because of sighting impairment (probably due to his alchemic practices), which gradually caused him blindness, al-Rāzī devoted himself to medicine, a field in which he excelled. As he believed that a physician should practice medicine in a big city with plenty of potential patients, he went to Baghdad, where he studied and practiced medicine in its hospitals. Later on he went to Rayy, having accepted the invitation of the Samanid governor Maṣṣūr b. Iṣṣāq to assume the direction of the hospital of the city. After becoming famous in Rayy, he went back to Baghdad where he headed the hospital that had been founded by al-Mu'taḍid shortly before. He died in Rayy in 925 or 935.

Al-Rāzī was a prolific author (he is said to have written some 200 works) and a versatile one indeed; Ibn al-Nadīm, who attributes to him dozens of works on different fields of knowledge, lists in his *Kitāb al-Fihrist* (*The Book of the Catalogue*) many of al-Rāzī's writings on cosmology, theology, logic, mathematics, and alchemy.

However, al-Rāzī's name is mainly related to his medical works: his masterpieces *Kitāb al-jāmi' al-kabīr* (*The Great Comprehensive Book*) and *Kitāb al-ḥāwī fī l-ṭibb* (*The Comprehensive Book on Medicine*). In addition to these works, during

his stay in Baghdad al-Rāzī wrote two other medical works: the *Kitāb al-Manṣūrī* (*The Book of al-Manṣūr*) and *al-ṭibb al-rūḥānī* (*The Spiritual Medicine*). The *Kitāb al-Manṣūrī*, dedicated as suggested by its title to his patron Manṣūr b. Ishāq, and divided into 10 volumes, had for a very long time (from the twelfth to the sixteenth century) a great influence on the teaching of medicine in the Latin world, thanks to Gerard of Cremona's Latin translation (*Liber Almansoris*). As for *al-ṭibb al-rūḥānī*, which seems to be complementary to the *Kitāb al-Manṣūrī*, it deals with the "diseases" of the soul.

The *Kitāb al-ḥāwī fī l-ṭibb*, translated and known in Europe under the title of *Liber continens*, is not a medical encyclopedia in the usual sense, although it is of a monumental size; it can be considered as a kind of private medical notebook, divided in several "study-files," each of them arranged according to the method of the time, that is to say "from the head to the toes." This private record of comments and reflections deals not only with case-histories of patients, but also with medical works which marked the history of medicine, from Hippocrates down to al-Rāzī's times. Because of its encyclopedic size and completeness, it was often confused with the *Kitāb al-jāmi' al-kabīr* that can be considered the most complete and voluminous Arabic medical text.

This work, which according to Ibn al-Nadīm and Ibn Abī Uṣaybi'a consists of 12 parts, is often mentioned by al-Rāzī himself in the *Kitāb al-ḥāwī fī l-ṭibb*, in the *al-sīra al-falsafiyya* (*The Philosophical Life*, where al-Rāzī says that he had spent 15 years of hard work to write the *Kitāb al-jāmi' al-kabīr*), and in *al-fuṣūl* (*Aphorisms*), where he provides future physicians with a list of all the medical books they needed to read. One of the parts of the *Kitāb al-jāmi' al-kabīr* is a medical multilingual lexicon where al-Rāzī quotes the definition or the translation of unfamiliar terms, either foreign (Greek, Indian, Persian, Syriac) or Arabic.

Al-Rāzī, who wrote on several diseases (paralysis, arthritis, diabetes, colic, etc.) devoted a work to smallpox and measles (*Al-jadarī wa-l-ḥaṣba*), translated into Latin over a dozen times.

For the first time, smallpox and measles were considered two different diseases, as al-Rāzī showed in his description of their clinical details.

Although he made continuous references to Galen, al-Rāzī criticized him about some theories, as shown in his *Fī shukūk 'alā Jālīnūs* (*Doubts About Galen*). In particular, regarding the notion of humors, al-Rāzī did not believe that a body could be warmed or cooled only by warmer and cooler bodies. At the same time, he criticized Galen's excessive confidence in mathematics in explaining the theory of vision that, according to al-Rāzī, goes from the object to the eye and to the optic nerve. Nevertheless, al-Rāzī acknowledged Galen's greatness and role as a leading master and great teacher in both philosophy and medicine.

In fact, restoring Galen's idea that "an outstanding physician must also be a philosopher," al-Rāzī also wrote on philosophy. Noteworthy is his commentary on Plato's *Timaeus* (a probable epitome of Galen's), a criticism of the Mu'tazilite doctrine and a polemical writing against the Ismā'īlīs and their idea of the infallible Imam. Although all his philosophical works are lost, the very few and short excerpts which have survived are sufficient to show that al-Rāzī considered philosophy as a goal in itself and not simply as a support to medicine.

In particular, in *Fī makhāriq al-anbiyā'* (*On the Tricks of the Prophets*), a book of religious polemic attributed to al-Rāzī and which has gone lost, he said that religions are among the main causes of enmity and wars among peoples. He also believed in the cumulative value of knowledge but, at the same time, in the independent thinking too. In fact, if it is true that every man may learn from his predecessors, it is also true that he can surpass them in knowledge, because every man can think by himself and does not need any guide teaching him what to think or what to do. In the first chapter of his *al-ṭibb al-rūḥānī*, al-Rāzī exalted reason ('*aql*) that according to him is the ultimate authority and, consequently, represents the only power capable to control, lead, and govern. Starting from this, al-Rāzī carried out his criticism against religion in general and against prophecy and prophets, in particular.

In fact, he rejected the idea of prophecy as well as that of the necessity for an Imam; the consequence of his statements was that prophecy, as a privilege for few men, had to be considered as a trick and an imposture because, according to al-Rāzī, reason is sufficient to distinguish good from evil, to help man organize his life in a proper way, and to know God. In other words, there is no need for prophets. There are other evidences that can confirm that prophecy is not necessary; as God has given all men an intellect, there is no reason that can justify the intellectual predominance of some men over others. God, in His great goodness and benevolence, gave the universal gift of intellect to every man so that, in accordance with His supreme justice, no one is wiser than another. Finally, the evidence that prophecy is a trick is based on the fact that all the prophecies revealed during the various eras of human history contradicted each other; starting from this evidence, the consequence is that God's Word is contradictory (as each prophet considers himself as God's mouthpiece). According to al-Rāzī, this absurd conclusion demonstrated that prophecy is a trick.

Although al-Rāzī was not imprisoned or executed because of his ideas on religion and prophecy, he was censored for his opinions, so that *Fī makhāriq al-anbiyā'* was destroyed. Anyway, it is possible to recover his ideas on religions and prophecy thanks to some polemical writings of his adversaries, such as that of his contemporary Ismā'īlī *dā'ī* Abū Ḥātim al-Rāzī (811–891), who wrote his polemical answer in the *A'lām al-nubuwwa (The Signs of Prophecy)*.

Thanks to some fragments of his *Kitāb al-'ilm al-ilāhī (The Book of the Divine Science)*, which had survived in later sources, it has been possible to recover al-Rāzī's cosmology, which was based on five eternal beings (*al-qudamā' al-khamsa*), although al-Rāzī denied the eternity of the world. These beings, whose interaction created the world as we know it, are the Creator (*al-Bārī'*), Soul (*al-Nafs*), Time (*al-Zamān*), Space (*al-Makān*), and Matter (*al-Hayūlā*). God, who is considered a kind of "maker" (*formator*

*mundi*, demiurge), did not create from "nothingness" but molded a preexistent matter, which was conceived of in an atomistic way, that echoes Democritus and Leucippus; in fact, the ultimate constituents of things are said to be indivisible because of their smallness and solidity. Al-Rāzī's atomism is quite different from that of the *mutakallimūn*: according to them, the existence of atoms depends exclusively on the continuous creative will of God. In al-Rāzī's atomism, the atoms possess "extension" and the characteristics of bodies depend on the number of atoms in proportion with the amount of void which has the force of attraction.

The eternity of Matter requires that Space and Time in which it is extended are eternal too. In particular, al-Rāzī distinguishes an "absolute" space from a "relative" one: the first is infinite and independent of the world, the second is an empty space, or void, which is inside Matter and which attracts bodies (a possible expedient to explain the Epicurean *clinamen*). Similarly, Time is distinguished in "absolute" time, that is to say "duration," and "limited" time, which is that of the spheres, the sun, and the stars.

The cosmological process began with the fall of the Soul, conceived of as living but not yet intelligent. Soul desired to embody herself into Matter that was not in motion yet. In doing so, Soul imparted a disordered and confused motion to Matter. God, who did not hinder this "desire" because He knew that Soul needed experience for learning, then sent the Intellect (*'aql*) to the Soul; in this way, the Soul became aware that this kind of matter had nothing to do with her true nature, and she tried to get rid of corporeal ties.

As previously said, before his formal training in medicine, al-Rāzī was an alchemist. Al-Bīrūnī, who attributes to him 80 works, lists 21 writings on alchemy. Although the primary sources for Arabic alchemy go back to Hermetism and to this corpus of traditions and writings, al-Rāzī's alchemy has nothing to do with mystery but with the fundamental chemical procedures, essential for pharmacology, which he explained in detail in alchemical works such as the *Kitāb sirr*

*al-asrār* (*The Book of the Secret of the Secrets*) and the previously mentioned *Kitāb al-asrār*. Here al-Rāzī spells out the alchemic procedures for plating and gilding metals and makes also a classification of minerals, divided into six sections: spirits, bodies, stones, vitriol, borax, and salts.

As to ethics, al-Rāzī can be considered “Epicurean in character” as he stated, especially in his *al-Ṭibb al-rūḥānī* and *al-Sira al-falsafiyya*, that pleasure is neither positive nor negative: it is the normal state of man when the pain ends (so man has to avoid not the passions, but their excesses). Besides these two works, al-Rāzī also wrote a work entitled *Kitāb al-ladhdha* (*The Book of Pleasure*), which has gone lost. Nevertheless, from the study of some of its excerpts and reports, survived in later authors, it seems that he believed in the replenishment theory of pleasure that, according to some scholars, is not Epicurean. In fact, “al-Rāzī thinks not only that all pleasure will be purchased at the price of harm, but also that the amount of harm will be at least as great as the pleasure that is achieved” (Adamson 2008: 94).

Al-Rāzī did not establish a well organized philosophical system, nevertheless he was the most liberal and independent Islamic thinker, as testified by his fight against the idea of an absolute authority granting power to few privileged men. The only authority in which he believed and which he accepted was reason, the universal gift that God gave to all men, without any distinction, and the intellectual support that helped Soul to recognize her origin and to return to it.

## Cross-References

- ▶ [Alchemy in the Arab World](#)
- ▶ [Atomism](#)
- ▶ [Ethics](#)
- ▶ [Form and Matter](#)
- ▶ [Galen, Arabic](#)
- ▶ [Medicine and Philosophy](#)
- ▶ [Medicine in the Arab World](#)

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## Abū Bishr Mattā ibn Yūnus

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### Abstract

In tenth-century Baghdad, during the decline of the 'Abbāsīd caliphate, a circle of Christian and Muslim physicians, philosophers, and translators grew up. They shared a deep and genuine interest in Greek scientific and medical knowledge and, following the tradition of the school of Alexandria, they devoted themselves to the study of Peripatetic philosophy through Arabic translations from Syriac. In their opinion, education should be grounded on this philosophy. School activity consisted of a teacher, his home, books, colleagues, pupils, and occasional visitors. On special occasions, open discussions were organized for huge crowds, often in the librarians' quarter. The principal promoter of this circle was Abū Bishr Mattā ibn Yūnus.

He was a Nestorian Christian who had been educated in the Syriac monastic school of the convent of Mār Mārī at Dayr Qunnā. Among his teachers, there were Christians who were the last followers of the Alexandrian school of philosophy: we know from the *Kitāb al-Fihrist* by Ibn al-Nadīm (written around 990) that Abū Bishr Mattā ibn Yūnus read the *Posterior Analytics* under the guidance of Abū Yahyā al-Marwazī and that he had as a teacher Abū Ishāq Ibrāhīm Quwayrā, a commentator of the Aristotelian *Organon*. He studied also under the *mutakallim* Abū Aḥmad al-Ḥusayn ibn Ishāq ibn Karnīb; Ibn al-Nadīm mentions in the *Fihrist* the interest for natural philosophy of this *mutakallim*.

During the caliphate of al-Rāḍī, Abū Bishr Mattā came to Baghdad where he revived the

Aristotelian studies through his translations, revealing to the Arabic readers an Aristotle much more complete than the one they had hitherto known. In particular, he translated for the first time into Arabic, from Syriac, the *Posterior Analytics*, not read in the Syriac monastic schools, possibly for dogmatic reasons (the Christians stopped at *Prior Analytics* I, 7): with this text, he offered to his readers the Peripatetic tradition of logic as a methodology of rational discourse. The *Posterior Analytics* or, in Arabic, *Kitāb al-Burhān* (*Book of Demonstration*) provided a paradigm for the subsequent generations of *falāsifa* “with a coherent system of deduction and demonstration, comprising all levels of rational activity, and serving as a guide for the division and hierarchical classification of the sciences, leading up to the First Philosophy” (Endress 1990).

Besides the translation of the *Posterior Analytics*, Ibn al-Nadīm mentions, among Abū Bishr Mattā ibn Yūnus’ translations, Alexander of Aphrodisias’ commentary on the *Posterior Analytics* and Themistius’ commentary of the last three books of *Prior Analytics* and of *Posterior Analytics*, the revision of the older version of the *Sophistici elenchi*, the *Poetics* (translated in Arabic for the first time), the *De caelo* and Themistius’ paraphrase of it, the *De generatione et corruptione* with the commentaries of Alexander and Olympiodorus, the *Meteorologica* with Olympiodorus’ commentary, *Book Lambda* of Aristotle’s *Metaphysics* with Alexander’s commentary as well as Themistius’ paraphrase, and finally Themistius’ commentary on the *Physics*. Only the translations of the *Posterior Analytics*, *Poetics*, and *Book Lambda* of Aristotle’s *Metaphysics* have survived. Besides, he wrote his own commentaries on Aristotelian works, for example, the *Categories*. We may assume from the manuscripts – as the MSS Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale, ar: 2346 and Leiden, Universiteitsbibliothek, or: 583 containing, respectively, Ibn Suwār’s “edition” of the *Organon* and Ibn al-Samḥ’s “edition” of the *Physics* – that these commentaries were more or less in the form of marginal notes or passages placed between the lemmata of text.

Abū Bishr Mattā won the fame of the logician of his time, and for this reason he was involved in

a dispute against the champion of the traditional Islamic sciences of his time, the grammarian Abū Sa‘īd al-Sīrāfī, who, on the contrary, reacted against the claim of Greek logic to universal truth, and defended the science of grammar (*al-naḥw*), considered by the traditionalists the propaedeutics to the religious sciences and by the same token to the truth of Revelation. This dispute took place in Baghdad in 938 in front of the vizier Ibn al-Furāt and is described by Abū Ḥayyān al-Tawḥīdī (d. 1023?) in the *Kitāb al-Imtā’ wa-l-mu’ānasa* (I, 108–128) as reported to him by Abū Sa‘īd al-Sīrāfī and the grammarian ‘Alī ibn ‘Īsā al-Rummānī.

Abū Bishr Mattā ibn Yūnus considers logic as the tool to distinguish “truth from falsehood, veracity from lying, good from bad, proof from sophism, doubt from certainty” (*al-Imtā’*, I, 108) and, in so far as it is the science of demonstration, as the basis of the entire building of learning. He assumes that logic inquires into the intelligibles and considers the meanings of the things, that are identical for all men and nations, at variance with grammar, that considers the utterances that a natural language uses to indicate the significance of things. For this reason, logic is more universal than grammar and the Aristotelian logical texts in Arabic translation provide the tool to know the truth about man, cosmos, and God.

On his part, Abū Sa‘īd al-Sīrāfī replies that no one translation is able to transfer the meanings from a language into another without confusing or at least changing them. For this reason, one can know the meaning of things only remaining within the boundaries of his own mother tongue. The logic was established according to Greek language and its conventional usage, and it was valid for Greek people: “Why must Turks, Indians, Persians or Arabs take Greek as judge and arbiter?” (*Imtā’*, I, 112). There is no universal logic as there is no universal grammar or language.

Abū Sa‘īd al-Sīrāfī focuses not only on the fact that Abū Bishr Mattā ibn Yūnus does not know Greek, as he translates from Syriac, but also on the fact that he does not know even Arabic. Abū Sa‘īd al-Sīrāfī asks him to explain the use of the conjunction *wa*, but Abū Bishr Mattā ibn Yūnus replies:



This is grammar and I have not studied grammar. For the Logician has no need for it, while the grammarian is very much in need of logic. For logic investigates the meaning, while grammar investigates the utterance. If, therefore, the logician comes across the utterance, this is a mere accident. Likewise, it is by sheer accident that the grammarian stumbles upon the meaning. And the meaning is nobler than utterance, and the utterance, humbler than the meaning (*Imtā'*, I, 114).

The debate about the merits of logic and grammar was reopened by the two more prominent disciples of Abū Bishr Mattā ibn Yūnus: Abū Naṣr al-Fārābī and Yaḥyā ibn 'Adī, who tried to eventually harmonize Greek thought and traditional learning: they were convinced of the possibility of presenting Aristotelian logic in genuine Arabic speech.

## Cross-References

- ▶ al-Fārābī, Abū Naṣr
- ▶ Ibn al-Samḥ
- ▶ Ibn Suwār (Ibn al-Khammār)
- ▶ al-Tawḥīdī, Abū Ḥayyān

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## Abū Hāshim al-Jubbā'ī

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### Abstract

Abū Hāshim al-Jubbā'ī (b. 861 or, more likely, 890; d. 933) was one of the most influential representatives of Mu'tazilism, a school of "rational theology" – or *ilm al-kalām* (literally "science of speech") as the discipline is termed in the Islamic intellectual tradition. He significantly developed the doctrinal system of the

“School of Baṣra,” and his followers are sometimes called after him “Bahshamiyya” or “Bahāshima.” The most important element of Abū Hāshim’s metaphysical thinking was his development of the so-called theory of “states” (pl. *aḥwāl*, sing. *ḥāl*). According to this doctrine, the qualifications of beings have an ontological reality that is neither described by existence nor nonexistence. The theory helped him to explain the nature of God’s attributes without asserting the existence of co-eternal beings in God. Abū Hāshim also claimed that the very being of things does not collapse into their existence. It was therefore debated whether or not his teaching had an influence on Avicenna’s essence-existence distinction.

### Biographical Information

Abū Hāshim al-Jubbāʿī (b. 861 or, more likely, 890; d. 933) was one of the most influential representatives of Muʿtazilism, a school of “rational theology” – or *ilm al-kalām* (literally “science of speech”) as the discipline is termed in the Islamic intellectual tradition. He lived and taught in the early period of what modern scholars have called the “scholastic phase” of Muʿtazilism. This periodization describes a shift from an earlier stage, in which Muʿtazilite teaching was an endeavor of merely independent thinkers, toward the emergence of real schools of thought with an established and comprehensive doctrinal system. Abū Hāshim’s father Abū ʿAlī al-Jubbāʿī (d. 915) was the founder of one of the major schools of Muʿtazilism of the “scholastic phase,” namely the so-called “School of Baṣra.” Abū ʿAlī had made significant contribution to the systematization of the doctrines of the “School of Baṣra,” but a number of central theories were only developed, refined, or revised by his son. Therefore, the later followers of Abū Hāshim’s teachings were also called “Bahshamiyya” or “Bahāshima.”

Most historical reports about Abū Hāshim actually focus on his teachings. We therefore possess only very limited biographical information about him. He appears to have spent most of his life in ʿAskar Mukram in Khusestan and in the city

of Basra. He was trained in *kalām* theology by his father. The sources report that Abū Hāshim already developed independent ideas while studying with Abū ʿAlī. Controversial issues that came up in the discussions between the two Jubbāʿīs were later recorded in a lost treatise entitled *al-Khilāf bayn al-shaykhayn* (“Differences between the two teachers”) by the Bahshamite theologian ʿAbd al-Jabbār al-Hamadhānī (d. 1025). After the death of his father in 915, Abū Hāshim claimed the leadership of the Baṣran Muʿtazila. Because of his young age, and apparently also because he disagreed with some of his father’s doctrines, Abū Hāshim’s claim raised some opposition among several fellow students. His most important antagonists formed a group called “Ikshīdiyya.” Yet the historical significance of these adversaries is quite marginal, specifically as compared to Abū Hāshim’s influence even beyond his own school. Sometime between 926 and 930, he settled in Baghdad, where he spent the rest of his life. He died there in 933 and was buried in the city (Schmidtke 2016).

Abū Hāshim’s thought was transmitted via his disciples, including Abū ʿAlī Ibn Khallād (d. 961?) and Abū ʿAbd Allāh al-Baṣrī (d. 980), who were among his most important students. During the tenth and early eleventh century, the school saw a blossoming under the Buyid dynasty, with the city of Rayy as its intellectual center. In the twelfth century, Bahshamite theology was adopted by Yemen’s Zaydite community, a minor sect of Shīʿī Islam. The Zaydites of Yemen continued transmitting this intellectual tradition down to modernity, and so they significantly contributed to the preservation of the school’s literature in the country’s manuscript libraries. In addition, Bahshamite literature has survived in Jewish, specifically Karaite manuscripts, that have been preserved in Cairo’s Geniza store rooms (Adang et al. 2007).

Abū Hāshim’s numerous writings themselves have not survived. The most important source for reconstructing his body of works is the later Bahshamite literature, which includes copious references to it (a list of his works was compiled by Gimaret 1976, 1984). Important summaries of Abū Hāshim’s teachings – and specifically his



ontological theories – are embedded in fragments of a commentary by ‘Abd al-Jabbār al-Hamadhānī upon a work by the Buyid vizier al-Šāhib Ibn ‘Abbād (d. 995). Al-Šāhib’s summaries rely in particular on Abū Hāshim’s *Kitāb al-Jāmi‘*, one of his major works (Madelung and Schmidtke 2016). Apart from comprehensive textbooks, Abū Hāshim also dedicated a number of treatises to the discussion of more specific issues, and he also wrote refutations against theological opponents, proponents of a natural causality or Hellenizing philosophers (*falāsifa*). Due to the lack of primary sources, any reconstruction of Abū Hāshim’s teaching has to rely on scattered reports from later literature and therefore remains to a certain degree speculative.

## Thought

Although generally described as a form of theology, *‘ilm al-kalām* was centrally concerned with a wide range of philosophical problems. Metaphysics was one of them, and Abū Hāshim made some significant contributions specifically to this field. His reflections departed from notions that were widely shared by *kalām* theologians (that is, not only by Mu‘tazilites like him). They had developed an understanding of beings that was conceptualized by two almost synonymous terms: *shay’* and *dhāt*. *Shay’* means “thing” and was defined as that which can become an object of knowledge and the subject of a predication. The translation of *dhāt* is somewhat more problematic: the medieval translators of Hellenistic philosophical works chose this term as the Arabic equivalent for “essence,” and so the *falsafa* tradition used it with this specific Aristotelian connotation. Yet this is not the case with *kalām*, where the term’s understanding was different and the translation “essence” would therefore be misleading. In this context, the notion of *dhāt* means that which can be described by properties and can consequently be distinguished or said to be similar or alike. Apart from “thing”, appropriate translations in the context of Abū Hāshim’s teaching for *shay’/dhāt* are “entity”, “self”, or “object” (Dhanani 1993).

The Baṣran Mu‘tazila accorded the status of “entity” to three kinds of beings. The first two are those types of entities of which the world was assumed to be made up: (1) atoms (pl. *jawāhir*, sing. *jawhar*), i.e., indivisible particles that occupy space and from which bodies can be composed; (2) accidents (pl. *a‘rād*, sing. *‘araḍ*) that inhere in atoms and determine their changeable qualities, including color, taste, their position in space, or their movement. Finally, the third of the three kinds of “entities” transcends the physical world, it is God.

An important element of Abū Hāshim’s metaphysical thinking was that he considered both the existent and the nonexistent as “entities” or “things.” This in turn means for him that the true reality of things does not collapse into their existence: rather, Abū Hāshim conceives of existence as a property supplemental to the things’ very being. “Things” or “entities” that are predicated to be nonexistent are identified with the possible, and their number was believed to be infinite. An important argument in support of this theory of the nonexistent was that only “things” or “entities” can be objects of knowledge. Hence Abū Hāshim concluded that God’s omniscience necessarily implies that He has knowledge of the particular objects before they exist, and that without His antecedent knowledge He would be unable to create them (Frank 1980).

Now, when Abū Hāshim came to analyze what properties (such as existence) actually are, he developed his arguably most important theory. The question of the ontological reality of properties was particularly relevant – and difficult to resolve – with regard to the eternal qualities attributed to God. Several generations of theologians had already struggled with this issue, because their affirmation of God’s multiple qualities was, from a logical perspective, difficult to reconcile with the monotheistic idea that He is one. The problem was consequently very much linked to the claim that whatever we conceive of has the ontological status of entities.

In order to resolve this dilemma, Abū Hāshim overcame the limitations set by an ontology that only admits the reality of either existing or

nonexisting things. He introduced a new category of so-called “states” (pl. *aḥwāl*, sing. *ḥāl*). “States” were a concept borrowed from the grammarians, who used it to describe predicates that express a manner of being or circumstance of a subject in a predicative sentence. Abū Hāshim applied this analysis to the properties we attribute to beings and then reinterpreted such predications as “Zayd is knowing”: “being knowing” would accordingly not refer to “knowledge” (that is an entity distinct from the entity described as “knowing”). Rather, the predication means that Zayd is (or exists) and that his being is further qualified by a circumstance or manner of being, i.e., the “state” of “being knowing.” Abū Hāshim conceived of these “states” as something real. Yet, unlike “things” or “entities,” they are not said to be real because they exist (*wujida*, *yūjadu*). Rather the reality of “states” – or their becoming actual – is described by the term *thubūt* (or referred to by the verb *thabata*, *yathbutu*, “to be actual/real”).

As against theories that admitted a description of the very nature of entities by a set of properties, Abū Hāshim believed that the identity of things finds its expression in one quality (or “state”) specific to it. The “state” that describes atoms as that which they are in and by themselves is their “being an atom.” It distinguishes atoms from other kinds of things, e.g., accidents of the color black, whose specific quality is their “being black.” Similarly, God has also His “most specific attribute” that distinguishes Him from all other beings. Abū Hāshim’s conceptions of these qualities as being real now allowed him to explain the foundation of other properties by arguing that one “state” is grounded in another. He could therefore claim that such eternal attributes as God’s “being knowing,” “being powerful,” “being living,” and “being existent” are entailed by His very being. Rather than by virtue of eternal knowledge, power, life, and existence, He deserves these qualities because He himself is eternal. This view helped Abū Hāshim to avoid positing a multiplicity of entities in God. The same principle of correlation between “states” was also applied to specific properties of things in this world. Abū Hāshim argued that whenever an atom comes

into existence (here the property “existence” is caused by an agent, namely the atom’s creator), it must occupy space. Its quality of “being an atom” entails that it occupies space whenever it exists, so that Abū Hāshim concluded that “occupying space” is caused by (the “state” of) “being an atom.” Atoms then may acquire additional properties: they may exist at different locations (and also change their locus), be composed to bodies, be white or black, etc. These additional properties are contingent and subject to change, and so Abū Hāshim posited that the “state” of moving from locus A to locus B or of being composed with other atoms is caused by accidents of movement or composition that inhere in atoms – reasoning that accidents themselves are contingent beings (Frank 1978; Thiele 2016).

Abū Hāshim’s doctrines had a significant impact even beyond his own school of *kalām* theology. His theory of “states” was later adopted by representatives of Ashʿarism, a rival school of *kalām* that later came to be the predominant strand in Sunni Islam. In addition, Abū Hāshim’s teachings were of significant relevance to debates on Avicenna’s essence-existence distinction, and it was discussed in this context to what extent the latter’s reflections built upon Abū Hāshim’s thought.

## Cross-References

- ▶ [Being](#)
- ▶ [Essence and Existence](#)
- ▶ [Kalām](#)
- ▶ [Metaphysics](#)
- ▶ [Philosophy, Arabic](#)
- ▶ [Theology Versus Philosophy in the Arab World](#)

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## Abu L-‘Abbās Lawkarī

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Life – Abū l-‘Abbās al-Faḍl b. Muḥammad al-Lawkarī was a second-generation student of Avicenna (d. 428/1037) through his most talented and devoted disciple Abū l-Ḥasan Bahmanyār b. Marzbān (d. 458/1066). Lawkarī belonged to one of the most influential families in the district of Merv and traced his origin to the town of Lawgar, situated on the road leading from Merv to Herat. It is not known when Lawkarī was born. But given that he was a student of Bahmanyār and

if it is true that Bahmanyār died in 458/1066, then he may have been somewhere in his 30s when Bahmanyār passed away. The fact that he was alive in 503/1110 – the year in which he compiled the table of contents of Avicenna’s *Ta‘līqāt* – is certainly consistent with such a hypothesis. It must then have been some time after 503/1110 that his eyes and general condition got so bad that he – as reported by al-Bayhaqī who explicitly refers to Lawkarī’s advanced age (*shaykhūkhathu*) – started to long for the end. While we know that Lawkarī passed away quite suddenly after a heavy midday meal, we do not know when this happened. In recent times it has been suggested that he passed away in 517/1123. There is, however, no evidence for this. The date in question was introduced by ‘Abd al-Raḥmān Badawī (Avicenna, *Ta‘līqāt*, Introd. p. 8) and was based on his understanding of the entry on Lawkarī in Carl Brockelmann’s *Geschichte der arabischen Litteratur* (GAL vol. 1, 602, 10a). While there were always doubts on this date, the matter remained unresolved, until recently, that is, when GAL’s entry on Lawkarī was published in English translation (Brockelmann, *History of the Arabic Written Tradition*, vol. 1, 526, 10a). Since then, there can be no more doubt that the dying date that is mentioned there is *not* Lawkarī’s, but that of his contemporary ‘Umar al-Khayyām (for whom we possess at least three death dates: 515/1121, 517/1123, and 526/1132): “Abū l-‘Abbās al-Faḍl b. Muḥammad al-Lawkarī was a contemporary of ‘Umar al-Khayyām, d. 517/1123 (p. 620), who, like him, was also active as a poet.” So, all we know is that at the time of his death, Lawkarī was an elderly man who considered his life complete and looked forward to the end and that he died after a sudden illness, at some unspecified date after 503/1110.

Works – According to al-Bayhaqī, Lawkarī wrote many works, among them:

1. *Bayān al-ḥaqq bi-ḍamān al-ṣidq (An Account of the Truth, with the Pledge to State the Facts)*
2. A *qaṣīda* in Persian with a commentary (which must be his *Sharḥ Qaṣīdat asrār al-ḥikma*

[*A Commentary on the Poem Called The Secrets of Wisdom*]

3. Essays (*rasāʿil*)
4. Learned annotations/comments (*taʿlīqāt*) and abridgements (*mukhtaṣarāt*)
5. A collection of poems (*dīwān shiʿr*)

From the above works, nos. 1 and 2 have survived. In connection with no. 5, it should be noted that, while we do not possess a *dīwān* by Lawkarī as such, still, Muʿīn al-Dīn al-Nīshāpūrī (d. 599/1203), in his *Itmām Tatimmat Ṣīwān al-ḥikma* (in several MSS in Istanbul), lists no less than 46 lines of poetry ascribed to him. As for no. 4, even if there is no trace of any *taʿlīqāt* or *mukhtaṣarāt* in Lawkarī’s name, it is also true that the style of his philosophical works that do survive (viz., nos. 1 and 2 and the *ʿAwīṣ al-masāʿil fī ʿulūm al-awāʿil* which will be discussed presently) is all consistent with his declared intention to explain philosophy in a concise but intelligible manner (see Style of Writing below). And if someone should call these therefore explanatory abridgements, this is certainly not far beside the truth.

The *Bayān al-ḥaqq bi-damān al-ṣidq* is an explanatory summary of Avicenna’s philosophical encyclopedia the *Kitāb al-Shifāʾ* (*The Book of Healing*). The word “truth” in the title must be understood as “the true sense of Avicenna’s philosophy as set out in the *Healing*,” which Lawkarī then promises to describe in a straightforward and unadulterated manner. In this work Lawkarī is mostly inspired by Avicenna, whom he quotes (almost) literally at times, turning this work into an important tool for future editions of the works of Avicenna, but also by Aristotle, Abū Naṣr al-Fārābī (d. ca. 339/950), and Bahmanyār.

The philosophical *Sharḥ Qaṣīdat asrār al-ḥikma* is also encyclopedic in character, but much shorter than the *Bayān al-ḥaqq*. Insofar as this work is philosophical, involves a *qaṣīda*, and is written in Persian, there are clear parallels with Avicenna’s Persian *Dānishnāma-yi ʿAlāʾ* (*Philosophy for ʿAlāʾ al-Dawla*) and his didactical poems like *al-Urjūza fī l-mantiq* (*The rajaz-Poem on Logic*).

Another work, not mentioned by al-Bayhaqī, is the *ʿAwīṣ al-masāʿil fī ʿulūm al-awāʿil* (*Difficult Questions about the Sciences of the Ancients*). The shortest of his three surviving works on philosophy, it addresses 30 questions in logic, natural science, mathematics, and metaphysics, listing the questions first and then, one by one, his answers. This treatise is not listed in any of the ancient biobibliographical sources, but in the one remaining copy, it is expressly ascribed to him. A close comparison of various sections of the *ʿAwīṣ al-masāʿil* with corresponding sections in the *Bayān al-ḥaqq* and the *Sharḥ qaṣīdat asrār al-ḥikma* confirms this ascription: there can be no doubt that Lawkarī is the author of this work.

Finally, another text by Lawkarī not mentioned in the *Tatimmat Ṣīwān al-ḥikma* is his very detailed table of contents of Avicenna’s *Taʿlīqāt*, which is preserved in the oldest copy of Avicenna’s *Taʿlīqāt* which was copied in 521/1127. Interestingly, Lawkarī’s use of *abjad* numbers in the tables of contents of each of the sections of the *Tabīʿiyāt* (the part on natural philosophy) of his *Bayān al-ḥaqq* is also found in this table of contents for Avicenna’s *Taʿlīqāt*.

Style of Writing – According to al-Bayhaqī, who calls Lawkarī both an *adīb* (a man of letters) and a *faylasūf*, it was Lawkarī who was responsible for the spreading of the philosophical sciences (*ʿulūm al-ḥikma*) in Khurāsān. At a time when especially Avicenna’s philosophy was facing severe criticism from al-Ghazālī (d. 505/1111), the importance of this fact can hardly be overestimated. According to Lawkarī’s own statement, his philosophical writings were inspired by the desire to present philosophy in a new kind of format. Until then, he says, the only books that he had come across were either much too detailed or way too concise. This new format, which one could call the “explanatory summary” (i.e., a *sharḥ* and *talkhīṣ* in one, comparable to the paraphrases of Aristotle by Themistius [d. ca. 390 CE]), is sufficiently detailed to be meaningful philosophically while leaving out most of the historical and accessory material. In the process, Lawkarī filtered most of the Greek context out of the philosophy of Avicenna, which may certainly

have facilitated its reception in Khurāsān, through his immediate students (e.g., Sharaf al-Dīn al-Īlāqī, Ibn Abī Ṭāhir al-Marwazī, 'Abd al-Razzāq al-Ṣīghnākhī) and then, by his writings, in Khurāsān and elsewhere in the Persianate world, through thinkers like Shihāb al-Dīn al-Suhrawardī (d. 587/1191), Naṣīr al-Dīn al-Ṭūsī (d. 672/1274), and, finally, Ṣadr al-Dīn al-Shīrāzī (d. 1045/1645).

In Hellenistic times, the Greek commentators of Aristotle would often explain Aristotle with Aristotle, drawing on other parts of his works in order to explain some difficulty in the text. In the *Bayān al-ḥaqq*, Lawkarī does the same thing, explaining Avicenna with Avicenna. Interestingly, he uses Avicenna's *Kitāb al-ishārāt wal-tanbīhāt* to explain some difficulties in the *Shifā'*. This means that he saw a unity of doctrine in both works where today, the common view is that the *Ishārāt* – Avicenna's last major philosophical work – is in various ways different from, and meant to replace, the philosophy of the *Shifā'*.

Significance – Al-Bayhaqī considered Lawkarī more as a transmitter than as a thinker in his own right. And if one looks at his surviving works and at the style in which they were written, this judgment is certainly not misplaced. Still, Lawkarī was very much in charge of the ideas that he was transmitting, this in the sense that he would make his own choices in his selection of topics and the way or order to present them. In the case of the physics of the *Bayān al-ḥaqq*, for instance, he cut Avicenna's number of chapters in half, which is exactly what one would expect from a teacher who focuses on the essential. On the other hand, in the case of the soul's fate after its separation from the body, he even decided to introduce a special discussion on its capacity to know in this separate state, a subject which he believed had been mostly ignored as a result of an undue emphasis on man's reward and punishment in the Hereafter. So, yes a transmitter and a teacher, but also an author with a keen and independent mind.

Modern Scholarship – While modern scholarship in Iran has thus far mostly been limited to the edition of the *Bayān al-ḥaqq* (partial) (Dībājī, Khaḍrī), the *Sharḥ Qaṣīdat asrār al-ḥikma*

(Dībājī, Rūhī), and global descriptions of the contents of these (Qarīb, Dībājī), in the West the focus was mainly on content: Jules Janssens with his studies on the doctrinal and textual similarities between the *Bayān al-ḥaqq* and the works of al-Fārābī, Avicenna, and Bahmanyār; Roxanne Marcotte with her biobibliographical, lexicological, and partly doctrinal studies; and Frank Griffel with his studies on the spirit of the age of Lawkarī and the way in which it is reflected in the life and/or works of, among others, Lawkarī. However, in view of Lawkarī's pivotal importance in the history of Islamic philosophy in Khurāsān and other parts of the medieval Persianate world, it would seem that thus far much too little has been done. We still need reliable editions of (most of) the *Bayān al-ḥaqq* and the *Sharḥ Qaṣīdat asrār al-ḥikma* and of the whole of the *'Awāṣ al-masā'il* and, besides, in-depth textual and doctrinal studies designed to lay bare the extent of Lawkarī's dependence on and, where applicable, modification of, the philosophy of Avicenna especially, though not exclusively. At the time of writing of this entry (April 2018), an edition of the entire natural philosophy – part of the *Bayān al-ḥaqq* (ca. 500 pages in print) – is in preparation, to be published in 2019 (M.J. ESMAEILI, Tehran).

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## Abū L-Barakāt al-Baġdādī

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### Abstract

In Baghdad of the first half of the twelfth century, Abū l-Barakāt al-Baġdādī not only gained notoriety as an accomplished physician but also as a resolutely independent philosopher. In his philosophical *summa*, the *Book of Evidence*, he provided incisive criticism of a number of Avicennan Peripatetic theses that made for novel philosophical insights into concepts of space, time and motion, a priori knowledge and self-awareness, unity of soul and intellect, and God’s knowledge.

Abū l-Barakāt al-Baġdādī, also known as Hibat Allāh (Nathaniel) and Ibn Malka, was born near Mosul into a Jewish family around 1077. He headed for Baghdad where he studied medicine with Abū l-Ḥasan Sa‘īd b. Hibat Allāh (d. 1101). His reputation as a physician gave him access to the courts of Seljuq sultans and the caliphs of Baghdad to whom he attended. He also taught medicine, although he managed to remain on bad terms with Ibn al-Tilmīdh (d. 1164), the famed Christian physician (Langermann 1998). The exact reason for his alleged conversion to Islam, late in life, remains disputed (four different accounts) (Pines 1979: 260n.4; Stroumsa 1990; Madelung 2011), as does the date of his death (in Baghdad or Hamedan), perhaps after 1165 (Brockelmann 2017 I: 864, while in his eighties (or nineties), although it could well be sometime before 1157, according to a copy of his *Treatise on the Intellect* (al-Ṭayyib 1980, 127n.1) that contains a common expression used for the deceased, or as early as 1152, according to Bayhaqī’s (d. 1169) *Completion* (written after ca. 1165) (Ülken 1949).

al-Baġdādī wrote an Arabic translation (in Hebrew script), with a lengthy philosophical commentary, on the *Ecclesiastes* that he dictated to his pupil, Iṣḥāq b. Abraham b. Ezra, who composed a (Hebrew) panegyric in praise of his master at the completion of the work in 1143 (Steinschneider 1964, no. 148), and of which four passages were edited, translated into Hebrew, and analyzed (al-Baġdādī 1964). He also wrote an astronomical work on the appearance of stars at night (Tunagöz 2015: 72–77); treatises on the soul (unedited), on weariness (*malāl*) (Tunagöz 2016: 29–39), on predestination, and on the intellect (al-Ṭayyib 1980; Marcotte 2004; cf. Madelung 2011); and a number of lost medical works: an *Abridgment of Anatomy* (based on Galen’s work), some pharmacological treatises, and glosses on Avicenna’s *Laws of Medicine* (Pines 1960; Madelung 2011).

In his commentary on the *Ecclesiastes* and notably in the introduction of his *Book of Evidence*, al-Baġdādī construed scientific knowledge (medicine, philosophy, etc.) as having been originally transmitted orally and then further transmitted via “esoteric” (symbolic or metaphoric) works penned by unknowledgeable individuals who corrupted the “truths” of earlier oral teachings. Therefore, remediation of the waning transmission of knowledge required individuals, like al-Baġdādī, who were able to recover the lost original “truths” of the *Book of Nature* (lit.: the “Codex of Being” [*ṣaḥīfat al-wujūd*]), the purported aim of his *Book of Evidence*, the *Kitāb al-Mu’tabar* (1938–1939; henceforth: *KM*) (Stroumsa 1996: 48–50; Sirat 1996: 132–133). While al-Baġdādī dabbled rather informally in philosophy, much of what we know derives from the three volumes of this philosophical *summa* (parts containing references to the Bible predate possibly his conversion to Islam late in life).

The *Book of Evidence* contains some of al-Baġdādī’s most penetrating philosophical insights, the fruits of his own personal investigations (al-Ṭayyib 2004). In this collection of personal notes on logic, physics (Sālim 2005; Wan Abdullah 2007a), and metaphysics (Abū Sa’da 1993), he re-examined earlier Peripatetic philosophical views, in particular those Avicenna included in his *Healing* (and *Salvation*). Throughout the work, he applied a “methodological

doubt” (an early version of Descartes’ methodological skepticism) with which he subjected systematically earlier philosophers’ definitions, demonstrations, and theories. This skeptical standpoint rests at the heart of the “dialectical turn” (Griffel 2011) in *falsafa*, during the first half the twelfth century, that initiated a new era of “critical philosophy” (Shihadeh 2014), which Ghazālī’s (d. 1111) skepticism introduced in theology (*kalām*), and which al-Baġdādī introduced in philosophy (al-Ṭayyib 2004), and upon which Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī (d. 1209), Shihāb al-Dīn al-Suhrawardī (d. 1191), and Ibn Kammūna (d. 1284) built. al-Baġdādī stated that he only included what he was able to ascertain with his own personal investigations, findings, and conclusions. He achieved this by relying upon self-evident and a priori truths (or propositions) that he uncovered by making use of un-Aristotelian intuitions, thus upholding the epistemic self-evidence of certitude attached to those intuitions or the notions underlying them. This is what provides an overall unity to his collection of personal notes (Pines 1979: 96–108).

In logic, al-Baġdādī owed much to Avicenna’s works (including his *Philosophy for Arūḍī* for dialectics, sophistry, rhetoric, and poetics, cf. Janssens 2016). He remains an important witness, together with Boethius (d. ca. 524–526), to the existence of a second Arabic version of Themistius’ (d. ca. 388–390) commentary on Aristotle’s *Topics* (of which no Greek text has survived), distinct from the one available to Averroes. Of this lost commentary, we have fragments (*KM* I: 241–246.6) containing Themistius’ classification of places (*mawāqī’*) that lends an element of apodicticity to the *Topics* (Hasnawi 2004, 2007). al-Baġdādī also provided a critical evaluation of the *Isagoge* and disputed the possibility of acquiring definitions (*KM* I: 55–57), an insight that inspired Shihāb al-Dīn al-Suhrawardī’s (d. 1191) critical views on definitions (Pavlov 2017a: 284–349, cf. Janssens 2018).

In physics, al-Baġdādī rejected the Avicennan view that corporeity is a “substantial form superadded to prime matter” (*hayūlā ūlā*) that actualizes it, arguing that prime matter is a body, being essentially the corporeal and unchanging underlying substrate of all bodily objects (*KM* III: 200–203;

Shihadeh 2015: 160–164), an extension susceptible of being perceived by the senses (Dag 1970: 42–45; cf. al-Khalīfī 1995, 2008). Out of the four primordial elements (*hayūlāt awwal*), only earth is constituted of indivisible corpuscles (on account of their solidity) (*KM* II: 10ff.; cf. Pines 1997).

al-Baġdādī introduced novel un-Aristotelian (often more Platonic) views on space, time, and motion (some upheld by Abū Bakr al-Rāzī, d. 930). He upheld Philoponus' (d. 570) critique of the Aristotelian notion of space (adopted by Avicenna) and the impossibility of a vacuum, adopting Philoponus' geometrical concept of a tridimensional and infinite space empty of all bodies — a void (Nony 2010, 2011). He also provided a mechanical refutation of *quies media* (rest between two contrary motions) (*KM* II: 97; cf. Langermann 2008: 59, 60–61).

With regard to motion, al-Baġdādī challenged Avicenna's Peripatetic definition in terms of an *entelekheia*, conceiving of motion as gradual emergence from potency to act, since notions of “gradual” and “all-at-once” are grasped, with the assistance of sensation (having extra mental existence), instantly and self-evidently (*KM* II: 30–32; McGinnis 2015; Asad 2016: 228–232; cf. Nony 2012, 2016). Moreover, apperception (*shu'ūr*) of time (not space) becomes “a measure of being rather than a measure of motion,” a view he illustrated with his thought experiment of someone sitting in a dark cave, not being able to perceive motion, yet perceiving the passing of (one kind of) time (*KM* II: 72–73).

al-Baġdādī rejected the Avicennan Peripatetic distinction between time (*zamān*), *aevum* (*dahr*), and eternity (*sarmad*) (*KM* III: 41), terms that denote the same thing, somehow implying that the world would have existed eternally (Sözen 2001). Elsewhere, he proposed a thought experiment with three spheres (adopted by Ibn Kammūna) to isolate time from velocities, mobiles and movers, and other motion-related concepts (*KM* III: 37–39; cf. Langermann 2005: 315). No longer a measure of motion, time becomes a measure of the soul's own precognitive-like intuition of time “by and together with” its original apperception of its own self: time becomes a component of his metaphysics of being. Sharing much with

Bergson's concept of time, his a priori notion of time becomes an aspect of all existents, a measure of being, including the being of God who is existence per se and, therefore, somehow not beyond time (Dag 1970; Pines 1979: 289–296; Abū Sa'da 1993; Saydabī 1996).

al-Baġdādī also criticized the concept of inclination found in the Aristotelian explanation of natural motion, by building, once again, upon Philoponus' concept of inclination (“an impulse (*rhopē*) acquired by the projectile”) that embeds the cause of motion inside the projectile itself (the theory of *impetus* or *mayl* that found its way into Avicenna's physics). He then conceptualized inclination as the “cause of the change in motion of a projectile,” a “natural” inclination (*mayl tabī'ī*) existing also during ascent, thereby demonstrating the possibility of two opposite inclinations coexisting in the same body (Nony 2010; Pines 1986). He taught that the progressive acceleration of the motion of a falling body was due to the “continuous” action of the principle of “natural inclination” found in that body, a negation of a principle of Aristotelian/Avicennan dynamics that a constant force produces a uniform motion (Nony 2010, 2011).

In psychology, al-Baġdādī, following Avicenna, upheld the view that the human soul is originated and that it survives the death of the body. However, he rejected (in physics and in metaphysics) the view that all human souls belong to the same species (*KM* II: 303, 381–387; Muehlethaler 2010: 64–69, 115–118, 254–255). His unitary conception of the soul “does not allow for accidents” (Avicenna) “to make up for all the differences between the individual souls” which “encompasses more than a single quiddity” (Muehlethaler 2012: 602). The definition of the soul as an incorporeal substance acting in and through the body may have Platonic or Plotinian influences. Uncommon for the time, he upheld a “very strict” notion of immateriality, the soul being mostly preoccupied, in this world, with corporeity, hinting at the soul's limited capacity of “attention” and its reduced capacity of recollection of ideas (*ma'ānī*) (Abū Sa'da 1993: 197–246).

al-Baġdādī rejected the idea that the active intellect was the cause of human souls, arguing



that different classes of human souls have many causes, different groups of souls forming discrete species, with corporeal matter individuating human souls (cf. Davidson 1992: 154–161). The innumerable stars and the heavenly souls of the planets become the causes of human souls to which they return after death (*MK* II: 152–153). Critical of Avicenna’s arguments for rejecting metempsychosis (*tanāsukh*), he noted that the soul was essentially active and governing (*fa’ ʿāla mutaṣarrifa*) and that it was endowed with unceasing self-awareness. Hence, if the soul has no recollection of any previous existence, and if it acquires knowledge with the help of organs and activities of the body, then it could not have had an existence prior to its attachment to the body (Muehlethaler 2010: 115–118, 254–256; cf. Wan Abdullah 2007b).

The human soul’s foremost apperceptions include “awareness” of its own self (i.e., the soul), of existence, and of time (*KM* III: 39; Pines 1979: 289), all three being grasped by intuitive evidence. Thus, al-Baġdādī pondered the link between the soul and the self that Avicenna’s concept of the self-awareness of an incorporeal soul substance raised. His descriptions of the human soul can apply to the “I-referent” (i.e., the soul) once the soul’s subsistence in a body (*hulūl*) is understood more generally (Muehlethaler 2010; cf. Ajhar 2010; Yıldırım 2018).

al-Baġdādī also focused on precognitive-like knowledge as he enquired into Avicenna’s hypothetical “suspended person” experiment (in his *Healing*) and the associated issues of self-awareness and consciousness. He affirmed the primary certitude of one’s own self-awareness, distinct from one’s knowledge through any of the bodily faculties traditionally associated with the external and internal faculties. Hence, he developed a novel epistemic notion of primordial self-awareness (tapping into Neoplatonic views) that replaced the epistemic functions associated with the faculties at the heart of Avicenna’s psychology. The soul’s self-apprehension through its self-awareness provides it with “apodictic” certainty and access to evident truths (Arnaldez 1987; al-Khalifī 1995). The soul’s self-awareness also

provides a precognitive-like intuition proof of the soul’s independence from the body and its immortality after death. In order to link the self, as the seat of the unity of agency, to cognition (raised by the Avicenna’s concept self-awareness of the soul), he introduced a general self-awareness and a particular self-aware agency, depending on the type of activities (e.g., digestion and growth being different from remembering), in order to preserve the unity of self and soul (Kaukua 2015: 104–123, 2016).

Self-awareness is at the heart of al-Baġdādī’s theory of the “unity of soul and intellect.” He rejected the Peripatetic/Aristotelian distinction between the two and merged them into a single psychological subject (*KM* II: 413–417), a view that appealed to Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī and Shihāb al-Dīn al-Suhrawardī. His nominalism, or conceptualism, emerges from his rejection of the doctrine of the intellect as a separate entity, and his elimination of forms “cognized by the intellect”, universals now being apprehended by the soul/mind as mere mental forms without any external reality (Pines 1997: 82–83; Davidson 1992: 154–161). Awareness of one’s own intellectual activities becomes identical with the awareness of the interior functions of the psyche that procures a priori and certain knowledge (Huwaydī 1979: 239–307). The intellect seems to be viewed as a substance, when it is the “subject” of an act, or as accident, or when it is an “act” of intellect (Cihan 2010; Marcotte 2019). His *Treatise on the Intellect’s Quiddity (fī Māhiyyat al-ʿAql)* (post-conversion) provides a variety of philological, scriptural, exegetical, theological, and philosophical accounts of the intellect (al-Ṭayyib 1980; Marcotte 2004).

al-Baġdādī took up neither the dominant Neoplatonic Peripatetic theory of effusion or emanation (*ḥayḍ*) (Nasrat 1973) nor the theory of one single active intellect as cause of all the souls existing in the sublunary world, preferring to postulate a theory of “successive divine volitions” (*KM* III: 157–158, 167). This introduced a plurality, preeternal or coming into being in time, of causes. The first volition, an attribute of the divine essence, creates the first being, the highest of the

angels (“spiritual beings” or *rūhāniyyūn*), elements of al-Baġdādī’s “angelology”: an indeterminate number of incorporeal “spiritual angels” become active “supernal” beings that now function as active principles, a view that inspired al-Suhrawardī’s ontology of lights and “lords of species” (cf. his *Philosophy of Illumination*) (Pines 1979: 302–319; Davidson 1992: 154–161; Corbin 1971: 299). Following Avicenna, al-Baġdādī provided a proof from contingency of the existence of God who remains the necessary existent. Essential attributes, such as wisdom, power, and knowledge, belong to God’s essence. As for God’s knowledge, it is manifold, the knowledge of particulars resting on God’s own intuitive knowledge and direct awareness of the world (Pines 1979: 310–315; Tunagöz 2012; Pavlov 2017b: 245–375, cf. Froissart 2018).

As for al-Baġdādī’s legacy, we know that his extensive Arabic commentary on the *Ecclesiastes* was studied in the Jewish (*yeshiva*) circles of Baghdad and still copied in 1335 (with acknowledgment of authorship), in spite of his reported conversion to Islam. As for his highly original, at times systematic though not always exhaustive, reevaluation of a great many Avicennan Peripatetic theses in his *Book of Evidence*, his views had their supporters and opponents. In his philosophical and theological controversies with Maimonides and Yosef ben Shimeon of Cairo over the former’s eschatological views on resurrection, Samuel ben Eli (d. 1193), the Gaon of Baghdad, quoted approvingly passages on the soul from his *Book of Evidence* (not translated into Hebrew, cf. Langermann 1996) and its orthodox theory of bodily resurrection (Stroumsa 1990, 1998, 1996; Pines 1979: 259–262). ‘Alā’ al-Dawla Faramurz b. ‘Alī defended his views against ‘Umar al-Khayyām’s objections (d. 1131) (Pines 1979: 3, 129); al-Biṭrūjī (fl. twelfth century) used some of his views in his dynamics; and Sharaf al-Dīn al-Mas‘ūdī (d. late twelfth century) also defended some of his views in his commentary on Avicenna’s *Pointers and Reminders*. Others, like the logician ‘Umar b. Sahlān al-Sāwī (or Sāwajī) (d. ca. 1145), refuted al-Baġdādī’s criticism of Avicenna’s theory of God’s knowledge of particulars in their universal

aspect, while Bayhaqī (d. 1169) penned (prior to 1154) a refutation of his *Book of Evidence* (Madelung 2011). His influence was perhaps greater on Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī who, in his *Eastern Investigations*, also criticized Avicennan Peripatetic theses, for example, his view that human souls share a common essence and his theory of faculty differentiation. Shams al-Dīn al-Shahrazūrī (d. 1288) noted that al-Baġdādī provided al-Rāzī with his best arguments against Avicenna, criticisms that Naṣīr al-Dīn al-Ṭūsī (d. 1274) set out to refute in his *Summary* of al-Rāzī’s *Muḥaṣṣal* and in a treatise on al-Baġdādī’s thesis on the infinitude of space (Madelung 2011). al-Baġdādī’s definition of motion appears in the work of Athīr al-Dīn al-Abharī (d. 1264) (McGinnis 2015). al-Baġdādī’s views are also discussed by Najm al-Dīn al-Qazwīnī al-Kātibī (d. 1276), in his *Wellspring of Wisdom* (and by its fourteenth-century commentator), by Barhebraeus (d. 1286), and even by Ibn Taymiyya (d. 1328) who, in his *Averting the Conflict (between Reason and Tradition)*, appreciated some of al-Baġdādī’s criticisms of Avicennan Peripateticism (Pines 1979: 1n.4, 129n.1; Madelung 2011). His theory of perception and of the soul, along with his discussions on self-awareness, had much impact on the psychology and epistemology of Ibn Kammūna and Shihāb al-Dīn al-Suhrawardī. Suhrawardī discussed al-Baġdādī’s views in his *Intimations*, a work commented by Ibn Kammūna who, having very good knowledge of the *Book of Evidence*, identified the anonymous positions rejected by Suhrawardī as those of al-Baġdādī (Pourjavady and Schmidtke 2006: 25; Muehlethaler 2010: 292–293). al-Baġdādī’s views also had an impact on the works of Eastern philosophers (al-Khalifī 2008), such as Mu‘īn al-Dīn Maybudī (d. ca. 1506) up to, at least, Mīr Dāmād (d. 1631), and his notion of time, and in Mullā Ṣadrā, Ṣadr al-Dīn al-Shīrāzī’s (d. ca. 1636) *Four Journeys*.

From the late 1930s to the early 1960s, Shlomo Pines (1960, 1979, 1986) truly pioneered Baġdādīan studies with the publication of groundbreaking works (cf. Corbin 1971, 1986). From the early 1990s onward, the likes of Abdullah, Abū

Sa'da, Ajhar, Cihan, Davidson, Griffel, Hasnaoui, Kaukua, al-Khalīfī, Marcotte, Nony, Pavlov, Saydabī, Shihadeh, Sözen, Stroumsa, and al-Ṭayyib have rekindled interest in al-Bağdādī's philosophical and scientific contributions.

## Cross-References

- ▶ [Arabic Philosophical Texts, Jewish Translations of](#)
- ▶ [Aristotelianism in the Greek, Latin, Syriac, Arabic, and Hebrew Traditions](#)
- ▶ [Boethius](#)
- ▶ [Ibn Kammūna, 'Izz al-Dawla](#)
- ▶ [Ibn Rushd, Muḥammad ibn Aḥmad al-Ḥafīd \(Averroes\)](#)
- ▶ [Ibn Sīnā, Abū 'Alī \(Avicenna\)](#)
- ▶ [Natural Philosophy, Arabic](#)
- ▶ [Philoponus, Arabic](#)
- ▶ [Philosophical Theology, Jewish](#)
- ▶ [Philosophy, Arabic](#)
- ▶ [Plato, Arabic](#)
- ▶ [Plotinus, Arabic](#)
- ▶ [Porphyry, Arabic](#)
- ▶ [Proclus, Arabic](#)
- ▶ [al-Rāzī, Fakhr al-Dīn](#)
- ▶ [al-Suhrawardī, Shihāb al-Dīn Yahyā al-Maqtūl](#)
- ▶ [Themistius, Arabic](#)
- ▶ [Translations from Greek into Arabic](#)

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## Abū l-Faraj ibn al-'Ibrī (Barhebraeus)

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### Abstract

Barhebraeus was the leading Syriac philosopher and man of letters in the thirteenth century. While not usually credited with being a particularly original thinker, he had an encyclopedic command both of Arabic and Islamic thought, especially that of Avicenna and al-Ġazālī, as well as of the Greek tradition as it was preserved in Syriac. Writing during the period of great social upheaval caused by the Mongol invasion of the Near East, he sought to create compendia in the Syriac language of philosophical and scientific knowledge as it was available to him. His most important work, the *Butyrum sapientiae*, was modeled on Avicenna's *Shifā'*, following it closely in form and content. It is not simply a translation into Syriac of the *Shifā'*, however, as Barhebraeus in many places synthesizes Avicenna's thought with the Syriac translations of Aristotle and other Greek philosophers. His shorter works the *Sermo sapientiae* and the *Mercatura mercaturarum* serve as primers to Aristotelian–Avicennan thought in Syriac. In addition to his purely philosophical pursuits, he was also a bishop of the Syriac Orthodox (sometimes called “Jacobite”) Church. In this capacity, he wrote extensive theological works which also discuss philosophical questions, occasionally in ways contradictory to the positions held in his philosophical writings. Despite this, Barhebraeus argued that philosophy and theology were ways of discussing the same truths using different vocabularies.

Barhebraeus (Abū l-Faraj ibn al-'Ibrī) was born in 1225 or 1226 in Melitene in southeastern Anatolia. His father was a physician named Aaron; however, the belief of earlier scholars that he



was of a Jewish background is now generally considered to be unlikely. In 1243 or 1244, his family relocated to Antioch on account of Mongol attacks. It is possible that during his stay in Antioch, he took monastic vows. Some time after this, he studied medicine and logic with a Nestorian teacher in Tripoli and may have worked in Damascus at the hospital founded there by Nūr al-Dīn al-Zanjī. In 1246, he was ordained bishop of the town of Gubros near Malatya. Shortly thereafter, he was transferred to the see of Laqabin and was subsequently made bishop of Aleppo. He was soon ousted from his position in Aleppo due to ecclesial politics and was only able to obtain reinstatement in 1258. In 1260, Aleppo was taken by the Mongols under Hülegü, and Barhebraeus went to Hülegü's camp to personally appeal for the safety of his flock but was briefly imprisoned in Qal'at al-Najm, east of Aleppo. In 1263, he was again found at the Mongol court serving as a physician to Hülegü along with another Syriac Orthodox cleric. In 1264, Barhebraeus was elected maphrian, the Syriac Orthodox exarch in the territory of the former Sasanian Empire and second highest office in that church after the patriarch. As maphrian, Barhebraeus had his residence at the monastery of Mar Mattai near Mosul, though he traveled frequently. In addition to spending time in Mosul and Baghdad, he also went a number of times to Tabriz and Maragha in the region of Azerbaijan, where the Mongol court was located. He died in Maragha on July 29 or 30, 1286, and was buried in Mar Mattai.

Barhebraeus was a prolific writer on a wide variety of subjects, including biblical exegesis, canon law, grammar, history, medicine, mysticism, and belles lettres in addition to his philosophical works. Especially noteworthy are his historical works, as he provides a contemporary account of the Mongol conquest of Iraq and Syria, and his mystical writings, modeled on those of al-Ġazālī. In addition to his original writings, he translated the *Ishārāt wa-l-tanbīhāt* of Avicenna into Syriac.

The three chief philosophical works of Barhebraeus, the *Butyrum sapientiae*, the *Sermo sapientiae*, and the *Mercatura mercaturarum* (or *Tractatus tractatum*) all expound the

Aristotelian–Avicennan philosophical tradition, but at different levels of detail. According to Janssens (1937), the three works constitute a graded curriculum progressing from a summary introduction in the *Sermo* to a full exposition in the *Butyrum*. It is worth noting, however, that both the *Sermo* and the *Mercatura* do go into some questions, particularly of logic, in more detail than does the *Butyrum*.

The *Sermo sapientiae* is divided into four chapters, each of which is divided into sections. The first chapter, eight sections on logic, covers the material of the *Isagoge* and the six books of the *Organon* in various degrees of detail. The second chapter includes thirty-two sections on the natural sciences. The third chapter, thirty-four sections on metaphysics, deals with proofs for the existence of a necessary being, the problem of divine attributes, the origin of the world, and the abstract intellect. The fourth chapter, in thirty sections, also deals with questions of metaphysics, but from the perspective of their relationship to theological questions. It discusses providence, evil, punishment and reward in the afterlife, the relationship of the rational soul to the heavenly souls, prophecy, and the Resurrection.

The *Mercatura mercaturarum* is divided into three “treatises” on logic, natural sciences, and metaphysics. Though it is sometimes described as an abridgment of the *Butyrum*, it is in fact the first of Barhebraeus’ three main philosophical works to have been written (Takahashi 2006). According to Takahashi, the *Mercatura* was likely modeled on the *Maqāṣid al-falāsifa* of al-Ġazālī, which was itself based on the *Dānesh-Nāme-i ‘Allā’ī* of Avicenna.

The most extensive of Barhebraeus’ philosophical works and the last of them to be written, the *Butyrum sapientiae* was modeled on Avicenna’s *Kitāb al-Shifā’* and to a large extent follows it in its content, though it also draws on other Arabic and Syriac sources. It is made up of four parts: logic, natural science, metaphysics, and practical philosophy, each of which is divided into “chapters,” “sections,” and “theories.” This plan of organization represents a significant departure from the *Shifā’* in that it completely omits that work’s section on mathematics while

it adds a more detailed section on practical philosophy. In this way, the *Butyrum* stays closer to the content of the Aristotelian corpus.

In composing the *Butyrum*, Barhebraeus would generally select two sources to form the basis of each section. He would use one main source, usually the relevant section of the *Shifā'*, and harmonize and supplement it with material from another source, usually from the Greco-Syriac tradition. For example, the first section of the *Butyrum*, on logic, closely follows the *Shifā'* in its method of covering the material of the *Isagoge* and the *Organon* but Barhebraeus also made use of the Aristotelian texts themselves from Syriac translations. In the section on natural science, he supplements the material from the *Shifā'* by making much use of the Aristotelian *Compendium* of Nicolaus of Damascus, which is largely lost in the original Greek. In the section on practical philosophy, a subject given little attention by Avicenna, Barhebraeus models his writing on the *Akhlāq-i Naṣīrī* of Naṣīr al-Dīn al-Ṭūsī, a contemporary whom he likely met during his visits to Maragha.

In addition to his purely philosophical writings, two of Barhebraeus' theological works contain much material of philosophical interest. The *Candelabrum sanctuarii* is an extended exposition of the Christian faith according to the scholastic method: each problem of doctrine is stated, a solution is provided and supported by biblical and patristic quotations, and objections are raised and responses given. The much shorter *Liber radiorum* discusses many of the same theological questions in a more abbreviated format.

As Janssens (1937) observed, there is a noticeable lack of consistency between certain positions taken by Barhebraeus in his philosophical works and those he puts forth in his theological works. For example, in the *Sermo sapientiae*, he states that the brain is the center of the animal faculties, while in the *Candelabrum* he claims that it is the heart. Likewise, he explains in the *Sermo* that the celestial spheres are not composed of the elements which form the sublunar world, while in the *Candelabrum* the entire universe is composed of the same elements. Notably, he also implies support

for belief in the eternity of the world in the *Sermo* despite explicitly condemning this same theory in his theological works.

These discrepancies between different works by Barhebraeus can likely be explained by his methodology and variations in his audience. In his writings, Barhebraeus was not so much attempting to provide his own doctrine as he was attempting to make available in Syriac compendia of the knowledge available in his time. Thus, in the *Candelabrum* and the *Radiorum* which he called his "ecclesiastical" treatises, he used what was available in theological sources for a churchly audience, while in his philosophical works he compiled and synthesized various sources from the Aristotelian tradition as they were available to him. On the most central points of philosophy, however, Barhebraeus tried to demonstrate the essential correspondence between philosophical and theological concepts. Thus, he sees the necessary being as equivalent to God the Father, the First Intellect to the Son, the Active Intellect to the Holy Spirit, and the abstract intellects to the angels.

Barhebraeus' influence on later philosophy is rather limited due to the sharp decline in Syriac literary activity in the generations immediately following his life. While the Mongol conquest had initially encouraged hope among Syriac Christians that they would be freed from Muslim rule, the conversion of the Ilkhanid ruler Ghāzān to Islam in 1295 led to further marginalization of Syriac language and culture. On the other hand, Barhebraeus' works provide a comprehensive picture of the intellectual world of the Near East of the thirteenth century and his efforts at providing an updated Syriac vocabulary for expressing contemporary thought served as inspiration for literary revivals of Syriac in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

## Cross-References

- ▶ [al-Ġazālī, Abū Ḥāmid Muḥammad](#)
- ▶ [Ibn Sīnā, Abū 'Alī \(Avicenna\)](#)
- ▶ [al-Ṭūsī, Naṣīr al-Dīn](#)

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## Abū Sulaymān al-Sijistānī al-Manṭiqī

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### Abstract

Abū Sulaymān Muḥammad ibn Ṭāhir ibn Bahrām al-Sijistānī (also: al-Sijzī) was a philosopher and a logician (*manṭiqī*). He is thought to have been born in Sijistān during the first quarter of the tenth century and to have died in Baghdad during the last quarter of the

tenth century. He succeeded Yaḥyā ibn 'Adī as a head of the Aristotelian School of Baghdad. Seemingly, he never engaged in systematic teaching, but his philosophical circle became famous during his lifetime as it was the object of recorded sessions by one of the most important men of letters of tenth-century Baghdad, Abū Ḥayyān al-Tawḥīdī.

Biographical data about Abū Sulaymān al-Sijistānī's background are scarce, but according to his name, he must have been born in Sijistān (or Sīstān), in eastern Iran, at an unknown date (first quarter of the tenth century?). There, he was close to the Saffarid king Abū Ja'far ibn Banawayh (r. 311/923 to 352/963). J. Kraemer (following M. Qazvīnī, who pointed at the important information preserved in Abū Ḥayyān al-Tawḥīdī's *Muqābasāt (Enlightments)*) established that he must have settled in Baghdad before 327/939, when he was asked to give an horoscope for 'Abd al-'Azīz ibn Nubāta. Al-Sijistānī was by then probably in contact with 'Alī ibn Yaḥyā ibn al-Munajjim – a member of an important family of scholars of Iranian descent who served the 'Abbāsīd – who was also asked to give his predictions about the child.

In Baghdad, al-Sijistānī studied with the Christians Yaḥyā ibn 'Adī (d. 363/974) and maybe with Abū Bishr Mattā ibn Yūnus (d. 328/940), whom only the late bio-bibliographer Ibn al-Qiṭṭī mentions, while his relationship with Yaḥyā ibn 'Adī is documented by several extracts of conversations between him and al-Sijistānī recorded in Tawḥīdī's works, as well as by references in the works of Yaḥyā ibn 'Adī (see Kraemer 1986: 25, 102 and Khalīfāt 1988: 56). Sijistānī was to succeed Yaḥyā ibn 'Adī as the head of the "School of Baghdad" (see Sezgin et al. 2000) and high-ranking personalities seem to have been visiting him. This Aristotelian school of philosophy in Baghdad kept alive the tradition of lectures and commentaries on the Greek philosophical corpus, in the tradition of what had been practiced in Athens, Alexandria, Rome, Antioch, etc.

From an unknown date, al-Sijistānī benefited from the protection of the Buyid king and patron



of scholars ‘Aḍud al-Dawla (b. 324/936, d. 372/983), but it is not clear where Abū Sulaymān al-Sijistānī and ‘Aḍud al-Dawla first met. ‘Aḍud al-Dawla had succeeded his uncle ‘Imād al-Dawla as the ruler of Fārs at the age of 13, with Shīrāz as his capital, and it is only in 376/964 that he entered Baghdad, after saving the ‘Abbāsīd caliph al-Ṭā’i’ from the threat of Bakhtiyār, a rival Buyid cousin. Al-Sijistānī kept visiting faraway Sijistān from time to time, as is recorded by his friend and disciple, Abū Ḥayyān al-Tawḥīdī, in chap. 89 of the *Muqābasāt*. Before 360/970, al-Sijistānī went to Rayy on his way to Sijistān, and paid a visit to the mathematician Abū Ja’far al-Khāzin (d. between 350/961 and 360/971). Ibn al-‘Amīd’s court in Rayy was at the time a place of intense philosophical activity, to such extent that a rivalry between the intellectual circles of ‘Aḍud al-Dawla, Ibn al-‘Amīd, and later on of Ibn al-‘Abbād and Ibn Sa’dān is recorded in a number of famous works of this period, among which are Tawḥīdī’s and Miskawayh’s, as well as the anonymous *Ṣiwān al-ḥikma*. The philosophical correspondence between ‘Aḍud al-Dawla and Ibn al-‘Amīd is preserved (see Daiber 1993), and Sijistānī’s visit to Rayy can be considered a friendly visit to the court of a friend and ally of his patron.

The *Ṣiwān al-ḥikma* (*Chest Box of Wisdom*), attributed to al-Sijistānī by the historian Zahr al-Dīn al-Bayhaqī (also known in Persian under the name of Ebn Funduq), has been the issue of a debate between scholars. Al-Qāḍī (1981), noticing that Abū Sulaymān al-Sijistānī is mentioned as passed away in the *Ṣiwān*, suggested that the book was composed from materials gathered with the help of al-Tawḥīdī and Miskawayh by a disciple of Abū al-Ḥasan al-‘Amīrī, the little known Abū l-Qāsim al-Kātib, to whom the book should be ascribed. On his side, Kraemer (1986) considers the *Ṣiwān* emanated from al-Sijistānī’s circle. The two interpretations are actually compatible, since Abū al-Qāsim can be considered a remote member of al-Sijistānī’s circle. The moral authority of the *Ṣiwān* remains al-Sijistānī, if we consider that the materials that constitute its bulk are, in addition to philosophical sessions held in the presence of Abū Ja’far ibn Banawayh (d. 963) the king of Sijistān and a close friend of

al-Sijistānī, excerpts from the cenacles of Abū l-Faḍl ibn al-‘Amīd and discussions between al-Sijistānī and his friends.

Jaadane (1967) and Kraemer (1986) have given penetrating analyses of Abū Sulaymān al-Sijistānī’s philosophy and for the latter, two encompassing volumes on his epoch (see Kraemer 1993, in addition to the volume devoted to Abū Sulaymān al-Sijistānī, published in 1986). These two count as reference works. Classical sources such as Ibn al-Nadīm, Ibn al-Qifṭī, Ibn Abī Uṣaybi’a, and al-Ṣafādī mention the relations between al-Sijistānī and prominent members of Yaḥyā ibn ‘Adī’s school, such as Abū ‘Alī ibn al-Samḥ (d. 418), Abū l-Khayr ibn al-Khammār ibn Suwār (d. 440/1048), and his disciple Ibn ‘Abbād, with whom al-Sijistānī exchanged letters.

As for al-Sijistānī’s closest disciples, they did not achieve the fame reached by the mostly Christian members of Yaḥyā Ibn ‘Adī’s circle, and it seems that al-Tawḥīdī, al-Ṣaymarī, al-Nūshajānī, Abū Muḥammad al-‘Arūḍī, and Ghulām Zuḥal were Sijistānī’s friends rather than his formal disciples. According to Ibn al-Qifṭī, commenting upon a verse written by al-Badīhī on al-Sijistānī, he was afflicted of a skin-disease and restricted himself from visiting people.

Metaphysical and ethical matters with concrete religious echoes were discussed in the circle. The primacy of logic or grammar was one of these. Yaḥyā ibn ‘Adī had devoted a treatise to this question (*Demonstration of the Distinction Between the Art of Philosophical Logic and the Art of Arabic Grammar*; *Tabyīn al-faṣl bayna ṣinā’atay al-manṭiq al-falsafī wa-l-naḥwi al-‘arabī*, ed. Khalīfāt 1988: 414–424), as the gap between religious grammarians of the Arabic language and the Aristotelian philosophers was widening to become purely ideological (see Versteegh 1977). The dispute between Abū Sa’īd al-Sīrāfī and Mattā ibn Yunūs was a landmark and kept being discussed in several of al-Tawḥīdī’s writings. In the *Muqābasāt*, Chap. 22, al-Sijistānī takes an opposite stand to his disciple’s (who supported al-Ṣīrāfī), telling him that “Grammar is an Arabic logic, and logic is an intellectual grammar,” affirming the superiority and universality of Greek logic. Materials on this issue have been gathered and commented upon by Kraemer (1986: 143–152).

From the same context emerged the question whether reason and religion can be reconciliated. Abū Sulaymān al-Sijistānī seems to have changed his mind regarding this issue (see Jaadane 1971: 74–80). As is well-known, the popular Pythagorism offered by the Brethren of Purity's *Epistles* had a far-reaching influence. Al-Sijistānī openly criticizes the Brethren for their attempt to unite Greek philosophy and Islamic religion into a single system. Jaadane notes that if in al-Tawḥīdī's *Imtā' wa-l-mu'ānasa (Enjoyment and Familiarity)*, al-Sijistānī underlines that religion and philosophy have different methods and different goals, in the testimony of the *Muqābasāt* (after 391/1001) he develops a view that may be closer to the Neoplatonist theories that one could read in Pseudo-Aristotle's *Theology* and in the tradition of the philosophical commentaries, which would lead to the Avicennian synthesis. According to the *Muqābasāt*, al-Sijistānī admits that the prophets are, just as the philosophers, concerned with the salvation of human souls. Nevertheless, he blames the theologians (*mutakallimūn*, used for both Christians and Muslims) for claiming to use a rational method of inquiry while they fall into the trap of dialectics (*jadāl*) (see Jaadane 1971: 78–79 and Kraemer 1986: 246).

Greek theories on the soul were also extensively discussed in the circle, as echoed from the quotations gathered in the *Šiwān al-ḥikma* and in Tawḥīdī's works (*Imtā'* and *Muqābasāt*). As Yaḥyā ibn 'Adī had been studying with al-Fārābī, it comes as no surprise to see in the materials discussed the overwhelming influence of the *Plotiniana Arabica*. Tawḥīdī himself reports that he attended al-Sijistānī lectures on Aristotle's *De anima*.

The bulk of al-Sijistānī's cosmological system is to be gathered from three treatises written on metaphysical matters, for which translations and illuminating annotations have been provided by Kraemer 1986: 274–310.

In the *Maqāla fī l-ajrām al-'ulwiyya anna tabī'atahā tabī'a khāmisā wa-annahā dhawāt anfus wa-anna al-nafs allatī lahā hiya al-nafs al-nātiqa (Treatise on the Celestial Bodies, that Their Nature is a Fifth Nature and that They Have a Rational Soul*, translated by J. Kraemer as *The Supernal Bodies Possess Rational Souls*),

al-Sijistānī departs from Aristotle's doctrine of the principle of motion to follow Alexander of Aphrodisias. As shown by Kraemer, al-Sijistānī maintains that the body's principle of motion is an inherent motivating power, and that the heavenly spheres are animated. For al-Sijistānī, the natural forms, or souls, of the heavenly spheres are within the spheres as the souls of animals reside in their bodies. What moves the heavenly spheres is their desire to be assimilated with the First Cause, or First Mover. Familiarity of the author with the Pseudo-Aristotle's *Theology* is noted by Kraemer in his notes to the translation (Kraemer 1986: 278–285). In his *Fī l-muḥarrīk al-awwal (On the First Mover)*, al-Sijistānī departs from Alexander of Aphrodisias' theory of the First Mover. Probably following Themistius, he poses the existence of a distinct Unmoved Mover, while Alexander kept identifying the First Mover to the God of Aristotle's *Metaphysics*, book *Lambda* (see Kraemer 1986: 285–292). Finally, in his *Fī l-kamāl al-khaṣṣ bi-naw'i al-insān (On the Specific Perfection of the Human Species)*, al-Sijistānī addresses the emanation of the virtues through creation. This power, according to him, flows from the Ultimate Principle of this world to the individual who governs through just laws and imposes order and harmony (Kraemer 1986: 293–310). This perfect individual is identified here with 'Aḍud al-Dawla, to whom the treatise is dedicated (it might not be overlooked here that 'Aḍud al-Dawla was a Shī'ite, even if we have no traces of his own understanding of the Imamate theory). Al-Sijistānī enumerates the different positions held by the followers of different sects of his times on God and the higher beings, and mentions the views of the "Ancient believers"; different sects of the Christians, for whom these higher entities are human substances (the Jacobite, Nestorian, and Melkite views are given); groups who believe this Being can be united with more than one person (the extremist Shī'ites, or *Ghulāt*) among whom "those who speak of incarnation (*ḥulūl*)"; a group of the Sufis; the Dualists, who hold the two roots of Light and Darkness as being united with the supreme principle; the Muslim theologians (the *mutakallimūn*), who describe the Supreme Being by means of Its attributes; and the "most excellent philosophers", who according to al-Sijistānī, hold

to negative theology. The importance of al-Sijistānī's writings has started to be appreciated with Kraemer's master study, but the full implications of his philosophical epistles remain to be inserted within the traditional narration of the history of medieval Arabic philosophy from al-Kindī to Averroes.

## Cross-References

- ▶ Abū Bishr Mattā ibn Yūnus
- ▶ Ikhwān al-Ṣafā', Encyclopedia of
- ▶ Miskawayh, Abū 'Alī
- ▶ Plotinus, Arabic
- ▶ al-Tawḥīdī, Abū Ḥayyān
- ▶ Yaḥyā ibn 'Adī

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*dhawāt anfus wa-anna alnafs allatī lahā hiya al-nafs al-nāṭiqā* (*Treatise on the celestial bodies, that their nature is a fifth nature and that they have a rational soul*) (ed.: Badawī), see below al-Sijistānī (1974). See Secondary Sources: Kraemer (1986) (trans.).

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theology. Wodeham's most important philosophical innovation was the “complex significantable,” akin to the contemporary idea of States of Affairs. He developed this in his epistemological project of ascertaining what we understand when we claim knowledge of things in the world. Ockham had held that the objects of scientific knowledge are mental propositions in which the concept naturally signifies the perceived objects, which led to questions about whether we make judgments about mental propositions or things. Wodeham's innovation was to argue that we formulate judgments about things in the world when things conform to the way the mind formulates propositions about them. While this does not introduce a new layer of ontological complexity to the extramental world, it does focus attention on the natural method by which we propositionalize what we perceive. Wodeham's doctrine of complex significantables was to be influential in later scholastic epistemological discourse, and it contributed importantly to the logico-semantic approach of Oxford theology. Wodeham was also an important opponent of spatiotemporal atomism, a view that arose within the philosophical speculation about how to mathematize our understanding of the physical world that characterizes the thought of the Mertonian “Calculators.”

## Adam Wodeham

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### Abstract

Adam Wodeham (d. 1358) is an Oxford Franciscan protégé of Ockham and influential adherent of Ockham's philosophical approach in the years of Oxford's “Golden Age” of

## Biography

Adam Wodeham (c. 1295–1358) is a Franciscan theologian and associate of William Ockham at Oxford where he is known to have been studying by 1320 and where he likely remained at least through the 1330s and possibly until his death. He began as a student of Walter Chatton, with whom he famously disagreed throughout his philosophical career. While Wodeham was known as the foremost expositor of Ockham's thought following the latter's departure from Oxford in 1324, he disagreed with his master on several critical points, particularly in epistemic questions and in matters regarding the Trinity and Eucharist.

Wodeham lectured on the *Sentences* in Norwich, in London, (scholars continue to disagree regarding the dating of these two sets of lectures) and finally in Oxford in 1334. The set known as the Norwich lectures, entitled *Lectura secunda*, are the only widely available Sentence commentaries, having been published in 1990. The Oxford lectures, which contain references to many of the views of his contemporaries, as well as a rich offering of his philosophical theology, remain unpublished. In addition, Wodeham's *Tractatus de indivisibilibus*, a compendium of arguments against spatiotemporal atomism then at issue in Oxford, remains, while his commentaries on the *Cantica canticorum* and Ecclesiasticus, *Postilla de sacramento eucharistiae*, and several other works appear to have been lost. Wodeham's reputation as a philosophical theologian remained considerable into the sixteenth century, when John Mair published Henry Totting of Oyta's abbreviated account of Wodeham's Oxford lectures. His postulation of the complex significable as the object of knowledge remains an important philosophical innovation, arguably prescient of contemporary understanding of States of Affairs.

### Epistemology in the Norwich Lectures

The Norwich lectures begin with a 250-page analysis of the epistemological problems associated with scientific knowledge, a necessary preamble to understanding the possibilities open to theology as a science. How is scientific knowledge of the world possible, and how do we glean understanding from what we perceive? Ockham and Scotus had argued that there is a difference of kind between intuitive and abstractive cognition correspondent to the sensitive and intellectual souls that compose the knowing self. While Scotus understood the two kinds of souls to be formally distinct, for Ockham, the distinction was real, making a unified, composite perceiving and understanding self, which Wodeham felt to be philosophically untenable, better explained by one soul capable of both perceiving and understanding. This forced him to admit that perceiving a red apple counts as an intellectual act, which fits

uncomfortably into the Aristotelian epistemic scheme. Wodeham maintained the distinction between intuitive and abstractive cognition, in which our cognition of this individual apple is distinct from the more general cognition of redness or apples as such, which we abstract from perception experiences, but in rejecting a corresponding distinction between kinds of souls to which these differing kinds of cognitive acts are suited, Wodeham stands out among fourteenth-century philosophers. His articulation of the relation between intuitive and abstractive cognition owes more to Scotus than to Ockham, who had posited an intermediate, imperfect intuitive cognition to account for objects once, but not now presently, perceived. Our presence to memory of a once-perceived object, Wodeham argues, is an abstractive cognition correspondent to an act of memory, and we need not posit an intermediate species of cognition to account for it.

Ockham had famously argued for the possibility of an intuitive cognition of nonexistent objects, provided that God brought about such cognition through *potentia absoluta*. A lively philosophical dialogue ensued regarding cases in which we seem to have intuitive cognition of nonexistent beings without direct divine intervention, which contributed significantly to Wodeham's epistemology. Peter Auriol had dominated the argument by describing our intuitive cognition's reliance intentional beings, created as direct result of our raw sense perceptions. The force of this argument had been powerful, likely contributing to Ockham's earlier theory of concepts as "thought objects," *esse obiectivum*. Auriol had noticed that our raw sensations can produce illusions, as when someone whirls a torch quickly in the night, creating an afterimage of a circle immediately present to our eyes. The afterimage is, in reality, not there, not outside our eyes, but it has a presence that suggests a regular tendency in our perception to create intentional beings for our intuitive cognition of external objects. Chatton had interpreted Auriol's account as being a good argument in favor of skepticism, the thin edge of the wedge that might lead to doubting the veridicality of all intuitive cognition. Wodeham was determined to oppose this, arguing that Auriol's illusions arising



from raw sensations did not necessitate recognition of an intuitive cognition of nonexistents; reason and experience both help us to recognize illusions that arise from our perception, and they rein in tendencies to imagine these illusions as having sufficient force as to threaten our knowledge of the perceptible world. The real problem here is Auriol's interposition of an intentional being arising from raw sensation that serves as the object of our intuitive cognition. Wodeham argues vigorously against these phantom intermediaries, recognizing that Auriol's arguments rely heavily on the illusion problems that can be laid to rest by relying on reason's mediating role in intuitive cognition. In opposing Auriol, however, Wodeham is not ignoring the possibility that God could be causing our intuitive cognition of something that appears present to us, but is not. Ockham had argued that such a divinely caused apparent presence would become rapidly apparent to us as illusory, which position Wodeham regarded as untenable. Wodeham was more willing to face skepticism than was Ockham, recognizing the possibility of divinely caused intuitive cognition of nonexistent entities as leading to the impossibility of certain empirical knowledge of perceived objects. This impossibility is ultimately not deleterious to scientific knowledge, though; provided that God is not actively deceiving us, our perceptions may function as direct evidence of objects in the world.

The focus of theological knowledge is, of course, God. Intuitive cognition of God would be beatific vision, available only to the blessed in heaven. When Wodeham was lecturing, John XXII was arguing against the beatific vision prior to Judgment Day, throwing the theological world into a furor; Adam makes no mention of this in the Norwich lectures. So the question is about the possibility of abstractive cognition of God, and here need arises to distinguish between three kinds of abstractive cognition. The first arises from reasoned argument grounded in concepts themselves abstracted from experiences in the world, as with the proofs for God's existence common in the schools. The second is a more specific, simple concept not dependent on other abstracted cognitions, but specific to its object

alone. The third abstractive cognition arises from intuitive cognition immediately, prior to rational analysis, as when we focus our attention to the red of an apple without yet forming assertions or denials in comparison to other reds we may have experienced. This kind of abstractive cognition is certainly possible in mystic vision, Adam argues, which fall short of the beatific vision but only just. Short of such mystic vision, though, will abstractive cognition arising from reason provide a simple concept proper to God alone? This "God-shaped" concept would be specific to divinity, in the way that "apple" is specific to apples only and not any other kind of fruit, but the "God-shaped" concept would be different in that it would have only one correlate in reality, an ontological being so unlike any created being as to stretch the referential functioning of a concept beyond breaking. Scotus, for whom the univocity of being came closest to creating such a concept, did not recognize such a simple God concept, and neither did Wodeham. Walter Chatton did, providing Wodeham opportunity to pour scorn on his predecessor, an opportunity he rarely denied himself when it arose.

Here Wodeham introduces the innovation for which he is perhaps best known, the complex significable. After having surveyed the fundamental questions of epistemology in the Prologue to the Norwich lectures, he fixed his attention on ascertaining what it is we understand when we claim knowledge of things in the world sufficient to undergird the concepts we use in theological argument. To do this, he triangulated between the views of Ockham and Chatton. Chatton had argued that the objects of scientific knowledge are extramental objects that we translate into the terms populating mental propositions. Ockham held that the objects of scientific knowledge are the mental propositions themselves. Both contain elements of the truth, Wodeham argued. Ockham had argued for a more instantaneous natural translation of perceptions into terms than Chatton had admitted, but both believed that our understanding grasps extramental reality and naturally arranges it into the subjects and predicates that make up our propositionally structured understanding. Chatton's disagreement with Ockham

lies in the mediation of mental propositions, which he felt were unnecessary mediaries. Wodeham agreed with Chatton that when we make judgments about things in the world, it is about the things, not mental propositions we construct about them. But the judgments we make frequently rely on temporal qualification; it would be folly to assume that “there was an elephant in the room” and “there will be an elephant in the room” are functionally equivalent. Hence, we make judgments not just about the bare particulars, in this case, elephants and rooms, but about how things are in the world. This is what Wodeham refers to as a complex significable, a thing known through having been signified through a complex proposition. We understand and make judgments about how things are in the world when the world conforms to the mode of signifying characteristic of the proposition formed in the mind. In effect, Wodeham’s complex significable “propositionalizes” the world. This is not to say that Wodeham has thereby added a rich ontological layer of qualifiers onto reality that correspond to the symbols, terms, and concepts we use to understand the natural world. There is no additional complexity to being beyond the things that exist in the way they exist in the world, but our propositionalizing what we perceive must be seen as taking into account both the existing and the mode of existing. Take the knowledge you now (presumably) have of there not being an elephant in the room. The object of this proposition, “There is no elephant in the room” is elephant-not-being-in-the-room. This is not a proposition enriching the being of some elephant somewhere, or of the room, nor is it wholly the product of the proposition-constructing mind intuitively cognizing the room. It is a truth about the room that corresponds to the proposition-constructing mind’s abstractive intuition. Another example will show the constructive steps that go into our use of complex significables. Take the proposition, “*Brontops* nursed its young.” On the assumption that you do not know what *Brontops* is, you cannot say whether the proposition is true or false, and the complex significable to which it may or may not correspond remains hidden. Upon learning that

*Brontops* is an extinct mammal, the general proposition “*Brontops* nursed its young” becomes evidently so. There is a complex significable to which this proposition refers, even though there are no *Brontops* now to which it refers. Contemporary philosophers are likely to recognize some similarity in Wodeham’s complex significable to States of Affairs, but this similarity depends very much upon the semantics and ontology to which one is willing to commit. Recent interpretations of Wodeham, particularly that of Susan Brower-Toland, argue in favor of this similarity, holding that Wodeham recognized that his theory of judgment committed him to complex significables having factual reality. In any case, Alexius Meinong and Adolf Harnack can certainly be counted as heirs of Wodeham’s approach; their conception of *Sachverhalte* suggests a sufficiently rich ontology as to admit of elephants-not-being-in-the-room being a real object of a proposition. Wodeham’s approach was influential on Wyclif, who developed it in his propositional realism, and on Gregory Rimini, who made use of the idea in his Sentence commentary as well.

Consequent to the complex significable account must be the knowledge or belief to which recognition of a complex leads. When one gives mental assent to a proposition like “Socrates is seated,” is the object of assent Socrates himself, the mental proposition “Socrates is seated,” or the complex Socrates-being-seated? Chatton had limited the object under consideration to Socrates and the mental proposition about him, but Wodeham insists that these two alone lead only to a partial object of assent; the complex is necessary for recognition as there being consistency between Socrates and the mental proposition. This further enhances the correspondent ontological commitment accompanying complex significables by making them not only correspondent to propositions we form about the world but also the truth-makers behind the acts of assent we give or withhold to these mental propositions. This seems to require that they be more than nothing, but Wodeham hesitates. He denies that the complex is but a nothing but stopped short at naming them “somethings.” Gregory of Rimini felt that Wodeham’s understanding of what entails a

“something” was at fault, and his account is notable largely for giving a broader definition of “something” than Wodeham’s. As mentioned, it can be argued that Wodeham in fact viewed the complex significant as a functioning something, real constituents of extramental reality, on a par with States of Affairs.

## Indivisibilism

Fourteenth-century Oxford was famous for its attention to the relation of semantics and logic to the natural sciences, particularly Aristotelian physics. The Mertonian “Calculators” were especially concerned to explore the relation of mathematical analysis to questions about movement through media like time and space. A natural result of this was the philosophical investigation into the ultimate structure of spatiotemporal reality. The common view had long been that space and time are both infinitely divisible, but by the 1320s, sufficient disagreement had arisen to lead to three classes of “atomists.” The first, of whom Chatton was most prominent, held that any continuum, whether spatial distance or temporal duration, was made up of a finite number of indivisible points or atoms. The second group, of whom Henry Harclay was best known, held that a continuum was composed of an infinite number of indivisible points, each conjoined to the other without space in between. The third, associated with Grosseteste, argued that the infinite number of atoms making up the continuum was mediately conjoined. Divisibilists rejected indivisibles in physical reality, while admitting immaterial indivisibles such as the intellectual soul. Ockham and Wodeham were among the most thoroughgoing of the indivisibilists, holding that an indivisible particle of spatiotemporal reality was simply a contradiction, a term we can imagine, like “square circle,” without possible referent. Others, the majority, were willing to countenance indivisibles as real but unwilling to assert their uniform presence as the sole constituents of spatiotemporal continua. Wodeham’s position is noteworthy for two reasons. First, his *Tractatus de indivisibilibus* serves as a guidebook to almost all the major

positions and arguments in play in Oxford and, second, because his vigorous attack on atomists seems to have effectively ended the matter, at least until the 1360s. Wodeham collected a mass of arguments against indivisibles, cataloging every possible philosophical problem that can arise from supporting the infinite divisibility of space and time. Indeed, Wodeham eagerly wades into the Zeno paradoxes familiar to philosophy students today, exploring the soundness of Aristotle’s resolutions of these classic problems. An earlier *Quaestio de divisione et compositione continui* exists as evidence for the evolution of Wodeham’s thought; in it, he articulates the idea that all infinite series must be equal, when considered as infinite. Imagining one infinite series beginning early in the day, and another beginning at the end of the day, we are constrained to admit that the former has more constituents than the latter, but as infinities, the two are equal. In the later *Tractatus*, though, Wodeham shifts, arguing in Q.5 that one infinity can be greater than another, a position that had earlier been argued by Grosseteste.

## Cross-References

- ▶ [Atomism](#)
- ▶ [Gregory of Rimini](#)
- ▶ [Henry Harclay](#)
- ▶ [John Duns Scotus](#)
- ▶ [John Wyclif](#)
- ▶ [Peter Auriol](#)
- ▶ [Robert Grosseteste](#)
- ▶ [Walter Chatton](#)
- ▶ [William of Ockham](#)

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## Adelard of Bath

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### Abstract

Adelard was a Latin scholar and teacher of the liberal arts. He was a pioneer in writing about “natura” as natural science, and was also responsible for making the first translations from Arabic into Latin of works on geometry and astronomy. Several generations of students used his Latin adaptation of Euclid's *Elements*, and his *Questions on Natural Science* remained a popular text into the Renaissance.

Adelard of Bath (c. 1080–1150), scientist and translator, is the most eminent among several of scholars in the West Country of England who involved themselves in mathematics and astronomy in the early twelfth century. He was proud to call himself “a man of Bath,” and it is likely that

he spent most of his career in this city, which had been restored as a spa in the early twelfth century, and attracted people from far and wide for the curative powers of its waters. Adelard uses Bath in examples in astronomical and magical texts, whilst his name is attested in documents from Bath Priory in 1100, 1106 and 1120, as a steward and knight of the bishop, John de Villula of Tours. As was customary, he went abroad to study, and refers to sojourns both in Tours (where a famous, but unnamed, wise man, taught him astronomy) and in Laon. It is at Laon that he made a pact with his “nephew” – that he would devote himself to the “studies of the Arabs” whilst his nephew would pursue French studies. These studies took him to Salerno, “Magna Graecia” (southern Italy), Syracuse in Sicily, and Mamistra and Tarsus in the Norman Principality of Antioch. He may well have travelled to the Middle East in the wake of the First Crusade, which led to the capture of Antioch in 1099; a later scholar appears to call Adelard an “Antiochene.” In these journeys, he mentions meeting a Greek expert in medicine and the nature of things in Magna Graecia, attending an anatomical demonstration in Tarsus, and experiencing the volcanic eruption of Mount Etna and an earthquake at Mamistra (Misis). There is no evidence that he visited Spain, though the transcriptions of Arabic terms, which he liberally uses in his translations, reflect Spanish pronunciation; this may reflect collaboration with Arabic speakers of Hispanic origin in England. It seems that, on his return from his seven-year trip, he spent the rest of his life in England and Normandy where he wrote most of his works. His humanistic works, *De eodem et diverso* (*On the Same and the Different*) and *Quaestiones naturales* (*Questions on Natural Science*) were dedicated respectively to William, bishop of Syracuse and Richard, bishop of Bayeux (either FitzSamson, bishop 1107–1133, or of Kent, 1135–1142). In early 1150, in Normandy, he dedicated his *De opere astrolapsus* (*On the Function of the Astrolabe*) to the young Henry Plantagenet, who was to become Henry II in 1154. This is the latest of the sparse dates that we have for Adelard’s life.

Adelard wrote two kinds of works: original texts written in a polished and elegant Latin, intended for entertainment as much as education; and mathematical works translated or adapted from Arabic texts, written for students and professionals. The earliest of the first group is probably the *De eodem et diverso*, which is an exhortation to the study of philosophy, following the model of Boethius’ *De consolazione philosophiae*. His aim is to show how the epistemology of Plato and Aristotle can be reconciled in a theory of universals which is very similar to what was later called the indifference theory. Its protagonists are two allegorical figures, Philocosmia, the lover of worldly pleasures, and Philosophia, the lover of wisdom. Philocosmia criticizes philosophers for being inconsistent, useless and poor, but rather promotes her attendants, Riches, Power, Honour, Fame, and Pleasure. Philosophia, however, wins the debate and the second half of the text is devoted to the description of her own handmaidens, the seven liberal arts. Philocosmia epitomizes preoccupation with “things” (*res*), whilst Philosophia gives priority to “words” or “terms” (*voces*): that is, the names of the genus, species, and individuals, which can each be applied to the same actual substance, and the words of the books of the seven liberal arts, which prevent the human soul from lapsing into corruption.

The *Quaestiones naturales* was the most popular of his literary works, and often accompanies Seneca’s *Natural Questions* in the manuscripts. It takes the form of a lively dialogue between Adelard and his nephew. The dialogue is built on a framework of pre-existing “questions on nature,” which evidently formed the basis of debate in the medical school of Salerno, which Adelard had visited. As such, the topics are on natural science, arranged from the lowest parts of the universe (the roots of plants) to the highest (the stars and unmoving sphere). Although Adelard claims that he is drawing from his “Arabic studies,” no direct Arabic sources can be recognized; literal quotations rather come from Plato’s *Timaeus* and Cicero’s *On the Nature of the Gods*. Nevertheless, the tenor of the discussions

could reflect the conversations that he engaged in, on his sojourn in Sicily and the Middle East. The aim of the *Quaestiones naturales* is to show how one should work out problems rationally, on the basis of observation, rather than depend on the writings of authorities. Well known is his comparison of the letter of authority with a prostitute who makes herself available to the affections of all-comers. Reason is to be preferred. Why else did God give each man a brain, unless it was so that he could work things out rationally himself and not rely on what an “authority” had said? (*Quaestiones naturales*, 6, p. 105). One should push rational arguments as far as they can go, and only when human knowledge completely fails, should one refer to the agency of God (*Quaestiones naturales*, p. 97).

An example of an argument based on reason is his discussion of whether brute animals have souls. Adelard claims that they do. For every animal makes a judgement (*iudicium*) as a result of a sensation, so that it seeks out something and avoids something else. More than that, one can observe that dogs react to words spoken to them, so they must have understanding (*intellectus*). In a human body, judgment and understanding can only take place if the soul is present. Since human bodies are more perfect than the bodies of brute animals, it is irrational to believe that animal bodies can perform judgement and understanding without a soul. Nor can one argue that animals’ souls perish with their bodies, for if, as has been shown earlier in the *Quaestiones naturales*, the elements that make up bodies never perish, but continuously reform to produce new bodies, how can the soul, which is a superior entity, perish completely? Conclusions such as this may have prompted Adelard to say in his preface that his readers cannot accept anything “new,” so that, when he wishes to put forward his own discovery he must say: “Someone else said, not I” (*Quaestiones naturales*, p. 83).

This argument also shows a preoccupation of the *Quaestiones naturales* with psychology, and with the senses, which is absent from earlier sets of natural questions. In general, while most of the questions themselves are found elsewhere, Adelard’s solutions are his own. He sometimes

appears to use a pre-existent question simply as a convenient starting point to investigate a topic that concerns him more deeply: for example, the question “Why does fanning generate coldness, if movement generates heat?” prompts him to consider essential and accidental qualities, while the question “Where do winds arise from?” leads him to discuss the problem of infinite movement. While one cannot describe the *Quaestiones naturales* as a systematic work on physics, several topics relevant to physics are dealt with.

Adelard’s translations from Arabic are literal and technical in nature: they teach one how to compute on the abacus, to solve geometrical theorems, to chart the course of the stars, to draw up horoscopes and to make talismans for effecting magic. Adelard, however, was keen to provide more than literal translations. In the case of Euclid’s *Elements*, in addition to his literal rendering, either he or members of his school recast the work in the form of a “commentum” in order to show how theorems followed on from one another by a process of deductive reasoning (this is the so-called “Adelard II” version of the *Elements*). In a work on how to use an astrolabe, based on Arabic texts on the subject, he includes a summary of cosmology according to the Ptolemaic system.

Adelard contributed significantly to establishing of the teaching of the quadrivium in the Middle Ages. The “Adelard II” version of the *Elements* was included in Thierry of Chartres’ two-volume collection of texts on the seven liberal arts (the *Heptateuchon*), and was copied in more than 70 manuscripts. His translation of the tables of al-Khwarizmi was also copied into the *Heptateuchon*, but was soon superseded by the *Toledan Tables*. His abiding reputation, however, was due to the *Quaestiones naturales*, which were printed three times in the Renaissance and quoted by scholars such as Giovanni Pico della Mirandola.

## Cross-References

- ▶ [Natural Philosophy](#)
- ▶ [Thābit ibn Qurra](#)

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like Albert the Great, Ulrich of Strasbourg, and Thomas Aquinas. They argued that beauty lies in the relation between the form and matter of a hylomorphic concrete whole. Although they were writing in the context of beauty as a property of all things that exist, some of them allowed for different degrees of beauty in different things. Traditionalist theorists put these ideas together with material from technical treatises on individual arts (such as poetry, music, and architecture) and ideas implied by medieval artifacts in order to construct a medieval aesthetic theory. Recently, however, strong arguments have been brought to suggest that there was no such thing as medieval aesthetics, given that the connection between beauty and human-made artifacts, central to many modern aesthetic theories, was not made.

Encyclopedia entries are not, usually, a suitable place for discussions of methodology, and least of all survey articles, to which readers look for a clear and balanced introduction to a field. Yet, a survey of what is called medieval aesthetics cannot avoid questions of method, because it is a matter of dispute whether medieval aesthetics is a subject at all. While there are a number of modern studies of medieval aesthetics, written by expert historians and philosophers, there are other recent historians and philosophers who put forward powerful reasons for thinking that there was no aesthetics in the Middle Ages. Given that encyclopedias are designed to celebrate the quarter-truth that there exists a stock of methodologically uncontroversial, fixed knowledge, which gives answers rather than poses fresh questions, most of this entry is devoted to explaining the "Traditional View," according to which there is medieval aesthetics. At the end of my discussion, however, I briefly explain the powerful arguments put by the Revisionists that medieval aesthetics is as much a nonsubject as medieval molecular biology or medieval nanotechnology. I do not discuss a recent revision of the Revisionist view (Marenbon 2009). Despite that difference, for some of my discussion here I draw on this earlier piece of mine.

## Aesthetics

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### Abstract

According to a "Traditional" view, there was a medieval aesthetics, which centered around the theories of beauty developed by theologians

## Traditional View

The traditional view is based on a certain conception of the subject matter of aesthetics (in general), which lies behind most aesthetic philosophy from the later eighteenth to the later twentieth century. Aesthetics, they consider, is about beauty, but beauty especially (though not exclusively) as manifested in works of art (by which are meant literary, pictorial, sculptural, architectural, and musical artifacts). The traditionalists acknowledge that there was no single branch of study in the Middle Ages devoted to this subject matter. But they believe that there was an underlying medieval aesthetics that can be extracted from a variety of sources: theoretical discussions (often theological), technical manuals of the different arts, and medieval artifacts themselves. Many of them make use of the thirteenth-century discussions of beauty. Since these theories are quite intricate and seem *prima facie* to be the medieval material nearest to the concerns of aesthetic philosophy, I shall look at the most important of these, before considering more briefly the medieval treatises on individual arts – separately. Then, I shall consider how the traditionalists put together their views of a medieval aesthetics.

## Theories of Beauty

Explicit and developed medieval discussions of beauty are not found until the early thirteenth century. In the background lie two different types of theory, which they could read in the ancient sources. On the one hand, there was the conception of beauty as a special sort of composite quality, which they read in Cicero and Augustine. For these authors, an object is beautiful in virtue of the arrangement of its parts in a congruent way, and the delightfulness of its color (a formula that would leave it open for a thing's beauty not to be a quality it has in itself, but in virtue of its effect on human observers). Some things, therefore, are (more or less) beautiful, and many things not at all beautiful. On the other hand, medieval authors read about beauty in

Chap. 4 of *On the Divine Names*, written in the fifth century by Pseudo-Dionysius and available in Latin from the ninth century. He presents beauty as a transcendental attribute, along with goodness (with which, he says, it is identical): all things have it by virtue of existing, since God is beautiful and he transmits beauty to all things.

It was in the early thirteenth century that the theory of the transcendentals was first carefully developed, and there are discussions of beauty in this context by writers such as William of Auvergne and the followers of Alexander of Hales who compiled the *Summa Alexandri* (cf. Pouillon 1946). At the same period, Robert Grosseteste was able, as a result of his general cosmological theory, to reconcile the idea that everything is beautiful with the Ciceronian–Augustinian definition in terms of color and proportion. Grosseteste conceived the entire universe as an irradiation of light from its ultimate source, God, and, on the medieval view, color is an effect of light. He also thought that the universe is constructed in accord with the laws of geometry, and so everything is proportioned as well as colored.

The three most important discussions of beauty by medieval theologians are those by Albert the Great and two of his pupils, Ulrich of Strasbourg and Thomas Aquinas. The theories are, on examination, very different from one another, but they are alike in attempting to bring together the Ciceronian–Augustinian view of beauty as a composite quality with Pseudo-Dionysius' transcendental conception of it. Albert treats the subject most fully in his commentary on *On the Divine Names* (Aquinas 1927: 417–443 – it is wrongly attributed to Aquinas in this edition), and so it is not surprising that he identifies beauty with goodness, though he allows that it differs from it “by reason” in certain ways. The identification is deeper than extensional equivalence ((x) (x is good) <-> (x is beautiful)), since all the transcendental attributes have by definition a universal extension and so are extensionally equivalent, and yet neither Albert nor anyone thinks that, for instance, truth (another transcendental) is identical to goodness. It is a moot point, therefore, whether Albert is thinking of beauty as anything more than a way of being

good. He helps us to understand what is involved in being beautiful through an analogy with more tangible beauty of the Ciceronian–Augustinian sort. Just as a body is said to be beautiful “from the resplendence of color over proportioned limbs,” so all things are beautiful by the “resplendence of the substantial or accidental form over proportioned and bounded parts of matter.” What does Albert mean by this comparison? According to the Aristotelian metaphysics that Albert and his contemporaries accepted, all natural things (except, in the view of some, angels and separated souls) besides God are composites of matter and their substantial form, which makes them the sort of thing they are – a human, or a dog, or a flower. They also are the subjects for accidental forms, such as having certain quantities and qualities and relations. For most thinkers of this period, it is matter which individuates forms, and so it makes sense to think of it as being “proportioned and bounded.” And so Albert’s comparison is not far-fetched. But there is the important difference that, whereas a person’s limbs may fail to be proportioned and, in the dark, may not have color resplendent over them, any matter-form composite will, on Albert’s theory, have the beauty of form resplendent over proportioned matter. Moreover, while in principle, a thing may have more or less even of a transcendental attribute, it is hard to see how any one matter-form composite is more or less beautiful than another in Albert’s sense. For this reason, Albert’s conception of metaphysical beauty is rather distant from what “beauty” normally means.

By contrast, Ulrich of Strasbourg (*De summo bono (On the Highest Good)* 1987–1989, II.4) does manage to find a way of admitting degrees of beauty into a theory which, like Albert’s, is based on the way in which forms inform matter. Not every bodily individual perfectly exemplifies the species of which it is a member. In order to be perfectly beautiful, the thing must satisfy the four criteria of quantity, number of parts, relation between the size of the parts and the whole, and disposition. The first two of these requirements are fairly straightforward and rule out certain sorts of abnormalities: for its quantity to be correct, something must be of the appropriate size for its

species; neither a dwarf, nor a giant, for instance; a human fails to have the correct number of parts if he or she is one-legged or one-eyed. The third requirement is stricter, since a dog with an unusually long tail or a person with too large a bottom would fail it (in line with a certain widespread intuitive notion of beauty). For the fourth requirement, disposition, Ulrich gives the example of the balance of humors in a human. Many people, according to the medieval theory of humors, do not have their humors in balance, but have, for instance, a choleric temperament or a melancholic one: they would therefore fail to be perfectly beautiful according to Ulrich. These criteria, therefore, would permit quite a fine ranking of beauty, based not just on the external characteristics of things, but on their internal bodily constitutions.

This sort of beauty is, however, just one of four general types distinguished by Ulrich. It is essential corporeal beauty. There is also accidental corporeal beauty. Ulrich separates the relationships between substantial form and its matter, and the matter-form composite and its accidents, which Albert considers together when analysing beauty. Essential beauty is the result of the correct relationship between the former pair, so that the bodily thing is a perfect example of its species, and accidental beauty results from the characteristics of symmetry and color that it has from accidents of quantity and quality. Rather than, like Albert, allude to the Ciceronian–Augustinian definition of beauty as an analogy, Ulrich thus incorporates it into his theory, as a different sort of non-species-based beauty. Ulrich also considers that noncorporeal things, such as angels and separated souls, can be beautiful, essentially or accidentally; for instance, a soul is accidentally beautiful through having knowledge. He does not, however, go into much detail over this side of this theory.

Despite the number of books that have been written on Thomas Aquinas’ theory of beauty (or even more ambitiously, his “aesthetics”), he writes about beauty only very rarely and always in passing, in his commentary on Pseudo-Dionysius’ *On Divine Names* and in the *Summa theologiae*. There are four passages that are



frequently quoted. In Chap. 4, Lectio 5 of the Commentary, Aquinas identifies brightness (*claritas*) and consonance (*consonantia*) as characteristics of beauty, and he remarks that “although the beautiful and the good are the same in subject, because both brightness and consonance are contained in the definition of the good, yet they differ by reason, because the beautiful adds beyond the good an ordering to the cognitive power that it is thus.” In the *Summa theologiae* (I, q. 5, a. 4 ad 1), Aquinas remarks that “in the subject the good and the beautiful are the same, because they are both based on the same thing, that is, on the form.” But the good is in respect of the appetite: good is what all things seek after. The beautiful, however, is in respect of the “cognitive power” (*vis cognoscitiva*), he says, “for things are called beautiful which please when they are seen.” And so, he argues, the beautiful consists in due proportion, because sense is “a certain ratio” and it delights in things that are similar to it. The idea of sense as a ratio is taken from Aristotle’s *De anima* 424a, where he sees the senses as means or ratios, which can be destroyed by sensations so strong that they lose their balance. In a later *quaestio* in the *Summa theologiae* (I, q. 39, a. 8), he explains – while talking about the beauty of the Son of God – that beauty consists, not just in due proportion, but also in wholeness or perfection (a thing must not be missing a part) and brightness (*claritas*), as exemplified by having a shining color. And in IaIIe, q. 27, a. 1, ad 3, Aquinas says again that the beautiful is the same as the good, but differs “by reason alone.” Then he goes on to explain that, whereas the good is that in which the appetite comes to rest, “it pertains to the definition of the beautiful that the appetite comes to rest in the sight or knowledge of it.” He adds that, for this reason, those senses are chiefly concerned with beauty which are most cognitive – sight and hearing (on which see McQueen 1993). Finally, he summarizes his point by saying that “the beautiful adds to the good a certain ordering to the cognitive power, so that the good may be said to be that which without qualification pleases the appetite, but the beautiful may be said to be that the apprehension of which pleases.”

Interpretations of these remarks center on two problems. The first is how to reconcile the side of the theory which identifies proportion/consonance, brightness, and wholeness as features in a thing which make it beautiful, with the side of the theory which emphasizes the role of the cognizer with regard to the beauty of a thing (by contrast with its goodness, for instance). Most interpreters insist that Aquinas has an objective conception of beauty – that is to say, things are beautiful in virtue of attributes that they really have, but that we have to make a special use of our intellectual faculties in order to grasp this beauty. Writing originally in 1920, Jacques Maritain (1965) identified a special power of intellectual intuition by which we grasp the beauty of things. More recent analysts (especially Eco 1970: 60–63, 2007: 281–317) have shown clearly that Aquinas does not suggest or have room for a notion of intellectual intuition, and they have elaborated their own accounts of how we cognize beauty (cf. Mothersill 1984: 323–366; Eco 1970; Jordan 1989; Marenbon 2017).

The second problem of interpretation is whether beauty is in fact a transcendental for Aquinas. Most interpreters believe that it is: their strongest argument for this view is that Aquinas identifies the beautiful with the good, and good is certainly a transcendental for him. But Aquinas never explicitly lists beauty as a transcendental, and in his presentation of the transcendentals in *De veritate* 1.1 beauty is not included. Kovach (1961) – the most thorough collection and analysis of texts on Aquinas and beauty – suggests that Aquinas came to include beauty among the transcendentals only after he had written *De veritate*. He proposes that for Aquinas beauty was a sort of super-transcendental, which brings the other transcendental attributes together. But Aertsen (1991) has argued powerfully that beauty is not an independent transcendental in Aquinas (nor in general in the thirteenth-century tradition). In his view, Aquinas thought that being beautiful is just a way of being good.

An even more radically minimalist interpretation of Aquinas’ remarks on beauty is possible. All things are good in respect of their forms, Aquinas believes (and he explains why – to be good is to be sought as an end; things are sought as

ends because they are perfect, and by being in act, they are in some way perfect; and it is the form which makes a thing be in act (*Summa theologiae*, I, q. 5, a.3)). Things are beautiful, too, in respect of their forms and the fact that – as perfections – these forms are objectively ends to be sought. There is nothing else in the nature of things on which beauty is based and so, in subject, beauty and goodness are identical. But a thing is called “beautiful” only when simply seeing or knowing its form is pleasing, and that happens when the object has, by virtue of its form, certain qualities (proportion, brightness, wholeness) that delight the cognizer. There is no reason at all to think that all things have these qualities. In the case of proportion, Aquinas says that it delights cognizers because the cognizing senses are themselves proportions. This would suggest that finding something beautiful depends on its having attributes that accord with those of the cognitive powers – not those of this or that cognizer, however, but rather those which cognitive powers must have if they are to cognize. And so on this interpretation, judgments of beauty are for Aquinas, just as they would be for Kant, subjectively universal.

However he is interpreted, Aquinas, like Albert, Ulrich, and the earlier thirteenth-century theologians, developed his ideas about beauty within the context set by Pseudo-Dionysius’ view that beauty is an attribute of God transmitted to all creation, and the Ciceronian–Augustinian view of beauty as a complex quality in the background. One contemporary author, who is not a theologian, had an entirely different source and so a completely different approach. Witelo’s treatise on perspective is an adapted translation from an eleventh-century Arabic author, al-Haytham. For al-Haytham (II.3), an object is beautiful just in case it has properties which affect viewers (he is concerned just with visual beauty, given that he is writing about optics) in such a way that they describe them as beautiful. What are these properties? They include color, but, in the main, they are grouped in antithetical pairs. For example, al-Haytham gives the pair discrete/continuous: separate stars, he believes, are more beautiful than nebulae, but a meadow is more beautiful when its vegetation is continuous than when it is broken up

into discrete patches and so is sparse. Clearly, al-Haytham does not believe that his paired characteristics provide a formula for showing what is or is not beautiful. Rather, things are beautiful because they affect us in a certain sort of way, and his antitheses provide a framework for recording some of the different characteristics of different things which have this effect. Witelo makes one important change to al-Haytham’s theory of beauty. Al-Haytham shows no awareness that what is considered beautiful may vary from culture to culture. Witelo (Baeumker 1908: IV.148) recognizes that many types of beauty are based on custom, and that each race will consider that the characteristics of its own members are beautiful. An Arab like al-Haytham will, therefore, judge different colors and proportions beautiful in a human being than a Dane, Witelo explains, perhaps with it in mind that al-Haytham condemns blond hair and blue eyes as ugly.

### Treatises on the Arts

Many treatises in the various areas now classified as art or the fine arts were written in the Middle Ages. They are, with a few exceptions, technical treatises and handbooks for practitioners, rather than second-order discussions of the issues considered by aestheticians today in connection with these arts – for instance, the nature of musical expression, or pictorial representation, or the relationship between authorial intention and the meaning of a text. In music, there was a highly theoretical approach, based upon Augustine’s and Boethius’ musical treatises, which made music into a branch of mathematics; and then there were a host of more practical handbooks. The *De diversis artibus (On Different Arts)* by Theophilus, probably from the twelfth century, is a treatise on how to use various types of materials (pigments, glues, varnishes) and how to work on various sorts of objects – walls, books, panels, glass, metal. Even the series of *Arts of Poetry*, such as Geoffrey of Vinsauf’s *Poetria nova*, written in Latin at the end of the twelfth and the beginning of the thirteenth century and based partly on Horace and partly on rhetorical manuals,



are mainly devoted to giving practical advice to the would-be poet. Dante's *De vulgari eloquentia* (*On Eloquence in the Vernacular*) is an innovative and reflective discussion about language, but contains little in the way of philosophical reflection about poetry itself.

### **A Medieval Aesthetic: The Traditional Approach**

Recent proponents of the traditional approach have included Edgar de Bruyne (author of a three-volume *History* of medieval aesthetics), the wide-ranging historian of aesthetics Władysław Tatarkiewicz, the renowned art historians Erwin Panofsky, Rosario Assunto, and Umberto Eco, as well as Neoscholastics such as Czapiewski and Kovach. The best of these studies are those by Panofsky and Eco: looking at them brings out the methodology shared by all these writers.

Although Panofsky concentrates on architecture and looks to general features of medieval thought rather than the more detailed theories of beauty and technical manuals discussed above, his way of constructing a medieval aesthetics shows very clearly the underlying methodology of the traditional approach. Panofsky was very impressed by the treatise written in the 1140s by Abbot Suger of St Denis, *De rebus in sua administratione gestis* (*On the Things Done Under His Direction*). Panofsky (Introduction to Suger 1946) argues that the treatise expresses ideas about aesthetics, inspired by Neoplatonism and the metaphysics of light, and that Suger was inspired by these theories in the way in which he had the cathedral built. Later, Panofsky generalized this way of seeing philosophical tendencies reflected in architectural design in his *Gothic Architecture and Scholasticism* (1957). The development of church architecture which led to the Gothic cathedral, unified in its space, and with its elements clearly differentiated, is seen as parallel to the path of scholastic thought towards the highly articulated clarity and the comprehensiveness of the synthesis of philosophy and religion which attributes to Aquinas.

There are two elements of soft Hegelianism underlying Panofsky's approach. The first is the assumption that there is a certain spirit of a period, which can be found in works so different as a cathedral and a theological treatise. The second is the idea that discerning this spirit in its different manifestations and variations is the main task for the historian of philosophy. Medieval aesthetics will therefore be, not a collection of different and often opposed arguments, but a rather a unified (if varying and developing) outlook. These two soft Hegelian tendencies permeate the monumental work of de Bruyne, and they provide the unstated rationale for Eco's studies of medieval aesthetics. Eco, however, is much more self-conscious than de Bruyne about his enterprise and the difficulties which it faces. He accepts that aesthetics did not exist as a recognized branch of philosophy, in the manner of, for instance, metaphysics or ethics, until Baumgarten's *Aesthetica* (1750–1758). Moreover, if aesthetics is to be centered, in the eighteenth-century manner, on beauty as something perceived by the senses, then, he admits, there was little aesthetic reflection in the Middle Ages. But "if we mean by 'Aesthetics' a field of interests around the value 'beauty,' its definition, its function, and the ways of producing and enjoying it – then the Middle Ages spoke of aesthetics." Particularly in his work on Aquinas' aesthetics, Eco shows great ingenuity in extending various hints found in his writings into a complete theory about beauty. He recognizes that Aquinas does not have a philosophy of art, in today's sense of the word, but, like de Bruyne and most of the other theorists, he makes the link between art and medieval theories of beauty by looking at technical treatises on individual arts.

### **Revisionist's Objections: Arguments Against the Idea of Medieval Aesthetics**

In the period from c. 1980 to present, various Revisionist arguments against the traditional approach have been made, especially by Paul

Oskar Kristeller, Jan Aertsen, Andreas Speer, and Olivier Boulnois (2008). Putting together the various critics, the following counter-argument can be constructed.

There were indeed some scholastic discussions about beauty, but (Aertsen 1991) it is misleading to think that beauty was considered a transcendental attribute in its own right, like unity or truth. Rather, it is just envisaged as an aspect of goodness. Aquinas, who has been regarded as the central medieval aesthetic philosopher, had very little indeed to say about beauty (Speer 1990). Moreover, most of the theories of beauty were proposed in a theological context. Even where they concern a notion like that of beauty in its normal sense – an attribute that different things possess to different degrees, their subject is the beauty of natural things, not that of artifacts. The link between beauty and art, which characterizes modern aesthetics, is missing – and so, given medieval assumptions it must be. Human-made things were judged as being lower than natural – that is, created – ones. And there was no system of fine arts, distinguishing the subject matter of what is now aesthetics (centrally: literature, painting, sculpture, architecture, music) from other pursuits (Kristeller 1980). The “arts” were the liberal arts of language (grammar, logic, and rhetoric) and mathematics (arithmetic, geometry, music – studied theoretically – and astronomy). Even when, in his *Didascalicon*, Hugh of St Victor (1961: II.21–28) takes the unusual step of listing seven mechanical arts along with the seven liberal ones, he just shows how distant medieval thinking was from the concept of the fine arts or art, as it is now understood. The mechanical arts are mostly practical crafts, such as agriculture, sailing, and weaving; “theatrical knowledge” turns out to include gymnastics and athletics, and painting and sculpture are included merely as subdivisions of arms-making.

Investigations by revisionist critics into individual works that had been used as sources for medieval aesthetics support this powerful line of counterargument. For example, a recent study of Suger’s *De consecratione* (Suger 1995) makes the

case that, contrary to Panofsky’s reading, Suger’s treatise puts forward his views on the liturgy, ecclesiology, and history, in line with his political aims, and does not present St Denis as a work of art.

There is, besides, another type of criticism that can be made of the traditional approach, related to the second element of soft Hegelianism mentioned above. Even if the traditionalists’ conclusions are accepted, they merely establish that there was a certain, characteristically medieval way of thinking about aesthetics, but not that there was the rational debate about aesthetic positions that would make the period one in which the subject flourished as a field of philosophy. It is true that Eco (1970, 1956) presents a philosophically interesting theory as Aquinas’ aesthetics. But, as he makes clear, this theory is his own construction; Eco is informed by Aquinas’ overall thinking informs, but it is he who is responsible for this supposedly thirteenth-century aesthetic theory (see Marenbon 2017).

Addendum (2017). This article does not attempt to look at medieval aesthetics in Arabic, Hebrew or Greek. Some of the most important scholarly work recently has been done in connection with literature and literary criticism: see Allen 1982, Carruthers 2013, Minnis and Johnson 2005, Robertson 2017, Rosenfeld 2011.

## Cross-References

- ▶ [Aesthetics, Byzantine](#)
- ▶ [Albert the Great](#)
- ▶ [Robert Grosseteste](#)
- ▶ [Thomas Aquinas](#)
- ▶ [William of Auvergne](#)

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## Aesthetics, Byzantine

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### Abstract

Byzantine aesthetics comprises views on traditional aesthetic concepts (beauty, light) and problems (values and properties) as well as discussions relevant to art theory (the status of the work of art, the functions of art, the beholder). It does not form a coherent system and it has to be reconstructed through numerous texts of different genres (philosophical, theological, rhetorical, etc.). The sources of Byzantine aesthetics, concerning mainly the visual arts, are ancient Greek aesthetics (late Platonic tradition on and rhetorical descriptions of works of art) and early Patristic thought (presenting the Christian attitude toward art and an elaborated theory of beauty). Art is appreciated, but in so far as it is a human creation that appeals to the senses it could be justified only on metaphysical grounds. The Byzantines' major contribution was the theory of image that was elaborated during Iconoclasm (eighth to ninth century) and legitimated in theological and philosophical terms orthodox religious art.

### The Nature of Byzantine Aesthetics

Modern discussions about the distinction between art and non-art or about the status of the work of art make us hesitant to apply unqualifiedly modern concepts (art, aesthetics) to the pre-modern era of Byzantium. The very existence of aesthetics in the Middle Ages is questionable and the medieval concept of art differs from that of antiquity and, even more, from that of the Renaissance. We cannot expect Byzantium aesthetics to be an autonomous branch of philosophy. On the other hand, the Byzantine writers often discussed

aesthetic concepts (beauty, image, light) and problems (aesthetic values and properties, the function of the work of art, the role of the beholder). But in most cases this discussion was made in the context of wider theological and philosophical issues that mostly attracted the Byzantines' interest.

What we can call "Byzantine aesthetics" has certain main characteristics: (a) It neither has a systematic nature nor does form a coherent whole. It emerged as a response to specific problems that were occasionally aroused; so, in regard to its major issues (theory of image, attitude to Greek art) it is mostly polemic. (b) There is almost no particular thinker who treated traditional aesthetic issues per se, analyzing the concepts he used or concluding his discussion without reference to the spiritual domain. (c) The Greek and Patristic heritage was always present in the manner the Byzantines speculated about art and it must be considered as the major source for the formation of Byzantine aesthetics. (d) Byzantine aesthetics referred not only to Byzantine art but also to ancient Greek art.

Hence, Byzantine aesthetics unlike traditional aesthetics does not deal primarily with the categories of beauty and taste, aesthetic experience or pleasure, critical examination and evaluation of beauty. More than a theory of beauty Byzantine aesthetics must be considered as a theory of art, that is, about the status of the work of art, its functions, its reception, its beholder, etc.

### The Sources of Byzantine Aesthetics

Twofold is the background of the Byzantines' views on art, mainly the visual arts: (a) the aesthetic ideas of Greek antiquity, namely the late Platonic tradition (where the role of art is to lead the way toward spiritual beauty), and the analysis of works of art in the rhetorical texts of Late Antiquity. The Byzantines imitated the ancient Greek aesthetic vocabulary (especially in the description of works of art) and when needed they transformed it (especially in the theory of image). (b) The early Patristic thought, particularly the Cappadocians and Pseudo-Dionysius, in

which the Byzantines found a warranted Christian attitude toward art and an elaborated theory of beauty.

One of the problems about studying Byzantine aesthetic views is the absence of specific treatises and the need to reconstruct it using texts of different genres and, more precariously, from the works of art. There are numerous Byzantine texts whose significance for aesthetics is indiscernible because of their titles. They are (a) texts that deal (exclusively or not) with art, like for instance (1) the apologetic texts against ancient Greek art, (2) texts on the theory of image and (3) descriptions of works of art (*ekphraseis*); and (b) texts with occasional references to issues of art and art theory with variant content (theological, historical, philosophical, rhetorical, literal) and written for various purposes and for different audiences during a period of ten centuries.

### Beauty and Other Aesthetic Concepts

In the Byzantine writings, many aesthetic concepts are used: beauty, resemblance, similarity, imitation, harmony, symmetry, image, prototype, imagination, symbol, color, form, light, place, time, artist, creation/creativity, life-like, etc. The vocabulary can sometimes be misleading since the language of Byzantine art criticism is completely different from the modern, and thus easily misunderstood. For instance, it is difficult to see why an icon was considered as a naturalistic copy of the original, if we do not take into account the beholder's reaction to the representation. The Byzantines' language has a philosophical background and was derived from late antique *ekphraseis*, rhetorical texts that were formulated to describe an art quite different from the Byzantine. Eusebius, Procopius, Paul Silentiarios, Photios, Psellos, and many others wrote numerous *ekphraseis* that help us to understand the parallel function of text and art, and discourse and image in Byzantium. These descriptions try to express something of the art's spirituality; the text shares a common end with the image described: they point to the truth that supersedes both.

The classical concept of beauty was used in the descriptions but it played no role for the iconoclastic controversy. The visible beauty, be it symmetry or appropriateness, is in earthly things and reflects the spiritual beauty of God (a theme common to the Platonic tradition). So beauty has aesthetic but more importantly ontological connotations. God is the beauty itself that surpasses and causes all created beautiful things.

### The Negation and the Acceptance of an Art That Appeals to the Senses

Throughout the Byzantine period existed, but not dominated, a rigoristic attitude to art, that was inherited from Early Christianity. Pagan (religious) works of art were condemned as material, immoral, and dangerous (inhabited by demons) while the possibility of a Christian art was questioned on the basis of the Old Testament's prohibition against graven images and the fear of idolatry. The hostility toward art, in general, was also justified by the illusionary and seductive character of the sensible art-objects and by the total rejection of sensual pleasures in favor of spirituality that demands the formation of the inner image (in the soul) and not the worship of material representations that are incapable of circumscribing God.

The emergence of Christian art (third century) helped to overcome the earlier aniconism and gradually (from the fourth century onward) the Byzantines made a distinction between the ancient works of art that can be appreciated as such and their deplorable religious meaning that must be rejected and condemned. The transfer to Constantinople of ancient masterpieces to adorn the new Christian capital is indicative. But in general, the Byzantine beholder (if there can be a single category that comprises the emperor, the clergy, high officials and scholars, philosophers and theologians, illiterates, etc.) was embarrassed by what can be labeled as "aesthetic pleasure."

It was later, probably from the eleventh century onward, that things changed. For instance,

Psellos has written descriptions where he analyses the ancient work of art aesthetically, commenting on many of its aesthetic qualities and using Platonic and Aristotelian terminology. Detailed descriptions, evaluation of certain material features, the choice of the form, the connection between the sensible form and the theoretical content of the work testify to the aesthetic interests of the Byzantines. After all, the primacy of the visual was a commonplace in Byzantium.

### The Theory of Image (Icon)

The development of Christian art and the cult of the images led to the need for the justification of religious imagery and to Iconoclasm (eighth to ninth century). The main problem was not the representation of natural objects (that was only a problem of craftsmanship and of style) or the artistic treatment of religious themes and personages. Thinkers like John of Damascus and Nikephoros of Constantinople, and the Seventh Ecumenical Council argued for the possibility and the legitimacy of the representation of the transcendence, that is, of the incarnated God.

In this perspective, the image was considered primarily as a liturgical object and secondarily as a work of art. The image represents its prototype (art as *mimesis*). Their relation is based on resemblance, which at first is an external one but it becomes internal, due to the anthropological premises of Byzantine thought and to a peculiar participation of the image in the prototype. Aesthetic qualities cannot play the first role; the artistic language is not irrelevant but its criterion is its functionality (it is questionable whether a more beautiful icon can serve better its purposes). As the art had to reflect the absolute beauty of God and testify to its immanence, likeness is not enough. What is needed is a symbolic language to convey the theoretical message. The image is a sign of the presence of an absence, an immanent trace of the transcendence. It does not express the artist's personal emotion but manifests a reality.

The truth of the image is not its appearance nor its beauty but its reference and its proper use. A functionalist approach is appropriate for understanding that the meaning of the image is its use. The image has many functions: didactic (not only for those who were illiterate), allegorical, mystical-anagogical, liturgical (in the process of liturgy), artistic. As Photios stated, the opposition between the external immobility of the image and the internal mobility of the spectator produces the artistic effect. The effect on the beholder is also psychological and moral as the image reminds him/her of events of the holy history and arouses many emotions: compassion, pity, affection and desire to emulate those who are represented. The response of the beholder is finally his/her spiritual ascent. It is not just the aesthetic pleasure that is produced by gazing the images. Beyond beauty and harmony what counts is the crossing of the gazes, of the holy person depicted and the faithful beholder. This is the ultimate function of a work of sacred art and, at the same time, it is overcoming.

### Influence

The Byzantine theory of image offered legitimacy to religious art as it is practiced until today among the Orthodox Christians. The distorted reception of Byzantine iconophilia by Charlemagne scholars led to a divergence between the East and the West on the use of sacred art. The outcome of Byzantine Iconoclasm was significant not only for the development of Byzantine art but for European civilization in general and showed how important is the dominion over the production of the symbolic and the imaginary within theoretical and social contexts. The issues at stake were the power of images and the place of the holy in the society and who controls them.

### Cross-References

- ▶ [Aesthetics](#)
- ▶ [Natural Philosophy, Byzantine](#)

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## Afḍal al-Dīn al-Kāshānī (Bābā Afḍal)

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### Abstract

Afḍal al-Dīn al-Kāshānī, known as Bābā Afḍal (d. ca 610/1213), was an Iranian philosopher and poet. Little is known about his life except that he had a lot of students and entertained relationships with princes. Although the term 'Bābā' is often used in the Persian world to refer to a Sufi master, it cannot be affirmed that he was a Sufi in the narrowest sense. Yet, he is to be seen as a philosopher in the ancient sense, as both a professor and a spiritual guide. He wrote most of his works in Persian, probably with the intention of establishing Persian as a philosophical language alongside Arabic. Combining freely Peripatetic and Neoplatonic tendencies, he can hardly be classified as belonging to a specific school of thought. All his concerns tend to the knowledge of the human soul or the "self" (*khūd*), and its progress towards perfection. He regarded self-knowledge as superior to all other sciences, being the unique access to immortality and eternity. In this respect, he set himself apart all other Muslim medieval philosophers and had some influence on the "philosophical renaissance" of the eleventh/seventeenth-century Safavid Iran.



Afḍal al-Dīn Muḥammad b. Ḥasan Marāqī al-Kāshānī, known as Bābā Afḍal (d. ca 610/1213), was an Iranian philosopher and poet born during the second half of the sixth/twelfth century and died in the seventh/thirteenth century. According to an anonymous prosopography composed at the end of the seventh/thirteenth or the early eighth/fourteenth century, he died circa 610/1213 (*Mukhtaṣar*, pp. 322–323; Zaryāb, p. 31; Rypka, pp. 838–39). As he speaks in one of his letters of having pursued the quest for wisdom for 60 years (Bābā Afḍal, *Muṣannaḥāt*, 698; Chittick, 140), we can assume that he was born before 550/1155 and had been at least 70 when he died.

The name of Bābā Afḍal Kāshānī appears for the first time in the works of the great Shī‘ī philosopher, theologian, astronomer, and vizier, Naṣīr al-Dīn al-Ṭūsī (d. 672/1273). In his commentary on Avicenna’s *al-Ishārāt wa l-tanbīhāt*, composed before 644/1247, Ṭūsī refers to an opinion of Bābā Afḍal on a point of logic (Ṭūsī, I, p. 283). In his *Sayr wa sulūk*, Ṭūsī also mentions having studied mathematics with Kamāl al-Dīn Muḥammad al-Ḥāsib, a student of Bābā Afḍal (Zaryāb, pp. 31–32).

As his letters and introductions indicate, Bābā Afḍal had children, family members, and a lot of students. He also entertained relationships with a number of princes. Yet practically nothing is known about his life. The only event mentioned by biographers is that he was briefly imprisoned by a local governor on charges of sorcery (*sihr*). The evidence is given by a poem he wrote in prison (*Muṣannaḥāt*, pp. 731–732; Chittick, p. 142).

As regards his religious affiliation, Mujtabā Mīnuwī and Yahyā Maḥdawī, the Iranian editors of Bābā Afḍal’s collected Persian works, are of the opinion that he belonged to the Ismā‘īlī branch of Shī‘ism, which was powerful at his time. The only fact that supports this assumption is that Kamāl al-Dīn al-Ḥāsib, a student of Bābā Afḍal and Ṭūsī’s master in mathematics, was a reputed Ismā‘īlī figure and probably the one who converted Ṭūsī to Ismā‘īlism (*Muṣannaḥāt*, introduction, xxii). Furthermore, it is said that certain ideas developed in the *Jāmi‘ al-ḥikma* (*The Sum of Wisdom*), attributed to Bābā Afḍal, echo

Ismā‘īlī teachings, but this attribution remains very dubious (Chittick, p. 27). Bābā Afḍal himself alludes to Sunnism as the best path (*Muṣannaḥāt*, p. 297; Chittick, p. 219), but this is not conclusive, since many Shī‘ī thinkers were observing “pious dissimulation” (*taqiyya*) by keeping their faith secret. More convincingly, his conception of intelligence (*khirad*) is not only unrelated with the Ismā‘īlī doctrine but also contradictory with it as it will be seen.

Seyyed Hossein Nasr has assumed that Bābā Afḍal was a Sufi (Nasr, p. 251). In the Persian world the term “Bābā,” which literally means “father,” is often used to refer to a Sufi master. Moreover, Bābā Afḍal refers to his students as his “religious brothers” (*barādarān-i dīnī*) and his “true companions” (*yārān-i ḥaqīqī*), which suggests very particular students, if not disciples (Chittick, p. 5). His pedagogical style of composition, as well as his choosing to write in Persian, indicates that these “companions” were neither trained in Islamic sciences nor at ease with philosophical Arabic, as a group of Persian Sufis could have been. This surely enables us to see him as a spiritual master and a Sufi in the broadest sense, since he prioritized the inner dimension of the Islamic teachings over its external and legalistic dimension. However, Chittick argues, as he was not formally affiliated to a spiritual guide (*murshid*) nor to a chain of transmission (*silsila*) tracing back to the Prophet nor was teaching the path to a direct perception of the divine, it cannot be affirmed that Bābā Afḍal was a Sufi in the narrowest sense (Chittick, p. 8). Ultimately, it would be vain to seek the origin of the ideas of Bābā Afḍal in a sectarian affiliation.

Bābā Afḍal is buried in Marāq, a mountain village north-west of Kāshān, in Central Iran. His tomb has been integrated in a mud-brick building surmounted by a pyramidal dome which is said to have been built in the Mongol period. The building contains a *miḥrab* in stucco dating from the Mongol period and two wooden frames delicately carved from the Safavid era. The building is said to have been built by an Ilkhanid prince, a devoted disciple of Bābā Afḍal, who is buried next to him and designated as “the king of Zanzibar.” This unverifiable affirmation is further



evidence of the mystery of Bābā Afḍal's life as well as of his popularity (Qarā'ī Gurgānī, p. 735).

## His Thought

What sets Bābā Afḍal apart among Muslim medieval philosophers is the fact that he wrote most of his works in Persian. Iranian philosophers such as Avicenna (d. 428/1037), Suhrawardī (d. 587/1191), and Naṣīr al-Dīn al-Ṭūsī also wrote in Persian but composed their major works in Arabic. Bābā Afḍal not only chose to write his major works in Persian; he also translated into Persian some of his own works first composed in Arabic – only the Persian versions of these works have survived – as well as some Arabic writings reputed to be translations from Greek sources. This linguistic choice may have been for a pedagogical need, as most of his students were unskilled in Arabic; however, it may well denote the general intention of establishing Persian as a philosophical language alongside Arabic. His effort to find Persian equivalents to philosophical terms in Arabic can be compared with Avicenna's in his *Dānishnāma-yi 'alā'ī*, but, in contrast with Avicenna, Bābā Afḍal devoted all his works to this undertaking.

As a philosopher, Bābā Afḍal can hardly be classified as belonging to a specific school of thought. He does not even use the word *falsafa* in his own compositions, nor does he refer to any philosopher other than “Hermes Trismegistus” and Aristotle. A contemporary of Ibn Rushd, alias Averroes (d. 595/1198) and Suhrawardī (d. 587/1191), Bābā Afḍal combines Peripatetic and Neoplatonic tendencies. More than for the originality of his views, he merits attention for the way he focused his reflections sharply on the goals he defined. Bābā Afḍal's intellectual research does not deal with the classical questions of Arabic medieval philosophy, such as the proofs of the Necessary Being, nor with mathematics, astronomy, or medicine, as did Muslim philosophers of the medieval period. The very center of gravity of his thought is “humanness”; his major goal is to determine the right path through life to become truly and perfectly, human. All his

metaphysical, ontological, and logical considerations lead ultimately to ethical conclusions. He is in this respect heir to the Socratic attitude, as well as a representative, after Ibn Miskawayh (d. 421/1030) – an Iranian thinker writing in Arabic – of “humanism in Islamic context” (Arkoun).

More precisely, all Bābā Afḍal's concerns tend to the knowledge of the human soul (*nafs*), typically designated as the “self” (*khūd*), and its progress toward perfection. The question of the self-knowledge – its enablement, its methods, its goals, and its fruits – lies at the heart of all his works, be they his own compositions or translations of others. Seyyed Hossein Nasr has rightly maintained that Bābā Afḍal's philosophy is primarily an “autology” in the sense of an exposé of the nature of the human self (Nasr, p. 260). This autology is not to be confused with psychology in the modern sense, as it is founded on metaphysical principles. On the other hand, nor should it be understood as a detached philosophical analysis of the human soul.

Bābā Afḍal's conception of humanness is situated within the framework of “anthropocosmism,” an Islamic philosophical tradition which considers the human and the natural world to be one. The idea that a human being is a *microcosmos* (*'ālam ṣaghīr*) while the whole world is a *macranthropos* (*insān kabīr*) can be traced back to the Neo-Pythagorean school and was especially developed in the Epistles of the Brethren of Purity (*Ikhwān al-ṣafā*) (fourth/tenth century) as well as in the writings of Bābā Afḍal's contemporary Muḥyī al-Dīn Ibn 'Arabī (d. 638/1240). According to Bābā Afḍal, when the self (*khūd*) or the human soul reaches the ultimate limit of its intellectual improvement, it finds and knows everything that is within in that “the human soul is general and encompasses all things, for they are within it” and that “all things are in the human” (*Rāhanjām-nāma*, in *Muṣannafāt*, p. 69; Chittick, p. 281). That is to say, “Whatever is of use and indispensable to humans is with them and in them. Its mine and fountainhead is the self (*khūd*). Whatever is outside them is similar to (*shibh*) and an image (*mithāl*) of their soul's forms. All the roots and realities are with them” (*'Arḍ-nāma*, in *Muṣannafāt*, p. 241; Chittick, p. 242).

In contrast with the Brethren of Purity, who were mostly concerned with the sciences of nature, and with Ibn ‘Arabī, who was deeply oriented toward theosophy, Bābā Afḍal dwelt upon the sufficiency of self-knowledge and its superiority over all other sciences. When the human soul knows itself, the nature of the whole of creation becomes clearly manifest to it (Nasr, p. 260). And this self-knowledge gives access to a higher plane of being and of perception: “When humans know that all things, whether apparent or hidden, exist within them, then the rank of their existence is much higher than those who know the existent things as outside of self” (*‘Arḍ-nāma*, pp. 238–239 Chittick, p. 240). Unlike disciplines such as astronomy, mathematics, medicine, or even Islamic law (*sharī‘a*), whose fruits and benefits are of no avail beyond the grave, self-knowledge provides real and enduring profit (*‘Arḍ-nāma*, p. 239; Chittick, p. 240). Bābā Afḍal’s critical attitude toward the most estimated sciences of his time, whether natural or religious, is noteworthy here. However, the passage that immediately follows expresses a deeper, if more implicit, opposition to a certain Sufism which endorses the annihilation (*fanā’*) of individual consciousness: “The hope in this explication was that knowledge-seeking humans would wake up and become aware of their own existence, subsistence, and sempiternity through certainty and plain-seeing, and of universal security from perishment, annihilation (*fanā’*), alteration, disappearance, unconsciousness, and without-self-ness” (*‘Arḍ-nāma*, p. 240; Chittick, p. 241).

Bābā Afḍal appears to follow Aristotle’s and Avicenna’s efforts to surpass Platonic dualism while conceiving the human being to be the substantial union of soul and body:

the human has two faces – one bodily, passing face, and one lasting, endless, soulish face that finds life from its own Nurturer. It is this of which [God] talks in the Divine Book: ‘Everyone upon [the earth] is undergoing annihilation, and there subsists the face of thy Lord, Possessor of Majesty and Generous Giving’ [Quran, 55:26-27]. The bodily face lasts through this soulish face, and every good and excellence that appears from it comes from the soulish face (...). So, when you seek the beginning and origin of humans, you must seek out the origin and beginning of both substances. (*Jāwidān-nāma*, in

*Muṣannaḥāt*, p. 303; Chittick, pp. 222–223; Mullā Ṣadrā, p. 51)

Bābā Afḍal adds that “The joinedness of these two substances (...) occurs because they are one in substance and essence.” Here, he clearly understands and adopts Aristotle’s hylemorphism as defined in the *De Anima*. Even more, Bābā Afḍal stresses the ontological precedence of the united substance: “the joining belongs to the root, and the difference and separation belongs to the branch” (*Jāwidān-nāma*, p. 305; Chittick, p. 223).

On these naturalist and non-dualistic premises, Bābā Afḍal elaborates an intellectualist definition of man: “the human is not human through bodily shape and guise” or “because he has soul, sensation, and movement,” but because he has intelligence – which Bābā Afḍal refers to both as *khirad* (Persian) and *‘aql* (Arabic). A human being is fully or perfectly human when the intellectual virtues such as correct thoughts, right seeing, knowledge of certainty, and truthful talking are actual or nearly actual in him. Anyone who cannot reach this rank only “has the name human by borrowing and sharing” (*Madārij al-kamāl*, in *Muṣannaḥāt*, pp. 9–10; Chittick, pp. 246–247). Elsewhere, he says that the completeness of humans is showed by the equilibrium of the animal potencies, especially appetite and wrath, between intensity and weakness, under the command of intelligence (*Madārij al-kamāl*, pp. 44–45, 94; Chittick, p. 184). Nevertheless, the ultimate rank of perfection of the human soul is the awareness (*agāhī*) of the self as being “the universal of the universals” (*kullī-yi kulliyāt*). This pure act of intellection is the perfection of life, and its own perfection lies in “the unification of the intellecter, the intellect, and the intellected” (*ittiḥād-i ‘āqil wa ‘aql wa ma’qūl*). This perfect intellection is identical to “complete being, perpetual joy, and subsistent enjoyment” (*Madārij al-kamāl*, p. 51; Chittick, p. 270). This anthropological and epistemological doctrine, rooted in Aristotelian ethics (*Nicomachean Ethics*, X) and noetics (*De Anima*, III), eventually underwent considerable development in the eleventh/seventeenth-century Safavid Iran, in the teaching of Mīr Dāmād (d. 1040/1631) and Ṣadr al-Dīn al-Shīrāzī (d. 1050/1640), alias Mullā Ṣadrā.

For Bābā Afḍal, intelligence (*khīrad*) is neither the body nor the soul, because both body and soul are subject to opposition and incompatibility, while intelligence is beyond all opposition and contradiction, becoming one with everything beyond itself through the knowledge of it. Thus, intelligence is not a potency of the soul, but a superior entity which encompasses the soul, and it is only through a return to intelligence that humanity can overcome its own mortality: “Hence the path of release and security from perishment and ruin is for humans to seek refuge in intelligence and to enter under its guardianship” (*Īmanī az buḷlān-i nafs*, in *Muṣannaḡāt*, pp. 604–607; Chittick, pp. 172–173).

Like many Arabic and Muslim philosophers, Bābā Afḍal embraces the Platonic division of worlds: below, the created things (*makhluqāt*), sensory and passive, and above, the intellectual forms, innovated and beginningless (*azaliyyāt*). He adopts the Arabic terminology of many Muslim Neoplatonists distinguishing within God’s creative activity between “creation” (*khalq*) by means of a preexistent something and “innovation” or “instauration” (*ibdāʿ*) without intermediary, calling “innovated” the spiritual existents and “created” the bodily or natural things. In his turn, Bābā Afḍal identifies “the realm of the created things” (*makhluqāt*), “the world of engendering” (*ʿālam-i takwīn*), “the world of nature” (*tabʿ*), and “the particular world” (*jahān-i jūzī*) on one hand and the “realm of the innovated things” (*mubdaʿāt*), “the world of the beginningless” (*jahān-i azal*), “the world of intelligence” (*jahān-i khīrad*), and “the universal world” (*jahān-i kullī*) on the other hand.

There are two worlds. One is reality (*ḥaqīqat*), the other image (*mithāl*). The reality is the root, and the image is the branch. The reality is the universal world, and the image the particular world. The existents of the particular world are the images of the existents of the universal world (. . .). The sensory awareness of this world – I mean the world of generation – is the image of the intellectual awareness of that world. The bodily world (*jismānī*) is an image and an imitation (*hikāyat*) of the spiritual world (*rūhānī*). (*ʿArḍ-nāma*, pp. 191–192; Chittick, p. 78)

Such a Platonic manifesto is obviously inspired by the *Theology* of the Pseudo-Aristotle,

alias Plotinus Arabus (Badawī, pp. 56, 93). Even more, Bābā Afḍal seems to be a hyper-Platonist when he claims that the corporal world is the realm of all dissimulation, just as the spiritual world and the intelligence are the realm of all manifestation or revelation (*ʿArḍ-nāma*, p. 198).

However, it is noteworthy that Bābā Afḍal did not adopt the idealist meaning of the term *mithāl*, pl. *muthul*, for “model,” “archetype,” and, finally, of “Platonic forms” (*muthul aflātūniyya*), as employed in some of Fārābī’s and Avicenna’s works. Likewise, he ignored the status of images as intermediaries between intellectual forms and corporal things. He was probably unaware of Ishrāqī doctrines about *mundus imaginalis* (*ʿālam al-mithāl*) and Ibn ʿArabī’s speculations on creative “separated imagination” (*al-khayāl al-munfaṣil*). But more decisively, he intentionally relegated images into the realm of the senses and of the corruptible; his psychology – or “autology” – does not recognize role for the creative imagination, nor do his metaphysics allow for an intermediary world between the realms of sense and of intellect.

Nevertheless, the idealism of Bābā Afḍal does not limit itself to purely metaphysical and ontological speculations but brings us back again to humanism. In the world of intelligence or in the universal world, all the elements of the particular world are subsumed into universals. Although human beings, in the corporal world, are individuals from various kinds, the essential reality of “being human” is unique in the world of intelligence (*ʿArḍ-nāma*, p. 198). That allows us to reflect on the universality of human nature and of reason beyond the multiplicity of cultures and historical contexts.

Like many other Muslim philosophers, Bābā Afḍal resumes the homology between the Quranic topics of the “Origin from God” (*mabdāʿ*) and the “Return to God” (*maʿād*) on the one hand and the Plotinian concepts of procession (πρόοδος) and conversion (ἐπιστροφή) on the other. In his *Sāz wa pirāya-yi shāhān purmāya*, he describes the hierarchies of the origin and return applicable to all existence (*wujūd*) with a special focus on humanity. The hierarchy of origin, which is the path of descent, goes from the First Intellect,

called “a viceregent of God” (*khalīfa-īst khudā-yi rā*), to the four elements. The hierarchy of return, or the path of ascent, goes from Nature – comprising the ranks of minerals, plants, and animals – to human beings, also called “a viceregent of God” (*Sāz wa pirāya*, in *Muṣannafāt*, pp. 90–91; Chittick, p. 182). The return of the human being, conceived as a microcosm, is to gain perfection by effecting the passage of all the degrees of the macrocosm from potentiality to actuality, one after the other, in himself. By governing themselves with intelligence (*khīrad*), human beings attain and unite with the first soul (or the universal soul) and finally with the radiance of the First Intellect (*‘aql-i awwal*) (*Sāz wa pirāya*, pp. 93–94; Chittick, p. 184).

In his *Jāwidān-nāma*, Bābā Afḍal proposes a detailed description of the degrees passed through by both the “bodily I” (*man-i jismānī*) and the “soulful I” (*man-i nafsanī*) on the way of their return to God. The origin of the human body or the bodily I is the unqualified body (*jism-i muṭlaq*). By means of a process of progressive complexification, it becomes a compound body, then a vegetal, then an animal, and finally a human body. The origin of the soulful I is nature, corresponding to the unqualified body, proceeding to the potency of mingling (*quwwat-i mizājī*, equivalent of Greek κρᾶσις), which corresponds to the compound body, then to the vegetal or growing soul, then to the animal soul, and then to the human soul, be it in its practical function as the “practical intellect” (*‘aql-i ‘amalī*) and the “writing soul” (*nafs-i kātibā*) or in its theoretical function as the “reflective soul” (*nafs-i fākīra*) and the “speaking” or “rationally speaking soul” (*nafs-i gūyā wa nāṭīqa*). And when the soulful I attains the ultimate term of its improvement, which is the knowledge of God, it is called “the sacred spirit” (*rūḥ-i muqaddas*) (*Jāwidān-nāma*, pp. 303–304; Chittick, p. 223; Mullā Ṣadrā, pp. 52–53). At this end, as we have seen the human self gains awareness of its own existence, security from perishment, subsistence, and sempiternity.

However, in the appendix (*mulḥaq*) of his *‘Arḍ-nāma*, Bābā Afḍal claims that the procession (*wurūd*) from the universal world to the particular one, such as the conversion (*ṣudūr*) or the return

(*bāz gasht*) from the former to the latter, has only a kind of mental existence, like a point of view or a consideration (*shumāranda*, equivalent of Arabic *i’tibārī*), in the belief (*gamān*) and the imagination (*khayāl*) (*‘Arḍ-nāma*, p. 251). No real relation between the two worlds can be proved by concrete evidences; the procession of the particular from the universal and the conversion of the particular to the universal remains hypothetical and indemonstrable. Even more, “Just as nothing can come from that world to this world, nothing can return from this world to that world” (*‘Arḍ-nāma*, pp. 252–253). Bābā Afḍal seems here to rally Aristotle’s positions beyond their Neoplatonic interpretations. Contrarily, the great philosopher – and Bābā Afḍal’s lector – Mullā Ṣadrā would devote his efforts to proving the reality of the universal process of return.

To be sure, Bābā Afḍal was far from being a skeptic and a nominalist. He asserts the persistence of the intellective soul (*nafs-i ‘āqila*) by distinguishing between it and the animal soul which perishes with the body. “The intellective soul is the principle of an existence superior to that of the animal soul (. . .). Giving the fact that the act of the intellective soul is without any instrument, and that every corporal instrument is subject to nullification and destruction, the intellective soul is not subject to nullification or destruction” (*Dar baqā-yi nafs-i ‘āqila*, in *Muṣannafāt*, pp. 623–624). While assuming this intellective immortality, Bābā Afḍal rarely touches upon the very specific teachings of the Quran regarding eschatology, paradise, and hell. Evidently, he conceived and practiced philosophy as independent from the religious sciences and the juridical religion.

All Bābā Afḍal’s works claim that the unique access to immortality is the realization of knowledge.

Hence the aeon (*dahr*), which is the duration of foreverness and everlastingness, stands through unconditioned existence, and unconditioned existence stands through the knower of unconditioned existence (*dānā-ye wujūd-i muṭlaq*). It is this that is the final goal and utmost end of all the sciences; knowledge is the perfection, final goal, and completion of humans; humans are the final goal and completion of life; life is the completion and

perfection of the movement of bodies; movement is the perfection of being a body; bodiment is the perfection of reception and acceptance; reception and acceptance are the trace of actorness; actorness is the trace of yearning and desire; desire is the trace of the essence of the knower (*dhāt-i dānā*); and the knower's essence is the first and the last of being. (*Arḍ-nāma*, p. 240; Chittick, p. 241)

Such a conception hardly provides for the afterlife of humble people, nor can it be easily conciliated with the explicit eschatological teachings of the Quran. Obviously, Bābā Afḍal shared some of the Fārābīan and Avicennian positions condemned by al-Ghazālī (d. 505/1111) in his famous *Tahāfut al-falāsifa*.

In conclusion, Bābā Afḍal is to be seen as a philosopher, not in the medieval scholastic sense, but in the ancient sense as characterized by Pierre Hadot: "The philosopher was a professor and a spiritual guide, whose goal was not to set forth his vision of universe, but to mold his disciples by means of spiritual exercises" (Hadot, p. 18). As a master of philosophy, Bābā Afḍal was not training his students in logical thought, instructing them in the natural sciences, nor glosing the books of his illustrious forerunners, but was trying to teach them how to know themselves through rational investigation, in accordance with Socrates' understanding of the Delphic maxim: "Know thyself!". Even more, he saw his particular conception of self-knowledge as a way of attaining immortality and eternity. Thus, it would be appropriate to think of him as a "rationalist mystic," in the sense that this term can be applied to Aristotle and other ancient and medieval philosophers (Chittick, p. 9).

In some respects, the philosophy of Bābā Afḍal, like that of Ibn Zakariyyā Rāzī (d. 313/925 or 320/932) and Ibn Rushd at the very same period, openly challenges the pretensions of both Shī'ism (Ismā'īli or Twelver) and Sufism to be the exclusive way to knowledge and salvation. From a theoretical point of view, Bābā Afḍal conceives true knowledge as accessible by the means of rational thought and not as a suprarational science; practically, he assumes that every human being has ability to attain intelligence, self-knowledge, and world knowledge, without the guidance of an impeccable Imām or an inspired

Saint. Thus, if the thought of Bābā Afḍal integrates some elements of Shī'i and Sufi conceptions, it is with the aim of establishing "true" philosophy or wisdom as the only spiritual path toward a virtuous, fully human, and quasi-divine existence.

## Edited Works

Nearly all of Bābā Afḍal's Persian works have been edited by Muḥtabā Mīnuwī and Yaḥyā Maḥdawī in 1331 Sh./1952–53. Some extended parts of them have been translated into English in the second part of William Chittick's monograph.

1. *Arḍ-nāma (The Book of Displays)* (*Muṣannafāt*, pp. 145–253), in four displays: (1) on the bodies, (2) on the doers and the workers of the cosmic and human bodies, (3) of the things known by human, and (4) on the knowers (*dānandagān*), their quiddity (*māhiyat*), and that-it-is-ness (*innīyyat*).
2. *Īmanī az buḷlān-i naḥs dar panāh-i khīrad (Security from the Soul's Nullification in the Refuge of Intelligence)*, devoted to the demonstration of the title proposition (*Muṣannafāt*, pp. 601–607).
3. *Jāwidān-nāma (The Book of the Everlasting)* (*Muṣannafāt*, pp. 259–326). Contrastingly with Bābā Afḍal's other works, this treatise is largely founded on the teachings of Quran and Hadith. It also deals with philosophical issues such as the various kinds of science, the importance of self-knowledge, and the origin and the end of existence, but it does "by way of reminding, not by way of argument and demonstration (*hujjat wa burhān*)."  
(*Muṣannafāt*, p. 321; Chittick, p. 233). In one chapter of the book (*Muṣannafāt*, pp. 323–326; Chittick, pp. 205–207), Bābā Afḍal explains the system of the Arabic *gematria*, which means the science of numbers and letters, in other words the philosophical alphabet adopted by many Iranian philosophers after Avicenna's *Risāla Nayrūziyya fī ma'ānī al-ḥurūf al-hijā'īya* (Ibn Sīnā 1999; Massignon 1952).

- Mullā Ṣadrā Shīrāzī would eventually resume the structure and much of the content of the *Jāwidān-nāma* in his *Iksīr al-‘arīfīn* (*The Elixir of the Gnostics*), without mentioning his source. The importance given by Bābā Afḡal to self-knowledge, to the issue of the origin and the return, as well as his reference to religious scriptural sources might well have been among the reasons for Mullā Ṣadrā’s interest in this work (Mullā Ṣadrā, Introduction, pp. xviii–xix).
4. *Mabādi-yi mawjūdāt-i naḡsāni* (*The Origins of the Soulful Elements*), a brief treatise on the general division of existents, with a special focus on some philosophical concepts (*Muṣannaḡāt*, pp. 585–597).
  5. *Madārij al-kamāl* (*The Rungs of Perfection*) (*Muṣannaḡāt*, pp. 3–52). Bābā Afḡal’s most complete discussion of the human soul and her way to reach perfection in knowledge. The treatise was written first in Arabic and then in Persian. The Arabic version has not been published.
  6. *Rāhanjām-nāma* (*The Book of the Road’s End*). In three talks, explaining that the self-knowledge is the road to human perfection (*Muṣannaḡāt*, pp. 55–80).
  7. *Risāla dar ‘ilm wa nuṡq* (*The Treatise on Knowledge and Rational Speech*). Written first in Arabic and then translated into Persian (*Muṣannaḡāt*, pp. 477–579). It deals mostly with Aristotelian logic. The claim of certain scholars that the work was in fact by Avicenna seems to be invalidated by some discrepancies in the definition of the reasoning by contradiction (*al-qiyās al-khulḡ*), previously pointed out by Naṣīr al-Dīn al-Ṭūsī (see p. 574) (*Iranica*, III, 288–289).
  8. *Sāz wa pirāya-yi shāhān-i purmāyah* (*The Makings and Ornaments of Well-Provisioned Kings*) (*Muṣannaḡāt*, pp. 83–110), Presenting itself in the guise of a “mirror for princes,” this treatise seems more interested by the perfect soul (*naḡs-i kāmīl*) than by the perfect prince.
  9. *Risāla-yi naḡs-i Arīṡṡūṡālīs* (*Aristotle’s Treatise on the Soul*) (*Muṣannaḡāt*, pp. 389–458 and 467–474). A translation of an epitome from Aristotle’s *De Anima*, with passages inspired by, if not quoted from, the *Theology* of the Pseudo-Aristotle, alias Plotinus Arabus.
  10. *Mukhtaṡarī dar aḡwāl-i naḡs* (*An Epitome of the States of the Soul*) (*Muṣannaḡāt*, pp. 461–466), a short treatise on the soul’s attributes ascribed to Aristotle.
  11. *Risāla-yi tuffāḡha* (*The Treatise of the Apple*) (*Muṣannaḡāt*, pp. 113–144). This is the pseudo-Aristotelian *Liber de pomo*, well known in Latin and Hebrew, relating the last teachings of Aristotle on his deathbed to his disciples.
  12. *Yanbū’ al-ḡayāt* (*The Fountain of Life*) (*Muṣannaḡāt*, pp. 331–385). Persian translation of an Arabic text attributed to Plato or Aristotle in various manuscripts, but which Bābā Afḡal attributes to Hermes, identified with the Quranic prophet Idris. In 13 speeches, each containing a series of admonitions addressed to the soul.
  13. *Čahār ‘unwān-i kīmiyā-yi sa ‘ādat* (*The Four Headings of the Alchemy of Felicity*), an abridgment of the first part of al-Ghazālī’s Persian *Kīmiyā-yi sa ‘ādat*. The “four headings” are knowledge of self, of God, of this world, and of the hereafter. Uncritical edition Ḥ. Rabbānī in Jāmī, *Ashī’ at al-lama ‘āt*, Tehran, 1352 Sh./1973, pp. 338–58.
  14. *Makātib va Jawāb as’ila* (*Letters and Answers to Questions*) (*Muṣannaḡāt*, pp. 681–728). Bābā Afḡal answered to questions from friends, disciples, or princes about various ethical, religious, or metaphysical subjects.
  15. Bābā Afḡal’s Persian poetry. More than 600 quatrains (*rubā’iyyāt*) are attributed to him (Chittick, 26), shared between three collections: (a) *Rubā’iyyāt-i Afḡal al-Dīn Kāshānī*, S. Nafīsī, ed., Tehran, 1331 Sh./1952, reprinted 1363 Sh./1984; (b) *Muṣannaḡāt*, M. Mīnuwī and Y. Mahdawī, ed., pp. 729–772; and (c) *Dīwān-i Ḥakīm Afḡal al-Dīn Muḡammad Maraḡī Kāshānī*, M. Fayḡī and alii, ed., Kāshān, 1351 Sh./1972.



16. *Jāmi‘al-ḥikma*, M. T. Dānishpajūh, ed., Tehran, 1361 Sh./1982–83. As already indicated, the attribution to Bābā Afḍal of this book, absent from most catalogues of his works, is dubious.

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## Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal

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### Abstract

Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal (780–855) of Baghdad, the eponymous founder of the Ḥanbalite School of law and theology was a prolific scholar of the Ḥadīth (*muḥaddith*), a jurist (faqīh), and an influential public figure. Ibn Ḥanbal’s theological teachings reflected an ultra-traditionalistic worldview and relied mainly on a meticulous study of the Qur’ān and the Ḥadīth. Ibn Ḥanbal was in conflict with speculative theology (*kalām*) which in his lifetime was practiced by several theological trends, the most prominent of which was the Mu’tazila. An epitome of Islamic traditionalism, Ibn Ḥanbal refused to accept the Mu’tazilite dogma of the createdness of the Qur’ān. For this refusal, he was interrogated and tortured during the *miḥna*, the inquisition which the ‘Abbāsīd caliph al-Ma’mūn adopted in 833.

### Life

Abū ‘Abd Allāh Aḥmad ibn Muḥammad ibn Ḥanbal (henceforth: Ibn Ḥanbal) was born in November or December 780 either in Merv (formerly an important city in the historic province of Khurāsān; today located near Mary, Turkmenistan) or Baghdad, Iraq. Ibn Ḥanbal’s family genealogy was of pure Arab lineage, and they lived for generations in Khurāsān where his grandfathers and father were military officers. Ibn

Ḥanbal was orphaned of his father at age three. Ibn Ḥanbal's mother moved to Baghdad and raised him in a Persian-speaking household. At the age of 14, probably due to the efforts of his uncle who served in the caliphal bureaucracy, Ibn Ḥanbal began his training as a scribe in the *diwān*, the office of the government. At the age of 15, the highly righteous and pious Ibn Ḥanbal abandoned the established post of a civil servant and began his training as a Ḥadīth scholar. For several years, he learned with teachers of low professional status in Baghdad. At the age of 19, following the Islamic ideal of travelling to acquire the knowledge of Ḥadīth (*al-riḥla fī ṭalab al-ʿilm*), he set out for the major Ḥadīth learning centers to be trained as a *muḥaddith* under the tutorage of great theological luminaries. He travelled to Kufa, Wasit, and Basra in Iraq, thereafter to Mecca and Yemen, and finally headed north to Tarsus (in today's Turkey) and Syria. His travels lasted for two decades, during which he collected a massive amount of Ḥadīth material. In the year 820, the 40-year old Ibn Ḥanbal finally settled in Baghdad and started his career as a *muḥaddith*. His household which included two wives, a concubine, six sons, and a daughter was constantly on the verge of abject poverty (Patton 1897, pp. 10–19; Hurvitz 2002, pp. 44–58; Melchert 2006, pp. 1–8).

As a *muḥaddith* with a growing circle of admirers, Ibn Ḥanbal belonged to the heterogeneous class of the Baghdadian *ʿulamāʾ* (religious scholars). This class comprised of hundreds of independent *muḥaddithūn* from different theological trends and a thin layer of judges and jurists who received their salaries from the state. Ibn Ḥanbal himself rejected the benefits of an official position. Although he was known as a scholar of high distinction, his modest lifestyle and aloofness from the ruling power led him to associate with the masses (*al-ʿamma*). Ibn Ḥanbal taught Ḥadīth, issued legal and doctrinal responsa, and gave spiritual guidance to a circle of devoted disciples who came from all walks of life, including two of his sons, Ṣāliḥ (d. 879) and ʿAbd Allāh (d. 903). ʿAbd Allāh would later become the prominent editor of Ibn Ḥanbal's works and an important transmitter of Ibn Ḥanbal's legal opinions and doctrinal aphorisms. Ibn Ḥanbal's

disciples also recorded his spiritual teachings which included moral guidance and instructions for proper everyday conduct. Another great canoniser of Ibn Ḥanbal's teachings was his preferred disciple, Abū Bakr al-Marwazī (or al-Marrūdhī, d. 888). (Hurvitz 2002, pp. 59–70; Ibn al-Jawzī 2013, pp. 365–511).

Ibn Ḥanbal's image as a martyr venerated by the masses emerged during the *miḥna*, a procedure of interrogation that the caliph al-Ma'mūn (reigned from 813 to 833) initiated as part of his efforts to restore the prestige and authority of his office. Al-Ma'mūn who came to power by overthrowing a legitimate caliph, wished to present himself as the successor of the Prophet Muḥammad and the absolute religious authority of the caliphate. To achieve this end, al-Ma'mūn had to undermine the religious hegemony of the traditionalistic *muḥaddithūn*, who enjoyed the loyalty and support of the masses, and to elevate the position of another class of scholars, known as the *mutakallimūn*. The *mutakallimūn* were the proponents of speculative theology (*kalām*). Several groups of *mutakallimūn* were active in Baghdad; among them the Mu'tazilites were the most prominent and influential in the caliphal court. Al-Ma'mūn had a keen interest in philosophy and science (he was a patron of the translation project of Greek writings to Arabic), and his courtiers enjoyed the logical reasoning and argumentative stratagems of *kalām*. A preferred pastime for the sophisticated elite was the public debates between the *mutakallimūn* and the *muḥaddithūn* which the caliph hosted in his palace. A frequent and prominent participant in these debates was the Murjī'ite (not Mu'tazilite; the Murjī'a was a rationalistic trend widespread in the eastern parts of the 'Abbasid caliphate) *mutakallim* Bishr al-Marīsī (d. 833). Between 819 and 826, al-Ma'mūn consulted Bishr and other Mu'tazilite *mutakallimūn* about the preferred theological doctrines and religious practices that were to become the backbone of his religious policy. Bishr introduced to al-Ma'mūn the doctrine of the createdness of the Qur'ān (*khalq al-qur'ān*), which by that time became the spearhead of Mu'tazilite *kalām* (Patton 1897, pp. 48–52; Ibn al-Jawzī 2015, p. 73). (For a



description of this doctrine and the counter-doctrine of the uncreatedness of the Qurʾān, see below in “Works and Thought.”)

In 827, al-Maʾmūn was finally persuaded that the doctrine of the createdness of the Qurʾān should become the official state religion, and he publicly announced his support of this doctrine (Patton 1897, pp. 54–55; Lapidus 1975, pp. 378–382; Hurvitz 2001, pp. 93–97). In 833, al-Maʾmūn instituted the procedure of *miḥna* (often rendered “inquisition”; although literally it is “testing” or “trial”) during which prominent *ʿulamāʾ* (in the first phase from Baghdad, in the second phase from the major cities in the provinces) were interrogated by the caliphal officials on the createdness of the Qurʾān. Al-Maʾmūn declared that only *ʿulamāʾ* who subscribed to this doctrine were allowed to hold official positions, to give judicial opinions, or to teach the Ḥadīth. Seven *muḥaddithūn* were summoned to the house of Iṣḥāq ibn Ibrāhīm (d. 850), the governor of Baghdad, and were made to testify that the Qurʾān was God’s speech, and that it was created by God. Thereafter, a second group of 25 *muḥaddithūn* which included Ibn Ḥanbal was summoned to the governor’s house. This time 23 *muḥaddithūn* declared under duress that the Qurʾān was created. Ibn Ḥanbal and another *muḥaddith* maintained that the Qurʾān was God’s speech, but refused to add anything to that declaration. Consequently, they were sent in irons to al-Maʾmūn who was at the Byzantine border preoccupied by the war against the Byzantines. Al-Maʾmūn was supposed to interrogate the two disobedient *muḥaddithūn*. They avoided interrogation and torture due to al-Maʾmūn’s unexpected death in August 833. Consequently, these two *muḥaddithūn* were sent back to Baghdad, yet only Ibn Ḥanbal survived the hardships of the return journey. Upon his arrival to Baghdad, he was immediately kept in detention, because the *miḥna* was pursued forcefully by al-Maʾmūn’s successor al-Muʿtaṣim Bi-ʿllāh (reigned from 833 to 842).

In September 834 Ibn Ḥanbal was put on a public trial. He was interrogated about his views about the uncreatedness of the Qurʾān and his belief in the beatific vision (*ruʾyat Allāh*;

Holtzman 2018, pp. 100–105). After 3 days of being interrogated, Ibn Ḥanbal was publicly flogged more than 20 lashes, whereas five lashes were enough to kill a man as fragile as he was. The later Ḥanbalite sources describe Ibn Ḥanbal’s endurance throughout the physical tortures, and how he fearlessly refused to declare that the Qurʾān was created. As a result of the flogging, he passed out, and the caliph al-Muʿtaṣim who feared that the masses would riot if Ibn Ḥanbal died during the interrogation, ordered his immediate release. By contrast, a Muʿtazilite source maintains that Ibn Ḥanbal finally acknowledged the createdness of the Qurʾān and was therefore released. A non-Ḥanbalite source presents the following version on Ibn Ḥanbal’s alleged retraction: Apparently, the governor of Baghdad, Iṣḥāq ibn Ibrāhīm intervened during the interrogation and saved Ibn Ḥanbal’s life. Iṣḥāq convinced the almost dying Ibn Ḥanbal that the caliph had retracted and no longer believed that the Qurʾān was created. When Ibn Ḥanbal murmured two Qurʾānic verses in response, the governor told the caliph that Ibn Ḥanbal had just declared that the Qurʾān was created. The caliph then ordered the release of Ibn Ḥanbal (*Ḥilyat al-awliyāʾ* 9, pp. 205–206). After the trial, Ibn Ḥanbal went into hiding and even stopped teaching the Ḥadīth. Ibn Ḥanbal kept a low profile after the death of al-Muʿtaṣim and the accession of al-Muʿtaṣim’s son, al-Wāthiq Bi-ʿllāh (reigned from 842 to 847), because al-Wāthiq continued to enforce the policy of the *miḥna*.

In 849, the caliph al-Mutawakkil ʿAlā Allāh (reigned from 847 to 861) reversed the pro-Muʿtazilite policy of his predecessors, abolished the *miḥna*, retracted the doctrine of the createdness of the Qurʾān, and toiled to establish positive relationships with the *ʿulamāʾ*. One of the qadis of Baghdad even included al-Mutawakkil in the trio of the greatest caliphs of all times, because “he eradicated the heretical doctrines and restored the Sunna” (*al-sunna*; the way of the Prophet; *Tārīkh* 8, p. 52). As another gesture of good will, al-Mutawakkil invited Ibn Ḥanbal to his court in Samarra (a city on the east bank of the middle Tigris, 125 km north of Baghdad) to teach Ḥadīth to the young prince al-Muʿtazz. Ibn Ḥanbal

made the journey in 851; however, he also clearly stated to the caliph and his advisors that he would not take this task upon himself. In July 855 Ibn Ḥanbal died of fever. The streets of Baghdad were filled with crowds of mourners. Some say that 800,000 men and 60,000 women were on the streets that day, lamenting the departure of this defender of the Sunna. Ibn Ḥanbal's funeral became one of the powerful symbols of the victory of traditionalism over rationalism. In the following decades, his disciples toiled to preserve his heritage and spread his teachings throughout the caliphate (Patton 1897, pp. 54–113, 172–173; Lapidus 1975, pp. 378–382; Hurvitz 2001, pp. 93–97, 102–111; 2002, pp. 117–148; Melchert 2006, pp. 8–16).

## Works and Thought

Ibn Ḥanbal was not a typical author (*muṣannif*) who wrote in the seclusion of his home. His most important work, the voluminous Ḥadīth compilation *al-Musnad*, was based on the thousands of Ḥadīth accounts that he collected during the two decades he travelled throughout the Islamic world and during the subsequent three decades he taught in Baghdad. *Al-Musnad* assumed its final form posthumously, when his son 'Abd Allāh edited the book and included additional material such as summaries of his conversations with his father, notes from other sources, and personal correspondences of 'Abd Allāh with other *muḥaddithūn* (Patton 1897, pp. 19–26; Melchert 2005). *Al-Masā'il (The Responsa)* which are several different collections of Ibn Ḥanbal's *responsa* were also not written by Ibn Ḥanbal himself. His two sons and closest disciples recorded his answers to questions directed to him and issued these responses after Ibn Ḥanbal's death. It has been argued that contradicting quotations of Ibn Ḥanbal's opinions as they appear in the various editions of *al-Masā'il* are the result of disagreements between Ibn Ḥanbal's disciples (Al-Sarhan 2011, pp. 54–108).

The main source of Ibn Ḥanbal's theological thought is a collection of creeds (*'aqā'id*) which he presumably dictated to his disciples (Laoust

1956–7; Watt 1994, pp. 29–40). These creeds, fully quoted in Ibn Abī Ya'la's (d. 1131) biographical dictionary entitled *Ṭabaqāt al-Ḥanābila*, assumed their final form in the decades following Ibn Ḥanbal's death (Al-Sarhan and Melchert 2014). Some articles of faith in these creeds are concerned with the practice of religion, and not with theological issues. Ibn Ḥanbal's theological thought as reflected in these creeds relies heavily on the Qur'an and the Ḥadīth. Most of the major articles of faith in these creeds challenge the rationalistic trends in Islam. For example, the creeds define faith as a combination of words, works, intention, and holding to the Sunna. Publicly declaring one's belief in God is not enough to be considered a believer. One should also perform works (or good deeds according to God's command) with the purest intention (*niyya*). Ibn Ḥanbal's perception of faith stands in stark contrast to the Murji'ite concept of faith. According to the Murji'a, faith consists of speech only, whereas works are considered legal matters. The major articles of faith in Ibn Ḥanbal's creeds also target the Mu'tazilite doctrines. Thus, the creeds state that God predetermines everything, including human actions. This statement defies the Mu'tazilite concept of free will or human free agency. The creeds also emphasize that the Qur'an is the uncreated speech of God, as opposed to the Mu'tazilite concept of the Qur'an as God's created speech. Moreover, the creeds emphasize the hypostatic character of God's essential attributes: God is hearing and seeing undoubtedly. He sits on His throne and places His feet on the Footstool. He moves, speaks, observes, looks, laughs, joys, and loves. These anthropomorphic descriptions, which Ibn Ḥanbal instructed to accept verbatim and never inquire their content, also defy the Mu'tazilite impersonal and transcendent perception of God (Watt 1973, pp. 292–294; 1994, pp. 33–39; Holtzman 2018, pp. 185–248).

Ibn Ḥanbal's major contribution to Islamic theology was the advancement of the doctrine of the uncreatedness of the Qur'an as a counter-response to the Mu'tazilite doctrine of the createdness of the Qur'an (*khalq al-qur'an*). We learn about Ibn Ḥanbal's views on this topic primarily from *al-Radd 'alā al-Jahmiyya al-Zanādiqa (A Refutation*

of the *Heretical Jahmiyya*). This influential treatise of theological polemics is the most important source of Ibn Ḥanbal's theological thought. *Al-Radd* is also one of the only existing sources on the teachings of the early *mutakallim* Jahm ibn Ṣafwān (executed 746), who was one of the first proponents of the doctrine of the createdness of the Qur'ān. In this work, Ibn Ḥanbal presents his Mu'tazilite contemporaries as the followers of Jahm, the Jahmiyya, thus labeling them as heretics.

The doctrine of the createdness of the Qur'ān was first articulated by early *mutakallimūn* such as Ja'd ibn Dirham (executed in 742 or 743) and Jahm ibn Ṣafwān. The Qur'ān itself testifies that it is "God's speech" (*kalām Allāh*, lit. "the words of God"; Q. 2: 75, 7: 144, 7: 158, 9: 6). Ja'd and Jahm claimed that the Qur'ān, being God's speech, was created (Patton 1897, p. 47; Watt 1973, pp. 242–244; Madelung 1974, pp. 504–505). In the beginning of the ninth century, the Mu'tazilites refined and perfected this doctrinal formula as part of their project to defend God's unity (*al-tawḥīd*) by expelling all references to anthropomorphism (*tashbīh*) from the discourse about God. The principle of God's unity was the foremost principle in the Mu'tazilite thought, and it included a denial of the hypostatic character of God's essential attributes like knowledge (*ʿilm*), power (*qudra*), and speech (*kalām*). Focusing on the attribute of speech, the Mu'tazilites first argued that "God has never spoken and does not speak, because speech exists only by virtue of an organ. You cannot ascribe [to God] body organs" (*Al-Radd*, p. 100; Seale 1964, p. 99). Elsewhere, the Mu'tazilites substantiated their claim by adding the following clarification: "God has created a thing. This thing enunciated for Him. He created a voice, and this voice was heard. . . Speech on the other hand is created only by virtue of an oral cavity, a tongue and a pair of lips" (*Al-Radd*, pp. 135–136; Seale 1964, p. 114).

In parallel with the Mu'tazilite discourse about the createdness of the Qur'ān, the *muḥaddithūn* promoted sayings which they attributed to the successors (*al-tābiʿūn*), namely, the Ḥadīth transmitters who belonged to the generation which

succeeded the Prophet and his companions (*al-ṣaḥāba*). On the basis of these sayings, the *muḥaddithūn* declared that the Qur'ān, as divine speech, was uncreated (*al-qur'ān kalām Allāh ghayr makhlūq*). We note that the Prophet's companions, let alone the Prophet himself, never claimed that the Qur'ān was uncreated (Madelung 1974, pp. 518–519; *al-Sharīʿa*, pp. 81–93). In response to the sayings of the successors that the *muḥaddithūn* promoted, the Mu'tazilites developed the following declaration: "The Qur'ān is the divine speech. It was created (*makhlūq*) by God. First it did not exist, then it existed" (*Maqālāt*, p. 582). The Mu'tazilites supported their rationalistic argument with the following Qur'ānic verse: "We have made it a Qur'ān in Arabic" (Q. 43: 3). The Mu'tazilites claimed that the verb *ja'ala* (to make) that appeared in this verse was synonymous with the verb *khalafa* (to create). Accordingly, in this verse God declared that He created the Qur'ān (*Al-Radd*, p. 101; Seale 1964, p. 101). The Mu'tazilite assertion that the Qur'ān was created corresponded with their denial of the hypostatic and independent existence of the divine attributes. By asserting that God's speech was created, the Mu'tazilites reaffirmed the temporality of this divine attribute and its dependency on the unchangeable essence of God. In other words, the Mu'tazilites reaffirmed that the Qur'ān was not eternal (*qadīm*; for a summary of the Mu'tazilite general principles in the question of the createdness and temporality of the Qur'ān, see: Tritton 1972, pp. 10–13; Peters 1976, pp. 335–336). We note, that Ibn Ḥanbal and the other *muḥaddithūn* never claimed that the Qur'ān was eternal. Several decades after the *miḥna*, traditionalistic scholars promoted the idea that the Qur'ān was eternal as a response to the Mu'tazilite negation of the eternity of the Qur'ān (Tritton 1972, pp. 8–9; Madelung 1974, pp. 516–518).

*Al-Radd ʿalā al-Jahmiyya* is arranged as a work of *kalām*. Its style is not typical of Ibn Ḥanbal's theological teachings. In fact, in this work Ibn Ḥanbal appears as a semi-rationalist, and almost as an Ash'arite theologian. Doubts on the authenticity of this work have been raised by the Damascene historian and ultra-traditionalistic *muḥaddith*, Shams al-Dīn al-Dhahabī (d. 1352-3;

*Siyar* 11, pp. 286–287). Other traditionalistic scholars of the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries also admitted that doctrinal and legal opinions were falsely attributed to Ibn Ḥanbal by unscrupulous scholars who wished to promote their own agenda. However, it is also known from Ḥanbalite sources that Ibn Ḥanbal indeed collected Qurʾānic verses to refute the Muʿtazilite doctrine of the createdness of the Qurʾān, and perhaps these verses comprised the basis of the original *al-Radd* (Melchert 2006, p. 101). Two versions of this treatise were transmitted by Ibn Ḥanbal’s son ‘Abd Allāh and his disciple al-Marwazī (al-Marrūdhī), who attested to the authenticity of the treatise which they found among Ibn Ḥanbal’s notes after his death (Al-Sarhan 2011, pp. 48–53; Al-Sarhan and Melchert 2014, pp. 47–49).

One cannot ignore the fact that *al-Radd* presents a sophisticated view of Ibn Ḥanbal’s doctrines, unlike the view expressed in his other works. In his creeds, Ibn Ḥanbal merely declares that “the Qurʾān is the speech of God by which He speaks. It is not created” (Watt 1994, p. 37). *Al-Radd ‘alā al-Jahmiyya*, on the other hand, is a tour de force of dozens of rationalistic proofs that address the uncreatedness of the Qurʾān from various angles. It is more reasonable to assume that Ibn Ḥanbal’s contribution to the discussion was by collecting Ḥadīth accounts to back up this traditionalistic doctrine. Thus, for instance, there is a record that Ibn Ḥanbal was overjoyed when he heard a rare Ḥadīth account according to which the *ṣahābī* Ibn ‘Abbās (d. 687–8) interpreted the Qurʾānic expression “an Arabic Qurʾān, free from any distortion” (Q. 39: 28) as “uncreated.” The story goes that Ibn Ḥanbal could not understand how this particular Ḥadīth account escaped him and hurried to add this text to his collection (*Al-Sharī‘a*, p. 84).

As the epitome of traditionalism, namely, the trend in Islamic thought which relies solely on the teachings of the Qurʾān, the Ḥadīth (or Sunna), and the consensus (*ijmā‘*) of the first generations of Islam, Ibn Ḥanbal perceived the religious content derived from these three sources of knowledge authoritative, homogenous, and undisputable (Al-Azmeh 1988, pp. 253–260).

By contrast, he perceived the religious content derived from *kalām* as erroneous, misguided, and self-contradictory. Relying on the opinions of past generations and even the Prophet himself, Ibn Ḥanbal forbade arguments on theological matters. Moreover, unlike his Muʿtazilite contemporaries and other *mutakallimūn*, Ibn Ḥanbal was not interested in proving the existence of God or His attributes (Abrahamov 2016, pp. 269–273; van Ess 1970, p. 43). But did Ibn Ḥanbal indeed reject the use of rational argumentations?

Long after the *miḥna* procedure was dismantled, one of al-Mutawakkil’s courtiers arrived at the caliph’s request to obtain Ibn Ḥanbal’s opinion on the Qurʾān, namely, why he believed that the Qurʾān was uncreated. The courtier, ‘Ubayd Allāh ibn Yaḥyā ibn Khāqān (d. 877) assured Ibn Ḥanbal that the caliph asked this question not because he wanted to put Ibn Ḥanbal to the test but because he nurtured a genuine desire to acquire knowledge and insight. The closing paragraph in Ibn Ḥanbal’s answer as dictated to his eldest son Ṣāliḥ, included all the building-blocks of Ibn Ḥanbal’s traditionalistic worldview: “Not one but many of our pious forefathers (*al-salaf*) used to say: ‘the Qurʾān is the word of God and it is uncreated’. This is also my conviction. I never engaged in *kalām*, and I see no use in talking about this topic unless you quote what is written in the Book of God, or quote Ḥadīth which is transmitted on the authority of the Prophet, his companions (*al-ṣahāba*) and their successors (*al-tābi‘ūn*). Any discussion, which relies on sources other than these sources, should be condemned” (*Masā’il* 2, pp. 419–430; *Siyar* 8, pp. 281–286). This apparently fierce rejection of the principles and methodology of *kalām* is in fact an apology. In the next to last paragraph of Ibn Ḥanbal’s response, he presented to the caliph a rationalistic proof that he developed in defense of his credo. Based on “all creation and command belong to Him” (Q. 7: 54), Ibn Ḥanbal deduced that God’s creation is other than His command (which is the Qurʾān). Hence, it is uncreated. Based on “If you [the Prophet] were to follow their desires, after the knowledge brought to you” (Q. 2: 145), Ibn Ḥanbal concluded that the Qurʾān is part of the divine attribute of

knowledge (*al-qurʿān min ʿilm Allāh*). Hence, it is uncreated (Madelung 1974, p. 518; Al-Sarhan 2011, p. 54). In this rationalistic proof, Ibn Ḥanbal demonstrated his skillful use of *istinbāt*, one of the devices of analogy (*qiyās*) which he forcefully condemned elsewhere. In *al-Radd ʿalā al-Jahmiyya*, Ibn Ḥanbal (or pseudo-Ibn Ḥanbal) used the *kalām* argument from disjunction (*qisma* or *taqsīm*) to refute the Muʿtazilite doctrine that God was everywhere and prove the traditionalistic conviction of God sitting on His throne (*Al-Radd*, pp. 142–153; Seale 1964, pp. 117–118; Abrahamov 2016, pp. 273–274). Elsewhere in *al-Radd*, Ibn Ḥanbal proved by way of analogy that God’s knowledge could not be created, because if so, it would mean that there was a time, before God created His knowledge, that He was ignorant (*Al-Radd*, p. 162; Seale 1964, p. 123; Madelung 1974, p. 515). Ibn Ḥanbal’s skillful application of *kalāmīc* argumentations in *al-Radd* and in the letter to the caliph al-Mutawakkil do not correspond with historical accounts that present Ibn Ḥanbal as lacking any ability to respond to rationalistic argumentations in theological debates. Thus, during the *miḥna* Ibn Ḥanbal was asked to prove the traditionalistic belief in the beatific vision. The Muʿtazilite interrogator asked him how was it possible that the believers would actually see God when it was well known that the human eye could grasp only limited bodies while God had no limits. All that Ibn Ḥanbal was able to do in response was to cite one of the Ḥadīth accounts that promised that the believers would see God on the Day of Resurrection (Holtzman 2018, p. 101).

Numerous theological dicta attributed to Ibn Ḥanbal appear in Ḥanbalite and Ashʿarite writings that were composed between the late tenth to the fourteenth centuries. These dicta were exposed to massive processing and manipulations by later generations (Holtzman 2018, pp. 159–163). A systematic identification of the pseudo-Ibn Ḥanbal’s doctrinal opinions in Ashʿarite writings in particular is still a desideratum in Western research. Moreover, Western research still lacks a work which synthesizes Ibn Ḥanbal’s theological thought. Accordingly, our survey which relies on readings in both a selection of Ibn Ḥanbal’s

works and relevant researches is by no means definitive.

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## Alan of Lille

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### Abstract

Alan of Lille is a philosopher, theologian and poet of the twelfth century. He is the author of a twofold work: the transposition in poetical form of the major themes of Platonism on the one hand and treatises of theology that include many aspects of the logic and ontology of

Gilbert of Poitiers on the other. He was the last representative of the first age of medieval speculation based on Boethius and on the *logica vetus*, which preceded the rediscovery of Aristotle's physics, metaphysics, and psychology, and the discovery of Arabic philosophy.

As a scholar, Alan of Lille (Alanus ab Insulis, c. 1120/1128–1203, sometimes called the *Doctor universalis*) was influenced by two major currents of twelfth-century thought: the so-called School of Chartres, which inspired several of his research themes and the philosophical movement initiated by Gilbert Porreta (or of Poitiers). He was interested both in the philosophy of nature in a Platonic perspective grounded in the *Timaeus*, as was traditional among the scholars associated with Chartres, and in the philosophy of language, logic, and ontology in a Porretan perspective. In this, he synthesized the two major centers of interest of the twelfth century. He is said to have taught in Paris between the years 1170–1180, probably at Mont Sainte-Geneviève, at the same time as Simon of Tournai, before leaving for Montpellier; like Thierry of Chartres, he became a convert in Cîteaux. Alan had great familiarity with the liberal arts, in particular the *trivium* – grammar, logic, rhetoric – and excellent knowledge of some Platonic authors of Late Antiquity (Chalcidius, Martianus Capella, Macrobius, and Boethius in the *Consolatio*). Despite living at the time of the beginning of the western reception of Arabic and Muslim texts (Avicenna), his thought remained within the framework of twelfth-century Latin culture (with the noticeable exception of his knowledge of the *Liber de causis*). In contrast with his contemporary Adelard of Bath, he demonstrated little interest in the “Arabic innovation”; his intellectual world was that of the *Aetas Boethiana*, the first age of medieval metaphysics dominated by Boethius and the *logica vetus*, of which he was the last representative.

His works belong to various literary genres and to different fields of knowledge. He wrote allegorical poems, in which he considered issues of natural philosophy: the *De planctu naturae*, the

*Anticlaudianus*, and the *Rythmus de incarnatione et de septem artibus* (a text in which the Liberal Arts admit their incapacity to understand the Incarnation). His other works pertained to theology (*Summa Quoniam homines* and *Regulae caelestis iuris*) and to preaching (*Ars predicandi* and *Sermones*); they also included an apologetic treatise, the *De fide catholica*, which was aimed against Cathars and Waldensians as much as against Pagans or Jews, and one more philosophical text, the *Sermo de sphaera intelligibili*.

Through his poetical and allegorical writings, he contributed to the development, peculiar to the twelfth century, of a new philosophical conception of nature, thus testifying to the tradition of reading and glossing of the *Timaeus*, characteristic of the School of Chartres. Alan's work is in great part the poetical transposition of the major themes of Platonism.

The *Lament of Nature* (*De planctu naturae*) – a *prosimetrum* (a work comprising alternating verse and prose sections) written between 1160 and 1170 – is a poetical allegory intended for philosophical and moral meditation. Nature, the *vicaria Dei*, whose task is to make harmony reign on Earth, descends to the poet in order to condemn the vices of humanity, first and foremost homosexuality.

The *Anticlaudianus*, a long epic of 6,000 verses composed in 1182–1183, describes an allegorical voyage of Prudentia to visit God so as to receive the soul of a perfect man. In this work, Alan gives an encyclopedic overview of human knowledge (grammar, dialectic, oratory art, mathematics, geometry, and astronomy) and a descriptive praise of moral and intellectual virtues. He meditates on the perfect man, whom nature alone cannot produce.

The *summa Quoniam homines*, like the *Rules of Theology*, is a text that shows Alain of Lille concluding century-long thought and opening new perspectives, among other things, on terminism. The *Summa* belongs to the Porretan–Boethian theological tradition. It deals with the Boethian issue of the transfer of categorical language to predication *in divinis* and the possibility of using categorical discourse in order to speak about God. In a reasoning inspired by the Pseudo-

Dionysius on the ineffable aspect of celestial science, Alan speaks of the translation of the categories when they are predicated of God. In contrast with Boethius who used the term *mutatio*, Alan's source here is Eriugena, whose arguments he uses. According to Eriugena, none of the ten categories, not even substance, is predicable of God in the proper sense (*nulla categoria proprie Deum significare potest*). A category can only be predicated of him in a figurative (*translative*) or metaphorical sense (*per metaphoram*), by transfer from the creature to the Creator (*per translationem a creatura ad creatorem*). Alan's debt to Gilbert appears in these texts mainly in the field of the semantics of terms and of ontology (see last section). Alan grounds his theory of signification on the distinction between *suppositio* and *significatio*, which occurs in the wider framework of the opposition between the “proper use” and the “improper use” of a term.

The *Regulae caelestis iuris* circulated under several different titles: *Theologicae regulae*, *Regulae Alani de sacra theologia*, *Maximae theologiae*, *Liber de maximis theologiae*, *De maximis theologicis*, *Axiomata theologica*. Beginning with the postulate that “each science is grounded in foundations which are proper to it,” this writing is an attempt at stating systematically the rules of theology. This organized set of 134 propositions, which are analyzed, commented upon or demonstrated, offers an axiomatization of theology, that is, the definition of the set of principles that theology needs in order to be constituted as a rigorous science, reminiscent of Boethius' treatise *De hebdomadibus*. This is the first attempt to provide theology with a scientific character, by presenting it according to a geometrical organization, and by applying logic and grammar to it. This work is inspired by Boethius, the Chartrians, and the *Liber XXIV philosophorum* – an anonymous text of supposed “hermetical” origin – and is pervaded by Neoplatonic henology. The starting point is not, as it was for Boethius, *esse*, being, but the One in the form of the monad. The first rule is “the monad is that which makes any reality one.” God is first considered as One or unity (*monas*) before being considered according to the metaphysical categories

of *esse*, simplicity, and form. This monad is God-One, through which all unities and pluralities and, therefore, beings come into existence. Henology reacquires a form of primacy, but is now represented as acting on the order of nature, and not any more as the presence in all things of the transcendental One. According to Alan, God is really One, but does not have being: “of that which is being (*esse*), there is no being. Of God, who is the being of all things, there is no being, because in order to be he does not participate in anything.” A “form without a form” or “form of forms,” God is “the first substance [. . .] called *ousia*” – in the words of the *Liber XXIV philosophorum*, “an intelligible sphere whose centre is everywhere and whose circumference nowhere.” Alan’s axiomatization of theology contributed, more than any other work, to the evolution of the old *sacra pagina* into a proper “theological science,” which took place at the beginning of the thirteenth century. Alan’s text inspired Meister Eckhart’s idea of an *Opus propositionum*, the set of the 1,000 theses necessary to an axiomatization of theological knowledge.

The *Sermon on the Intelligible Sphere* is a treatise of Neoplatonic metaphysics, inspired among others by Boethius, and also by Bernard of Chartres and Gilbert Porreta for the theory of “native forms.” The universe consists in four spheres with four modes of being and four modes of knowledge. The first sphere is that of reality, dominated by nature, in which “the marriage of forms and their subjects is celebrated.” The second is that of primordial matter around which the forms revolve in a continuous movement. The palace of the World-Soul that illuminates the universe is the third sphere, in which the pure form returns to its origin. The fourth is the perfect sphere of intelligibles, of eternal ideas.

One of the salient traits of the philosophy of Alan of Lille is its Porretan character. Alan is one of the thinkers who echoes most strongly the thought of Gilbert. A large part of Alan’s philosophy of language, his theory of reference (in particular, the theory of the *nomen appellativum*), and, most of all, his ontology consist in the intelligent use, systematization, and

rethinking of Gilbert’s doctrines. Here Alan does not use allegory or poetry, but dry and technical reasoning. Although Platonism pervades part of his thought, one must not expect to find him defending a realist ontology. On the contrary, his ontology is grounded in strict particularism (and in this, Alan’s thought constitutes yet another example that realism and Platonism must not be considered as necessarily related). Alan’s position is nominalistic, and can be described more precisely as a trope theory. He does not accept universal entities, in the sense of entities that are common to several spatiotemporally distinct individuals. All properties, both essential and accidental, are particular. A man is man through his own humanity, this apple is red through its own redness, and Socrates is wise through his own wisdom. Complementary to this particularism, Alan also borrows from Gilbert his theory of exact resemblance or *conformitas*. Two individuals that belong to the same species or exemplify the same property are considered to be conform in this respect. Although they are both particular, the humanity of Socrates and that of Plato are exactly resemblant and therefore conform (*Regulae, CXXX: “Conformitas est singularium naturarum plena similitudo. Vt Socrates et Plato dicuntur naturaliter conformes suis singularibus humanitatibus eos similiter conformantibus”*). This form that makes Socrates a man causes him to belong to a group of individuals which have the same specific characteristic; it makes him resemble other men. Men do not resemble each other through a common form, but through the conformity of their own form.

On the basis of this exact resemblance, one can, through abstraction, obtain universal concepts that are ontologically grounded. The specific or generic universal is the reunion or collection of all the individuals which present the same specific or generic character; however, this universal is not a *res*.

## Cross-References

- ▶ [Gilbert of Poitiers](#)
- ▶ [Schools in the Twelfth Century](#)



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## Albert of Saxony

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### Abstract

Albert of Saxony (early 1320s – July 8, 1390) was born in or near Helmstedt in the early 1320s. He studied at the University of Paris, and became the first rector of the University of Vienna. Albert was very influential in both

natural philosophy and logic, and many of his works were already printed several times by the early sixteenth century. He was thoroughly familiar with the works of many of his contemporaries at Paris (John Buridan and Nicholas Oresme), as well as with important works from Oxford philosophers (Thomas Bradwardine, William of Ockham, William of Heytesbury). He drew extensively on these sources, but made important innovations in both logic and natural philosophy. Among other things, Albert was one of the defenders of the so-called impetus theory for projectile motion. This theory claimed that the proximate cause of the motion of a projectile was a force inherent in the projectile itself, in contrast to the more traditional (Aristotelian) view that the proximate cause was inherent in the part of the air that was adjacent to the projectile. Albert died in Halberstadt on July 8, 1390, where he had been the bishop from 1366 onward.

### Lemma

Little is known for certain about Albert of Saxony's (also known as Albert of Rickmersdorf or as Albertutius) early life. Traditionally, c. 1316 has often been suggested as his date of birth, but it has been shown that this date is merely the result of a misinterpretation of an early eighteenth-century source. Instead, he was more likely born in the early 1320s. This uncertainty concerning Albert's birth date is a result from the fact that the first dated record we have of his life is that in 1351 he determined as a master of arts in Paris.

Albert's place of birth was Helmstedt, or otherwise the region around Helmstedt, which lay in lower Saxony. Prior to studying at the University of Paris, he would have attended one of the schools in his diocese, at Halberstadt or at Magdeburg. In addition, he may have also studied for some time at the *studium generale* at Erfurt. There is, in fact, a reference to a stay in Erfurt in what might be the only work we have of Albert written before his stay at Paris, the *Philosophia pauperum*, but its authenticity is still uncertain.

After becoming a master of arts, Albert began studying theology but he apparently never accepted in it.

During his stay in Paris, Albert fulfilled different administrative functions in the university. For some time he was proctor and receptor of the English-German nation, and in 1353 he was appointed rector of the entire arts faculty. Albert probably left the University of Paris in 1361/1362 and little is known of his activities in the 2 years following his departure, apart from the fact that he was involved in some diplomatic transactions between Pope Urban V and the Duke Rudolph IV of Austria. In 1365, he became the first rector of the newly founded University of Vienna; in fact, Albert had played an important role in obtaining papal support for its founding. His rectorship in Vienna lasted only 1 year, because he was appointed bishop of Halberstadt in 1366, a position which he held until his death there on July 8, 1390.

## Thought

Albert is well known both for his works in logic as well as for those in natural philosophy. His most important works in logic are the *Perutilis logica* (*Very Useful Logic*), the *Quaestiones circa logicam* (*Questions on Logic*), and his *Sophismata*. In addition, he wrote commentaries on the *Ars vetus* (*Isagoge, Categories and On Interpretation*) and on the *Posterior Analytics*. Albert's works in natural philosophy include commentaries on the *Physics, On the Soul, On the Heavens, On Generation and Corruption, On Sense and What is Sensed*, and on the *Meteorology*. He also wrote commentaries on the *Ethics* and on the *Economics*. In addition, he commented on John of Holywood's (Johannes de Sacrobosco) astronomical work *De sphaera* (*On the Sphere*) and wrote some (short) mathematical treatises including the *Tractatus proportionum* (*Treatise on Proportions*), which was modeled on Thomas Bradwardine's treatise *De proportionibus velocitatum in motibus* (*On the Proportions of Velocities in Movements*). None of Albert's theological writings – if he wrote any – survive.

A long-standing characterization of Albert was that he was only a transmitter and not an original thinker. This characterization, however, now seems no longer tenable. It is certainly true that he often relied heavily on others. For example, his commentary on the *Ethics* is strongly influenced by Walter Burley's commentary. But in natural philosophy as well as in logic, Albert made important contributions of his own.

The most important and influential of Albert's logical works is his *Perutilis logica*. This work is not a commentary, but an independent treatise consisting of six related tracts on various topics in logic. The first tract defines the basic terminology to be used in the rest of the tracts, such as sign and intention, and also discusses the basic structure of propositions. It is followed by tracts on the properties of terms, on propositions, on inferences and topics, on fallacies and, lastly, on obligations and insolubles. An important source of inspiration for the *Perutilis logica* was Ockham's *Summa logicae*, both for its structure and for part of its doctrinal contents, but Albert's work is considered to be both more systematic and more comprehensive than Ockham's and contains much that is not found in Ockham. Also closely related to the *Perutilis logica* is Buridan's *Summa logicae*, but since the relative priority between Albert's and Buridan's work is still unclear, it is difficult to answer questions on influence and originality. It is still possible, however, to point out some interesting differences between Albert's and Buridan's views.

One of the key differences that have been noted is the different ways in which Albert and Buridan understand how the copula "is" (*est*) functions in a proposition. Buridan interprets it in a manner that makes it atemporal, in the sense that in a proposition such as "man is an animal" the copula "is" not only applies to all men that exist presently, but to all men in the past and in the future as well. Albert, on the other hand, strongly emphasizes that "is" always and only signifies the present tense, which implies that in the proposition "man is an animal," the term "man" only stands for (in fourteenth-century terminology: suppositis for) all men presently existing. As a consequence, Albert and Buridan give a rather different explanation for

the reasons why scientific propositions are eternally true. Since the subject term of a scientific proposition in Albert's view only stands for presently existing things, he cannot just claim that the eternal, or universal truth of such a proposition is accounted for by the fact that it is true of all of the particulars that the subject term stands for. For, in order to claim universal truth, all the particulars in the past and in the future would have to be taken into account as well. Albert quite elegantly evades this apparent problem by saying that in order for a scientific proposition to be eternally true, all that is required is that each and every time the proposition is thought of, or uttered, or written, it is true of all the particulars existing at that moment.

Just like his *Perutilis logica*, Albert's *Sophismata* also shows an Oxford influence. *Sophismata* (sophisms) are sentences that give rise to difficulties in their interpretation, because of certain ambiguities or other characteristics. One of the tools Albert relies heavily on to solve such *sophismata* is a distinction between compounded and divided senses (*sensus divisus* and *sensus compositus*), in the sophisticated form into which it was developed by William of Heytesbury. This distinction enables one to take the scope of modal operators into account when analyzing the truth value of a proposition.

Albert's works in natural philosophy are closely related to the works of John Buridan and Nicholas Oresme. This has led scholars to believe that there was a so-called Buridan school in Paris, of which Buridan was the teacher and Albert of Saxony, Nicholas Oresme, Marsilius of Inghen, and Themon Judaeus were the students. This, however, was not the case. The fact that Buridan belonged to the Picard nation of the university, whereas Albert belonged to the English-German nation, more or less rules out the possibility of a teacher – student relation in the strict sense, and the fact that it is known that Albert incepted under Albert of Bohemia (from his own nation) does the rest. The doctrinal interconnections, however, between these philosophers are many and undeniable, even if the precise relations between them are unknown. The recently suggested description of this group as “a small intellectual network of

nearly contemporary masters of arts, who were familiar with each others' work and at times responded to each other” seems much more accurate.

One of the interesting themes in Albert's important commentary on the *Physics* is his analysis of projectile motion. This type of motion was problematic to analyze within an Aristotelian framework, because Aristotle had insisted that all local motion occurs by contact between a mover and the thing moved. What then, in the case of projectile motion, is the mover that remains in contact with the projectile? A traditional (Aristotelian) answer – though certainly not the only one – had been that the motive force is transferred by the original mover to the air, after which one part of air would pass on this force – with diminishing intensity – to the next part, so that there is always contact between the projectile and that part of the air which currently has the motive force. This solution, however, has a number of difficulties, not the least of which is that it is hard to see how motion can be a continuous process when the motive force is transferred from one (seemingly discrete) part of the air to the next. Albert gives a different explanation for this phenomenon, one that was also given by Buridan. According to Albert, the original mover (for instance the person throwing the projectile) transfers the motive force to the projectile itself. Because the moving force becomes a quality of the projectile, there is no longer any need for any other direct contact between a mover and the projectile. The name under which this moving force in the projectile became known and famous was *impetus*, but Albert still used the term *virtus motiva*.

The topic of *impetus* also sheds some more light on the relation between Albert's and Buridan's commentaries on the *Physics*. It has now been shown that Albert's commentary was composed somewhere between Buridan's third redaction and his final redaction of his commentary on the *Physics*. Part of the evidence for this is that the term *impetus*, which was not used by Albert, is only used in Buridan's final redaction of his commentary. But more importantly, in his final redaction Buridan, at times, responds to

Albert or takes over elements from his discussions.

There is more disagreement between Albert and Buridan on the ontological status of quantity. Albert sides with Ockham when he reduces the ontological category of quantity to the categories of substance and quality whereas Buridan had defended that quantity must be a distinct ontological category besides substance and quality. As a consequence, Albert considers condensation and rarefaction – the phenomena that had occasioned Buridan to assign a separate status to quantity – as merely forms of local motion of the parts of a given substance. Albert did not, however, always take Buridan's *Physics* commentary as his starting point. On the questions of the possibility of the existence of a void, for example, he models his discussions on Oresme's commentary instead.

Oresme's works have also, again together with Buridan's, influenced Albert's commentary on Aristotle's *On the Heavens*. But apart from the fact that Albert discusses many questions not found in either Buridan or Oresme, he also surprisingly and very interestingly organizes the material in a novel way. Instead of following the traditional division of *On the Heavens* into four books, he chooses to arrange the work according to the three major topics he distinguishes in Aristotle's work: the world as a whole, its noble parts, namely heaven and earth, and its less noble parts, namely the elements, especially insofar as they exhibit the qualities of being either heavy or light. As a consequence, Albert treats the traditional books three and four as a thematic unity and writes a commentary that is divided in only three parts.

To sum up, not only was Albert thoroughly familiar with a wide range of philosophical views in his time, but he was also responsible for introducing several new ideas into the philosophical discussions. Albert was very influential and remained so for a long time, which can be demonstrated not only by the number of surviving manuscripts, but also by the number of times his works were printed. His commentaries on the *Physics*, *On the Heavens*, and *On Generation and Corruption*, as well as many of his logical works were all printed multiple times in the late

fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries. His *Tractatus proportionum* was even printed at least 15 times. Albert thereby became one of the most important figures in the transmission of fourteenth-century philosophy.

## Cross-References

- ▶ [John Buridan](#)
- ▶ [Marsilius of Inghen](#)
- ▶ [Nicholas Oresme](#)
- ▶ [Thomas Bradwardine](#)
- ▶ [William Heytesbury](#)
- ▶ [William of Ockham](#)

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## Albert the Great

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### Abstract

Albert the Great (c. 1200–1280) was a master in theology (Paris, 1245), a member of the Dominican order (he entered in 1223), a bishop (1260–1262) and he was declared a Saint, then a Doctor of the Church in 1931. His philosophical investigation reaches all the fields of knowledge, from mineralogy to theology; the spread of his readings is overwhelming, covering Ancient Greek, Latin, Byzantine, Arabic, and Jewish authors. His ambition was to

deliver to his contemporaries a deep understanding of the newly available Aristotelian philosophy (metaphysics, psychology, natural science, and “theology” through the *Liber de causis*) founded on a synthesis of the teaching of peripatetism and of that of Christian faith.

## Life, Work, Influence

Albert the Great was probably born around 1200 in Lauigen in Germany and died in 1280. He was canonized and declared a Doctor of the Church in 1931. During his long and eventful life he has often been burdened with institutional and religious duties linked to his role within the Dominican order (where he entered in 1223), alternating with periods of intellectual and academic achievements, on which we will focus here. He was educated in Padua, then taught as a lector in various places in Germany within the Dominican order. He studied theology in Paris from 1241 on and became Master in 1245, the year Thomas Aquinas became his student. He taught in Paris until 1248. He was then sent in Cologne as the regent of the *Studium generale*, which he run until 1254. Thomas Aquinas followed his master to Cologne where he served as *magister studium* until 1252; Ulrich of Strasbourg was also his student there. Albert was appointed prior provincial of Teutonia from 1254 to 1257. The same year he was asked by Pope Alexander IV to discuss the separation of the intellect (the famous “Agnani dispute”, which led to the *De unitate intellectus* and to the chapters of his *Summa theologiae*, directed against Averroes, but only after the crisis of the 1270s about monopsychist theses and Averroism generally). He returned to Cologne from 1257 to 1259. He became bishop of Ratisbon from 1260 to 1263, then traveled in Germany many years after a stay in Würzburg. He was in Strasbourg from 1267 to 1270. He was in Paris in 1277 in order to defend his student Thomas Aquinas. He died in 1280 in Cologne.

The chronology of his philosophical works remains uncertain especially for the commentaries on Aristotle, which were written between 1250 and 1270. The first work was the *De natura boni*

(around 1223), then he wrote the commentary on the *Sentences* and the *Summa de creaturis* (around 1243 during his stay in Paris), the commentaries on Pseudo-Dionysus’ *De divinis nominibus* and *De ecclesiastica hierarchia*, the *Super ethicam* between 1248 and 1252 in Cologne. He composed the commentaries on the *Posterior Analytics* and the *Politics* during his bishopate (around 1262–1263), as well as his second commentary on the *Ethics* (*Ethica*) and the *De unitate intellectus contra Averroem*. The paraphrases on the *Topica* and the *Sophistici elenchi* were finished around 1269. The commentary on the *Liber de causis* was written between 1264 and 1267. A reconstitution of the order of the paraphrases on Aristotelian natural philosophy (which included some pseudepigraphs) has been proposed. We quote some major works (see Weisheipl 1980: 565–577): *Physica* (1251), *De caelo et mundo*, *De generatione and corruptione*, *Meteora*, *De minerabilibus*, *De anima*, *De intellectu*, *De vegetabilibus* (= *De plantis*), and *De animalibus* (1258 for the first version). The logical commentaries that have not been already mentioned were probably written during the second part the 1250s, but there is no certitude. The *Isagoge* was for instance composed after 1251 (the commentary on the *Physics*) and before 1263–1264 (the *Metaphysica*). Most of Albert’s exegesis on ancient works is written in the style of the “avicennian” paraphrase, and not of the literal commentary, a choice in accordance with Albert’s philosophical style.

Albert’s work is generally acknowledged as a very important moment in the history of the transmission of ancient Greek and Arabic philosophy in the Middle Ages. He read and commented on the vast collection of philosophical texts newly available, together with works the tradition had already transmitted: Pseudo-Dionysus, all the Aristotelian works (including all the books of logic, natural philosophy, the *Ethics*, the *Politics*, the *Metaphysics*, and the *Liber de causis*), Avicenna, Averroes, and Maimonides, as well as Porphyry, Boethius, Augustine, and Euclid, mentioning only some of the most famous authorities he used and collected in philosophy, science, and theology. He was accordingly called the

*Doctor Universalis*. His encyclopedic approach led him to complete Aristotelian philosophy when some books were missing, as, for instance, for those treatises of the *Parva naturalia* that were known at that period, but not yet transmitted. His ambition was to bring a deep and complete understanding of Aristotelian philosophy to his contemporaries (who he called the “Latins”) and to show that there was no contradiction between the philosopher as interpreted through a well-ordered peripatetism and Christian teaching. He has also been praised and systematically seen as being essentially the master of Thomas Aquinas. But his thoughts have been subjected to various readings, very often quite critical. He was criticized for a gratuitous accumulation and curiosity, without being able to elaborate a coherent theory of his own. This unworthy reading of Albert is being revised (see de Libera 2005: 11 sq.).

Albert’s reception in the Middle Ages and beyond is a complex matter. Many apocryphs have been attributed to him such as the *Small and the Great Albert* (a treatise on the virtues of minerals, plants, and animals), and the *Women’s Secret*; he long enjoyed a strong reputation as an expert in magic. His sharp distinction between the objects and goals of philosophy led by reason and of theology where revelation prevails (though it has to be constituted as a science) has been often viewed as an ambiguous defense of the autonomy philosophy, dangerously near to the Latin Averroists and the “two-fold theory of truth.”

The very important number of manuscripts preserved speaks by itself for a great influence of Albert during the Middle Ages, but this impression is to be qualified: his writings have often been used as a mine of informations about ancient philosophers, new concepts, and interesting distinctions without his personal theory being adopted as such (see Ebbesen, “Albert (the Great ?)’s companion to the *Organon*,” in Zimmerman and Villemain-Diem (1981), for this phenomenon in logic).

As A. de Libera has argued (de Libera 2005: 40 sq.) Albert’s thought has led to different trends in medieval philosophy: the German Dominican school anchored in the *Studium Generale* of Cologne, which major figures are Ulrich of

Strasbourg (dead before his master in 1277), Dietrich of Freiberg (d. 1318–1320), and Bertold of Moosburg (d. 1361), even though Eckart can be seen as part of this school; Latin Averroism especially in Italy; and Albertism proper, a movement best illustrated by Heymeric de Campo’s (1395–1440) work, but spread all over Europe in the fifteenth century. Albertists adopted the Dominican’s realistic position on the problem of the universals against the Occamist nominalistic theses, and developed it as a philosophical path distinct from Thomas Aquinas’ realism.

## Thought

### Logic

The critical judgment to which Albert has often been subjected as a philosopher has been seen as especially justified in the case of his logic, so that S. Ebbesen (Zimmerman and Villemain-Diem 1981), following Prantl’s critique, goes as far as asking whether Albert “the Great” received this appellation according to the greatness of his thought, or, more probably, because of a labeling (“Great”) which was supposed to distinguish members of the Dominican order from those of the Franciscan one (minor friars). Albert’s dependence toward Kilwardby’s commentaries on logic is beyond question, long extracts of his paraphrases being almost copied from Kilwardby’s questions. This is true in particular for the *Analytics*, the *Peri hermeneias* and the *Sophistici elenchi*. But in others works, such as the commentaries on Porphyry’s *Isagoge* and on *Categories*, Albert’s writings are much less dependent, and represent a novelty in medieval Latin logic, because of their intensive use of Arabic texts, especially Avicenna’s *Logica*, together with al-Ġazālī, al-Fārābī, and Averroes (for his commentary on metaphysics) – the question of Albert’s knowledge of Averroes’ middle commentaries on logic remains unsettled. Despite Avicenna’s overall influence, the Dominican master produced a personal synthesis for important questions such as the division of philosophy and the place of logic, the division of logic (he adopts the Arabic “long *Organon*,” which includes



rhetorics and poetics), the object of logic (syllogism?, language?, reasoning?, secondary intentions?), the universals, etc. He does maintain those general theoretical choices within the commentaries marked by Kilwardby's influence so that he is led also in those texts to personal reformulations. One can say, in general, that Albert is much more interested in the ontological and noetical questions underlying semantic and logical problems, as it can be seen in the way he deals with the problem of the universals (see the section "[Metaphysics](#)"). His logic has been widely read, but has had no great influence on a philosophical point of view during the thirteenth century. His work encounters nonetheless some important echoes during the early fourteenth century, as shown by the sharp debate over the secondary intentions as the subject of logic where his position (and his ambiguities) is an obvious starting point.

### Metaphysics

Albert sees the human intellect as a similitude of the separate intellect, extrinsic to matter and body. With Albert's refutation of the theory of the unity of the intellect we reach the core of the difficult question of his relationship to Averroes. Albert rejects clearly the monopsychist idea of the unity of the possible intellect he attributes to different philosophers (and not to Averroes proper) and advocates for a plurality of intellects. But the agent intellect as a part of human soul is itself an emanation of the separated agent intellect, extrinsic to the body and independent from him, so it is not essentially the substantial form of it. This theory leads to his adoption of the peripatetic theory of the conjunction of human soul to separate intellect, itself linked to his conception of human felicity.

Albert's metaphysical thought is clearly determined by his conception of the relationships between *Metaphysics* and what he considers as Aristotle's theology (the "philosophical" theology, the eminent part of metaphysics, to be distinguished from the Christian theology founded in revelation). It is not contained in book *Lambda* of the *Metaphysics*, but in the *Liber de causis*. This text, a Latin translation of an Arabic adaptation

(realized in the circle of al-Kindī) of a collection of propositions taken from Proclus' *Elements of Theology* is considered by Albert as an Aristotelian synthesis, which contains the authentic peripatetic teaching on the subject of the first cause and primary causes. He develops what we would today call a Christian version of the neoplatonic theory of emanation, clearly distinguished from the Latin Avicennian theory of the *Dator formarum* (which Albert considered as Plato's position). His theory of the influx incorporates the Aristotelian hylemorphism, through the famous theory of the education (*eductio*) of forms. It leads to a reconstruction of the Arabic and Greek peripateticism he finds in Alexander, Avicenna, Averroes, al-Fārābī, al-Kindī, and others authors (some of them Jewish, as "David," the author of the collection which constitutes the *Liber de causis* according to Albert) and corrects through his reading of Pseudo-Dionysius.

His position on the problem of universals is to be considered as a part of his metaphysics, much more than logic, both because of his avicennian position on the "accidental" role of significant expressions in logic – the universality of the logical predicate being systematically based upon the communicability of a real nature – and because his solution is mainly rooted on a Avicennian theory of essence combined with his conception of a Christianized version of the "neo-platonic" theory of the three states of the universal (*ante rem* = form pre-contained in the first cause, *in re* = immanent universals, *post rem* = abstracted concepts). This synthesis is itself founded on a conception of the causality (the essence being an ideal cause which pre-contains things) Albert has conceived with the *Liber de causis* and Pseudo-Dionysius.

### Ethics

During the first part of the thirteenth century several anonymous commentaries on a partial version of the *Ethics* (called *Ethica vetus* = *Nicomachean Ethics* II–III, completed by *Ethica nova* = *Nicomachean Ethics* I) were produced, but Albert is probably the first Latin commentator of the complete version of the *Ethics* (known as *Ethica*

*Lincolniensis*, a new translation of Robert Grosseste around 1246–1247). He was also the first to make a great use of the collection of Byzantine commentaries (especially Eustratus' called "the Commentator" by Albert) also translated by Grosseste. He commented *Ethics* twice, first around 1250 in Cologne, a literal commentary with questions reported by Thomas Aquinas (= *Super ethica, Alberti Magni Opera omnia* IV/1–2, Münster, éd. W. Kübel), then he wrote another commentary around 1262 (= *Ethica*, ed. Jammy t. 4a, Borgnet t. 7). His commentaries had a great influence during the Middle Ages. He contrasts the theoretical and practical aspects of Aristotle's teaching through the distinction of *ethica utens* (ethics as a rule for life) and *ethica docens* (ethics as a subject-matter for teaching). He tried to clarify the relationships between human felicity and Christian happiness in God, a reflection linked to his complex theory of the human intellect, its place within the soul, its relationship to the body, and to man himself. Human felicity is described, in accordance with the second part of book X of the *Ethics*, as the form of pleasure attached to the activity of the best part of man's soul, the intellect, which is extrinsic to the body, and whose perfection is to be found in the conjunction with the separate agent Intellect.

### Sciences

Albert is known for his great interest in all the sciences available at the time. He has commented on all the books of natural philosophy written by Aristotle, which was at the time complemented with pseudepigraphs (*De plantis*, *De mineralibus*, *De caelo et mundo* etc.), and by Albert himself through works of his own. As other masters of mid-thirteenth century (for instance Adam of Buckfield and Peter of Spain) he proposed a division of natural philosophy based upon the different aspects of its object (the mobile body), where each part corresponds to a precise treatise of the Aristotelian corpus. This includes the *Physics* (its object being the mobile body in general), the *De generatione et corruptione*, the *De caelo et mundo*, etc. The *De mineralibus* deals with the inanimate body, the *De anima* with the animated body according to the soul, its powers and parts,

the *Parva naturalia* describe the operations of the soul, Albert's *De intellectu et intelligibili* deals with the intellectual part of the soul, the *De plantis* describes the body as animated by a vegetative soul, the *De animalibus* as animated by a sensitive soul. But Albert's curiosity and competence extended beyond the sole Aristotelian corpus, and included the arts of the *Quadrivium* as he for instance commented on Euclid's *Elements*.

### Cross-References

- ▶ [Aristotelianism in the Greek, Latin, Syriac, Arabic, and Hebrew Traditions](#)
- ▶ [Philosophy, Arabic](#)
- ▶ [Thomas Aquinas](#)

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## Albertism

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### Abstract

Albertism is a movement within late-medieval Aristotelianism that distinguished itself from other contemporary philosophical schools by taking Albert the Great as the most reliable interpreter of Aristotle. Its main representatives were Johannes de Nova Domo (Paris) and Heymericus de Campo (Cologne). Albertism was very critical of Nominalism and challenged Thomism and Scotism on a number of issues in the field of logic, natural philosophy, and metaphysics. Its main center throughout the fifteenth century was the *Bursa Laurentiana* at the University of Cologne, which housed Johannes Hulshout of Mechele, Gerardus de Harderwijck, and Arnoldus Luyde de Tongeris. They were active in the writing of Albertist manuals and commentaries on Aristotle, most of which were printed in large numbers and distributed at many different universities. In these writings, the

Albertists took a well-defined stand on a number of issues without, however, developing an independent, all-embracing philosophical system – an observation that also applies to the other schools of thought. In the modern period, it lost much of its attraction because of its critical attitude toward Nominalism and due to the fact that, unlike Thomism and Scotism, it lacked support from the religious orders. Some of its ideas nevertheless survived within different Thomistic and Scotistic schools.

### What Is Albertism?

Albertism is a philosophical and theological movement that was primarily active in the fifteenth century and which, in sources of the period, was called the *via alberti* or *via albertistarum*. Its adherents were labeled *albertistae*. For the most part, these terms appear in commentaries on Aristotle or in independent works dealing with issues related to the reading of Aristotle as this was practiced in the arts faculties of the various universities. Occasionally, references to the *via alberti* or to the *albertistae* can also be found in theological treatises.

Most characteristically, the Albertists defended a reading of Aristotle, which was drawn from the writings of Albert the Great and which they themselves distinguished from those of other late-medieval schools of thought, such as Thomism, Scotism, and Nominalism. This Albertist reading of Aristotle is documented in a great number of treatises written *secundum viam alberti* or *secundum processum albertistarum*, most of which were printed in Cologne in the 1480s and 1490s, but also in the writings of numerous other authors who refer to the views of the Albertists in their writings, such as the Parisian philosopher Johannes Versor and the theologian Denys the Carthusian.

Prior to the fifteenth century, thinkers also frequently referred to the writings of Albert the Great and used them as a starting point for their philosophical and theological reflections. A good example is Ulrich of Strasbourg, who in contemporary sources was referred to as *discipulus*

*alberti*. The influence of Albert the Great is also visible in the works of other thirteenth- and fourteenth-century philosophers and theologians, such as Dietrich of Freiberg and Meister Eckhart, sometimes even very prominently, not least because contemporaries considered Albert to be one of the main *expositores* of Aristotle. However, in none of these cases is there mention of *albertistae*, in terms of members of a school of thought with a self-proclaimed identity nor in terms of a specific reading of Aristotle that was programmatically applied in all main parts of the arts curriculum, as was the case with Albertism in the fifteenth century.

### Johannes De Nova Domo and Heymericus De Campo

The precise circumstances under which the *via alberti* came into existence and established itself are still obscure. In any case, the role of Johannes de Nova Domo, a master of arts, active at the University of Paris at the beginning of the fifteenth century, was crucial. He quoted Albert extensively in his works, calling him *doctor meus*, and compared Albert's teachings with those of Thomas Aquinas. Most importantly, he considered Albert the most thorough and faithful interpreter of ancient Aristotelianism, that is, the philosophical movement represented according to him not only by Aristotle but also by Boethius, Avicenna, and Averroes. In fifteenth-century sources, as in the works of Johannes de Nova Domo himself, this movement was also called the "peripatetic tradition" and as such carefully distinguished from other ancient schools, like those of the Platonists, Stoics, and Epicureans. According to Johannes de Nova Domo, the *sententia peripateticorum* is best found in the works of Albert, much more so than in those of Thomas Aquinas, who in several places had not considered decisive issues as carefully as had his teacher.

Also of crucial significance was the relationship of Albertism to the Christian Faith. As Johannes de Nova Domo makes clear at the outset of his *De esse et essentia*, the Aristotelian tradition as documented in the writings of Albert was

especially well suited to explaining and corroborating matters of Faith, much more so than any other philosophical tradition, even the Platonist, all of which encountered serious conflicts with Revelation. Remarkably, it is in Johannes de Nova Domo that one finds the notion of the harmony between Aristotle and Faith most strongly expressed, a feature which later in the century became the hallmark of Thomism.

Johannes de Nova Domo taught in Paris. It was however through the activities of his pupil Heymericus de Campo at Cologne that Albertism developed into a school of thought with an institutional framework that secured its survival for many years to come. For Heymericus, as for Johannes de Nova Domo, Albert the Great was the best reader of Aristotle. In his *Tractatus problematicus*, written in 1423 in Cologne, Heymericus demonstrated that on many occasions the interpretations of Albert the Great and Thomas Aquinas were different and sometimes even radically opposed. However, before he entered into a discussion of the views of what he considered to be the main representatives of philosophical thought in his time, the *principales huius temporis philosophiae defensores*, namely, the Albertists and Thomists, he first critically examined and then rejected the views of the Nominalists in the opening parts of his *Tractatus problematicus*, which, for that reason, he entitled *Contra Modernos*.

### Criticism of Nominalism

Nominalism does not deserve to be reckoned as part of the Aristotelian tradition, Heymeric argued, because its defenders deny the existence of real universals outside the human mind. According to Aristotle, the objects of scientific knowledge are necessary and universal. Therefore, if universals had only a mental existence, then the sciences would not deal with reality but only with human thought, which would be absurd. For this reason, Heymeric concluded, Nominalists can only do logic, which is indeed concerned with human concepts, but none of the sciences dealing with things outside the human mind, such as

physics and metaphysics. As the main representatives of Nominalism, he mentioned William of Ockham, John Buridan, and Marsilius of Inghen and considered the first to be the inaugurator of Nominalism, who out of jealousy had distorted Aristotelianism and invented an opposing school of his own.

This criticism of Nominalism, which in a less vigorous way was also present in the writings of Johannes de Nova Domo, had enormous impact. Both the argument that Nominalists are unable to engage in physics and metaphysics and the verdict that Nominalism does not belong to the Aristotelian tradition were repeated time and again until well into the sixteenth century. As a consequence, Nominalist authors were excluded from academic debates, which had an immediate practical effect. As a rule, in the commentaries on Aristotle written by Albertists, Nominalist authors were not mentioned and their positions not discussed. The most important conversants in their debates were the Thomists and, to a lesser extent, the Scotists. At Cologne, the Nominalists were also ignored by the Thomists, who, as far as this matter was concerned, shared the critical view of the Albertists.

From treatises produced within the faculties of theology, a more or less similar picture emerges. Here Albertists and Thomists also made a common stand against Nominalism. Exemplary is a disputation held at the Theological Faculty, at the University of Cologne in 1480. Here the Nominalist Johannes Rype de Alen was attacked by representatives of both schools but most powerfully by the Albertist Gerardus de Harderwijck, who accused him of not following the teachings of Aristotle when discussing the relations between the three divine persons. Johannes Rype de Alen identified these relations with the divine persons themselves, as had Ockham before him, and to whom he also openly referred. This caused Gerardus to object that Johannes denied any real distinction between the categories of substance and relation and that he thus ignored the principles of Aristotle. Significantly, for Albertists, the principles of Aristotelian philosophy also count when discussing the mysteries of Christian Faith, such as the Trinity and the Incarnation.

Not only in Cologne but also elsewhere the relationship between Aristotelian philosophy and Christian Faith was a matter of much debate. For many Albertists, Nominalism posed a serious danger to the adequate understanding of Christian Faith. They were supported in this perception by a large number of Thomists and Scotists. For this and other reasons, at the Universities of Heidelberg, Tübingen, Freiburg, and Ingolstadt, the arts faculties became divided into two different camps: that of the *via moderna*, defended by Nominalists, and that of the *via antiqua*, supported by Albertists, Thomists, and Scotists, each with their own reading of Aristotle and their own exams. In this way, the supporters of the *via antiqua* tried to avoid that students with a mistaken understanding of Aristotle would cause troubles in theology. As a result, Albertism, together with Thomism and Scotism, became one of the principal movements within the *via antiqua*.

The consequences of this development, which took place in the second half of the fifteenth century, cannot be underestimated. At one and the same university in the same year, the same texts of Aristotle were read by two different masters from two different perspectives, that of the *via antiqua* and that of the *via moderna*. In the case of the *via antiqua*, the works of Albert the Great, Thomas Aquinas, and John Duns Scotus were used and, in that of the *via moderna*, those of William of Ockham, John Buridan, and Marsilius of Inghen. Against the background of this institutional separation, it becomes clear why, in actual fact, the doctrinal profile of Albertism established itself largely through debates with Thomism and Scotism and not so much with Nominalism.

### Albertism and Thomism

As Heymericus reports in a 1458 letter to the University of Cologne (the so-called *Invectiva*), when he first arrived in the city in 1422, he encountered the same philosophical schools he knew from Paris, including the Albertists and Thomists. When then asked to list the agreements

and disagreements between these two schools in an academic dispute, the Thomist Gerardus de Monte reacted ferociously, claiming that it was impossible to find any agreement between Albertism and Thomism or to harmonize their methodologies in any coherent way. The Thomists obviously felt compelled to draw a clear line of demarcation between themselves and Albertism, although the reasons for this attitude remain uncertain. In all probability, however, they were dissatisfied with the way Albert the Great had proceeded in his commentaries on Aristotle. For, as Albert repeatedly stated, he tried to understand Aristotle solely on the basis of the natural principles of Aristotle himself without any reference to miracles or Faith, even if this would lead to conflicts with Revelation – an approach clearly differing from that of Thomas Aquinas. That Albertists, like Johannes de Nova Domo, claimed philosophy should be in harmony with the Christian Faith was for the Thomists in Cologne void and not in accord with the approach taken in Albert's own commentaries. Heymericus was not taken aback by Gerardus de Monte, however, and in his account of the dispute (the *Tractatus problematicus*), he described not only the differences between the two schools but also those points where they were, to his mind, in agreement. Where he observed a disagreement, he added a so-called *concordantia* in which he tried to bring the two schools together, showing, for example, that a conceptual ambiguity was involved or that the texts of Aristotle were unclear. Obviously he viewed the opposition between the two schools from the perspective to which his training in Paris had accustomed him, one more moderate than that current in Cologne, as manifested by Gerardus de Monte's uncompromising reaction. From this, an initial conclusion may be drawn – one of paramount importance for an adequate understanding of the early years of Albertism – namely, that its image as a movement fundamentally distinct from Thomism, and not merely on individual points but taken as a whole, had its origin in Cologne. It was a product of Thomism and imposed upon the followers of Albert the Great, who were themselves far less radical, even if they also observed a number of clear disagreements.

However, the situation changed toward 1456, when Gerardus, by then one of the most important Thomists at Cologne, in his *Concordantiae dictorum Thomae Aquinatis et Alberti Magni* once again attacked Heymericus but this time from entirely the opposite angle. Gerardus now claimed that, in the *Tractatus problematicus*, Heymericus had opposed the views of Albert and Thomas where in fact there is no conflict between their views at all. Gerardus came to this conclusion, according to his own account, after a renewed study of the writings of the two Dominicans. This rereading made it evident to him that both authors operated from exactly the same premises and that Heymericus had fundamentally misunderstood Albert's and, above all, Thomas' positions. Heymericus, at that time no longer active in Cologne but teaching in Leuven as professor of theology, reacted immediately and with great ire. He defended his original views, arguing that there are points of both agreement and disagreement in Albert's and Thomas' reading of Aristotle and that while some of these disagreements can be resolved, others definitively cannot. This clash marked the beginning of the second phase of Albertism, which is characterized by the fact that its representatives, much more clearly than before, present the image of a school of thought opposed to Thomism, to the extent that it was now the Albertists themselves who, against the conviction of the Thomists, stressed the opposition of Albert's and Thomas' interpretations of Aristotle. This is also the period in which the majority of commentaries *secundum viam alberti* were composed and in which new points of doctrinal difference were noted and discussed. Remarkably, the treatises *secundum viam thomae* much less frequently entered into debate with their Albertist antagonists.

### The Institutional Factor

Throughout the century, Cologne was the main center of Albertism, with important representatives in Paris, Krakow, and Uppsala. The special position of Cologne was closely linked to an institutional peculiarity. As was the general trend at



late-medieval universities, courses were held increasingly in the colleges and *bursae*, where students lived together with one or more masters. This meant that not only daily disputations and exercises but also the regular curricular courses were stamped with the personality of a specific group of masters, namely, those who had their home in the *bursa*. In Cologne, several *bursae* of this type existed, one of which bore a clear Albertist signature, namely, the *Bursa Laurentiana*, named after Laurentius Berungen de Groningen, who in 1439 or 1440 became its regent master, in the legacy of such famous Albertists as Heymericus de Campo and Johannes Hulshout of Mechelen. In its later years, the *bursa* housed masters like Gerardus de Harderwijck and Arnoldus Luyde de Tongeris, who were active in the writing of Albertist manuals and commentaries on Aristotle.

These manuals, some of which survived in manuscripts, others in printed editions, document the daily practice of reading Aristotle according to the *processus albertistarum*. The text was divided into small sections introduced by a division of the text and elucidation of its content. A number of short questions followed, in which specific problems linked to the text were discussed. It is especially in these questions that the doctrinal views of the Albertists came to the fore, and the arguments of Thomists and Scotists were refuted. The Thomists and Scotists employed largely the same arrangement in their own commentaries, the most important distinction being the sources they used in dividing and explaining the text of Aristotle. As a rule, in separating the different sections of the text, the Albertist used the commentaries of Albert the Great as a model, not those of Thomas Aquinas. Most of the distinctions introduced to clarify the meaning of Aristotle, as well as the solutions to the questions, also had their origin in the works of Albert.

### The Question of Doctrinal Unity

It is hardly possible to construe from the writings *secundum processum albertistarum* a comprehensive doctrinal unity with a clear foundation in the

works of Albert the Great. Although in general the same texts of Albert were employed, and the same texts of Aristotle commented upon, the focus of the various commentaries differed. In addition, sometimes works were attributed to Albert, which were as a matter of fact not his, but were considered to be so in the fifteenth century. A telling example is the reference to *magister Albertus in libro De ortu et progressu scientiarum*, which appeared in an Albertist commentary on the *Isagoge* of Porphyry. In actuality the work quoted was not by Albert, but by Robert Kilwardby. However, in Cologne, there existed a manuscript in which the treatise was attributed to Albert the Great, carrying the same title of *Super ortu et scientiarum progressu*, and which was used by some Albertists. This means that for the Albertists the most important factor was not doctrinal unity and coherence, but the fact that the sources used stemmed from their professed master. The same can also be observed among the Thomists. To be sure, with the Thomists, the matter was even more complicated, as in the fifteenth century it was an open secret that the works of Thomas Aquinas contained many apparently contradictory statements, which made the construction of a coherent theory shared by all Thomists almost impossible. This ambiguity in the works of Thomas was readily exploited by the Albertists, as proof that his commentaries were not a secure guide when reading Aristotle.

It is important to recognize precisely how the Albertists (as well as the Thomists) proceeded in their commentaries, as the impossibility of finding a single, comprehensive doctrinal system based upon the works of Albert the Great himself led some earlier researchers to question the existence of an Albertist school of thought. However, the sources show that the *via alberti* was characterized not by internal coherence and unity, but rather by the shared use of a number of distinct doctrines when explaining Aristotle, which were taken from works attributed to Albert the Great. These were highlighted in individual questions in which these beliefs were defended against the views of other schools, primarily against those of the Thomists. Other works were entirely devoted to this purpose, such as the



*Promptuarium argumentorum*, a manual designed to help students of the one school to find arguments against the beliefs of the other.

A study of these doctrines reveals that the majority were concerned with difficult passages or items within the texts of Aristotle that had already been discussed by the Greek and Arabic commentators, and remained bones of contention within the Aristotelian tradition, such as the principle of individuation, or the question of whether humans can have direct knowledge of separate substances. As far as these points were concerned, all those authors representing the *via alberti* shared the same views. Conversely, on derivative and less crucial items, there were differences among the Albertists. These latter issues, however, were never labeled as being illustrative of the *via alberti*.

The main focus of those works labeled *secundum processum albertistarum* is always Aristotle and Albert the Great. Significant in this connection is that the independent works of Heymericus de Campo, such as the *De sigillo aeternitatis* and the *Ars demonstrativa*, which were clearly designed as coherent philosophical systems, were not labeled by him as Albertist. In the same way, contemporary historiography did not consider these works to be examples of the *via alberti*. Johannes Trithemius, for example, in his *De scriptoribus ecclesiasticis*, quoted these works without any references to the Albertist tradition. Moreover, he underlined their connection with Cusanus, an author who, like Heymericus in the abovementioned works, did not consider himself to be commenting on the works of Aristotle, even when Aristotle was occasionally discussed. Therefore, at least from a historical point of view, Albertism is to be regarded primarily as a movement within the Aristotelian tradition at late-medieval and early-modern universities.

## Doctrinal Issues

Notwithstanding the fact that in his independent writings Heymericus does not present himself as an Albertist, it was he who in his *Tractatus problematicus* listed the doctrines of the *via alberti*

and commented upon them for the first time. His treatise was crucial, as in the period to come most authors followed his views on the matter. A number of doctrines were added to the initial catalogue of 18 items, reaching a total of approximately 30 toward the end of the century, but it remained principally the same list, as the items he had mentioned were the most essential.

The following sections list a number of doctrinal points which were characteristic of Albertism and in which Albertism distinguished itself from other late-medieval schools of thought, such as Thomism, Scotism, and Nominalism. These points were argued for in commentaries *secundum viam alberti* and were also attributed to the Albertists in writings by members of the other schools of thought.

### Logic

Against the conviction of a number of Thomists and Nominalists, the Albertist claimed that logic in itself is a purely theoretical science. The fact that logic directs the mind to argue correctly does not mean that it is in itself practical or even partially practical, as some Thomists and Nominalists had argued. Logic is solely an activity of the intellect and not of the will, being a science that has as its goal to produce true statements. To make their claim, Albertists referred to the distinction made by Aristotle between practical and theoretical sciences, whereby the former produce something outside the human mind and involve the activity of the will, while the latter remain within the mind. In this sense, logic is not practical. Only in a derivative sense can it possibly be labeled practical, namely, when logic is used as a tool in other sciences. But this does not concern the nature of logic per se. To distinguish between these two senses, Albertists discriminated between *logica docens* which is the theoretical science of logic in itself, as laid down, for example, in the *Tractatus* of Peter of Spain, and *logica utens*, which is the practical use of logic in physics, metaphysics, and any other science or art.

### Individuation

For the Albertists, matter is the sole cause of individuation. In this regard, Albertism was

opposed to Scotism and Thomism, as both of these schools tried to found individuality in a formal principle: the Scotists in the so-called *differentia individualis* and the Thomists in matter as determined by quantity. The Albertists, however, argued that according to Aristotle, form is always universal. Principles that are based on the form of a thing can, therefore, never account for the individuality of the thing, as individuation means to be distinct from others. The only possible candidate is that which is opposed to the form, namely, matter. Being last in the order of being, matter is in itself undivided and incommunicable. Hence, it is both the root of numerical distinction from others and the root of incommunicability. Particularly against the Thomists, Albertists claimed that quantity by nature is communicable and therefore cannot be the primary source of individuation, even if directly linked to matter, since it is shared by different individuals. Matter therefore remains the single most important and complete source of individuation.

### Human Knowledge

It was the firm belief of Albertists that humans can have direct knowledge of separate substances already in their earthly life. On this point, Albertism distinguished itself from Thomism and Nominalism. For representatives of both these schools argued that, according to Aristotle, all human knowledge begins with the senses. Therefore substances that are not perceived by the senses, such as separate substances, cannot be known directly but only indirectly through the sensible effects they produce. The Albertist, however, maintained that this reading of Aristotle is too narrow. When dealing with the knowledge and being of separate substances in his *Metaphysics*, Aristotle had remarked that separate substances know themselves and that human beings sometimes, for a very brief moment, possess the same knowledge as separate substances. For the Albertist, this passage clearly confirmed that Aristotle was of the opinion that humans sometimes know separate substances directly, as they do themselves, even if this is the exception rather than the rule. To further corroborate their reading of Aristotle, Albertists referred to the theory of the

*intellectus adeptus* as put forward in the writings of Avicenna and Averroes. If humans have collected sufficient sense data, they are able to turn their intellect immediately to the source of the intelligibility of that sense data, namely, the agent intellect, which is itself either a separate substance or a direct emanation of a separate substance. In both cases, humans can know separate substances without first turning to the senses. It is in the immediate knowledge of separate substances that humans grasp the first principles of both theoretical and practical knowledge, such as the principle of non-contradiction or the rule that the good is to be striven for and the bad avoided.

### Being and Essence

Albertists strongly opposed the claim of Thomists that there is a real distinction between being (*ens* or *esse*) and essence (*essentia*). As Denys the Carthusian reported in his commentary on the *Sentences*, it was the depth of the Albertist's response to the Thomists on this issue which caused him to switch from the Thomistic to the Albertist side. According to the Albertists, it is fundamental to the *sententia* of Aristotle that the substantial form and nothing else conveys being to the thing determined by this form. This being is not attributed to the thing from the outside, but flows from the substantial form, which is itself a substantial part of the thing. The essence and the being of the thing are no more distinct than the significates of a respective noun and verb: the former highlighting the thing of the act and the latter the act of the thing, as, for example, the noun "walk" signifies a distance walked or to be walked and the verb "walk" the moving or traveling this distance. A similar point had already been made by Dietrich of Freiberg against Thomas Aquinas. According to the Albertists, it was Averroes who, against Avicenna, made clear that this was how Aristotle needed to be understood. That being is given by the substantial form does not mean that the form is a completely independent source of being. The substantial form is only the principle of the formal being. Besides this form, there is the agent, which acts from without as an efficient cause and produces the thing, thus bringing it from non-being into being. According to

Aristotle, the agent is really distinct from the thing produced, as the efficient cause is not part of the thing in the way that the formal cause is. In this sense, and only in this sense, the Albertists maintained, can one speak of a real distinction between the thing and the being of the thing caused from without. If that is what the Thomists intend, then there is no real opposition between the two schools. If however the Thomists speak of being as something distinct from and added to the substantial form, then they truly depart from the Aristotelian tradition, according to the Albertists.

### The Proper Object of Logic

Several items that in contemporary sources were labeled characteristic of the *via alberti* were not mentioned by Heymericus in his *Tractatus problematicus* but appear only later, in the second half of the fifteenth century. The most significant of these is the view that logic is primarily concerned with second-order rather than with first-order concepts. First-order concepts are concepts of things in reality, such as men and living beings. Second-order concepts, on the other hand, are concepts attributed to these first-order concepts, such as “species” and “genus,” in propositions like “man is a species” and “living being is a genus.” In maintaining that logic primarily deals with second-order concepts, the Albertist was in full agreement with the Scotist, against the Thomists and Nominalists. Although the debate concerned the genuine nature of logic according to Aristotle, its immediate source was a remark made by Avicenna in his *Metaphysics*, which stated that the subject of logic is second-order concepts added to first-order ones. Albertists thus saw themselves as the true followers of Avicenna’s reading of Aristotle on this point, a reading which, according to them, was imperative, because otherwise the distinction made in the Aristotelian tradition between logic on the one hand and physics and metaphysics on the other would collapse. Logic is a rational science, whereas physics and metaphysics are real ones. Although all these sciences can talk about man, logic is not interested in man as a real man, nor in the concept of man, but rather in the concepts that can be predicated of the concept used in the real

sciences to refer to real men. Because, the Albertists argued, the concept of man is predicated of numerically distinct men in reality, this concept has the nature of a species, and thus the second-order term “species” can be predicated of it. The Albertists admitted that there is a certain relationship between first- and second-order concepts, inasmuch as the latter, say “species,” are attributed to the former, say “man,” dependent on the fact that the first-order concept “man” refers to different individuals in reality. However, and this is crucial, they did not consider second-order concepts to be a natural property of first-order concepts, as the Thomists claimed, nor to be a natural sign of them, as the Nominalists maintained. Logic, for the Albertists, was a science concerned with second-order concepts ontologically independent of first-order concepts. In short, logic is a true science in its own right.

### Conclusion

As said above, the majority of texts *secundum viam alberti* were written in the second half of the fifteenth century. In the century to come, their number declined, and the Albertists gradually disappeared as significant contributors to philosophical and theological debates, as was the case with other medieval schools of thought. To be sure, this does not mean that the reading of Aristotle put forth in the writings of Albert the Great was no longer of interest. On the contrary, his works continued to be published and read. However, his reading was no longer supported by institutions especially devoted to this task, as had previously been the case, and became henceforth the matter of a few dedicated individuals. The institutional death of Albertism was largely the result of shifting doctrinal interests. Its opposition to Nominalism was critically regarded by Cartesians, and its proximity to Thomism, despite all controversies, made it difficult for Protestant authors to accept. That despite the same pressures Thomism was able to persist was largely due to the establishment of chairs devoted to the reading of Thomas and especially to the enormous efforts of both the Dominican and Jesuit orders – an

institutional support system which was not granted to Albertism, consequently leaving the tradition to be divided and absorbed into the various Thomistic and Scotistic schools of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.

## Cross-References

- ▶ [Albert the Great](#)
- ▶ [Aristotelianism in the Greek, Latin, Syriac, Arabic, and Hebrew Traditions](#)
- ▶ [Denys the Carthusian](#)
- ▶ [Dietrich of Freiberg](#)
- ▶ [Essence and Existence](#)
- ▶ [Heymeric of Camp](#)
- ▶ [Realism](#)
- ▶ [Thomism](#)

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## Alchemy in the Arab World

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### Abstract

Between the eighth and ninth centuries, Islamic civilization inherited from Greece, Persia, India, and ancient Mesopotamia the body of knowledge known as alchemy: a school of learning dealing with the ancient arts of fire (in particular: working metals, precious metals, manufacturing glass, and glazing and fake precious stones). After a first short period in which the body of their knowledge was acquired and translated, Muslims started putting forth their own works, and Arab-Islamic alchemy (al-kīmīyāʿ) took shape in its contents and literary genres; although documents, philosophical and allegorical texts, technical texts, and recipes sometimes seem muddled and disjointed, as a whole they formed a complex discipline. Many discussions have taken place and are still taking place regarding the real meaning of alchemy and its effective role within Islamic society: on its philosophy and cosmology, on its techniques and materials, on its goal, on preparing the elixir, a single procedure and a single purpose; beyond the veils of the tradition of secrecy, which by definition “hides,” alchemy has still clearly shown a close connection with other natural sciences, from medicine to physics, from botany to zoology. Glorified as a science, reviled as deception

or illusion, worshipped and despised by many but still studied, quoted and passed on constantly up to our modern age, alchemy, through the Islamic tradition, acquired the semblance that it would continue to bear for a very long time, throughout the Muslim world at first, and from the twelfth century onwards, up to the Latin Middle Ages.

The word *kīmiyā'* (*al-kīmiyā'*), from the Greek *χυμεία* or *χημεία* (*χέω*, to smelt, *χύμα*, molten matter), during the twelfth century, when alchemy came to the western Latin world, became the Latin *alchemia/alchimia*.

## The History

According to various authors, alchemy first appeared in the Islamic world during the Umayyad era (Damascus, first half of the eighth century): interested in science, and particularly in alchemy, the Umayyad prince Khālid b. Yazīd – grandson of Mu'āwiya, the founder of the dynasty – is said to have summoned Greek philosophers from Egypt and ordered them to translate alchemical texts from Greek and Coptic into Arabic. Although to date there is no evidence to support these stories, they are still quite plausible and likely: during the first centuries of Islam, a fervent desire to obtain knowledge and translations often caused messengers being sent in search of books or foreign scholars being invited into schools to train local pupils.

Regardless of the true nature of the knowledge obtained during the Umayyad era, it was in the second half of the eighth century and throughout the first half of the ninth, during the 'Abbāsīd era in Iraq that alchemy was first studied systematically. The wealth of knowledge that Islam inherited from more ancient traditions and which can be described as alchemy is, essentially, the heritage that one of its first authors, Pseudo-Democritus (Bolos of Mendes? Second century BCE) already considered as a part of his school of learning. In his book *Physikā kai mystikā*, he divided matter into four large groups: gold, silver, stones, and purple. Except for the latter, “purple” – if “purple” here really means a dye for textiles – alchemy would

therefore be a school of learning involving the most noble parts of the arts of fire: working precious metals and certainly imitating them and making colored glass (imitating precious stones and various kinds of glazing). The secrecy enshrouding all these techniques (the theory that probably lay behind these techniques remains unknown) would seem, on one hand, to be the legacy of very ancient times when techniques were considered sacred; on the other, it would seem to relate to the “operational” need to protect certain production secrets.

Between the eighth and ninth centuries, there was a rapid increase in translations into Arabic: certainly, the whole *corpus* of work attributed to Balīnās (Apollonius of Tyana), a *corpus* that seems to be the origin of alchemical cosmology (see below); a large group of works attributed to Hermes Trismegistus, an author that, according to a particular interpretation, was translated into Arabic as Hermes of the Hermeses (*Harmis al-Harāmisa*), “triple” (one name, three persons), or bearer of three sciences, as well as a great number of essays and comments attributed to more or less known real or pseudoepigraphical authors such as Cleopatra, Mary the Copt, Ostanēs, Zosimus, Stephanus, Olympiodorus, etc.

After incorporating Greek alchemical traditions, most likely along with traditions from Ancient Mesopotamia, Persia, and India, the Muslim world soon started producing its own works. Among its first authors, there is Jābir b. Ḥayyān (eighth–ninth century), credited by tradition with approximately 3,000 titles – no more than 500 according to recent studies – which obviously were not all his own work but came from his school of learning. Even the above-mentioned Khālid b. Yazīd is credited with certain works, and many other later authors who, as time went by, gave birth to the three fundamental genres within Arab alchemical literature: technical and philosophical alchemical texts, like those of al-Rāzī, Maslama al-Majrīṭī (tenth century, Iran, and Spain), and al-Ṭuḡrā'ī (twelfth century, Iran); allegorical texts, like those of Ibn Umayl al-Tamīmī (tenth century, Egypt) – and later (thirteenth and fourteenth centuries), those of al-'Irāqī and al-Jildakī – at once celebrations of

their ancient legacy and at the same time a continuation of the tradition of secrecy; finally the recipes, often included in many alchemical texts. Found as beautiful calligraphy within the works, or as mere scribbles in their margins or on white spaces and flyleaves, recipes complete a picture that becomes to be increasingly defined as a single “object” with infinite facets.

Since the middle of the twelfth century, all these works, which were known and translated in Muslim Spain, were transferred into medieval Latin: with Robert of Chester’s translation of the *Morienus* in 1144, Arab alchemy entered the Christian world: a different adventure, a different story, that we shall not deal with here.

### The Texts and Their Contents

Since its first appearance in the Islamic world, alchemy was a school of learning that converged with various other natural sciences: as a testimony to an almost invisible and ambiguous dividing line, cosmological theories are appropriated from philosophy, embryological theories from philosophy and medicine, and the description and treatment of minerals, animals, and plants from natural sciences and pharmacology. Following a path probably already consolidated since ancient times, the scholarly alchemist was a man of great knowledge, yet not necessarily a philosopher, who absorbed everything, gathered all information adapting it to his science; while the façade of original theories faded away, it breathed new life into its subject and that which likely was not alchemical initially, or was expressed in a different manner, acquired, during the course of this process, the characteristics of Islamic alchemy.

The settlement process resulted in a proteiform and controversial school of learning; amongst its followers, some (al-Majrīṭī) paired it with magic, while others, more daring (Ibn Umayl), paired it with Prophecy; others yet, realists, tried to lead it back to dealing with nature: an operational science for experts dealing with the arts of fire in the footsteps of the ancient masters. Between the ninth and eleventh centuries, philosophers and scholars debated: al-Kindī was against it, while

al-Fārābī was favorable to it; Abū Bakr al-Rāzī, philosopher and physician, was also an alchemist, and Ibn Sīnā (Avicenna), another philosopher and physician, considered transmutation (see below) impossible; al-Bīrūnī accepts only its technical role. Approaching the modern age, Ibn Khaldūn (d. 1406), who was well versed in it and wrote of it in detail, tried to destroy it once and for all, but his attempts were in vain.

### Philosophical Texts

A cosmology is undoubtedly at the root of the theory of transmutation; this is what needs to be studied if certain aspects of this elusive theory are to be understood. What we briefly describe here is the cosmology found in the first book of the *Miftāḥ al-hikma* (*The Key of Wisdom*, or *Philosophy*), the work of a self-styled pupil of Apollonius of Tyana; this cosmology has slightly different characteristics in the works of Jābir b. Ḥayyān and other authors, but the theory of transformation resulting from it is not substantially different.

At the origin of the creation of the universe, God, in his eternal solitude, expressed a desire to create; the result of this desire, which God expressed without further definition, is a substance bearing the characteristics of absolute potentiality; since opposites had yet to be defined, this matter is at once everything and nothing. Then (a “then” that is beyond time), God uttered the word *kun* (“let there be,” cf. the *fiat* of the *Genesis*). This word, which is light, defined its opposite, darkness; and with the creation of these opposites, light and darkness, which carried with them heat and cold and all other “physical” opposites associated with them (movement/stillness, hot/cold, light/heavy, rarefied/dense, etc.), the whole universe was produced through a series of opposites and intermediates. In the beginning, five “natures” (hot/dry, cold/dry, hot/damp, cold/damp, and balanced, or damp, intermediate) were formed as four concentric spheres of decreasing luminosity and mobility, gathered around a still and dark core. This first stratification was defined by three concentric regions: the higher realm (spiritual), the intermediate



(planetary), and the sublunar; within the sublunar world, the natures produce the four elements, which then produce the three composite bodies: minerals, vegetables, and animals.

If we were to compare the vast body of the universe with the bodies of the sublunar world, we would immediately notice a characteristic that makes them opposite: while the body of the universe presents itself as a creature of light with a dark inner core (where the darkest point is the Earth at its center), each body contained within it has a dark and passive exterior, which is matter, and a more “luminous” core where operational capacities reside: this is true for creatures at all levels, including the most noble, mankind, which hosts a rational soul within its body’s matter.

Still, aside from this inversion of conformation, there are two fundamental characteristics shared by the universe and each creature: (a) the recurrent stratification in opposites and intermediates, and (b) the shared substratum formed by the natures.

- (a) Just like in the universe between the higher and sublunar realms lies the intermediate planetary realm, joining the other two, and in the sublunar realm, between animals and minerals, there are plants: in each subject, be it mineral, plant, or animal, there is an intermediate state between two complementary compositions, exterior and interior.
- (b) Beyond and below the “actual” configuration that each formed creature manifests, in the innermost core of its being there is a substratum made up by the natures. The different arrangement of these natures, meaning the different relations in their composition, results in different creatures; yet the substratum itself, meaning the natures, is shared by each form.

This type of cosmology, which has been expressed with slight differences by different authors, still leads to very similar conclusions in what concerns the theory of transmutation – directly generating the theory of alchemical transmutation. In alchemy, transforming something (transmutation) means correcting the numerical

relations between the natures: an extremely difficult process of immersion in the structure of matter itself, moving gradually from the composite body to the elements and then to the natures, operating then on the natures themselves, where the transformation will occur. If we view the body as composed of three levels: exterior, interior, and intermediate, we see that correcting relations between the natures is especially achievable at the intermediate level, since, due to its position, it involves the other two adjacent levels; in any event, each body can be transformed into another simply by “correcting” its natures, and transformation will occur via the careful and experienced application of fire, since applying or subtracting its warm nature will result in the desired corrections. The highest and most noble of all transformation procedures within the alchemical tradition is the Great Work, which results in the obtainment of the “object of desire,” the *iksīr* (elixir): its nature, the most balanced, the nature of gold, can “tint with its color” (transform into itself) each inferior nature.

Jābir b. Ḥayyān’s work (*corpus giabirianum*, *Kitāb al-ahjār*) describes the theory of the composition of the bodies and transmutation and also defines what we might call quantitative aspects. The text states that each body, in the form in which it appears to our eyes, has an exterior “actual” composition and an interior “potential” composition; these two compositions, exterior and interior, together, form a total composition (where the relation between natures is 1:3:5:8). Operating a transformation means modifying the exterior “actual” composition by accessing the interior “potential” composition: at the end of this procedure, the total composition will remain unchanged, but the exterior (or “actual”) composition will have changed because actual natures will have transferred, in a certain percentage, to a condition of potentiality, while interior natures will have become exterior.

This Jabirian theory, although interesting because it attempts to mathematize the composition of matter, highlights a weakness of the alchemical theory: the impossibility of determining the two initial and final compositions between which the transformation is realized leads the

author to rely on improbable numerological theories (relations between names and compositions in natures). Unable to rely on a strong and solid theory, degenerating into the most pure forms of *empeiria*, alchemy often ended up attempting to simply repeat the procedures of its predecessors.

### Allegorical Texts and Recipes

Since the beginning, alchemical literature of a more or less openly “scientific” nature was accompanied by translations of a great deal of allegorical literature. It is worth mentioning that this genre is not original to the Muslim world; already Greek alchemy had Zosimus, or Hermetic texts, or the vast body of works attributed to various authors of Alexandria during the early centuries: this literature, which originated to protect and expand on very ancient *techne*, reached Islam along with the other translations and was studied and commented upon by a number of authors. The mystery grew with the inevitable fracture between the polytheistic rebirths and Islamic monotheism and with the spread of quotes out of context; on the contrary, when characters were known and cherished, the various stories were expanded upon and details were added to them. A well-known case, for example, is that of Alexander the Great, who in Arabic became Dhū l-Qarnayn (the two-horned one); the *Alexander Romance*, attributed to Callisthenes, was the origin for the creation of an alchemical heroic figure, which combined the wisdom of the Greeks, the Persian tradition, and Indian science. Along with Alexander, there are many other revered characters that were adopted and are often mentioned in alchemical allegory: philosophers like Democritus, Aristotle, and Socrates; physicians like Galen; and also prophets, like Mūsā (Moses), ʿIsā (Jesus), and even Adam, father of the humankind, to whom God transferred, along with other knowledge, a few pages of alchemy.

In allegorical texts, the Great Work takes on various different forms. In its different stages, in the retort and alembic, it often became an event: a journey, an ascent, an access to the temple, an exile in a palace or chamber, a siege, the

destruction of a city and a pacification amongst its ruins, the hunt and cooking of prey, a gathering of rain and dew, the gestation of an embryo in the uterus, and an infinite number of other events that are vivid images of the procedure. In its condition of completeness, taken as a single entity somewhere between action and result, the event is replaced by an object: like the egg, be it a hen’s egg or the cosmic egg, which contains within itself each element and nature, or like the hermetic tree, firmly planted and motionless, but “readable” even in its becoming, from its roots to its leaves. At the core of all this proliferation, there was a unique reality: as the alchemists themselves wrote, the endless number of alchemical allegories is nothing but the descriptions of a single procedure and a single object.

At the root of this vast body of allegorical work, there is not only a religious or initiatic literature, or that of writers and poets; a large part of Arab alchemy is in fact based on philosophical texts, often Aristotelian: a great deal of imagery and names of minerals, plants, and animals, descriptions of man and other creatures, depictions of the skies, the heavenly bodies, etc., are “alchemized” borrowings from various sciences, from which alchemy borrowed more or less faithfully. And not all of it came from Alexandria and from the Greeks, as mentioned previously, Persia, India, and ancient Mesopotamia also had a strong influence.

Alchemical allegory had a strong impact on its readers, from East to Spain. Alchemical allegory appears sporadically throughout literary texts, poetry, and prose and, as time went by, even in the musings of mystics, with interventions that are often brief yet effective as lightning: in the East, alchemical allegory is quoted by al-Bīrūnī (d. 1048) the scientist who in one of his works even mocked the alchemists, and by al-Ġazālī, (d. 1111), the theologian; between the two worlds, it is mentioned by Ibn ʿArabī (d. 1240) the mystic; in the West, Ibn Ṭufayl (d. 1185), the philosopher, in his work *Ḥayy b. Yaqzān* mentions the unobtainable red sulfur, one of the names for the elixir.

In closing, a brief note on recipes: unlike the descriptions of equipment occasionally found

throughout alchemical texts, sometimes detailed in drawings and which can be reproduced, recipes are often difficult to decipher; although a few are quite clear, such as the recipes for purifying the *lāzaward* (lapis lazuli → natural ultramarine), or the instructions for coloring different materials (papers, precious woods, etc.), most of the recipes concerning the Great Work use terms and expressions drawn from allegory. The difficulty in interpreting them joins the already hard task set by other scientific texts, nonencrypted recipes, and pharmacopoeias, due to the difficulty in identifying minerals, plants, and various substances. Prudence in interpreting them is required, as hurried interpretations have often been detrimental; the challenge, however, is irresistible.

## Cross-References

- ▶ [Abū Bakr al-Rāzī, Muḥammad ibn Zakarīyā' \(Rhazes\)](#)
- ▶ [Alchemy in the Latin World](#)
- ▶ [Alexandrian Tradition into Arabic: Medicine](#)
- ▶ [Alexandrian Tradition into Arabic: Philosophy](#)
- ▶ [Apollonius of Tyana](#)
- ▶ [al-Bīrūnī, Abū Rayḥān](#)
- ▶ [al-Fārābī, Abū Naṣr](#)
- ▶ [al-Ġazālī, Abū Ḥāmid Muḥammad](#)
- ▶ [Hermes Trismegistus](#)
- ▶ [Ibn 'Arabī, Abū Bakr Muḥammad Muḥyiddīn](#)
- ▶ [Ibn Khaldūn, Abū Zayd 'Abdarrāḥmān](#)
- ▶ [Ibn Sīnā, Abū 'Alī \(Avicenna\)](#)
- ▶ [Ibn Ṭufayl, Abū Bakr \(Abubacer\)](#)
- ▶ [al-Kindī, Abū Yūsuf Ya'qūb ibn Ishāq](#)
- ▶ [Translations from Greek into Arabic](#)
- ▶ [Translations from Greek into Syriac](#)

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## Alchemy in the Latin World

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### Abstract

Alchemy, originally an attempt to find a process to transmute base metals (such as lead and copper) into gold or silver, may be considered a metallurgical science mixed up with considerations of theoretical philosophy. Medieval alchemy in the West may be divided into two main stages: from the middle of the twelfth century to the end of the thirteenth century, the Arabic material was assimilated and Latin treatises were composed on the basis of this material, but with an increasing level of distinctive features; during the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, alchemy developed from the Latin texts of the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries rather than from Arabic sources.

Alchemy never came into universities; it was a knowledge on the fringe. However, it had a very close link with natural philosophy and medicine. The authoritative texts in alchemy are few in number: some Arabic translations (especially those attributed to al-Rāzī and Avicenna), the *Summa perfectionis*, and some texts attributed to Arnald of Villanova, Ramon Llull, and Johannes de Rupescissa. Authors used to compile ideas from previous major alchemists.

The Latin word *alchimia* is a transcription of the Arabic *al-kīmiyā'*, which is itself a transcription of the Greek word *χυμεία* (fusion).

## Before the Latin Translations of Arabic Texts

The Early Middle Ages in the West did not know of alchemy. The only traces observed are some technical recipes translated from Greek alchemical compendia but completely divorced from the context. For instance, the *Mappae clavicula*, a craft treatise dating from the ninth century or earlier, contains metallurgical recipes.

The first circulation of Arabic alchemical materials dates from the beginning of the twelfth century, but they were designed for a very practical use. The *Diversarum artium schedula* of the monk Theophilus (maybe the pseudonym of the Saxon Roger of Helmarshausen, who lived between 1106 and 1140) contains one alchemical recipe which comes probably from Arabic sources. Some additions to the *Mappae clavicula* attributed to Adelard of Bath (fl. 1140) also betray an Arabic origin. These observations allow us to conclude that some Arabic recipes were already circulating in the West from the beginning of the twelfth century but on a very small scale.

## The Latin Translations of Arabic Alchemical Treatises

During the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, a wide movement of Latin translations from Arabic texts developed in Spain and Italy. Since various Islamic classifications of science did regard alchemy as a discipline in its own right, as well as Latin texts based on Arabic sources such as Dominicus Gundissalinus' *De divisione philosophiae*, many treatises were translated.

The *Liber de compositione alchimiae* of "Morienuis," translated by Robert of Chester in 1144, is generally considered to be the first alchemical treatise known in the Latin West. This text reports a dialogue between the Umayyad caliph Khālid b. Yazīd (c. 668–704/709), known as the first Arabic alchemist in the Islamic tradition, and the monk Maryānūs, a legendary disciple of the Greek alchemist Stephanos of Alexandria; the authenticity is very doubtful; this work is in all likelihood pseudonymous.

Translations of many classical works of alchemy were made in the subsequent period. Gerard of Cremona (1141–1187) translated three treatises, one from the corpus attributed to Jābir b. Ḥayyān (a very large corpus of texts probably written during the end of the eighth century and the ninth century), the *Liber divinitatis de septuaginta* (the *Book of Divinity*, a part of the *Kitāb al-sabʿīn*, the *Book of Seventy*); the *De aluminibus et salibus* (on alums and salts), a technical text which gained a wide diffusion (it was a major source to Vincent of Beauvais for alchemy); and a *Lumen luminum*. Other works of the two main Arabic alchemists, Jābir b. Ḥayyān and Abū Bakr al-Rāzī (854–925/935), were translated, such as the *Liber misericordiae* (*Kitāb al-rahma*, the *Book of Forgiveness*) of Jābir and the *Liber secretorum* (*Kitāb al-asrār*, the *Book of the Secrets*) of Rāzī, along with pseudepigraphical texts. Some alchemical treatises attributed to Avicenna were also translated, such as the *Ad Hasen regem epistola de re tecta* (*Risālat al-iksīr*, *Epistle on the Elixir*), which might be genuine, and the alchemical *De anima* (*On the Soul*), which is spurious and exerted a great influence. In a more allegorical vein, the *Turba philosophorum* (*Muṣḥaf al-jamāʿa*, *Book of the Community*), a discussion between legendary Greek alchemists, and the *Tabula chemica* (*al-Māʾ al-waraqī wa-l-ard al-najmiyya*, *The Silvery Water and Starry Earth*) by “Senior Zādith” (Muḥammad ibn Umayl, first half of the tenth century) were translated. Among these translations, we also find some treatises not originally imbued with alchemy, as, for instance, the *De secretis naturae* (*Kitāb sirr al-khalīqa*, *Book of the Secret of Creation*) of Balīnās (Pseudo-Apollonius of Tyana): translated by Hugo Sanctellensis before 1151, it contains the *Emerald Tablet*, a very short and enigmatic text attributed to Hermes, which gained currency in the West.

From Arabic alchemy major theoretical concepts were imported, such as the theory of mercury and sulfur as the two principles of metals. All metals are made by the mixture and cooking of mercury and sulfur in the depths of the earth during a period of hundreds of years. Modern appellations are misleading: mercury in that time was considered to be a cold and moist principle,

whereas sulfur was regarded as a hot and dry principle. The differences between metals depended on the purity of these principles and on the place and the duration of the cooking. The theory of elixirs is also typical of Arabic alchemy: in order to transmute base metals into gold, the alchemist has to balance the properties of a body (coldness, heat, moisture, and dryness). He will achieve this by using a preparation called “elixir.” This preparation is made from the distillation of materials (generally organic substances such as hair, eggs, blood, etc., but these substances are technically called “stones”).

Various trends of Arabic alchemy, technical, allegorical, etc., all found their way into the West. The reception of Arabic alchemy was a complex movement. Scholars believed that alchemy could offer a major technological contribution to the knowledge of minerals. Alchemy never penetrated durably the academic world, however, in spite of several attempts. One of the reasons for this is to be found in a translation made by Alfred of Sareshel around 1160 of a section of Avicenna’s *Kitāb al-Shifāʾ*, in which the possibility of transmuting species is denied (in a well-known passage called the *Sciant Artifices*). The translator added this section at the end of Aristotle’s *Meteora* (under the title of *De mineralibus*, more generally known today, although erroneously, as the *De congelatione et conglutinatione lapidum*), and it was therefore regarded as one of Aristotle’s genuine works. This wrong assumption was largely responsible for the development of what we commonly call the alchemical debate, in reference to the fierce discussion among the thirteenth- and fourteenth-century scholars about the possibility of transmutation.

One of the major problems met with by the translators of alchemical works was that a large part of the recipes that formed the basis of the *practicae* was transmitted orally. Reading these recipes was very difficult and many words were coded. Some of these Arabic codes are found in Latin alchemy, as translations or transcriptions. Moreover, the method called *verbum de verbo* (translation word for word) of many translators made texts quite difficult to understand.

## The Thirteenth Century

From the beginning of the thirteenth century, the assimilation of Arabic alchemy went further. Treatises started being written directly in Latin in the style of the Arabic translations, and attributed to renowned authorities, such as the *Summa perfectionis* of Pseudo-Geber. The authenticity of these first Latin alchemic works is subject to various discussions.

The translator Michael Scot (d. 1235) probably wrote an *Ars alchemiae*. His alchemy is entirely based on Arabic elements. It contains very scanty theoretical information and is mostly concerned with recipes. The main scope of this author was to solve obscurities and contradictions of Arabic texts in order to provide a more intelligible alchemy to the Latin world.

Albert the Great (1193–1280) wrote a *De mineralibus*, in which he assumed the possibility of transmutation (even though he asserted that he never met an alchemist succeeding in his work, his philosophical principles did not allow him to deny this possibility). This work is the most accomplished attempt to develop a proper mineralogy in the Latin West. It is based on Greek and Arabic materials, which were assimilated and adapted. In addition to this, some 30 alchemical treatises are attributed to him, probably wrongly.

The Franciscan Roger Bacon (1214–1293), in his *Opus maius*, regarded alchemy as an important field of knowledge. Assuming that the alchemical work was a sort of medicine for metals, he was the first in the West to assume that it could be applied to the human body and, hence, that it could be used to remove its corruptions and prolong a man's life (the so-called *prolongatio vitae*). Alchemy was therefore to his eyes one of the foundations of medicine. Many apocryphal alchemical treatises are attributed to Roger Bacon, too.

At the end of the thirteenth century, in addition to the translations of Jābir b. Ḥayyān's texts mentioned above, a corpus of Latin texts began to circulate under the name of "Geber" (the Latin name of Jābir b. Ḥayyān), the *Summa perfectionis* being the most successful. Recent research tentatively attributes the authorship of this work to the

Franciscan Paul of Taranto, without any certainty. The alchemy of the *Summa perfectionis* had a very large diffusion and was regarded as a major source for centuries. The theory of "mercury alone" is one of its typical features: mercury is the main base of metals and is the only principle of their medicine. The alchemical work is no longer made on the basis of organic matters (as it was said in the pseudo-Avicennian *De anima*, the main text of this trend in the Latin West) but on the basis of various mercurial compositions made from minerals (mercury, ammoniac salt, sulfur, and arsenic).

The technological and economical rise of the thirteenth century led scholars of this time to be significantly interested in alchemy. During this century, alchemy was usually not mixed up with allegorical considerations. Neither was it more practical, however, as is often assumed, first because alchemy had always had a practical side and then because its development during this century was theoretical as well. However, from the end of the thirteenth century, the increase in the number of alchemical frauds aroused suspicion about alchemy's validity.

Scholastics (such as Vincent de Beauvais, Robert of Kildwarby, and Thomas Aquinas) never ranged alchemy among the *artes liberales*. They rather considered it as a mechanical art, a tool used for the sake of other disciplines (such as medicine and metallurgy). The theoretical side of alchemy was explained by physics, by natural philosophy. As an art basing its operations on philosophical principles, alchemy was linked with medicine and agriculture (which were also considered as secondary fields of physics).

## The Fourteenth Century

During the fourteenth century, the main sources of alchemical authors were not directly the Arabic texts translated but the Latin treatises composed during the thirteenth century: the *Summa perfectionis* became one of the main authoritative texts. Moreover, the allegorical trend of alchemy began to expand in the Latin West; the *Turba philosophorum* and the *Emerald Tablet* came to

be used more widely. We also observe a Christianization of alchemy, the appearance of a more religious alchemy (as was already the case in Arabic alchemy). The pharmaceutical side of alchemy was particularly well developed (especially the distillation of alcohol). The attempt to find the elixir of life and the medical topic of body restoration became a core issue.

The alchemical debate remained intense in the fourteenth century. The opponents of alchemy, in addition to the *Sciant artifices*, asserted that the transformation of species was against nature; in reaction to this assertion, alchemists invoked the fact that they were doing what nature itself was doing (the creation of metals), the only difference being that they did it more quickly. A decree entitled *Spondent quas non exhibent* is said to have been promulgated (in 1316?) by Pope John XXII against false coiners (although this decree does not appear before the end of the fourteenth century). Although it did not condemn alchemy as such, this decree encouraged suspicion against alchemists (in addition to the increase in the number of frauds). However, no juridical condemnation of alchemists took place. One of the major opponents to alchemy was Nicolas Eymerich (1320–1399), who asserted in his *Contra alchymistas* that alchemists, once they had been disappointed with their art, were turning to demons or to the devil.

Some alchemical treatises are attributed to Arnald of Villanova (1240–1311), the famous Catalan doctor. These texts are probably not genuine, but the question is not solved yet. In the *Rosarius philosophorum*, the most widespread of these works, we find an alchemy based on the theory of the “mercury alone” (like in the *Summa perfectionis*). The alchemist has to reduce a metal to its *prima materia* (mercury containing sulfur) and project this mercury on a vile metal in order to transmute it. He rejected the use of organic matter. He also mentioned, following Roger Bacon, the possibility of healing the human body, thanks to alchemy. Other treatises attributed to Arnald of Villanova are characterized by a more religious doctrine, as the *De secretis naturae* and the *Tractatus parabolicus*, in which the alchemist established a link between the philosopher’s stone and Christ.

This allegorical and religious kind of alchemy is also found in the alchemical treatises wrongly attributed to Thomas Aquinas (such as the *De multiplicatione*, c. 1320).

Toward the middle of the fourteenth century, a commentary on the *Emerald Tablet* was written under the name of a certain Hortulanus, in which the alchemical Work is meant to be a reproduction of God’s creation.

In his *Pretiosa margarita novella* (written between 1330 and 1350), Petrus Bonus of Ferrara synthesized the main alchemical ideas of his time, mainly from the *Summa perfectionis*. He was more a philosopher than an alchemist, and considered alchemy as a divine art, introducing theology into the debate.

Ramon Llull (c. 1233–c. 1316), the Catalan philosopher, opposed alchemy. However, at the beginning of the fourteenth century, a corpus of apocryphal alchemical texts began to circulate under his name. This corpus gained a very wide diffusion (until the seventeenth century), and many different ideas and trends are found in it. The most important one (and probably the first) is the *Testamentum*: the alchemical doctrine of this work shows close resemblance to the doctrine expounded in the works attributed to Arnald of Villanova (but, as the dates of those texts are not clearly settled, it is impossible to assert which way the influence spreads). One of the specificities of the *Testamentum* lies in that it mentions for the first time in the West, in addition to the transmutation of metal and healing of the human body, the creation of gemstones through the alchemical work. The Arabic concept of elixir also occupies a very important place in this book. The observation of colors as signs of different stages in the alchemical work became central in the pseudo-Llullian corpus. This work was raising alchemy to the status of natural philosophy, which contributed to giving it a very long-lasting success (until the seventeenth century).

In the *Liber de consideratione quintae essentiae omnium rerum* (c. 1351–1352), Johannes de Rupescissa (d. after 1365) introduced into alchemy the use of the concept of the quintessence to designate the result of repeated distillations. In the trend of the *prolongatio vitae* of Roger Bacon, he asserted that the quintessence



provides incorruptibility for corruptible things (in the sublunary world), considering it as a terrestrial corollary to the celestial ether. He also showed a very religious fervor in his writings in defense of the Franciscan order. His ideas were followed by many alchemists: for instance, one of the pseudo-Llullian treatises, the *De secretis naturae*, is clearly indebted to his work.

The book of Guillaume Sedacer (d. 1382), the *Sedacina*, is an original work. Beside the list of major alchemical authorities of this period, he created a proper alchemical vocabulary (mainly from Arabic words).

## The Fifteenth Century

To date, the alchemy of the fifteenth century has not received much attention. The main alchemical doctrines of this century are those of Arnald of Villanova, Johannes de Rupescissa, and especially Pseudo-Ramon Llull. This was the time of an enormous production of alchemical manuscripts. Among alchemists of this century, George Ripley (fl. 1470) should be mentioned as a very original author. He composed an alchemical poem in English entitled *The Compound of Alchymie [. . .] Conteyning Twelve Gates*, mainly inspired by pseudo-Llullian theories and by the work of a mysterious alchemist, Guido de Montanor. This poem quickly became a classic of medieval alchemy.

## Conclusion

Medieval alchemy was at first based on Arabic texts and then specifically on Latin compositions. It remained a marginal knowledge, and never came into universities, but had a very close link with natural philosophy and medicine. Treatises were generally compilations of ideas of previous renowned alchemists, and the great authorities were just a few: some Arabic translations (especially those attributed to al-Rāzī and Avicenna), the *Summa perfectionis*, and some texts attributed to Arnald of Villanova, Ramon Llull, and Johannes de Rupescissa.

## Cross-References

- ▶ [Abū Bakr al-Rāzī, Muḥammad ibn Zakarīyā' \(Rhazes\)](#)
- ▶ [Adelard of Bath](#)
- ▶ [Albert the Great](#)
- ▶ [Alchemy in the Arab World](#)
- ▶ [Apollonius of Tyana](#)
- ▶ [Arabic Texts: Natural Philosophy, Latin Translations of](#)
- ▶ [Hermes Trismegistus](#)
- ▶ [Ibn Sīnā, Abū 'Alī \(Avicenna\)](#)
- ▶ [Ibn Sīnā \(Avicenna\), Latin Translations of](#)
- ▶ [Natural Philosophy](#)
- ▶ [Ramon Llull](#)
- ▶ [Roger Bacon](#)
- ▶ [Thomas Aquinas](#)

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## Alexander of Aphrodisias and Arabic Aristotelianism

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### Abstract

Alexander of Aphrodisias, commentator *par excellence* of Aristotle, lived about 200 AD. A fairly important part of his works was translated into Arabic during the ninth century and greatly influenced the reception and

interpretation of the Stagirite's thought in the East. Important fragments of his commentary on the *Metaphysics* have been preserved in Ibn Rušd's own *Great Commentary* on that work. Among the independent treatises preserved in Arabic, the most important are *On the Principles of the Universe*, *On Providence* and *On the Intellect*.

The longest (about 25 pages) of Alexander of Aphrodisias' works preserved in Arabic is the treatise known as *On the Principles of the Universe*. As it happens, it is also a text which is totally unknown in the Greek sources, although its main theses can be found in the author's other works, the commentaries and above all the collection of short dissertations transmitted under the general name of *Questions*. It lays down that the heavenly bodies are moved by souls and that their motions arise in consequence of the desire that they feel for the First Cause of the universe (God). Their circular motion expresses their desire or their will (the two notions are not always clearly distinguished) to imitate or to become similar to the immutability of the self-thinking divine mind which moves them as object of thought and love. As the motions of the fixed stars and of the different planets are diverse, they are the cause of the diversity and variety of the physical phenomena which they originate in the world of generation and decay, situated below the sphere of the moon. This influence occurs through a "spiritual power," identified with nature, which penetrates all parts of the world, thus ensuring its cohesion and permanence. The condition of the universe is thus similar to that of the city or the household in which the authority of the leader is the cause of order at all levels. Although these theses have their origin in Aristotle, in particular in the twelfth book (Λ) of the *Metaphysics*, they are developed by Alexander in the sense of working out the connection between the heavenly and terrestrial realms and laying much more emphasis on it.

The treatise *On Providence* begins in truly Aristotelian fashion with a doxographical introduction which sets out briefly and rejects two

antagonistic conceptions of divine providence. The first is that of Epicurus and his school, building on the old atomistic doctrine of Leucippus and Democritus, according to which the gods do not play any role in the governance of the universe which is the product of pure chance and of the haphazard collision of atoms in the void. The second is that of the Stoics (Zeno of Citium is cited by name). For them providence rules all worldly processes and nothing escapes the benevolent care of the gods. According to Alexander, both positions are unacceptable. The harmony of the cosmos and the regularity of the natural processes make it totally unlikely that they should be entirely devoid of design. On the other hand, it would be unworthy of the gods' majesty to care for every individual being in itself. Such a conduct would degrade them to a position inferior to that of the creatures since the end, in any natural or moral process, is always above the entity acting towards it. Alexander's aim is to develop a theory of providence which should avoid the opposite excesses of the other schools while conforming to the principles of the Aristotelian system. His solution is based for the most part on astronomical considerations deriving from the *Metaphysics* and the treatises *On the Heavens* and *On Generation and Corruption*. The physical processes taking place in the world of generation and decay depend on the regular motions of the heavenly bodies and are themselves subject to unchanging laws. Just as the king does not personally look after each and every one of his subjects, but establishes general rules and ensures that they are observed and followed, in the same way God or the gods provide for the general welfare of the world as a whole, but it would be absurd to assume that they know each individual being as such. The annual motion of the sun causes the alternation of the seasons and thus creates the conditions appropriate for human life. As the annual motions of the stars are themselves dependent on the gods, that is, on the heavenly intellects which move them as objects of love, the beings of the physical world and man himself depend on them. Alexander however goes one step further by explaining that the gods have knowledge of what happens in the natural world, a thesis which is surely difficult

to reconcile with the Aristotelian notion of the self-thinking divine intellect. His doctrine is summed up in the idea that providence is not exerted by the gods "according to the first intention," but is the secondary and concomitant effect of their existence.

These two treatises, then, cover in part the same ground. They sketch a grand cosmological and metaphysical scheme in which the heavenly bodies constitute a level of reality intermediate between the purely immaterial intellects which govern them as final causes and the world of generation and decay situated below the sphere of the moon. The connection between the opposite realms of immutability, regular motion, and change is twofold: by desiring and imitating their immaterial and unmoved movers, the stars regulate the seasonal and regular alternation of physical conditions down on earth. The eternity of the species, contrasting with the constant coming-to-be and disappearing of individuals, reflects in its way this celestial unchangeability. The particular appeal of this system resided for the Arab philosophers in that it allowed to establish, between God and the world, the close and logical link which was missing in the original Aristotelian texts. By restricting God's knowledge of the particulars to the species, however, it paved the way for the antiphilosophical controversies of al-Ghazālī and others.

These two concepts, the downward influence of the heavens on the world of nature through the divine power emanating from them and the upward motion of assimilation, form the basic components of the "cosmometaphysics," as it has sometimes been dubbed, of the great Arab philosophers. These elements are found more or less scattered in the main works of al-Fārābī, the *Mabādi' Arā' Ahl al-Madīna al-Fāila*, and *Al-Siyāsa al-Madaniyya*, also known under the title of *Mabādi' al-Mawjūdāt*. The parallelism between the structure of the universe and that of the state which governs the plan of these two treatises also derives from the analogical conception which is particularly evident in Alexander's work. But it is Ibn Sīnā (Avicenna) who first built up these elements into a coherent and systematic whole. To be sure, he went beyond the

Alexandrian scheme, particularly in the distinction he established between the souls and the intellects of the heavenly spheres, as well as between necessary and contingent being. The fact remains that Alexander's exegesis provided the general framework and the main components of his theory as expounded in greatest detail in the ninth book of the *Metaphysics* (*al-Ilāhiyyāt*) of the *K. al-Šifā'*, the sixth chapter of which is devoted to the question of providence.

Although he opposed Ibn Sīnā's views on many topics, Ibn Rušd (Averroes) is equally under the sway of Alexander with regard to the problems sketched above. The impact of the latter's interpretation of Aristotle is felt in the *Paraphrase of the Metaphysics* as well as in the *Great Commentary* (*tafsīr*) on the same, although the source in that case is Alexander's own commentary rather than the short epistles. Other works of Ibn Rushd's are also indebted to the *Principles of the Universe*, notably the *De Substantia Orbis* preserved in Hebrew and the *Tahāfut al-Tahāfut* for the conception of nature as a divine power emanating from the heavenly bodies.

Many lesser works bear witness to the deep and lasting influence of Alexander in the Islamic world, though in many cases it may derive from the two great philosophers just mentioned rather than to the direct use of his epistles. Suffice it to name here the Jewish Arab philosopher of Spain Maimonides and the late compiler 'Abd al-Laṭīf al-Baḡhdādī.

In the field of psychology, and more specifically with regard to the theory of intellect, the influence of Alexander's exegesis of Aristotle was also decisive through the Arabic translation of his short epistle *On the Intellect*. The re-interpretation of the active intellect postulated by Aristotle in the third book of the *De Anima* as an entity completely separate from matter and situated outside the human soul is the most outstanding feature of this short but hugely influential work. It is on this basis that the Arab philosophers, particularly al-Fārābī and Ibn Sīnā, evolved their own view of the Active Intellect as the last of the celestial intellects emanated from the First Cause and governing not only human intellection but the natural phenomena and the generation of forms in

their entirety. The translator of this text misunderstood it on several important points and thus unwittingly gave rise to new entities, in particular the so-called acquired intellect. These were then taken up by the Arab philosophers as genuine elements of Aristotle's system and incorporated in their increasingly complicated attempts at explaining the *modus operandi* of the human intellect and the way in which it abstracts intelligible forms from the sensibles. Al-Fārābī thus wrote a short *Epistle on the Intellect* which is heavily indebted to Alexander's noetics and exerted in turn a profound influence on his successors, culminating in Ibn Rushd's *Great Commentary on the De Anima* and initiating through it endless debates among the Western schoolmen.

## Cross-References

- ▶ [Aristotelianism in the Greek, Latin, Syriac, Arabic, and Hebrew Traditions](#)
- ▶ [Ibn Rushd \(Averroes\), Latin Translations of](#)

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maintaining a fundamental, doctrinal loyalty to Augustine, while also trying to incorporate various doctrines of Aristotle into his systematic thought. It is this intellectual trajectory that has led scholars to regard him as the founder of the early Franciscan school. Like other famous scholastics, he is known by an epithet – he is the “Irrefutable Doctor” (*doctor irrefragibilis*).

## Alexander of Hales

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### Abstract

Alexander of Hales (c. 1185–1245) is a thirteenth-century thinker who made major contributions to the development of Scholasticism, especially insofar as it became a rigorously systematic and philosophical method for doing theology. Alexander contributed to this development in two principal ways: he is among the earliest scholars to engage the thought of the newly translated works of Aristotle, and he is the first to use the *Sentences* of Peter Lombard as the basis for his lectures in theology. This momentous choice marks the shift of theology from focus on biblical commentary to systematic treatment of questions. Alexander also became the first Franciscan to be regent master of theology at Paris, when this “well-respected and rich man” entered the order in the academic year 1236–1237, while also retaining his chair of theology at the University of Paris. Alexander’s influence among early Franciscans came about in three important ways: through his leadership of the Franciscan *studium generale* at *le grand couvent des Cordeliers* at Paris; through his most famous pupil, Bonaventure (who reveres him as his mentor); and through a *summa* of theology that was compiled, to some extent, under his direction before his death. It was eventually attributed to him and was widely used within the order. Alexander provides evidence of

## Biographical Information

Alexander was likely born in Hales, Shropshire (now Halesowen, Worcestershire), between 1180 and 1186 (Doucet 1951). He studied at Paris and became a master of arts there sometime before 1210. He incepted as regent master of theology around 1220 or 1221. In 1230 he represented the university at the papal curia of Pope Gregory IX. He became a canon of St. Paul’s, London, and later at Lichfield (the cathedral city for the diocese in which Hales was); by 1231 he was archdeacon at Coventry. In 1235 he was sent on a diplomatic mission to France for King Henry III. In 1236, when he was at least 50 years old, he entered the Franciscans. He attended the First Council of Lyon (1244–1245) and died on August 21, 1245, shortly after returning from it. He was buried at *le grand couvent des Cordeliers* in Paris; his tomb was damaged in a fire in 1580. In 1795, it was demolished, along with the church, during the revolution (Wierzbicki 2008).

## Thought

Until developments in scholarship in the twentieth century, Alexander was most famous for a *summa* of theology attributed to him, long referred to as the *Summa fratris Alexandri*. During the production of the modern critical edition, scholars began to question his sole authorship of the *summa*, and it is now clear that this work is not exclusively by Alexander. We know definite parts of this work are not by Alexander (Doucet 1948); the entire fourth volume, for example, is not by him. Although Alexander is not the sole author, he may have supervised the redaction of the text up

until his death in 1245, and those scholars whom we know did work on the compilation of this text were his collaborators in a common project: Jean de la Rochelle (c. 1190/1200–1245), Odo Rigaud (d. 1275), and William of Melitona. Jean de la Rochelle was a colleague of Alexander's at Paris and succeeded him in his chair when the latter resigned. Odo and William were students of Alexander; Odo succeeded La Rochelle in the Franciscan chair at Paris. It is thus at least accurate to say that this early and influential *summa* is the work of a "Halesian circle" of Franciscans which produced the final version, completed by 1257, and now usually referred to as the *Summa Halesiana* (or *Halensis*). "It was meant to provide students at *studia generalia* with an up-to-date systematic theological encyclopedia" (Roest 126). In this regard it had considerable influence within the Franciscan network of *studia*. Gilson takes this work to illustrate "the spirit of the thirteenth-century Franciscan school of theology" at Paris (Gilson 1955). It does provide evidence of doctrines that some scholars have called an "Augustinianism," at least as this was held prior to the 1260s: the identity of the soul and its powers, divine illumination, universal hylomorphism, and the impossibility of creation from eternity. Boehner (1945) provides a detailed exposition of the philosophical doctrines of this text. Given the complicated authorship of the *Summa Halesiana*, the definitive sources for Alexander's own teachings must be sought in those works that can be definitively attributed to him.

The discovery of the most important of these authentic works was announced in 1946, namely, his lectures on the *Sentences* of Peter Lombard, edited and published as *Glossa in quatuor libros Petri Lombardi* (1951–1957). The editors date this work to a period between 1223 and 1227. In addition to this work, we also have many disputed questions from Alexander's teaching career, both from before and after he became a friar. Sixty-eighty questions, dating from before he entered the Franciscans, were published in 1960. Several questions from after he became a friar are now available in critical editions, as well as certain other works, including an exposition of the Franciscan rule (Wierzbicki 2013a,b, 2015, 2016;

see list, Wierzbicki 2008). Wierzbicki has established that many of these disputed questions from his Franciscan years were incorporated into the second book of *Summa Halensis* (Wierzbicki 2015; Robson 2017).

Alexander's *Glossa* on Peter the Lombard's *Sentences* are important for many reasons, three to be considered here: its methodology, its sources, and its aim. It is based on the structure of the *Sentences*, and so is divided into four parts: God, creation, the incarnation, and the sacraments.

In his commentary Alexander adopts a dialectical method that becomes typical of scholastic methodology; this method allows him to treat questions one-by-one, presenting arguments on various sides of a question before responding to opinions contrary to his own position. This methodology did not go without criticism: Alexander's contemporary, Roger Bacon (c. 1214–1294), for example, faults him for his role in directing theology away from a biblically-focused method by his decision to teach by commenting on the *Sentences* of Peter the Lombard, into which he also introduced the distinctions within the text. As Gilson points out, the *Glossa* already contain, for many topics, the basic structure of the scholastic *quaestio*: (1) a statement of the question, (2) objections against the author's answer, (3) an affirmation of the author's answer with a theological authority, (4) the justification of the answer, (5) responses to objections (Gilson 1955).

The range of sources that Alexander brings together in the *Glossa* is extensive and reflects the range of the vastly expanded medieval library also being consulted by his contemporaries at Paris, such as William of Auxerre (1140/1150–1231) and William of Auvergne (d. 1249). His cautious eclecticism is worthy of considerable note for anyone surveying the development of thirteenth-century thought, for, although he is often hesitant to follow Aristotle, he is, by no means, hostile. On the contrary, he draws on major writings of Aristotle and is clearly working to take considerable account of various teachings of Aristotle as he constructs his theological synthesis. But he also incorporates various writings from the Christian tradition, both ancient – including Pseudo-Dionysius, Boethius, and John



Damascene – and more recent – Bernard of Clairvaux, Anselm of Canterbury, and the Victorines.

Alexander is attempting a theological synthesis that takes account of both the intellectual heritage of Christendom and Greek philosophical thought, while also covering the entire range of theology, from God to creatures to their return to their creator. Alexander is thus a major contributor to the Scholastic project of an all-encompassing synthesis, which attempts to harmonize discordant authorities in its quest for truth.

Alexander writes as a theologian who regards faith and reason as distinct in various ways even if they are ultimately harmonious. Although he has not worked out the nuances of this distinction, Alexander thinks that we can know that God exists by use of reason alone, despite the fact that we have no direct knowledge of the divine essence. Alexander presents a sort of anthology of proofs for God's existence, including a brief version of Aristotle's argument from the *Physics* for a first, unmoved mover: "Every mover, as such, is led back to some supreme immovable principle; otherwise one proceeds *in infinitum*. Likewise, none of the things that are has being from itself, because being would have no term, and so, the existence of a supreme being is able to be inferred" (*Glossa* I 1951).

Alexander also thinks that we can accurately arrive at certain conclusions about the divine nature by negation and by analogy, that is, by denying what is unworthy of God or by coming to recognize how certain perfections can be predicated analogously of God. So, based on this intellectual foundation, Alexander works at length to articulate an understanding of God as simple, infinite, omnipotent, omniscient, and immutable.

Among these divine attributes, Alexander gives considerable attention to God's knowledge. He takes his starting point from Augustine who posited the Platonic forms as ideas in the divine mind. He tries to work out the difficulties of claiming a plurality of ideas in the simplicity of the divine being. Given this divine simplicity, he reasons that whatever is in God must, in fact, be God. And so, he concludes that the divine ideas only differ in a manner of speaking. It is in this

way that God himself is the exemplar of creatures. Alexander thus affirms the unity of God while also establishing "exemplarism" as a principal causal relation from which to consider creatures and their creator.

In contrast to God's simplicity, creatures are distinguished by various levels of composition. Alexander adopts a version of Aristotle's theory of hylomorphism, which holds that corporeal beings are composed of matter and form. The distinguishing principle of a human being is a rational soul, which then enters into union with matter. The rational soul is the principle of life, sensation, knowing, and willing. The powers of the soul are one with its substance; hence the human soul is the image of God in its substance (and not merely accidentally). Alexander understands freedom of choice to be a function of the complicated interaction of both intellect and will.

A focus on the will and freedom is found in the Alexander's ethical teachings, which clearly reflect his strong allegiance to Augustine. Morality is a matter of loving rightly and requires due respect for the hierarchy of goods. Alexander attempts to synthesize a charity-based ethics with a theory of divine and natural law. Many of his ethical teachings are developed at greater length in his disputed questions.

Alexander, influential among the early Franciscans, such as Richard Rufus and Jean de la Rochelle, represents a trajectory of scholastic thought that adheres closely to Augustine while attempting to synthesize a wide range of sources.

## Cross-References

- ▶ [Augustine](#)
- ▶ [Bonaventure](#)
- ▶ [Peter Lombard](#)

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## Alexandrian Tradition into Arabic: Medicine

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### Abstract

Alexandria was the centre of Hellenistic scholarship. It is here that the works of the classical physicians Hippocrates and Galen (d. CE 216) were collected and commented upon, that the canon of (mostly) 16 books by Galen, meant for medical instruction, was established and abridged to the *Summaria Alexandrinorum*,

that the scholarly genres of (medical) encyclopedia and commentary were cultivated, and that “Galenism,” primarily Galen’s system of humoral pathology and his teleological interpretation of anatomy began to flourish.

All these texts and many more by authors other than Hippocrates and Galen, all the genres of medical writing and ways of medical instruction, not least a close relation between Galenism and Alexandrian Aristotelianism found their way into, and were to dominate, Arabic medicine. The principal vehicle for this complex transmission was the translation campaign, Greek into Arabic, of scholars, active under early ‘Abbāsīd rule (ninth century CE) in Baghdad, and led by the Nestorian master translator, Ḥunayn b. Isḥāq. This campaign not only laid the foundation for a consistent medical and pharmaceutical terminology in Arabic but also paved the way for a more flexible postclassical Arabic. The creative appropriation of Hellenistic scholarship in general, and medicine in particular, as collected and canonized in Alexandria, constituted a defining political and cultural feature of early ‘Abbāsīd society. However, it remains a matter of dispute how direct and continuous that tradition “from Alexandria to Baghdad” was.

Alexandria, on the western corner of the Nile Delta, had become, soon after its foundation by Alexander the Great in 332 BCE, the centre of medical scholarship, represented mainly by the works of the early third century anatomists Herophilus and Erasistratus. Supported by the tolerant reign of the Ptolemies, Hellenistic literature and scholarship generally flourished. Although under Roman and Byzantine rule the institutional focus and symbol of this scholarship, the famous Library of Alexandria, and its successors, was destroyed on several occasions, and although some Christian thinkers tended to denounce Greek philosophy as “pagan,” the Hellenistic syllabus of learning as cultivated in Alexandria maintained its exemplary function. Particularly after Justinian’s closing of the

Athenian Academy in CE 529, Alexandria became the principal heir to a long tradition of Hellenistic philosophy and the sciences; its numerous medico-philosophical schools, called *academia* or *museion*, offered library services and instruction. It is in these schools that medical authors like John Philoponus (d. c. 570), Stephanus of Alexandria (middle of the sixth century), Palladius (second half of the sixth century), and John of Alexandria (early seventh century) taught, mainly writing commentaries on works by the classical authors Hippocrates and, foremost, Galen (d. CE 216), and it is the curriculum of these schools that was to dominate the academic teaching of late Antiquity and early Islam.

The core of the medical curriculum consisted of a number of Hippocratic works, mainly those commented upon by Galen, and a standardized set of, mostly, 16 works by Galen meant by himself to serve as an introduction for beginners, starting with *De sectis* (in Arabic *K. al-Fīraq*) and comprising, among others and in varying order, *De pulsibus ad tirones* (*K. al-Nabḍ al-ṣaġīr*), *Ars parva* (*K. al-Ṣinā’a al-ṣaġīra*), and *Ad Glauconem de medendi methodo* (*K. ilā Iġlawqun fī l-ta’attī li-shifā’ al-amrāḍ*). For school instruction, these 16 books were abridged and partially commented upon, around 500 (or perhaps only after the Arabic conquest of Egypt in 640), in compendia, called *Summaria Alexandrinorum*, and subsequently translated into Arabic (*Jawāmi’ al-Iskandarāniyyīn*). No Greek bibliographer lists this corpus; it is only extant in Arabic versions, followed by Hebrew and Latin translations. Apart from establishing the syllabus of medical textbooks, the Alexandrian scholarly tradition was also to shape Islamic medical literature by developing the genre of the encyclopedia, or compilation (e.g., that of Oribasius, who died after 395, and of Paul of Aegina, writing around 640), on the one hand, and of that of the commentary on the other, starting with Galen’s extensive commenting on the Hippocratic writings and culminating in the almost boundless Arabic, Persian, and Turkish commentaries spreading from Avicenna’s medical encyclopedia, the *Canon of Medicine*. A further feature of medical theory that originated in Alexandrian scholarship and was

destined to pervade adjacent cultures, that is, the Persian and the Syriac ones, and subsequent traditions, that is, the Islamic and the Latin West, was what has been called Galenism, that is, the system of humoral pathology and the teleological orientation of anatomy (as displayed in *De usu partium*) shaped by Galen.

The translators from Greek into Arabic, working under the first ‘Abbāsids, did not, however, stop at this core of medical texts, but undertook to make available the integral texts contained in the *Summaria*, the whole voluminous *Corpus Galenianum*, more Hippocratic works, numerous works by the important author Rufus of Ephesus (around CE 100), Philagrius (first half of the fourth century), Alexander of Tralleis (d. 605, his *Therapeutica*, Arabic *al-Kunnāsh*), and others, to medical theory and practice as cultivated in Baghdad, the new capital of the Islamic empire, and other urban centers. A priceless document of (a) the interplay between the political and administrative authorities active in ninth-century Baghdad and the translators, in a very broad sense the intermediaries between Alexandria and Baghdad, and of (b) their professional skill, reaching a remarkably high level within decades, is a letter of the master translator, Ḥunayn b. Isḥāq (died in the seventies of the ninth century), to a patron on *What Was Translated of Galen’s Works*. From Ḥunayn’s inventory, we learn that he himself was engaged in the search for Greek medical manuscripts, beyond the canon of “works that were read in the school (*kuttāb*) of Alexandria,” trying to secure more than one copy of a given work in order to collate the texts and arrive at their “original” reading. In revising previous translations and providing new ones, many of them via Syriac versions, often in cooperation with colleagues, notably his son, Isḥāq b. Ḥunayn, and his nephew, Ḥubaysh al-Ḥasan al-Aḥsam, and in composing original works following the models of Alexandrian medical writing, Ḥunayn created a broad basis for all medical scholarship in classical Islam. Moreover, he and his collaborators established a fairly consistent medical terminology and, challenged by the syntax of Greek technical texts and exploiting the inherent potential of classical Arabic, contributed to the

emergence of a more flexible “Middle” Arabic suitable for scientific and philosophical writing.

The immediate need for medicine in the Hellenized centers of the Islamic Near East is demonstrated by the fact that the Hippocratic and Galenic writings, as channeled through the Alexandrian syllabus, belong to the earliest texts that were translated from Greek into Arabic, as well as by the highly visible prominence enjoyed by physicians serving the ‘Abbāsid rulers in Baghdad. The most influential group of physicians is that of the Nestorian family Bukhtīshū‘ whose member Jurjīs b. Jibrīl (d. after 787) is reported to have been called from the Iranian city of Gondēshāpūr to Baghdad to treat the caliph al-Manṣūr (r. 754–775) and whose long line of successors represents the transition of Alexandrian medicine in Syriac language to that in Arabic and exemplifies the close cooperation between patrons and sponsors of the translation movement: caliphs, courtiers, administrative and military functionaries, and experts: physicians, directors of hospitals, translators, medical authors, a number of them in personal union. From the biographies of the Bukhtīshū‘ family as well as from many different sources it becomes clear that the creative appropriation of Hellenistic scholarship in general, and medicine in particular, as collected and canonized in Alexandria, constituted a defining political and cultural feature of early ‘Abbāsid society.

It is a matter of dispute how direct and continuous the tradition “from Alexandria to Baghdad” was and what role Christian scholars played in this tradition. Previous scholarship relies on the accounts of philosophers such as al-Fārābī who constructs an uninterrupted teaching tradition of Aristotle’s works from Alexandria to Baghdad with Antioch and Ḥarrān as intermediary stations and with Christian scholars as exclusive carriers of this tradition, and, on the other hand, of physicians such as Ibn Riḏwān (d. 1068) and Ibn Jumay‘ (d. 1198). These attribute a general decay of the medical art after Galen to the Christian authorities who, they write, had no interest in intellectual matters and were content to work with abridged and popularized compendia by, for example, Oribasius and Paul of Aegina and with digests in the form of the *Summaria*

*Alexandrinorum*. After the Muslim conquest of the Near East, specifically of Alexandria, the new rulers transferred the medical instruction to Antioch and Ḥarrān, and it is only with the ‘Abbāsīd ruler al-Ma’mūn (r. 813–833) that scholarly medicine was revived and saved from oblivion. The anti-Christian sentiment of these authors, absent from earlier accounts, but highly influential down to Ibn Khaldūn’s *Muqaddima* (end of the fourteenth century, and beyond), and the purported “humanist” role of the ‘Abbāsīd sovereigns as true heirs to Greek scholarship are due to a conscious anti-Byzantine policy initiated by these themselves. In fact, the tradition from Alexandria to Baghdad was carried to a considerable extent, but not exclusively, by Christian teachers and writers, and more importantly, the chain of that tradition was by no means a single, continuous one; rather one has to assume a simultaneous existence of philosophical and medical schools in the Hellenized cities of the Near East. At any rate, the consistency of the medical canon, of the ways of instruction, not least the close relationship between Galenic medicine and the Alexandrian Aristotelianism during the centuries between Alexandria and Baghdad remain remarkable.

## Cross-References

- ▶ [Alexandrian Tradition into Arabic: Philosophy](#)
- ▶ [al-Fārābī, Abū Naṣr](#)
- ▶ [Galen, Arabic](#)
- ▶ [Ibn Khaldūn, Abū Zayd ‘Abdarraḥmān](#)
- ▶ [John Philoponus](#)
- ▶ [Translations from Greek into Arabic](#)

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## Alexandrian Tradition into Arabic: Philosophy

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### Abstract

The doctrinal impact of the School of Alexandria on Arabic philosophy becomes increasingly clear, thanks to a deeper knowledge of the textual tradition of Arabic and Syriac philosophy. One may go as far as to see in al-Fārābī (d. 950), Avicenna (c. 980–1037), and the respective traditions they initiated, the culmination of the scholarly endeavor of

Ammonius and his successors. But at first glance, this Arabic synthesis left no room for Plato and the *Chaldean Oracles*. In fact, the articulation of Aristotelian logical and physical inquiries with Plato's theological insights, which had prevailed in Alexandria, gave way to a system wherein the rational sciences reached their highest point in a nondiscursive contact with an Eternal entity, whether God or a lower principle. The process of reception of the Alexandrian tradition into Arabic began in the eighth century and ended in the eleventh century. Alexandrian philosophy continued to nurture Arabic thought up to Averroes' time (1126–1198) and beyond.

In what follows, the expressions "Alexandrian philosophy" and "Alexandrian philosophers" will refer to the School of Ammonius son of Hermias (around 470 to after 517), his students and their students, and Simplicius (c. 490–560), who was also known to the Arabic authors.

## Introduction

The political, social, and economic reasons why Greek science was translated and adapted in Arabic have been examined and documented by D. Gutas in his *Greek Thought, Arabic Culture*. On one hand, the Islamic Empire was in need of science and techniques to assure its power and to subsequently overthrow the Byzantine Empire's claim to incarnating the Greek legacy. On the other hand, it was in the political and economic interest of all ancient, more learned, denominational elites living within the new Islamic Empire's frontiers to provide these sciences. They thus hoped to keep their previous influential positions. And since philosophy was conceived of as "the science of sciences," this may explain the efforts exerted to make it available in Arabic. The fact that ultimately the interests of Pagans and Christians involved in this endeavor socially converged is undeniable. This convergence is exemplarily embodied in the collaboration between the two most skillful and prolific scientists and translators of the ninth century, namely the Christian

Ḥunayn b. Isḥāq (809 to c. 873) and the Pagan Thābit b. Qurra (836–901). But from this undeniable convergence of interests, one ought not to infer that their motivations were even remotely identical. Thābit wrote he yearned for the triumph of intellectual Syriac Hellenic Paganism over Christianity – thanks to or through Islam, one cannot be sure – while Ḥunayn wished to create the conditions for a *modus vivendi* founded on rational, Aristotelian grounds. Whatever their motivation, Greek philosophy found its way into Arabic-Islamic civilization and contributed to shaping Islamic theology, especially in the post-Avicennian tradition (Wisnovsky 2004).

## General Appraisals

Unlike the term "Neoplatonist," which is commonly received among Hellenists to refer to the Alexandrian School, Arabic philosophy scholars have till recently debated whether we should refer to the latter and its members as Aristotelian, Neo-Aristotelian, Neoplatonizing Aristotelian, or representing Neoplatonized Aristotelianism. As for the latter two denominations, possibly coined by McGinnis and Reisman (2005), they seem a fitting description of the reception of the Alexandrian commentary tradition on Aristotle into Arabic. But none of these terms would befit qualifications of the Alexandrian School itself, unless one ignored that Alexandrian philosophers also wrote commentaries on Plato and almost certainly acknowledged the authority of the *Chaldean Oracles*. What thus possibly characterizes Arabic philosophy in its first stage does not apply to its Alexandrian sources. Historically speaking, the main question to address is what happened between the departure to Constantinople of Stephanus, the probable last headmaster of the School, at the beginning of the seventh century (about 610), and the very beginnings of philosophy in Arabic, which can tentatively be traced back to the time of Ibn al-Muqaffa' (c. 720–756). Doctrinally speaking, a related issue to address is how Neoplatonism became Neoplatonized Aristotelianism. Both questions have received various and sometimes contradictory answers.

This problem of appellation not only reflects the debate among specialists of Greek philosophy about the comparative assessment of the doctrinal trend within each one of the Neoplatonist Schools of Athens and Alexandria, but also reflects the lack of agreement on the nature and proportion of Neoplatonism which entered the first doctrinal elaborations by Arab or Arabic-speaking philosophers during the ninth and tenth centuries. Among the global appraisals which currently prevail in Arabic scholarship, I will content myself with sketching out those that have something to do with Alexandria and its influence. As far as I know, there are two.

The first significant global assessment was documented by Endress in some of his studies. Endress considers that the Arabic philosophers' progressive realization of the autonomy of philosophy vis-à-vis the only other, religious, form of knowledge, viewed at that time as the knowledge par excellence, occurred alongside a growing emphasis on philosophy's rigorously rational and demonstrative nature. In other words, as Greek philosophy was being translated, Arabic philosophers became increasingly aware of what might separate them and their discipline from the religious sciences practiced by clerics. That all Arabic Peripatetic philosophers considered religion a lower rhetorical or dialectical form of knowledge also originated in this conception of philosophy as a demonstrative science.

The second assessment was by Wisnovsky (2004: 151) who helpfully described it as follows: "In one sense Avicenna stands as the culmination of the 'Ammonian synthesis,' which I take to be the attempt by Ammonius son of Hermeias, and his successors such as Asclepius (fl. 525), John Philoponus (d. c. 570), and al-Fārābī (d. 950), to fold the broader, Neoplatonic project of reconciling Aristotle with Plato, into the narrower, Peripatetic project of reconciling Aristotle with himself." Wisnovsky's studies on Avicenna show firstly how a wide range of Neoplatonic texts, many of which belong to the Alexandrian tradition, influenced Avicenna's interpretation of Aristotle; and secondly, why a correct assessment of Avicenna's achievements in metaphysical inquiries can only be accounted for if one assumes

that he in some way knew Ammonius' interpretation of the *Metaphysics*, as reported in Asclepius' and Philoponus' respective commentaries on *Metaphysics* and *Physics*. Recently, Bertolacci (2006) also drew attention to the influence of Ammonius' metaphysics on al-Fārābī. And Vallat's study (2004) is entirely devoted to the impact of the School of Alexandria on al-Fārābī's understanding of philosophy as pedagogy.

In order to further characterize the Alexandrian tradition and the way Arabic philosophy inherited from it a part of its salient trends, one must not only take into account the tenet of the concordant reading of Plato and Aristotle, but also the role ascribed firstly to Aristotle and then to Plato within the Alexandrian curriculum of studies. Roughly speaking, one may state that Aristotle stands here for the logical and physical method of inquiry, and Plato for the dialectical and theological approach (see, e.g., Elias, *In Cat.*, p. 124, 17–23: sentence known in Arabic) as well as for all the doctrinal elements related to the salvation of the human soul. Thus, although Plato as an author disappeared from the very conception of the Arabic curriculum of studies for lack of translations, this articulation between rational physical science and theological knowledge lived on in the form of the connection between discursive or dianoetic understanding and an intuitive kind of knowledge. In other terms, even though the juncture between these two kinds of perceptual activities no longer applied to Aristotle and Plato but to Aristotle and his Neoplatonizing interpretation, the fact remains that a great deal of Arabic philosophers, and especially all Peripatetic philosophers, whatever their religion, admitted the need for articulating science with theology and, ultimately, for ordaining both of them to the eudemonic state attained through the conjunction of the perfected human intellect with a metaphysical entity, whether God, the Agent Intellect or a Celestial Intellect. Albeit schematic, this survey shows how Alexandrian Platonism mainly survived in Arabic philosophy through the Aristotelian texts and therefore beyond. In one unique case Platonism also meant politics (on this, see the entry on ► "[al-Fārābī, Latin Translations of](#)" in this volume).



## Textual Evidence

From a literary point of view, the two main features of the Arabic reception of the Alexandrian tradition that I will retain are the following: (1) the almost complete disappearance of Plato's works and the irrelevant influence, if any, of the commentaries on Plato's works; (2) the fact that, although extensively used, the commentaries on Aristotle are almost never or only very rarely referred to explicitly, which makes their influence difficult to assess.

This stands out clearly when compared with the cases of Alexander of Aphrodisias and Themistius, whose names are well known in Arabic literature. Some of Alexander's and Themistius' Aristotelian commentaries and treatises were translated retaining their author's name, subsequently copied and hence preserved as independent works. Between them and the Pagan philosophers from Alexandria whose commentaries circulated anonymously, Philoponus offers a middle ground: his opposition to the doctrine of the eternity of the world earned him fame among Muslim and Christian philosophers who often relied on his arguments; nevertheless, his works were apparently not valued as much as those of Alexander or Themistius, since they were preserved only through excerpts and adaptations. I do not share Lettinck's confidence regarding Philoponus' authorship of the partial commentary *On Physics* preserved in Arabic. Some ideas from Simplicius' *On Physics* apparently also found their way in this commentary, but under another name. The possible influence of Simplicius' commentary on al-Kindī has been noticed by Jolivet (1993) and al-Fārābī's allusions to the *Poem* of Parmenides might also stem from it (see Vallat 2004).

Thus, with the exceptions of Olympiodorus' *On Meteorology* (different from the one preserved in Greek), the Alexandrian material preserved in the School of Baghdad's commentary on *Physics*, a few scraps of Simplicius' and Ammonius' *On Cat.*, fragments of some length of Simplicius' on Euclid's *Elements* (unknown in Greek), fragments of Philoponus' *Contra Aristotelem* and *Contra Proclum*, and a few quotations of Ammonius on

music preserved by Ishāq b. Ḥunayn and al-Kindī, all the Alexandrian commentary tradition known at some point in Arabic has disappeared as independent works. This means that the manuscripts of these commentaries were never copied or ceased to be very early. Once used by Arabic scholars, these works were apparently unworthy of being copied and therefore for the most part fell into oblivion.

As a result, one comes across only anonymous and indirect references, which, in order to be seen and identified, require that we know the underlying Greek or at least that the comparison between the meaning of the Arabic and the generally well-known Greek doctrines can be made with sufficient accuracy. In this respect, al-Fārābī's (d. 950) and 'Abd al-Laṭīf al-Baġdādī's (d. 1231) respective *Fuṣūlmuntaza'a* (*Excerpts from the Ancients' Works*) are representative cases. The former contains, for instance, anonymous quotations drawn from one of Proclus' work known both in Greek and Arabic (almost entirely preserved in Greek but only partially in Arabic) and echoes of Porphyry's *On Nicomachean Ethics*, which is sometimes referred to in Arabic works, but is no more preserved in Arabic (except for a few passages) than in Greek. Although Dunlop suggests it, it seems rather daring to ascribe to Porphyry the "Seventh Book" inserted in the Arabic textual tradition of the *Nicomachean Ethics* called in Latin *Summa Alexandrinorum*. As for 'Abd al-Laṭīf al-Baġdādī, Rashed (2004) has shown that his work contains anonymous quotations unknown in Greek but whose content is familiar enough to be safely attributed to Alexander of Aphrodisias.

Another hindrance further complicates the inquiry into sources. We possess Arabic anonymous Alexandrian commentaries or fragments, which testify to a posterior stage of the Alexandrian tradition to the one known in Greek, that is, apparently posterior to Stephanus. The best known example of this is Ibn al-Bīṭrīq's Arabic summary of a work entitled *Talkhīṣk. al-naḥṣ li-l-Iskandariyyīn*, the *Alexandrians' Epitome of Aristotle's De anima*, which has been masterfully edited by Rüdiger Arnzen. In all likelihood, Ibn al-Bīṭrīq (first half of the ninth century) worked on



an Alexandrian paraphrase, mainly composed of excerpts from Philoponus' *In De an.*, and whose Greek original is unknown. The Alexandrian sources that Ibn al-Ṭayyib (c. 980–1043) referred to in his *On Eisagoge* and *On Categories* also remain partly nameless, although both commentaries have been edited. The content of his *On Isagoge*, from which he failed to withdraw explicit Pagan allusions – a peculiar omission on the part of a Bible commentator – points to a translation of epitomized Alexandrian sources. As shown by C. Ferrari in her edition of Ibn al-Ṭayyib's *On Cat.*, this work displays countless similarities with all the known Alexandrian treatises from Ammonius to David. If ever rediscovered, his other commentaries on Aristotle's *Organon* would surely confirm this observation. Furthermore, Rashed (2005) has established that *On Cat.* is somehow connected with the *Marginalia* of Arethas of Caesarea (c. 850–944) to the *Isagoge* and *Categories*. An in-depth study of the sources remains to be done in the case of another member of the School of Baghdad, Ibn Zur'a (942–1008). His published epitome of *De interpretatione*, *Prior*, and *Posterior Analytics* has not yet been studied.

For all these Aristotelian works, Arabic philosophers made use of translated Greek commentaries without actually naming them most of the time.

The commentator called “Allīnus” or “Ilinus” in Arabic sources deserves a special mention. Ibn al-Ṭayyib and his teacher Ibn Suwār frequently quoted him, the latter having even allegedly translated his *On Cat.* Apart from Olympiodorus and Stephanus, “Allīnus” is the sole name quoted by Ibn al-Ṭayyib in *On Isag.* Among the various attempts to identify the Alexandrian commentator behind the name, Rashed (2005) put forward David, whom Hugonnard-Roche (2009) has since shown not to be a possible option.

A newly discovered complete version of what is still erroneously called *Ibn al-Muqaffa'-'s Logic* might provide useful additional information about the Alexandrian philosophical tradition in Arabic. This handbook on logic, which clearly can neither be ascribed to Ibn al-Muqaffa' nor to his son Muḥammad, constitutes in fact an epitome

of the whole Alexandrian *Organon* including *Rhetorics* and *Poetics*. The only version described in ancient sources, which is now published (Danish-Pazuh 1978), includes the epitome of Porphyry's *Isagoge*, *Categories*, *De interpretatione*, and *Prior Analytics*. To the best of my knowledge, the comparison with known Alexandrian commentaries has not been made yet.

Equally intriguing are the fragments of Paul the Persian's Syriac work preserved in Arabic thanks to Miskawayh's *Tartīb al-sa'ādāt*. According to Gutas (1983), Paul relies on some Alexandrian prolegomena to Aristotle's logic whose degree of scholarly refinement would suggest they are posterior to David's. This case is puzzling because Paul's floruit approximately tallies with Khosrow Anushirvan's reign (531–579), whereas the probable date of writing of David's prolegomena coincides with the end of this reign at the earliest.

How then could David or any later author have influenced Paul? Moreover, could the composition, the transmission, and the translation of the aforementioned work into Syriac have occurred simultaneously with the composition of Paul's treatise? No attempt has yet been made to solve this apparent chronological and geographical conundrum. In fact, it might be that Simplicius' *On Categories*, or another similar commentary, is the treatise used by Paul in one form or another. For that matter, Gutas, who examined Paul's fragments, envisages the possibility of Simplicius' influence. A new edition and study of Miskawayh's *Tartīb al-sa'ādāt* might bring further light on this issue.

## Ways of Transmission

More likely from a chronological and geographical point of view, Simplicius' influence on Paul would reinforce a hypothesis which has not met much favor either among Greek or Arabic scholars, that is to say, the settling of Simplicius in a Graeco-Syriac speaking region after he and/or some of his colleagues from Athens returned from Khosrow Anushirvan's court in 532. The city of Ḥarrān (Carrhae), where intellectual Syriac Hellenism remained alive till the end of the tenth

century, has been proposed by Tardieu as the place where Simplicius might have stayed. C. Luna has challenged the part of Tardieu's hypothesis, which deals with evidence contained in Simplicius' *On Physics*, regarding the place where he composed this commentary. Nonetheless, the case has been bolstered by further elements brought forward and documented by I. Hadot. So far, the entire issue remains to be addressed comprehensively or disproved by any Greek or Arabic scholar, especially when it comes to the issue of Simplicius' school of mathematics, the existence of which has been recorded only by Arabic sources. This issue makes Simplicius' return to Athens problematic.

In addition to I. Hadot's most recent study on this issue (2007), it may be added that: (1) from the report of the tenth century bio-bibliographer Ibn al-Nadīm, it appears that the Arabic translation of Simplicius' *On Cat.* and its chapter on relatives in particular may at some point have been studied by readers of the Euclidean commentator and mathematician Theon of Alexandria. This constitutes indirect supplementary evidence for Simplicius' teaching activities, both mathematical and philosophical. (2) Al-Fārābī's *Book of Particles* (see Vallat 2004: 373–375; 2011a) also points to the fact that the gathering of logical and mathematical interests in relation to the question of Aristotle's treatment of relatives remained a well-established tradition among the Arabic philosophers after Simplicius' time. The possible influence of Simplicius on al-Fārābī's *On Elements* can now be assessed on the basis of Arnzen's recent edition of al-Nayrizī's "Sammelkommentar" on Euclid's *Elements*, which includes 24 quotations by Simplicius. Apparently (see Hogendijk 2008), Qusṭā b. Lūqā (d. c. 912) made use of Simplicius' *On Elements* in his *Introduction to Geometry*. (3) The Graeco-Aramaic name of the dedicatee of Simplicius' *On De anima* mentioned by Ibn al-Nadīm is in all likelihood a Ḥarranian name; (4) the historian Agathias is not the only surviving source for the exile of Simplicius and his colleagues. Ibn al-Nadīm's *Fihrist* not only bears witness to both of the philosophers' journey to Khosrow's court and of their departure, but notes at the same time that Priscianus' *Solutiones ad Chosroem* was sent

to Khosrow. Since Ibn al-Nadīm did not rely on any Greek source, it means that this treatise was somehow translated either into Pahlavi or into Syriac. Moreover, the second discussion between Khosrow Anushirwan and the philosophers reported in Ḥunayn b. Isḥāq's *Ādāb al-falāsifa* (p. 60) might well bring together distinctive features of Damascius' metaphysical agnosticism.

From I. Hadot's study, one may also retain that a Pagan genealogy might explain more satisfactorily the origin of the typically harsh Neoplatonic anti-Christian polemic echoed in various texts by Arabic scientists and philosophers (whether heathen or Muslim) than the 'Abbāsīd's philhellenism alleged by Gutas. A thorough examination of Thābit b. Qurra's praise of the triumph of the Graeco-Syriac heathenism over Christianity along with the consideration of the specificity of the Ḥarranian milieu studied by Pingree might justifiably lead to a reappraisal of the primary ideological context of the Graeco-Syriac–Arabic translation movement.

The other, much better known, means of transmission from Alexandria to the Syriac and Arabic-speaking world is exemplarily represented by a former Christian student of Ammonius in Alexandria called Sergius of Resḥ'aynā (d. 536). Plato's disappearance from the philosophical curriculum might be attributable, to begin with, to Sergius' decision to replace him with Christian theological works, such as those of Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite. Be that as it may, as Hugonnard-Roche and Watt have shown, from the sixth to the tenth century Christian Syriac scholars proficient in Greek and, later on, in Arabic, represent not only the best known channel through which Greek philosophy was subsequently transmitted to the Arab world, but also the other, monotheistic, matrix of Arabic philosophy. Whether clerics, monks or appointed translators, and scholars, their role should not be underestimated. Arabic–Islamic philosophy most probably owes to them not only its monotheistic form of Neoplatonism, which originated under the supervision of the Muslim philosopher al-Kindī within the "Kindī Circle" of appointed translators (Endress 1997b), but also its specific Peripatetic anatomy, shaped within the School of Baghdad to

which al-Fārābī belonged. The tenth century Arabic translation of Aristotle's whole *Organon* can thus be seen as the achievement of their four-centuries-long work. Through them, the Alexandrian conception of philosophy as an Aristotelian curriculum of studies passed on not only to al-Fārābī, Avicenna, and Averroes, but also, thanks to these three authors, to the Latin world where it contributed in some way to the elaboration of the *Gradus Philosophicus* in the Faculties of Arts.

## Cross-References

- ▶ 'Abd al-Laṭīf al-Baġdādī
- ▶ Abū l-Faraj ibn al-'Ibrī (Barhebraeus)
- ▶ Arethas of Caesarea
- ▶ Aristotle, Arabic
- ▶ Ibn Sīnā, Abū 'Alī (Avicenna)
- ▶ Ibn Suwār (Ibn al-Khammār)
- ▶ Ibn al-Ṭayyib
- ▶ Ibn Zur'a, 'Īsā ibn Iṣḥāq
- ▶ al-Kindī, Abū Yūsuf Ya'qūb ibn Iṣḥāq
- ▶ Logic in the Arabic and Islamic World
- ▶ Philoponus, Arabic
- ▶ Plato, Arabic
- ▶ Plotinus, Arabic
- ▶ Porphyry, Arabic
- ▶ Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite
- ▶ Sergius of Resh'aynā
- ▶ Thābit ibn Qurra
- ▶ Themistius, Arabic
- ▶ Translations from Greek into Arabic
- ▶ Yaḥyā ibn 'Adī

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## ‘Allama al-Ḥillī

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### Abstract

Abū Maṣṣūr Jamāl al-Dīn al-Ḥasan b. Yūsuf b. Muṭahhar al-Ḥillī, known as al-‘Allāma al-Ḥillī (648/1250 – 726/1325), is one of the most prominent Twelver or Imāmi Shī‘i scholars of Medieval times. His Arabic nickname *al-‘allāma* means “the man of most knowledge” or “the most learned one,” embracing the “traditional [religious] sciences” (*al-‘ulūm al-naqliyya*) and the “intellectual sciences” (*al-‘ulūm al-‘aqliyya*). He also seems to have been the first Shī‘i scholar to receive post mortem, by the famous theologian Muḥammad Bāqir al-Majlisī (d. 1111/1699), the title of *āyat allāh* (“sign of God”), that would eventually be granted to the most authoritative jurists (*fuqahā’*) in modern and contemporary Twelver Shī‘i communities (al-Majlisī 1983, vol. 53, pp. 221, 252; vol. 106, p. 30). In the Shī‘i historiography, al-Ḥillī remains famous for his role in the conversion of the Ilkhānid ruler Uljaytū (r. 703–716/1304–1316) to Shī‘ism, as well as in the spread of Shī‘i beliefs in Iran. He remains as the main representative of the rationalist school of al-Ḥilla, in Iraq, whose influence replaced that of the traditionalist school of

Qum, in Iran, following the destruction of this city by the Mongols. With regards to the evolution of the Imāmi doctrine, he was one of the main artisans of the reformist current which, following the Occultation of the twelfth Imām in 329/940–941, turned the esoteric Shī‘i religion into a rationalized system of beliefs and practices, dominated by jurisprudence (*fiqh*) and progressively politicized (Kohlberg 1983). He is credited with more than 100 works in various fields that pertain to principles of law (*uṣūl al-fiqh*), theology (*kalām*), and other religious sciences, as well as philosophy and logic. His works, with those of his teacher Naṣīr al-Dīn Ṭūsī (d. 672/1273), represent the last school of original thought in Shī‘i Imāmi theology (*kalām*), the work of the later generations consisting mostly in commentaries upon them (Madelung 1970, p. 28). His compendium of theology entitled *Bāb al-ḥādī‘ashar* (“the Eleventh Chapter”), together with its commentary by Miqdād al-Suyūrī (d. 826/1423), still serve today among Shī‘i schools as an authoritative exposition of the principles of the Imāmi faith (al-Ṭihirānī 1983, vol. 3, pp. 5–7).

### His Life

Al-Ḥasan b. Yūsuf b. al-Muṭahhar al-Ḥillī was born in 648/1250 in al-Ḥilla, one of the main centers of the Twelver Shī‘i community during the last ‘Abbasid period. His father, Sadīd al-Dīn Yūsuf b. ‘Alī b. Muḥammad b. al-Muṭahhar al-Ḥillī, must have been one of the leading personalities of the city; he is said to have written several works on Prophetic and Imāmi traditions (*ḥadīth*) and the principles of Twelver Shī‘i religion (*uṣūl al-dīn*). His uncle Ja‘far b. al-Ḥasan al-Ḥillī (d. 676/1277), later known as al-Muḥaqqiq al-Ḥillī or al-Muḥaqqiq al-awwal (“the first verifier of the truth”), was also a major scholar of this city, one of the first representatives of the theological school of al-Ḥilla.

Ḥasan b. Yūsuf b. al-Muṭahhar was 8 years old when the Mongols invaded Iraq, devastated

Baghdad, and murdered the last 'Abbasid calif al-Musta'ṣim in 656/1258. These events were frequently described as the end of the world by the representatives of the Sunni majority; however, for the Twelver Shī'is, they also offered a historical opportunity, since the Mongols had successively defeated their two main adversaries, i.e., the Nizāri Ismā'īli state of Iran, centered in the fortress of Alamut, and the Sunni califate of Baghdad. Thanks to the efforts of Shī'i scholars and neo-diplomats, such as the philosopher and scientist Naṣīr al-Dīn Ṭūsī (d. 672/1273), the Shī'is of Iraq were spared by the invaders. According to al-'Allāma al-Ḥillī himself, his father went as an ambassador of the Shī'i community to the court of Hülagü in 656/1258 and gained from him a grant (*fīrmān*) protecting al-Ḥilla, al-Kūfa, and the main Shī'i centers of Iraq from destruction. Therefore, al-Ḥilla superseded Qum and Baghdad as the stronghold of Shī'i learning for more than a century (Newman 2013, pp. 122–137). Many other Shī'i scholars, including al-'Allāma al-Ḥillī, would actively collaborate with the new regime, in accordance with the *fatwa* of Radī al-Dīn b. Ṭāwūs (d. 664/1266) according to which it was preferable to serve a just non-believing ruler than an unjust Muslim.

The young al-Ḥillī first studied religious sciences (*tafsīr*, *ḥadīth*, *fiqh*) and sciences of Arabic language in his hometown, under the guidance of his father and his uncle. Many of his teachers were among the most famous scholars of his time (Khawānṣārī 1971, vol. 2, p. 278). In the field of *ḥadīth* and Imāmi tradition, he studied under Jamāl al-Dīn b. Ṭāwūs (d. 673/1274) and his brother Radī al-Dīn b. Ṭāwūs, mentioned above. In the field of philosophy and logic, he learnt the Metaphysics (*Ilāhiyyāt*) of Ibn Sīnā's (d. 428/1037) "Book of Healing" (*Kitāb al-Shīfā'*) from Naṣīr al-Dīn al-Ṭūsī. He became acquainted with the works of Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī (d. 606/1209) and Athīr al-Dīn al-Abharī (d. ca 663/1265, see Terrier 2018a) on logic and philosophy through Najm al-Dīn Dabīrān Kātibī Qazwīnī (d. 675/1277), who co-founded with al-Ṭūsī the observation center of Marāgha in 657/1258–1259. One can assume that al-Ḥillī met al-Kātibī at Marāgha around the year 670/1271–1272, while he was

studying there under al-Ṭūsī (Schmidtke 1991, pp. 12–22), and that he left Marāgha after the latter's death in 672/1273, when he was himself 24 years old. During the following 20 years, he stayed partly in al-Ḥilla and partly in nearby Baghdad (Schmidtke 1991, p. 19). Ḥillī's teachers include also Shams al-Dīn Muḥammad al-Kīshī, a Shāfi'i scholar, and a Sufi well acquainted with the works of Ibn 'Arabī (d. 637/1240), as well as 'Izz al-Dīn Abū l-'Abbās al-Wāsiṭī (d. 694/1292–1293), a student of Shīhāb al-Dīn al-Suhrawardī (d. 586/1190). It is likely that al-Ḥillī became aware of the ideas of Ibn 'Arabī and Suhrawardī through these two scholars. However, it was in the field of jurisprudence (*fiqh*) that al-Ḥillī first became distinguished, reaching the rank of jurisconsult (*mujtahid*) at an early age, and his works on law soon became authoritative.

In 694/1295, when al-'Allāma al-Ḥillī was 45 years old, Ghazan Khān (d. 703/1304) was the first Ilkhān to convert to Islam. While adhering superficially to the "orthodox" Sunni Islam, he paid particular attention to the Shī'is in Iran and Iraq, enriching the Imām's shrines of Karbalā' and Mashhad. His brother and successor Uljaytū (r. 703–716/1304–1316), known in Islamic sources as Muḥammad Khudābanda, declared Islam the religion of state immediately following his accession to the throne. At first he was a Sunni Ḥanafī; later he adhered to the Shāfi'i doctrine; finally, he became Shī'i in 707/1307–1308. He then tried to enforce the Shī'i beliefs among the Muslims of the kingdom, notably by ordering the names of the 12 Imāms to be mentioned in the Friday prayers and that of 'Alī b. Abī Ṭālib (d. 40/661), the first Imām, to be engraved on the coinage. However, his endeavor seems to have been unsuccessful. According to Mamluk sources, he rejoined Sunni Islam towards the end of his reign; but other pieces of evidence show that he continued to adhere to Shī'i Islam until his death in 716/1316.

Certain biographical accounts suggest that 'Allāma Ḥillī was the main responsible for Uljaytū's conversion to Shī'ism; in addition to Shī'i sources (Afandī Jīrānī 1991, vol. 1, p. 361; Khawānṣārī 1971, vol. 2, pp. 279–281;



‘Āmilī 1960–62, vol. 24, p. 231), Ibn Baṭṭūṭa also mentioned this fact (Ibn Baṭṭūṭa n.d., p. 156; Schmidtke 1991, pp. 24–25). A report says that after having divorced his wife, Uljaytū regretted deeply and required whether there was a lawyer of any juridical school who could nullify this divorce. Al-Ḥillī was summoned to court where he engaged in discussions with Sunni scholars and defeated them, making such an impression on Uljaytū that he adopted Shī‘ism (Khwānṣarī 1971, vol. 2, pp. 279–280). Yet the Shī‘i theologian and historian Nūrullāh Shūshtarī (d. 1019/1610) relates that Uljaytū had already converted to Shī‘ism, after witnessing a vision during a visit to the tomb of Imām ‘Alī at Najaf, at the time al-Ḥillī came to his court. The latter took part in discussion sessions with Shāfi‘i doctors and convinced them of the preeminence of the Shī‘i doctrine (Shūshtarī 2014–2015, vol. 3, p. 578; Idem, vol. 5, p. 282).

It is certain, however, that al-‘Allāma al-Ḥillī had an excellent relationship with the Ilkhān. It is likely that he accompanied him in Rajab 709/December 1309 visiting the tomb of Salmān al-Fārisī, a companion of the Prophet and an early figure of Shī‘ism, after which he stayed in his court at Sulṭāniyya, near modern-day Qazvin. He offered the new convert several treatises on Shī‘i theological dogmatic, such as *Minhāj al-karāma fī ma‘rifat al-imāma* (“The Path of Nobility in the Knowledge of the Imamate”), *Kashf al-yaqīn fī faḍā‘il amīr al-mu‘minīn* (“The Unveiling of the Certitude on the Merits of the Prince of the Believers [‘Alī b. Abī Ṭālib]”), and *Istiqṣā‘ al-naẓar fī l-baḥṭh ‘an al-qaḍā’ wa l-qadar* (“The Profundity of the Research on the Divine Decree and Ordination”), demonstrating that man is a free agent (al-Ṭihirānī 1983, vol. 2, pp. 31–32); he also wrote at Uljaytū’s demand a treatise concerning the merit of the veneration of tombs. Together with his son Fakhr al-Muḥaqqiqīn (d. 771/1369), he was frequently engaged in public discussions with Sunni scholars on juridical or theological topics (Shūshtarī 2014–2015, vol. 3, pp. 578–584), and both were then appointed in the mobile school (*al-madrasa al-sayyāra*) which accompanied the Ilkhān wherever he went (Khwānṣarī 1971, vol. 2, pp. 281–282; Schmidtke

1991, pp. 29–31). Al-Ḥillī’s departure from the court may have taken place during Uljaytū’s lifetime, if we assume that the latter reconverted to Sunni Islam during his reign. Between 715/1315 and 716/1316, al-Ḥillī appears to have left Sulṭāniyya for al-Ḥilla, where he remained for the final 10 years of his life, which he dedicated to teaching (Schmidtke 1991, pp. 31–32).

Among al-Ḥillī’s numerous students, the most prominent was his son Fakhr al-Muḥaqqiqīn who accompanied him everywhere until his death and wrote commentaries on several of his works. Two of his nephews, ‘Amīd al-Dīn (d. 754/1353) and Ḍiyā al-Dīn al-‘A‘rajī (d. after 740/1339–1340), also wrote commentaries on a number of his works. Another of al-Ḥillī’s outstanding students was Quṭb al-Dīn al-Rāzī al-Buwayhī (d. 766/1365), famous for his works on logic and philosophy, who attended his lessons at the *madrasa sayyāra* between 709/1309 and 714/1414–1415 (Schmidtke 1991, p. 39).

Al-‘Allāma al-Ḥillī significantly contributed to the spread of Shī‘ism in Iraq and Iran through his teaching and his political activity. For this reason, he remains widely respected among the Twelver Shī‘is and is even credited by a popular account with an encounter with the hidden twelfth Imām (Shūshtarī 2014–2015, vol. 3, pp. 582–583; Khwānṣarī 1971, vol. 2, pp. 282–283). However, at the time that the temptation of revenge against the Sunnis would have been widespread among the Shī‘is, he always kept a moderate attitude, far from the fanaticism which he considered to have caused only painful trials for the Shī‘is. This attitude is obvious from his participation in many discussions with Sunni scholars, as well as from his theological positions presented below. In his works, he avoids discussing issues which had been distinctive of early Imāmi theology and commonly condemned as “heretic” by Sunni theologians, such as the change of God’s will (*badā’*), the particular resurrection of God’s best friends and worst enemies at the end of time (*raj‘a*), and the integrity of the Qur’an. Yet, he makes no concession concerning the succession of the Prophet, the imamate and the intercession, refuting the Sunni and Mu‘tazili conceptions with both rational and scriptural arguments (Laoust

1966, 1978). His moderate attitude did not prevent him from being the target of the Ḥanbali lawyer and theologian Ibn Taymiyya (d. 728/1328), who authored a violent refutation of his *Minhāj al-karāma* entitled *Minhāj al-sunna al-nabawiyya*, as well as fatwas against the veneration of tombs and various Shī'i practices. To be sure, the revival of Shī'ism under the Ilkhāns, in which al-'Allāma al-Ḥillī played a major role, also led to a recrudescence of the anti-Shī'i feeling in the Seljuq kingdom (al-Jamil 2009).

### His Thought

According to the comprehensive study of Sabine Schmidtke, al-'Allāma al-Ḥillī is to be considered, together with Naṣīr al-Dīn al-Ṭūsī and Mītham al-Baḥrānī (d. 699/1300) – the author of a major commentary on the *Nahj al-balāgha*, the collection of sayings attributed to 'Alī b. Abī Ṭālib – as the main representative of the last Imāmi Mu'tazili theological school. This school started to develop sometime after al-Sharīf al-Murtaḍā (d. 436/1044) and al-Shaykh al-Ṭūsī (d. 460/1067), two prominent Twelver Shī'i scholars reformist scholars following the Occultation of the twelfth Imām, under the influence of the Mu'tazili school of Abū l-Ḥasan al-Baṣrī (d. 436/1044). Interestingly, the heresiographer al-Shahrastānī (d. 548/1153), in his famous *Kitāb al-milal wa l-niḥal*, considered Abū l-Ḥasan al-Baṣrī to have adopted the doctrine of the philosophers under the cover of theology (*kalām*) (Shahrastānī 1947, vol. 1, p. 78). In this respect, the Mu'tazili school of al-Baṣrī would also have influenced the Sunni theologian Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī (d. 606/1209), who tried to adapt philosophical concepts – mainly borrowed from Ibn Sīnā – to the Ash'ari rather than the Mu'tazili and Imāmi doctrine (Madelung 1970, pp. 27–28; Schmidtke 1991, pp. 2–7; 1994).

As for al-'Allāma al-Ḥillī, one can argue, from the study of his extant theological works, that in contrast to Naṣīr al-Dīn al-Ṭūsī and similarly to Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī, he was basically a theologian, yet a Twelver Shī'i, rather than a philosopher. Although well acquainted with philosophy and

influenced by some Avicennian ideas, he rejected philosophical doctrines whenever they disagreed with his theological views. In his demonstration of God as “necessarily existent by itself” (*wājib al-wujūd li-dhātihī*), “absolute existence” (*wujūd muṭlaq*) and “perfect existence” (*wujūd kāmil*), he appears to have been strongly influenced by Avicenna's concepts and arguments (*Bāb*, pp. 5–7; transl., pp. 9–12; *Kashf*, pp. 29–40). However, he rejected the Neoplatonist notion of emanation (*ḥayḍ, ifāda*), arguing that God is a voluntary agent and not a necessitating cause (Schmidtke 1991, p. 255). Likewise, he disagreed with the philosophers' (namely al-Fārābī (d. 339/950) and Avicenna) doctrine of the eternity of the world by conceiving God as a voluntary agent who may annihilate His creation if He has a reason to do so (Schmidtke 1991, p. 215). Furthermore, as seen above, it is likely that al-Ḥillī became acquainted with the ideas of Ibn 'Arabī and Suhrawardī; however, although he wrote commentaries on the latter's *Kitāb al-Talwīhāt* (see below), one can assume from his theological works that neither Suhrawardī's doctrine of illumination (*ishrāq*) nor Ibn 'Arabī's theosophy and monism had any influence on his thought.

Al-'Allāma al-Ḥillī authored many philosophical works, most of which are commentaries on various classical works of philosophers, apparently intended for students of religious schools. His first one was *al-Asrār al-khaṣfiyya fī l-'ulūm al-'aqliyya* (“The Hidden Secrets about the Rational Sciences”), written before 680/1281. It is organized in three parts, according to the classical division of philosophy in logic (*manṭiq*), physics (*tabī'iyāt*), and theology or metaphysics (*ilāhiyyāt*). In this book, al-Ḥillī is highly critical of philosophical propositions disagreeing with fundamental theological views (Schmidtke 1991, pp. 56–57). He completed in 694/1295 a commentary on al-Kātibī al-Qazwīnī's (d. 675/1277) *Ḥikmat al-'ayn*, entitled *Īdāḥ al-maqāshid* (“The Clarification of the Aims”) (al-Ṭīhrānī 1983, vol. 2, p. 501; Schmidtke 1991, p. 80). In 717/1317, he completed a commentary on Avicenna's *Kitāb al-Shifā'* entitled *Kitāb Kashf al-khaṣā min Kitāb al-Shifā'* (“The Unveiling of the Hidden from the Book of Healing”), one

of his most authoritative works in the field of philosophy, only the second part of which is extant. All his remaining philosophical works are lost and known only by title. Four of them concerned Avicenna’s *al-Ishārāt wa l-tanbīhāt*, and two others different views of Avicenna. Two further works seem to have been commentaries on Suhrawardī’s *Kitāb al-Talwīḥāt* (“the Book of Intimations”): *Hall al-mushkilāt min Kitāb al-Talwīḥāt* (“The Solution of the Problems of the Book of Intimations”) and *Kashf al-mushkilāt min Kitāb al-Talwīḥāt* (“The Unveilings of the Problems of the Book of Intimations”). Most of these works were probably composed just before 720/1320 (Schmidtke 1991, pp. 56–59). Schmidtke assumes that “the reason why most of al-Ḥillī’s philosophical works are lost was presumably that they were of little originality. Since he was a theologian rather than a philosopher, it is most likely that he composed most of his philosophical works as books of instruction for his students” (Schmidtke 1991, p. 60). However, one can also assume a disinterest, or even an aversion towards philosophy, on the part of the late Shī‘ī scholars. For example, Sayyid Ḥaydar al-Āmulī (d. after 787/1385–1386), who was a student of Fakhr al-Muḥaqqiqīn and a highly speculative thinker, paid little attention to Avicenna’s ideas and concepts, more because of his mystical inclinations than because of supposedly “conservative” theological views (Terrier 2018b).

The thought of al-‘Allāma al-Ḥillī can be adequately presented following the classical structure of two of his theological treatises. *Kashf al-murād fī sharḥ Tajrīd al-i’tiqād* (“The Unveiling of the Meaning. A Commentary on the Purification of the Belief”), completed in 696/1297, is the first commentary written on Naṣīr al-Dīn al-Ṭūsī’s *Tajrīd al-i’tiqād*, historically one of the most influential Shī‘ī theological treatises, and the first to integrate the Peripatetic school of philosophy within Shī‘ī theology; al-Ḥillī’s *Kashf al-murād* would eventually serve as basis for many later commentators of the work (al-Ṭīhrānī 1983, vol. 18, p. 60; Schmidtke 1991, p. 90; Kamada 1992). *Al-Bāb al-ḥādī ‘ashar fī mā yajibū ‘alā ‘āmmat al-mukallaḥīn min ma’rifat uṣūl al-dīn* (“The Eleventh Chapter about the Knowledge of the

Principles of Religion Which Is Incumbent to All the Responsible Beings”), completed in 723/1323, was originally an additional chapter – the eleventh one – of *Minḥāj al-ṣalāḥ fī ikhtisār al-Miṣbāḥ*, a summary of *Miṣbāḥ al-mutahajjid*, a book of supplications and rituals authored by the earlier Shī‘ī scholar al-Shaykh al-Ṭūsī (d. 460/1067) (al-Ṭīhrānī 1983, vol. 23, pp. 164–165; vol. 21, pp. 118–119). Numerous commentaries have been written about al-Ḥillī’s *Bāb al-ḥādī ‘ashar* by Shī‘ī scholars, theologians, and philosophers, among which Ibn Abī Jumhūr al-Aḥsā‘ī (d. after 904/1499) is to be mentioned (al-Ṭīhrānī 1983, vol. 3, pp. 5–7; Schmidtke 1991, pp. 80–81; 2013; Terrier 2018c). Both al-Ḥillī’s treatises are organized in five parts: the question of God’s essence and attributes; divine Justice (*‘adl*); prophecy; imamate; and destination (*ma’ād*) – all of which integrate many philosophical ideas.

At the very beginning of *Bāb al-ḥādī ‘ashar*, al-Ḥillī considers incumbent (*wājib*) upon all responsible subjects (*mukallaḥīn*) the knowledge of God, of his positive and privative attributes, of prophecy, of imamate, and of the destination, “by proof and not by imitation” (*bi-l-dalīl lā bi-l-taqlīd*) (*Bāb*, pp. 3–4; transl., pp. 4–5). However, his conception of religious law (*fiqh*) was far different. Al-Ḥillī is well known for having divided the community into *mujtahids*, i.e., jurists who are habilitated to exercise personal judgement (*ijtihād*); and *muqallids*, i.e., lay believers who must follow the latter. Al-Ḥillī defined the principles of *ijtihād* in his *Mabādī al-wuṣūl*, stating that the *mujtahids* are fallible in contrast to the infallible Imāms and may revise their statements; that *ijtihād*, being fallible, allows for *ikhtilāf*, or “divergence of opinions,” among *mujtahids*; and that despite its fallibility, *ijtihād* is authoritative as long as the infallible twelfth Imām has not manifested. To quote Farhad Daftary, “al-Ḥillī’s acceptance of *ijtihād* represents a crucial step towards the enhancement of the juristic authority of the ‘ulamā’ in Twelver Shī‘ism in the absence of a manifest Imām” (Daftary 2013, p. 78).

Concerning fundamental theology (*uṣūl al-dīn*), al-Ḥillī took part in the debate on the ontological relationship between God and His attributes. He objected to the position of

the Ash'ari theologians according to which God's essential attributes are entailed by real entities (*ma'ānī*) subsisting independently of Him (*qā'ima bi-dhātihī*) and residing in His essence (Gimaret 1990, p. 236). Al-Ḥillī, in agreement with the Mu'tazilis and the philosophers (*falāsifa*), rejected the existence of such entitative attributes as inconsistent with God's unity (*tawḥīd*) and stated that the divine essential attributes of being knowing, powerful, living, and existing are entailed by the divine essence itself. It means, God is not knowing through a knowledge, powerful through a power, living through a life, etc. but is knowing through his essence, powerful through his essence, living through his essence, etc. (*Bāb*, p. 24; transl., pp. 38–39). However, al-Ḥillī disagreed with the view of philosophers such as Ibn Sīnā and al-Ghazālī (d. 505/1111), according to which attributes are not existential matters (*wujūdiyya*). Distinguishing between mental existence and existence in the external world, as did Aristotle and the Muslim philosophers, he stated that God's attributes are additional to his essence in ratiocination (*ta'aqqul*) but do not have any extramental reality (*fī l-khārij*) (Schmidtke 1991, pp. 168–169).

Concerning the notion of existence (*wujūd*), al-Ḥillī mainly follows the Avicennian tradition (Schmidtke 1991, p. 180) by considering the quiddity (*māhiyya*) of all things as established before their existence. This principle of anteriority of the essence to the act of existing would be eventually reversed by the Iranian Twelver Shī'i philosopher Ṣadr al-Dīn al-Shīrāzī, best known as Mullā Ṣadrā (d. 1045/1635-1636 or 1050/1640-1641). With regards to God's knowledge, al-Ḥillī stresses that it embraces universals as well as individuals, agreeing here with al-Rāzī against philosophers and Avicenna in particular, without going so far, however, as al-Ghazālī did, as qualifying as infidelity (*kufr*) the thesis that God knows only universals and not future contingents (Al-Ghazālī 1990, p. 254). As for God's will, he rejects the view, shared by Avicenna and al-Rāzī, that God determined things from all eternity by a pre-eternal will. He considered God's knowledge as the motive for His action: when God knows that a certain act has an advantage (*maṣlaḥa*), then that

knowledge is will and becomes the motive of its enaction (*Bāb*, p. 14; transl., p. 22).

The nature of God's justice ('*adl*) is another main chapter of all Islamic classical theological treatises, especially from representatives of the Mu'tazili school. On this issue, al-Ḥillī supported the Mu'tazili position of ethical objectivism, according to which good and evil have real existence and are independent from revelation; consequently, there are things the goodness and evil of which are necessarily known by reason (Schmidtke 1991, p. 99). He argues that "reason ('*aq*) of necessity passes judgement as to what actions are good (*ḥasan*), such as the return of a trust and doing good, and as to what are evil (*qabīḥ*), such as injustice and an injurious lie. For those who deny all system of law, like the atheists (*malāḥida*) and the philosophers of India, judge good and evil thus. . ." (*Bāb*, p. 25; transl., p. 40). On the contrary, the Ash'aris, i.e., the representatives of the Sunni "orthodoxy," maintain that both good and evil are standards determined by the law (*sharī'a*); good is what the Lawgiver commands and evil is what He prohibits. Against al-Rāzī, al-Ḥillī maintains that rational-objective ethical standards apply to God as well as to man. That is, God approves one act because it is good, disapproves another because it is evil, and it is not because God approves or disapproves an act that it is good or evil; revelation is essentially the detailed explanation of what can be synthetically known by reason.

On the issue of free will versus determinism, al-Ḥillī firmly adhered to the Mu'tazili position that man is a free agent: "We are free agents (*fā'ilūn bi-l-ikhtiyār*), and necessity requires this: because of the necessary difference between a man's falling from the roof and his going down from it by a ladder – otherwise our responsibility (*taklīf*) for a thing would be impossible, and there would be no sin; and because of the evil of His creating an act in us and then punishing us for it" (*Bāb*, p. 27; transl., pp. 42–43). As stresses his commentator Miqdād al-Suyūrī (d. 826/1423), "if man were not the bringer-into-existence of his actions, and did not have power over them, then God would be the most unjust of unjust beings" by imposing moral obligation upon him and

by rewarding and punishing him for them (*Bāb*, p. 27; transl., p. 44; Schmidtke 1991, p. 125). Another argument borrowed from the Mu‘tazilis is that it is impossible for God to commit any evil; consequently, it must be man who produces his acts both good and evil (*Bāb*, p. 28; transl., p. 44). This was contradictory to the Ash‘ari position, especially that of al-Rāzī, according to which God is the doer of everything, be it good or evil, and although man appears to be a voluntary agent as he acts in accordance with his motives, he is in reality “compelled in the form of a free agent” (*muḍṭarr fī šūrat mukhtār*) (Schmidtke 1991, p. 134), an expression, interestingly, used by Avicenna himself (Ibn Sīnā 1983–1984, p. 51). Consequently, on this issue, al-Ḥillī’s position does not converge with that of the philosophers. However, he remains in accordance with the Mu‘tazili and Shī‘i creeds: as a *ḥadīth* attributed to the fifth and the sixth Imāms states: “Neither determinism nor delegation of power [from God to man], but something between” (*lā jabr wa lā tafwīḍ wa lākin al-amr bayna l-amrayn*), a position eventually deepened by Shī‘i philosophers such as Mīr Dāmād (d. 1040/1631) (Mīr Dāmād 2012–2013).

A necessary consequence of divine Justice, according to al-Ḥillī, is that grace or kindness (*luṭf*) is incumbent upon God. “Grace is that which brings the creature near to obedience and keeps him far from disobedience. [...] For whenever he who wills an act from another (i.e. when God wills that man do something) knows that he will not do it except with the aid of an act which the willer can perform without any trouble, then if he does not perform it he would be contradicting his own aim, and reason pronounces that evil – God is exalted upon that!” (*Bāb*, p. 32; transl., p. 50) Having made man responsible for his acts, God is obliged to provide him with every possible facilitation which enables him to fulfil his obligations, and this is the definition of grace (Schmidtke 1991, p. 109). Likewise, al-Ḥillī maintains, in agreement with the Mu‘tazilis, that the existence of misery and pain is necessary in this world; however, it should always be for a hidden benefit. Consequently, it is incumbent upon God to compensate for the suffering He

imposes to man, either directly, or which He had ordered, made licit or caused through constraint (*Bāb*, p. 33; transl., p. 52; Schmidtke 1991, pp. 121–122).

Al-Ḥillī’s statement on God’s obligation to dispense grace upon the responsible beings leads him to affirm the necessity of prophecy and imamate according to reason. That is, appointing a man who brings a message from Him, received by inspiration (*waḥy*) without a mediator, to guide men towards good and salvation, is incumbent upon God; as well as appointing the successor (*khalīfa*) of the Prophet, who stands in its place, except in receiving divine inspiration without a mediator (*Bāb*, pp. 34, 39–40; transl., pp. 54, 62). This is again in accordance with the Mu‘tazili teachings. However, Ḥillī differs from the latter by refuting the idea that the Prophet could commit an act of evil, be it major or minor. He argues that it is necessary that the Prophet be immune to sin (*ma‘šūm*), from the first day of his life to the last, in contradiction with the Sunni conception that he was immune to sin only following the revelation (*Bāb*, pp. 34, 37–38; transl., pp. 58–59).

Concerning the purpose of the prophetic mission, al-Ḥillī, by upholding the Mu‘tazili view that man rationally knows ethical values in a general way, maintains that besides the acts whose moral value is known to man by reason, there are some acts which will either hinder or help man to fulfil his moral obligation, the value of which is not discernable by reason. The task of the prophets is not only to confirm what is already known by reason but also to convey something supplementary to reason. Here, al-Ḥillī adopts al-Ṭūsī’s definition of prophecy: “The prophetic mission is a grace which embraces benefits such as the support of intelligence in what it demonstrates, the teaching to [intelligence] of judgment in what it does not demonstrate, the teaching of good and evil, useful and harmful, the preservation of the human race, the perfecting of individuals according to their different predispositions, the teaching of the secret arts, morals and politics, and finally, the teaching of punishment and reward” (*Kashf*, p. 468).

As a proof of Muḥammad’s prophecy, al-Ḥillī puts forward the miracles, the first of which is the



Qur'an. By supporting the thesis that the Qur'an is the principal miracle of the Prophet, which is a typical Sunni creed, al-Ḥillī may have intended to conceal and deny the original allegation of the Shī'is that the holy book has been falsified, such a denying having become widespread among the rationalist Twelver Shī'ī scholars following the Occultation (Amir-Moezzi 2011, 2015). He also shares al-Rāzī's view that God creates miracles (*mu'jizāt*) exclusively for the prophets and charismatic powers (*karāmāt*) for the saints or the "friends [of God]" (*awliyā'*) (Schmidtke 1991, pp. 159–164). Interestingly, this is a view shared by both Sufis and Shī'is, the former identifying God's friends with their saints or spiritual masters, the latter, including al-Ḥillī, identifying them with their twelve impeccable Imāms.

Concerning imamate, which is the fourth pillar of religion (*uṣūl al-dīn*) according to the Shī'ī creed, al-Ḥillī gives a rational definition: "imamate is a universal authority in the things of religion and of the world belonging to some person (no more than one individual at any one period) and derived from the Prophet." Imamate is necessary according to reason (*wājiba 'aqlan*), because it is a grace and grace is incumbent upon God. Imamate is a grace because when men have a leader and a guide whom they obey, they draw near to soundness and depart from corruption (*Bāb*, pp. 39–40; transl. p. 62). In addition, Miqdād al-Suyūrī claims that "everything which proves that prophecy is necessary proves also that the imamate is necessary. [...] In the same way in which prophecy is incumbent upon God on philosophical grounds, so also is the imamate." (*Bāb*, p. 41; transl. p. 64).

Secondly, it is necessary according to reason that the Imām be immune to sin, otherwise he would need another Imām, and there would be an endless chain, which is impossible (*Bāb*, pp. 41–42; transl. pp. 64–65). It is noteworthy that the impossibility of an endless chain is a typically Aristotelian argument, fundamentally irrelevant to the arguments found in the ancient Imāmi traditions, which are based on esoteric and nonrational statements. Thirdly, it is necessary according to reason that the Imām be specified (*manṣūṣ*) for the imamate, because immunity to sin is a hidden matter (*bāṭina*)

which no one perceives but God; that is, the Imām must be appointed by God, not by the people, according to the Shī'ī creed and contrasting with the Sunni creed (*Bāb*, p. 43; transl., p. 68). Finally, it is necessary that the Imām be absolutely the best of the people (*Bāb*, p. 44; transl., p. 69). Therefore, the Imām after the Prophet Muḥammad must be 'Alī b. Abī Ṭālib, and after him, their 11 descendants through Muḥammad's daughter and 'Alī's wife, Fāṭima, each of them who preceded having appointed his successor, according to the creed of the Twelver Shī'is (*Bāb*, pp. 44–45, 50–51; transl., pp. 69–70, 78). Al-Ḥillī's rational justification of imamate would be eventually resumed by the famous student of his son Fakhr al-Muḥaqqiqīn, the Shī'ī-Sufi thinker Sayyid Ḥaydar Āmulī, in a polemic epistle entitled *Risāla Raf' al-khilāf wa l-munāza'a* (Āmulī 2017; Terrier 2018b).

About the Destination (*ma'ād*), i.e., the hereafter, 'Allāma al-Ḥillī still stands on the crest line between theological tradition and philosophical (blameworthy) innovation. He agreed with al-Rāzī that God will restore men after having caused their passing away. However, while the latter, as an Ash'ari theologian, denied in principle that God is subject to any obligation, al-Ḥillī, in view of his notion of divine Justice, held that God is obliged to do so. Moreover, he asserted that this obligation is known by reason, which is a typical Mu'tazili view (Schmidtke 1991, pp. 207–208). Regarding the modality of this restoration, he adopted an ambiguous position and may have evolved in his view. On the one hand, he supported that a living being consists of basic parts which are not subject to change and additional parts which are subject to change and dispersed by death, and that at the time of its restoration, God reassembles only the basic parts of it; consequently, he disagreed with the view of the philosophers that man consists of a body and a rational soul (*nafs nāṭiqā*). On the other hand, he supported Avicenna's conception, first adopted by al-Ṭūsī, that the rational soul is the substance of man and that it is separate from the body and uncorruptible, taking it as a base for his own conception of the hereafter (*Kashf*, pp. 274–281; Schmidtke 1991, pp. 218–219).

Regarding retribution, al-Hillī maintained that man, in virtue of his free will, deserves reward and punishment for his acts of obedience and disobedience. In view of his Justice, God is obliged to render to man all the reward and punishment that he deserves for his action unless he pardons him or the Prophet intercedes on his behalf (Schmidtke 1991, p. 223). This is another view shared by the Twelver Shī‘is and the Mu‘tazilis. Concerning the question of the Muslim grave sinner, al-Hillī objected to the Mu‘tazili view of mutual cancellation of acts of obedience and disobedience, and of reward and punishment (Schmidtke 1991, pp. 227–230). On account of the Imāmi concept of belief, he rejected the Mu‘tazili notion of the intermediate position of the Muslim grave sinner. He also argued on the basis of reason against the eternal punishment of a believing sinner, considering God’s forgiveness (*‘afw*), the Prophet’s intercession (*shafā‘a*), and repentance (*tawba*), as ways in which the sinner’s punishment might be cancelled (Schmidtke 1991, pp. 235–249). Here again, it is worth noticing that this rationalization considerably attenuates the dualistic doctrine of the early Shī‘ism.

In conclusion, if al-‘Allāma al-Hillī was a theologian rather than a philosopher, playing a key role in the diffusion in Iraq and Iran of a moderate and rationalized Shī‘i creed in early modern times, he also played a significant role in the history of philosophy in Islam. With him, the idea arose that an authoritative religious scholar should be competent in philosophy, if not a follower of the philosophers. Above all, by adapting Avicenna’s concepts, arguments and ideas, as well as the Mu‘tazilis’ ones, to Shī‘i theology and imāmology, he bequeathed a doctrine suitable to be combined with Ibn ‘Arabī’s theoretical mysticism and Suhrawardī’s philosophy of illumination, and paved the way for the synthetic works of Sayyid Ḥaydar Āmulī, Ibn Abī Jumhūr al-Aḥsā‘ī, and up to Mīr Dāmād and Mullā Ṣadrā in modern times.

### Al-Hillī’s Main Edited Works

In the reproduction of an *ijāza* (licence to teach), al-Majlisī gives a list of some of al-Hillī’s

books up to 720/1320 (Majlisī 1983, vol. 104, pp. 147–149). For a complete annotated list of Hillī’s works, see Schmidtke (1991, pp. 74–98).

Al-‘Allāma al-Hillī, *Al-Alfayn al-fāriq bayn al-ṣidq wa l-mayn* (ed.: al-A‘lamī, H.). Beirut: Mu‘assasat al-A‘lamī li-l-maṭbū‘āt, 1402/1982. This work was written between 709/1309–10 and 712/1312–1 (al-Ṭihirānī 1983, vol. 2, pp. 298–299; Schmidtke 1991, pp. 78–79).

Al-‘Allāma al-Hillī, *Anwār al-malakūt fī sharḥ al-Yāqūt* (ed.: Zanjānī, M. N.). Tehran: Dānishgāh-i Tihirān, 1959. This work was completed in 684/1285 (al-Ṭihirānī 1983, vol. 2, pp. 444–445; Schmidtke 1991, p. 79).

Al-‘Allāma al-Hillī, *Al-Bāb al-ḥādī ‘ashar fī mā yajibu ‘alā ‘annmat al-mukallaḥīn min ma‘rifat uṣūl al-dīn*, edited together with its commentaries *al-Nāfi‘ yawm al-ḥashr* by al-Miqdād al-Suyūrī and *Miftāḥ al-bāb* by Abū l-Faṭḥ b. Makhdūm al-Ḥusaynī (d. 976/1568–69) (ed.: Muḥaqqiq, M.). Mashhad: Mu‘assasat āstān-i quds-i riḍawī, 1372 Sh./1993–94. English transl.: Hasan b. Yūsuf b. Alī Ibnu’l-Mutahhar al-Hillī, *al-Bābu ‘l-Hādī ‘Ashar. A treatise on the principles of Shī‘ite theology* (W. Mc Elwee Miller, English Trans.). London: The Royal Asiatic Society, 1928.

Al-‘Allāma al-Hillī, *Ṭiqāḥ al-maqāṣid fī sharḥ Ḥikmat al-‘ayn* (ed.: Munzawī, ‘A.). Tehran: Čapkhānah-i dānishgāh, 1378/1959.

Al-‘Allāma al-Hillī, *Irshād al-adhhān fī aḥkām al-īmān* (ed.: al-Ḥasūn, F.). Qum: Mu‘assasat al-nashr al-islāmī, 1410/1989. This work was completed in 696/1296–7 (al-Ṭihirānī 1983, vol. 1, pp. 510–512, which mentions thirty-eight commentaries on this book; Schmidtke 1991, pp. 77–78).

Al-‘Allāma al-Hillī, *Istiḡṣā‘ al-naẓar fī l-baḥṭh ‘an al-qaḍā‘ wa l-qadar* (ed.: Tabrīziyān, F.). Tehran: Mash‘ar, 1418/1997–98. It was written after 709/1309 (al-Ṭihirānī 1983, vol. 2, pp. 31–32; Schmidtke 1991, p. 78).

Al-‘Allāma al-Hillī, *Al-Jawhar al-naḍīd fī sharḥ Manṭiq al-Tajrīd* (ed.: Bīdārfar, M.). Tehran: Intishārāt-i Bīdār, 1363 Sh./1984–85. This work is a commentary on the logics of Naṣīr



- al-Dīn al-Ṭūsī's *Kitāb al-Tajrīd* (al-Ṭīhrānī 1983, V, p. 290; Schmidtke 1991, p. 85).
- Al-'Allāma al-Ḥillī, *Kashf al-murād fī sharḥ Tajrīd al-i'tiqād* (ed.: Ḥasanzādah al-Āmulī, Ḥ.). Qum: Mu'assasat al-nashr al-islāmī, 1437/2015–16.
- Al-'Allāma al-Ḥillī, *Khulāsāt al-aqwāl fī ma'rifat al-rijāl* (ed.: Baḥr al-'ulūm, M. Ṣ.). Najaf: al-Ḥaydariyya, 1972. This work was completed in 693/1294 (al-Ṭīhrānī 1983, vol. 7, pp. 214–215; Schmidtke 1991, pp. 85–86).
- Al-'Allāma al-Ḥillī, *Mabādī' al-wuṣūl ilā 'ilm al-uṣūl* (The foundations of jurisprudence: An introduction to Imāmī Shī'i legal theory) (ed. & trans.: Shah Naqavi, S. A.). Leiden: Brill, 2017 (al-Ṭīhrānī 1983, vol. 19, pp. 43–44; Schmidtke 1991, pp. 91–92).
- Al-'Allāma al-Ḥillī, *Manāḥij al-yaqīn fī uṣūl al-dīn* (ed.: al-Anṣārī, M. R.). Qum: n.n., 1416/1995–96. This work was completed in 680/1281 (al-Ṭīhrānī 1983, vol. 22, p. 352; Schmidtke 1991, p. 94).
- Al-'Allāma al-Ḥillī, *Minhāj al-karāma fī ma'rifat al-imāma* (ed.: Mubārak, 'A.). Mashhad: Mu'assasat 'Āshūrā' li-l-taḥqīqāt wa l-buḥūth al-islāmiyya, 1419/1998–99. Also in its refutation by Ibn Taymiyya, *Minhāj al-sunna al-nabawiyya* (introd., pp. 77–202) (ed.: Salīm, R.). Cairo: Maktabat dār al-'urūba, 1962. This work was written after 709/1309 (al-Ṭīhrānī 1983, vol. 23, p. 172; Schmidtke 1991, p. 95).
- Al-'Allāma al-Ḥillī, *Mukhtalaf al-shī'a fī aḥkām al-sharī'a* (ed.: unknown). Tehran: n.n., 1323/1905. It was written between 699/1300 and 708/1309 (al-Ṭīhrānī 1983, vol. 20, pp. 218–221; Schmidtke 1991, p. 92).
- Al-'Allāma al-Ḥillī, *Nahj al-ḥaqq wa kashf al-ṣidq* (eds.: al-Ḥusaynī, F., & al-Ṣadr, R.). Beirut: Dār al-kitāb al-lubnānī, 1982. It was written after 709/1309 (al-Ṭīhrānī 1983, vol. 24, p. 416; Schmidtke 1991, p. 97).
- Al-'Allāma al-Ḥillī, *Nahj al-mustarshidīn fī uṣūl al-dīn*, edited with al-Miqdād al-Suyūrī, *Irshād al-tālibīn ilā nahj al-mustarshidīn* (ed.: al-Rajā'ī, M.). Qum: Manshūrāt maktabat Āyatullāh al-'uzmā Mar'ashī al-Najafī, 1405/1984–85. This work was completed in 699/1299 (al-Ṭīhrānī 1983, vol. 24, p. 424; Schmidtke 1991, pp. 97–98).
- Al-'Allāma al-Ḥillī, *Nihāyat al-wuṣūl ilā 'ilm al-uṣūl* (ed.: al-Bahādūrī, I.). Qum: Mu'assasat al-imām al-Ṣādiq, 1425/2004–5. It was completed in 704/1305 (al-Ṭīhrānī 1983, vol. 24, pp. 408–409; Schmidtke 1991, p. 96).
- Al-'Allāma al-Ḥillī, *Qawā'id al-aḥkām fī ma'rifat al-ḥalāl wa l-ḥarām* (3 vols.; ed.: unknown). Qum: Mu'assasat al-nashr al-islāmī, 1413/1992–93. It was completed on 699/1300 (al-Ṭīhrānī 1983, vol. 17, pp. 176–177; Schmidtke 1991, p. 88).
- Al-'Allāma al-Ḥillī, *Al-Risāla al-sa'diyya*, in *Kalimāt al-muḥaqqiqīn* (ed.: unknown). Tehran: n.n., 1315/1898, pp. 338–379. This work was written between 709/1309 and 711/1312 (al-Ṭīhrānī 1983, vol. 12, p. 183; Schmidtke 1991, pp. 86–87).
- Al-'Allāma al-Ḥillī, *Risāla fī Wājib al-i'tiqād 'alā jamī' al-'ibād*, together with al-Miqdād al-Suyūrī, *I'timād fī sharḥ Wājib al-i'tiqād*, in *Kalimāt al-muḥaqqiqīn* (ed.: unknown). Tehran: n.n., 1315/1898, pp. 380–422 (al-Ṭīhrānī 1983, vol. 25, p. 4; Schmidtke 1991, p. 87).

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## al-ʿĀmirī, Abū I-Ḥasan

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### Abstract

The tenth-century Khurasani philosopher Abū I-Ḥasan Muḥammad b. Yūsuf al-ʿĀmirī was one of the last representatives of the philosophical tradition initiated by al-Kindī. His works show a strong influence of Greek philosophy, for example, the *Book on the Afterlife* (*K. al-Amad ʿalā l-abad*) draws heavily on Plato’s *Phaedo* and the *Chapters on Metaphysical Topics* (*K. al-Fuṣūl al-Maʿālim al-ilāhīya*) are, in fact, a paraphrase of parts of the *Elements of Theology* by the late Neoplatonist Proclus.

About al-ʿĀmirī’s life not much information is preserved. Although he is said to have lived under the patronage of certain rulers at given times, he is also pictured as an itinerant Sufi in one of al-Tawḥīdī’s accounts. At the beginning of his *On the Afterlife*, al-ʿĀmirī listed the titles

of his 17 major works, five of which are known to be extant today. This list provides a good picture of the topics he wrote on, namely, logic, physics, psychology, metaphysics, ethics, biology and medicine, different religions, Sufism, and interpretation of the Qurʾān, as well as of dreams. However, it seems that he was primarily known as a metaphysician.

## Biographical Information

Whereas al-ʿĀmirī's date and place of birth are unknown, the exact day of his death occurring in Nishapur was apparently January 6, 992. The reason why this date has been preserved is that on the very same day, the religious scholar Abū Bakr Aḥmad b. al-Ḥusayn b. Mihrān al-Muqri' passed away and al-ʿĀmirī was said to have saved him from hell by being his ransom.

In his early years, al-ʿĀmirī studied with Abū Zayd al-Balkhī (d. 934), a student of al-Kindī, then spent some time at the courts of various rulers, and visited Baghdad twice. In the sixties and seventies of the tenth century, he was in Ray under the patronage of Abū l-Faḍl b. al-ʿAmīd and his son Abū l-Faḥ b. al-ʿAmīd Dhū l-Kifāyatayn. In the entourage of the latter, al-ʿĀmirī came to Baghdad and attended the scholarly gatherings which Abū l-Faḥ organized there. Al-Tawḥīdī reports the course of many such sessions in his various works, among them an encounter between al-ʿĀmirī and the famous grammarian Abū Saʿīd al-Sīrāfī. The latter answered the former's question on the nature of the Arabic particle *bi-* in the *basmala* with silence.

Al-ʿĀmirī spent the last years of his life in Nishapur and Bukhara, where he was, at least temporarily, at the court of the Samanid vizier Abū l-Ḥusayn ʿUbaydallāh b. Aḥmad al-ʿUṭbī, most probably benefiting from the ruler's magnificent library.

## Thought/Philosophy

Al-ʿĀmirī's concept of knowledge comprises traditional religious and philosophical sciences. The importance of the religious sciences lies in their

being based on divine revelation. Thus, they are able to provide answers to questions which intellect alone cannot solve, for example, what kind of acts of devotions and religious observances should be performed. As to religious sciences, al-ʿĀmirī distinguishes *kalām* which is attained by intellect, *fiqh* (law) which is perceived by intellect and sense perception, and the science of *hadīth* which is grasped by sense perception alone and linguistics, which functions as a tool to the former three. Correspondingly, philosophy is divided into metaphysics, mathematics, natural sciences, and logic. Only a person who has mastered the latter three sciences and proceeded to metaphysical matters can be truly called a philosopher. The history and development of Greek philosophy as such, and metaphysics in particular, are closely tied to the Qurʾānic revelation received by Luqmān and Solomon. The former is taken to be the first sage who taught Empedocles his knowledge, and the companions of the latter are said to have instructed Pythagoras in physical and metaphysical matters. Al-ʿĀmirī's own metaphysics is founded on the Neoplatonic hierarchy of being, which he either uses in its basic form (God – Universal Intellect – Universal Soul – Nature) or in a more detailed elaboration (God – Universal Forms and Intellect – Universal Soul and Sphere of the Spheres, which may correspond to Universal Nature – Spheres and Heavenly Bodies – Beings composed of the four elements). However, it is the dichotomy between the spiritual and the bodily world which is of crucial interest to al-ʿĀmirī's thought. Man is understood as forming a link between these two worlds as he consists of a spiritual soul and a body which is composed of the four elements. In this world, man acts as God's representative, and in the next one, he may become an eternal adornment, if he succeeds in likening his soul to the divine by grasping the eternal intellectual forms. The human soul and body are understood as two separate substances, which are independent of each other and may therefore overcome one another. Although the soul is able to prevent the body from giving into its desires, the body can lead the soul astray and distract it from its ultimate goal, that is, its ascent to the spiritual world. Whereas the soul provides life to the body, the body enables the soul to

experience good and evil and thus to discriminate between them by its own personal trial. This distinguishes men from the angels who have knowledge of the evil but no experience of it. However, as the human body constitutes a liability to the soul, God has set up the religious law by which man is guided from the lower to the upper world. Therefore, al-ʿĀmirī describes man as being religious by nature. Religious belief may be caused by one of two different powers or faculties of the human soul, either the intellective or the imaginative one. If it is by the former, true belief results, and if it is by the latter, either true or false belief may result.

Within the scope of religious belief, the problem of predestination and free will falls, which was prominent in the *kalām* discussions of his time and which al-ʿĀmirī tackled in two of his extant writings, the *Deliverance of Mankind from the Problem of Predestination and Free Will* (*Inqādh al-bashar min al-jabr wa-l-qadar*) and the later *Determination of the Various Aspects of Predestination* (*al-Taqrīr li-awjuh al-taqdīr*). His approach is to determine four essential causes of any given existence, namely, the four Aristotelian causes (matter, agent, form, and end) and countless accidental causes. Furthermore, matter, agent, and form are distinguished into a proximate and a remote matter, agent, and form and are, thus, twofold causes. Hence, God may always be understood as the remote agent of any human action, whereas man is the proximate cause of his actions. Thus, al-ʿĀmirī's position turns out to be a middle one between believing in predestination, which he explains as resulting from taking into consideration only the accidental causes and human deficiency, and believing in free will, which results from focusing solely on the essential causes and the generosity of God. As to heavenly influence, which is the mean by which divine predestination is communicated to the lower world, al-ʿĀmirī explains that man is subject to this influence due to his corporeal form but may escape it with the help of his purified soul.

In addition to the configuration of the celestial spheres and bodies, magic, witchcraft, spells, talismans, and the evil eye may also have an impact on man, although they are rarely able to affect his

rational soul. Contrarily, prayer may grant further reaching power over other bodies to saints and prophets, because prayer strengthens the soul's spirituality, provides the help of the angels, and is only granted by God as an honor.

Al-ʿĀmirī's philosophical thought does not seem to have had a strong impact on later generations. Therefore, it comes as no surprise that only seven of his writings are known to be extant today: The *Book on the Afterlife* (*K. al-Amad 'alā l-abad*) which is influenced by Plato's *Phaedo*; the *Chapters on Metaphysical Topics* (*K. al-Fuṣūl al-Ma'ālim al-ilāhīya*) which are, in fact, a paraphrase of parts of Proclus' *Elements of Theology*; the *Deliverance of Mankind from the Problem of Predestination and Free Will* (*Inqādh al-bashar min al-jabr wa-l-qadar*) which also discusses several *kalām* positions on the topic; the *Determination of the Various Aspects of Predestination* (*al-Taqrīr li-awjuh al-taqdīr*) which draws on the Aristotelian model of the sublunar world; the *Vision and the Visible* (*al-Ibṣār wa-l-mubṣār*) on sense perception in the tradition of Aristotle's *De anima*; *An Exposition on the Merits of Islam* (*al-I'lām bi-manāqib al-islām*); and *An Explanation of the Various Aspects of the Interpretation of Dreams* (*al-Tabṣīr li-awjuh al-ta'bīr*) whose existence in a Turkish manuscript has recently come to light. The *Seven Discussions between the Shaykh and al-ʿĀmirī* (*al-Majālis al-sab' bayna al-shaykh wa-l-ʿĀmirī*) contain reports about philosophical exchanges in the form of questions and answers. Recently the identification of the questioner with Ibn Sīnā and of the respondent with al-ʿĀmirī has been suggested. Al-ʿĀmirī's authorship of the *Book on Happiness and its Creation in Human Life* (*K. al-Sa'āda wa-l-is'ād fī l-sīra al-insānīya*), although often upheld, is far from being established for certain.

## Cross-References

- ▶ al-Balkhī, Abū Zayd
- ▶ al-Kindī, Abū Yūsuf Ya'qūb ibn Ishāq
- ▶ Plato, Arabic
- ▶ Proclus, Arabic
- ▶ al-Tawḥīdī, Abū Ḥayyān

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## Āmulī, Sayyid Ḥaydar

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### Abstract

Sayyid Ḥaydar Āmulī (d. after 787/1385–86), is a Shīʿi Imāmi thinker, famous for his efforts to reconcile Twelver Shīʿism, Sufism, and a certain form of philosophy. According to his autobiographical accounts, this member of a noble family of northern Persia relinquished his worldly career around the age of thirty, donned the Sufi cloak and became a wandering gnostic. His two major sources of inspiration are the early esoteric tradition of the Shīʿi Imāms and the theoretical mysticism of Ibn ʿArabī. In most of his works, he intended to demonstrate the harmony between Law (*sharīʿa*), or the exoteric dimension of religion, Path (*ṭarīqa*), or the mystical tradition

of Sufism, and Truth (*ḥaqīqa*), or the intellectual knowledge of realities. For this reason, he is to be seen as a major representative of the ‘golden age of heterodoxies in Islam’ during the early modern period, and as a forerunner of the Shī‘i philosophical gnosis in the eleventh/seventeenth-century Iran.

Bahā’ al-Dīn Ḥaydar ibn ‘Alī ibn Ḥaydar al-‘Alawī al-Ḥusaynī al-Āmulī, known as Sayyid Ḥaydar Āmulī (b. 719/1320 – d. after 787/1385–86), was a Shī‘i Imāmi thinker in the fields of theology (*kalām* and *tafsīr*), mysticism, and metaphysics. He is still celebrated for his efforts to reconcile Twelver Shī‘ism, Sufism, and a certain form of philosophy and for this reason is frequently associated with Ḥāfiẓ Rajab al-Bursī (d. after 813/1410–11) and Ibn Abī Jumhūr al-Aḥsā‘ī (d. after 904/1499) (see their entries); he is also to be seen as a forerunner of the Shī‘i philosophical gnosis in the eleventh/seventeenth-century Iran (Shaybī 2011, II, pp. 104–115).

## His Life

Ḥaydar Āmulī was a member of a large family of sayyids (descendants of Prophet Muḥammad) from Āmul, in the province of Tabarastān. He belonged to a subset of the Iranian population who had already converted to Twelver Shī‘ism before the Safavid era (906–1134/1501–1722), when it became the state religion of Iran. Under Ilkhanate rule (656–756/1258–1355) and the semi-anarchic post-Ilkhanate or pre-Timurid interregna (756–807/1355–1405), Iran was still predominantly Sunni; nevertheless, Shī‘i ideas permeated the empire, emanating from the resident Sufi brotherhoods which remained at least nominally Sunni (Molé 1961; Bausani 1968).

Most of the available information on the life of Sayyid Ḥaydar Āmulī come from his two autobiographical accounts, the first of which was included at the beginning of his *Muḥīṭ al-a‘ẓam*, completed in 777/1375–76 (*MAa*, I, pp. 528–531; *MAb*, pp. 202–204; *La philosophie shi‘ite*, French introd., pp. 18–19, Arabic introd. pp. 42–44), and

the second in his *Naṣṣ al-nuṣūṣ*, finished in 782/1380–81 at the age of 63 (*NNa*, pp. 535–537; *NNb*, II, pp. 851–853; *La philosophie shi‘ite*, French introd., pp. 21–23, Arabic introd. pp. 10–13). Both accounts are mainly apologetic and focused on his spiritual evolution. He begins the first account by retracing his lineage to the fourth imam ‘Alī b. Ḥusayn Zayn al-‘Ābidīn (d. ca 95/714). He relates therein how for 20 years he studied exoteric Imāmi sciences, first in his birthplace Āmul, then in Khurasān, and in Iṣfahān. After that, he returned to Āmul and entered the service of the Prince of Ṭabaristān, Fakhr al-Dawla Ḥasan ibn Kay-Khusraw ibn Yazdgard (r. 734–750/1333–1349), the heir of a dynasty going back to the Sassanid kings of ancient Persia, whose minister he ultimately became, attaining thereby wealth and glory.

Around the age of 30, in 749/1348 or before, in consequence of a spiritual crisis, Sayyid Ḥaydar Āmulī relinquished his worldly career, left his parents and friends, donned the *khirqā* or Sufi cloak, and set out on a journey to the Shī‘i shrines of Iraq and to Mecca. On the road, he sat for a time in Isfahan at the feet of a Sufi master called Nūruddīn Tihirānī (from a village close to Isfahan), from whom he received a second *khirqā*, reputed to have been offered by the Angel Gabriel to the Prophet Muḥammad, then given by the latter to ‘Alī ibn Abī Ṭālib (d. 40/661), then by Imām to Imām to the eighth one ‘Alī al-Riḍā’ (d. 203/818), then by the latter to the Sufi master Ma‘rūf al-Karkhī (d. 200/815), then to Sarī al-Saqatī (d. 253/867), then to Abū al-Qāsim al-Junayd (d. 298/911), and so on to Shaykh Tihirānī (*MAa*, I, pp. 534–535; *MAb*, p. 206). Having accomplished his pilgrimage (*ḥājj*) in 751/1350, he visited the tomb of the Prophet but had to leave Medina due to ill health and returned to Najaf, Iraq, settling near the shrine of the first Imām ‘Alī Abī Ṭālib. Two of his major works (*Asrār al-sharī‘a* and *Jāmi‘ al-asrār*) were written during this Sufi Iraqi period.

Sayyid Ḥaydar remained for some years in Baghdad, where he studied with Fakhr al-Dīn Muḥammad b. Ḥasan b. Muṭahhar al-Ḥillī, best known under his nickname of Fakhr



al-Muḥaqqiqīn (d. 771/1370), the son of al-‘Allāma al-Ḥillī (d. 726/1326). In 759/1358, he exchanged with him a series of questions and answers, described in an autograph manuscript dated from 762/1360–61 and entitled *al-Masā’il al-āmuliyya* (“The questions of Āmul”) (al-Ṭīhrānī 1983, V, p. 204–205; Dānashpajūh 1953, I, p. 70). In 761/1369, Fakhr al-Muḥaqqiqīn granted him an *ijāza*, a license to teach a considerable number of collections of Imāmi ḥadīths (*MAa*, pp. 531–534; *MAB*, pp. 204–206; *NVb*, intr., pp. 31–34). In 769/1367–68, Sayyid Ḥaydar composed at Fakhr al-Muḥaqqiqīn’s demand the *Risāla Raf’ al-khilāf wa l-munāza’a*, a polemic epistle seeking to justify the passive attitude of the first Imām ‘Alī during the reigns of the three first caliphs, an argumentation opposed to both Sunni historians and Shī’i “exaggerators” (*ghulāt*). This relationship certainly afforded Ḥaydar Āmulī a considerable legitimacy as a theologian and a transmitter of Imāmi ḥadīths and probably spared him the hostility of Shī’i scholars over his Sufi sympathies and his own tendency to “exaggeration” (*ghuluww*) in the veneration of the Shī’i Imāms.

Ḥaydar Āmulī spent the rest of his life in Najaf, where he completed most of his works. He died sometime after 787/1385, which is the date of his last known work, the *Risāla fī l-‘Ulūm al-‘āliyya* (“Treatise of Sublime Sciences,” see al-Ṭīhrānī 1983, XVIII, p. 327).

## His Thought

If the intellectual life and the major thinkers of the Safavid period are well represented in historical studies, the Ilkhanid and post-Ilkhanid period remains poorly known despite its fertility. With the destruction of the Sunni caliphate by the Mongols (656/1258), “Sunni orthodoxy” had lost its hegemony in the Persian world. The lack of any fixed religious policy and the atmosphere of social chaos in the Ilkhanid state were favorable to the rise of many messianic movements but also to the flourishing of three spiritual movements previously considered heterodox, if not heretical, which are Twelver Shī’ism (after the destruction

of the Alamut state of its Ismā’īli rival in 654/1256), Sufism, and philosophy. Sayyid Ḥaydar Āmulī is to be seen as a, if not as the, major representative of what could be called a “golden age of heterodoxies.” He was involved in the rapprochement between Shī’is and Sufis, which were at this time in Iran two minority yet powerful groups in a double process of conflict and coalescence (see Calmard 1997; Gronke 1997). Āmulī had been a Shī’i since his earlier education, and he converted to Sufism when he was a mature man, without renouncing Shī’ism. His Sufism was both practical and theoretical: on the one hand, he donned the *khirqā* and travelled as a dervish for 1 or 2 years; on the other, he adopted most of Ibn ‘Arabī’s (d. 638/1240) theosophical conceptions and sought to integrate them into Shī’i theology and imāmology.

Consequently, the thought of Ḥaydar Āmulī had two major sources of inspiration: the early esoteric Shī’i tradition, i.e., the teachings of the Imāms as collected in the classical collections of ḥadīths, and the theosophy of Ibn ‘Arabī. These two sources were not only difficult to reconcile (Ibn ‘Arabī is reputed to be a Sunni thinker) but were both also difficult to be accepted by the intellectual and religious milieu of Ḥaydar Āmulī. On the one hand, the esoteric aspect of the Shī’i Ḥadīth was commonly disregarded by Shī’i jurists-theologians, if not actually rejected on the grounds of “exaggeration” or “extremism” (*ghuluww*) – the term denoting anti-Sunni positions, messianic claims, deification of the Imam, pretension to the vision of God, etc.. On the other hand, the doctrine of Ibn ‘Arabī was regarded as heretical by most of the Shī’i and Sunni doctors (*‘ulamā*).

In pursuing this rapprochement, Ḥaydar Āmulī was not only an audacious thinker; he was also an original one. Among the main axes of his thought are what he calls “the testimony to the unity of Existence” (*al-tawḥīd al-wujūdī*); the harmony between “religious Law” (*sharī’a*), “mystical Path” (*ṭarīqa*), and “spiritual Truth” (*ḥaqīqa*); the correspondences between “the book of Qur’an” (*al-kitāb al-qur’ānī*), “the book of horizons” (*al-kitāb al-āfāqī*), i.e., the physical world or *macrocosmos* (*al-‘ālam al-kabīr*), and “the



book of souls” (*al-kitāb al-anfusī*), i.e., the inner self or *microcosmos* (*al-‘ālam al-ṣaghīr*); and the spiritual, inner, or esoteric signification (*bāṭin*) of all the religious prescriptions, from prayer to holy struggle (*jihād*), in complement to their outer or exoteric form (*zāhir*).

Ḥaydar Āmulī sought to elaborate a theology which could be at the same time both intellectually rigorous and intuitively concrete. He investigates the Islamic notion of the “testimony to the unity of God” (*tawḥīd*), which he divides in a “theological” (*ulūhī*) and an “ontological” (*wujūdī*) unity. The latter is no other than the doctrine of “the unity of existence” (*waḥdat al-wujūd*), inherited from Ibn ‘Arabī and condemned as a form of pantheism by a number of theologians, whether Sunni or Shī‘i (NNa, Arabic introd., pp. 16–65). Ḥaydar Āmulī also combines two kinds of apparently contradictory discourse on God: *tanzīh*, i.e., the declaration of God’s incomparability with the created beings, leading to an apophatic theology or *via negationis*, supported in particular by the rationalist Mu‘tazilite theologians, and *tajallī*, i.e., theophany or God’s self-disclosure by the means of his Names. In this regard, prophets and Imāms are to be seen as loci of manifestation of God, as well as exemplifications of the perfect human being (*al-insān al-kāmil*). A lost treatise entitled *al-Asmā’ al-ilāhīyya wa ta’yīn maṣāhirihā min al-ashkhāṣ al-insāniyya* (“The Divine Names and the Designation of the Human Persons who are Their Loci of Manifestation”) was probably devoted to this typically Shī‘i-Sufi topic which pervades all his extant works.

The congruence between law (*sharī‘a*), or the exoteric and legalistic dimension of religion; path (*ṭarīqa*), or the mystical and existential tradition of Sufism; and truth (*ḥaqīqa*), or the pure contemplation of essential realities, lies at the heart of all Āmulī’s works. His still extant earlier treatise, *Asrār al-sharī‘a* (“the Secrets of the Law”), is more especially devoted to the demonstration of this congruence. Āmulī’s speculations in this regard take as their point of departure a saying attributed to the Prophet: “The Law is my discourse, the Path is my action, and the Truth is my states of being.” The five “principles” or

“roots” (*uṣūl*) of the Shī‘i faith, unity of God, prophecy, imāmate, divine justice, and final resurrection (*ma‘ād*), followed by its five “branches” (*furū‘*) – prayer, fasting, alms, pilgrimage, and *jihād* – are examined in their successive aspects of exoteric law, mystical path, and spiritual truth, in order to demonstrate that there can be no contradiction between them. This conceptual triad of law, path, and truth has correspondences with that of prophecy (*mubuwwa*), legislative mission (*risāla*), and divine friendship (*walāya*). Within all of them, the most esoteric or inner dimension encompasses the exoteric or outer ones. As a result, every prophet and legislator is first a friend of God (*walī*), but not every friend of God is a prophet. This enables our author to support at the same time the religious preeminence of the prophet and the ontological superiority of the Imām, which is a crucial tenet of Shī‘ism.

This perfect harmony seems to justify and to require a “sacred alliance” between Shī‘i jurisprudence (*fiqh*), Sufism, and philosophical gnosis (*‘irfān*). Indeed, the religious law is the object of the exoteric sciences, the spiritual path is the object of Sufism in its individual form, and the spiritual truth is the object of knowledge attained by “spiritual unveiling” (*kashf*), confirmed by rational-intellective (*ma‘qūl*) as well as scriptural-traditional (*manqūl*) proofs.

Āmulī’s most celebrated doctrine, elaborated in particular in his treatise *Jāmi‘ al-asrār wa manba‘ al-anwār*, is that in their essential reality, Shī‘ism and Sufism are not only compatible, but identical; i.e. the “true Shī‘is,” in the esoteric sense of the term, are the “Sufis” and the “true Sufis” are Shī‘i (Corbin 1972, III, pp. 178–190). Ḥaydar Āmulī addresses this argument to Sufis and Twelver Shī‘is with the aim of establishing harmony among them and to lead each group to its own truth, respectively, the esoteric (*bāṭin*) and the exoteric (*zāhir*) aspects of the same superior truth contained in the teachings of the Imāms (*JA*, pp. 40, 222, and 254). For this purpose, he dissociates “real” or “true” forms of Shī‘ism and Sufism from others considered to be “false.” On the one hand, “true Shī‘is,” in the exoteric sense of the term, are Twelver Imāmi Shī‘is, representing a moderate and – at that time – quietist branch of

Shī'ism, not to be confused with Ismā'īlis, Zaydis, nor with "exaggerators" (*ghulāt*). On the other hand, "true Sufis" are exemplary early masters and ascetics such as Abū Yazīd al-Baṣṭāmī (d. 234/848 or 261/874) and Junayd al-Baghdādī (d. 298/911), both reputed to have been the disciples of the Shī'ī Imāms. These "true Sufis" are identical to the "well-tested believers" (*al-mu'minūn al-mumtaḥanūn*) referred to in a famous Imāmi ḥadīth: "Our Cause is difficult; the only ones able to bear it are a Prophet missioned by God, an angel of Proximity, and a faithful believer whose heart has been tested by God for faith" (*JA*, pp. 32–33, 36–37, 39 and 600; *Ibid.*, French introd., pp. 27–29; Amir-Moezzi 1994, p. 137). He rules out, as "false" forms of Sufism, the organizational aspect of the brotherhoods, i.e., the *ṭarīqa* as a social and historical institution, and antinomianism (*ibāḥiyya*), i.e., the rejection of the obligations of law (*sharī'a*) on pretext of having acquired the knowledge of the ultimate truth (*ḥaqīqa*). Ḥaydar Āmulī wrote two works, now lost, especially devoted to Sufism: a summary of the *Risāla Iṣṭilāḥāt al-ṣūfiyya* of 'Abd al-Razzāq al-Kāshānī (730/1329–30), a lexicon of the technical terms of Sufism, entitled *Talkhīṣ iṣṭilāḥāt al-ṣūfiyya*, and a *Risālat al-Faqr wa taḥqīq al-fakhr* ("Treatise of Poverty and Verification of the Glory [Attached to it]"), which purports to be a justification of the way of life of dervishes, basing itself on the saying attributed to the Prophet Muḥammad, "Poverty is my glory (*al-faqr fakhrī*); because of it I glorify myself above all Prophets and Messengers."

Ḥaydar Āmulī cannot be simply regarded as an ecumenicist theologian. He supports a radically Shī'ī and anti-Sunni historiography, claiming the divine right of 'Alī and rejecting the three first caliphs. In this regard, he claims that powerlessness (*'ajz*) is not contradictory with impeccability (*'iṣma*), which is the common attribute of the Imāms and the prophets and that the dignity of Imām, the guide of the community, is not dependent on the possession of the temporal authority (*RM*). Likewise, he develops a typically Shī'ī "historiosophy" assuming that each revealed law (*sharī'a*), from that of Adam to that of Muḥammad, "the seal of prophecy," was followed by a

cycle of divine friendship (*walāya*); that each prophet-legislator (*nabī mursal*) has had 12 legatees (*awṣiyā'*), those of the Prophet Muḥammad being the 12 Imāms; and that the task of these legatees is to conserve the exoteric dimension of the law and to unveil its esoteric dimension by means of spiritual exegesis (*ta'wīl*) (*JA*, pp. 240–242). As regards eschatology, he maintains against his gnostic master Ibn 'Arabī that the seal of the absolute divine friendship (*walāya muṭlaqa*) is the Imām 'Alī and not Jesus and that the seal of the determined divine friendship (*walāya muqayyada*) is the twelfth Imām, the awaited Mahdī, and not Ibn 'Arabī himself as pretended by his commentator Dāwud al-Qayṣarī (d. 851/1350) (*JA*, pp. 385, 395–448; *NNA*, pp. 167–261; *NNb*, I, pp. 244–394). Finally, regarding the hierarchies of initiation with its "poles" and "pillars," dominated by "the pole of poles," as received by numerous Sufi individuals and orders, he maintains that they are not more than 19, including 7 prophets and the 12 Imāms; by doing so, he makes Sufi doctrine subservient to Shī'ī tenets, on the principle that the "true Sufis" are Shī'ī or have to become so.

About imāmology, Ḥaydar Āmulī maintains positions irreconcilable with Sunnism. Not only does he affirm the consubstantiality of imāmate and prophecy, but also he emphasizes the theophanic nature of the Imām. He seems to be the first, in the modern period, to record as reliable the "theo-imāmosophical sermons" attributed to the Imām 'Alī, in which the latter claims his identity with the Qur'anic divine names (Amir-Moezzi 2011, pp. 103–131), followed in this attitude by Ḥāfiẓ Rajab al-Bursī and Ibn Abī Jumhūr. Contrarily, rationalist *fuqahā'* consider these traditions to be spurious and the conceptions that they corroborate to be pure "exaggeration". Āmulī's association with Fakhr al-Muḥaqqiqīn may have shielded him from condemnation and persecution like that faced by Rajab al-Bursī in Ḥilla one generation after him.

Henry Corbin has given the title of "Shī'ī Philosophy" to the first edition of the *Jāmi' al-asrār*, published along with the *Risāla Naqd al-nuqūd*. It was an enigmatic, if not provocative, association, since Ḥaydar Āmulī deals much less with

philosophical concepts and doctrines than with Twelver Shī‘i and Sufi notions and topics, conferring much more authority and efficacy to spiritual intuition and vision than to discursive argumentation. For example, as regards absolute existence, Ḥaydar Āmulī claims that it cannot be understood by reason and intellectual speculation (*naẓar fikrī*) but only by “spiritual unveiling and tasting” (*kashf wa dhawq*) (*NNa*, pp. 413sq; *NNb*, II, p. 672) and that the philosopher (*ḥakīm*), while seeking the truth by means of intellectual demonstration, remains frustrated and veiled (*NNa*, pp. 479sq; *NNb*, II, p. 770); and he quotes Avicenna, “the most learned of the philosophers (*ḥukamā’*),” confessing in his *Ta’līqāt* that “the understanding of things in their essential realities is beyond the capacity of human being,” that means, in Āmulī’s argumentation, beyond the capacity of rational philosophy, not of gnosis (*NNa*, pp. 480–482; *NNb*, II, pp. 772–774; Ibn Sīnā, p. 34–35). Consequently, it seems more appropriate, where he is concerned, to speak of “Shī‘i gnosis” (*irfān shī‘ī*) rather than “Shī‘i philosophy.”

Nevertheless, the thought of Ḥaydar Āmulī touches on philosophy in the proper sense of the word. His works show clearly an effort of systematization and conceptualization of various elements in order to build a coherent onto-theology. If his knowledge of Greek philosophy seems to be limited to the account made by ‘Abd al-Karīm al-Shahrastānī (d. 548/1153) in his *Kitāb al-mīlāl wa l-niḥāl* (“Book of Religions and Sects”), he is certainly influenced by Neoplatonism. In his *Naṣṣ al-nuṣūṣ*, he refers to the Neoplatonic scheme of procession according to Ibn Sīnā: “From the True God, which is the true One and the universal first Cause, proceeded the First Intellect, which is also One, according to the rule that ‘only one can come from one’ (*lā yaḍuru min al-wāḥid illā l-wāḥid = ex uno non fit nisi unum*), and the rest of being proceeded from the first Intellect in due order. The True God is absolutely free of any relation to the bestowal of existence on the world.” (*NNa*, p. 520; *NNb*, II, p. 829) Ḥaydar Āmulī also uses subtle philosophical arguments, as when he says that, since one cannot doubt one’s own particular and determinate existence, nor can one doubt universal and absolute existence (*NNa*,

p. 410; *NNb*, II, p. 668; *NNMW*, p. 623). Finally, in his considerations on ethics, he adopts the Aristotelian system of the four cardinal virtues of wisdom, courage, temperance, and justice and their definition as happy mediums between two extremes. He considers that each of these virtues corresponds to a form of testimony to divine unity (*tawḥīd*) and encompasses a number of Islamic virtues, which he illustrates by examples from sacred history (*NNa*, pp. 370–381; *NNb*, II, pp. 592–613).

One of the most singular characteristics of Āmulī’s works, on which Henry Corbin called attention, is his use of diagrams in complement to his discursive argumentation. These spherical schemes illustrate the hierarchies of worlds, levels of reality, modes of knowledge, prophets, saints, sages, etc.; they are based on the “science of balances” or correspondences as established by the famous – as well as mysterious – alchemist Jābir b. Ḥayyān (third/ninth century). As Corbin argues, this “diagrammatic art,” far from being merely an *ars memorativa*, as in Latin scholasticism, is conceived of being “an *ars interiorativa* or an *ars meditativa*,” providing experimental confirmation of his metaphysical investigations (Corbin 1972, III, p. 178; Corbin 2006, pp. 91–92; *NNa*, introd., pp. 33–34). Sayyid Ḥaydar presents these diagrams as being “intellectual images” (*amthila ‘aqliyya*) obtained by spiritual unveiling and tasting, in order to give form (*tashkīl*) to metaphysical knowledge (*al-ma‘arīf al-ilāhiyya*) and theosophical truths (*al-ḥaqā’iq al-rabbāniyya*) (*NNa*, p. 31; *NNb*, I, pp. 42–43).

Ḥaydar Āmulī was also deeply concerned with the science of letters and numbers (*‘ilm al-ḥurūf wa l-a’dād*), a kind of Arabic *gematria* whose purpose was to unveil the secrets of the named realities by their alphanumerical characters. Following Ibn ‘Arabī in particular, he considered the letters of the Arabic alphabet to be the means of the creation, i.e., of the self-disclosure of God (*tajallī*). The first letter of the alphabet, the *ālīf*, symbolizes the pure divine essence, while the second letter, the *bā’*, symbolizes the first emanation, i.e., Intellect, and the beginning of the procession of all realities. Similar speculations can be

found in the *Mashāriq al-anwār* (“The Orient of Lights”) of Ḥāfiẓ Rajab al-Bursī (see the relevant entry). But while the latter applies this theory to the analysis of special names and formulas, Ḥaydar Āmulī emphasizes the general correspondence between letters, words, and verses of the three books of God, horizons, and souls. He has a strong predilection for the number 19, which is the number of the letters of the *bismillāh*, the opening formula of the Qur’an, which he considers to be the sum of all the spiritual and physical worlds, plus the perfect human being (Corbin 2006, pp. 118–142).

Finally, the concern of his thought with the phenomenon of revelation remains to be briefly examined. The thought of Ḥaydar Āmulī can be described as a philosophy of revelation or even, if we are to take his sayings at face value, as a revealed philosophy. His masterpiece is a monumental Qur’anic exegesis entitled *al-Muḥīṭ al-a’ẓam* (“the Greatest Ocean”). Of its seven volumes, only the first has been edited, and the others seem to be lost; the edited volume includes six introductions and the commentary of the first brief surah of the Qur’an, the *Fātiḥa*. In its present form, the opus is not so much a *tafsīr* as a treatise on the inner, esoteric dimension of the Qur’an, its point of departure being the ḥadīth: “Qur’an has got an outer and an inner dimension; the inner has itself an inner dimension, and so on till seven inner dimensions.” As a Shī’i, Ḥaydar Āmulī uses to interpret Qur’anic verses in the light of Imāmi ḥadīths and, reciprocally, considering the two texts to be equally revealed.

The book marks a turning point in the history of both Shī’i thought and Islamic philosophy, since Ḥaydar Āmulī is the first Twelver Shī’i thinker to practice Qur’anic exegesis in his own name. In the early doctrine of Twelver Shī’ism, only an Imām had the competence and the legitimacy to interpret Qur’an in virtue of his impeccability. The fragment of verse 3:7 states: “None know their [i.e., allegorical verses’] interpretation except God and those who are firmly rooted in knowledge (*al-rāsikhūn fī l-‘ilm*),” where the latter are understood to specify the Imāms. Moreover, in this conception, the Qur’an remains a “silent book” without esoteric interpretation

(*ta’wīl*) by the Imām, whilst the Imām as hermeneutist is called “the speaking book.” Consequently, the “occultation” of the twelfth Imām in 260/874 left a gaping void in the Shī’is’ religious life. It would fall to philosophers and gnostics to assume the task of hermeneutics, not by any impeccability but by means of both reflection and inspiration. After Naṣīr al-Dīn al-Ṭūsī (d. 672/1274) had transmitted the principles of philosophical exegesis from Ismā’īlism to Twelver Shī’ism, Ḥaydar Āmulī would be the very first to assume this role, considering that the followers of the Imāms among the “masters of unity” (*arbāb al-tawḥīd*) are also among “those who are firmly rooted in science” and habilitated to interpret Qur’an (*MA*, pp. 148–150). As a consequence, contrary to what happened in the Sunni world, the practice of *ta’wīl*, the spiritual interpretation of Qur’an has remained alive in Shī’i milieus.

However, Ḥaydar Āmulī also claims to have a special legitimacy to interpret the Qur’an, superior to what a rational philosopher like Averroes could have claimed for himself. This claim appears in his *Naṣṣ al-nuṣūṣ fī sharḥ al-fuṣūṣ* (“The Text of the Texts. A Commentary of the Bezels [of Wisdom]”), written after *al-Muḥīṭ al-a’ẓam*. It is a commentary on the *Fuṣūṣ al-ḥikam* of Ibn ‘Arabī, a series of theosophical speculations inspired by the figures of prophets, and undoubtedly one of the most influential and widely discussed works of Islamic philosophy and mysticism. Ibn ‘Arabī, in the introduction to the book, claimed to have received it from the hands of Prophet Muḥammad in a dream (Ibn ‘Arabī 2002, pp. 47–48). Ḥaydar Āmulī, as many Sufis do, apparently takes this saying at face value. Moreover, he develops a singular system of correspondences between the Prophet Muḥammad, Ibn ‘Arabī, and himself. He says that two books belong to the Prophet: the Qur’an, which was revealed to him (*al-nāzil ‘alayhi*), and the *Fuṣūṣ al-ḥikam* which proceeded from him (*al-ṣādīr minhu*). Equally, two books are reputed to belong to Ibn ‘Arabī: the *Fuṣūṣ al-ḥikam* sent to him (*al-wāṣil ilayhi*) and the *Futūḥāt al-makkiyya* proceeding from him. Correspondingly, two books belong to himself: *al-Muḥīṭ al-a’ẓam*, his commentary of the Qur’an, which overflowed onto

him, and *Naṣṣ al-nuṣūṣ*, his commentary on the *Fuṣūṣ*, which proceeded from him. He concludes that the *Muḥīṭ al-a-ẓam* is for him what the book of the *Fuṣūṣ al-ḥikam* was for Ibn ‘Arabī and what the Qur’an was for the Prophet Muḥammad, i.e., a book revealed by God (NNa, pp. 148–149; NNb, pp. 216–217).

It is of interest that in his *Naṣṣ al-nuṣūṣ*, and already in his *Jāmi‘ al-asrār*, Ḥaydar Āmulī criticizes some views of Ibn ‘Arabī, especially those on “the seal of the divine friendship.” The question arises: Did he really think, while doing so, that the *Fuṣūṣ al-ḥikam* had been revealed by the Prophet to Ibn ‘Arabī? Certainly he did not, since he explicitly addresses his criticism to “the greatest master” (*al-shaykh al-akbar*) and not to the Prophet. However, it seems exaggerated to say with M. Bidārfar that Ḥaydar Āmulī wrote a refutation under the cover of a commentary (NNb, introd., pp. 13–14). He was acknowledging the transcendent inspiration of Ibn ‘Arabī and attributing what he considered to be false in his sayings to his human fallibility; accordingly, he was qualifying him as a Gnostic (*‘arif*), not as a friend of God (*walī*), the latter being essentially infallible. Despite the fact that Ibn ‘Arabī was not Shī‘ī, Ḥaydar Āmulī strived to incorporate his theosophy into mainstream Twelver Shī‘ism, something which can be regarded with Corbin as his foremost contribution to Islamic culture (Corbin 1972, III, p. 155). It is clearly in the Shī‘ī world, especially in Iran, that the thought of Ibn ‘Arabī has remained most alive and influential, while it is commonly rejected by Sunni doctors; and as in the case of Qur’anic exegesis, it would not have been possible without the undertaking of Ḥaydar Āmulī.

Āmulī’s syncretism itself would eventually be combined with the illuminationist theosophy of Suhrawardī, of whose work Āmulī gives no account, although he must certainly have been aware of it, by Iranian Imāmi thinkers such as Mīr Dāmād (d. 1040/1631) and Ṣadr al-Dīn Shīrāzī alias Mullā Ṣadrā (d. 1050/1640); and they would give all its significance to the syntagma of “Shī‘ī Philosophy.” In particular, his conception of resurrection (*qiyāma*), distinguishing between minor, median, and

major resurrection, each of them having an outer (*ṣuwarī*, *zāhir*) and an inner (*ma‘nawī*, *bāṭin*) aspect and each of them occurring in the “world of horizons” (*al-‘ālam al-āfāqī*) and in the “world of souls” (*al-‘ālam al-anfusī*) (MAb, pp. 570–599; ASh, pp. 330–403), could be one of the sources of the eschatological philosophy of Mullā Ṣadrā (Jambet 2017, pp. 57–67). In this respect, Ḥaydar Āmulī can surely be seen as one of the principal forerunners of the “Safavid philosophical Renaissance” in the eleventh/seventeenth century. Finally, it appears that an important part of the history of Islamic thought is due to the efforts of this remarkable thinker.

### His Works

According to the writings of Ḥaydar Āmulī himself, he composed around 40 works in Persian and Arabic. In his *Jāmi‘ al-asrār wa manba‘ al-anwār*, composed around 752/1351–5, at the eve of his Iraqi period, he mentions seven previous works, at least three of them having been written in Persian, which are today reputed to be lost (JA, pp. 3, 614). In the introduction of *Naṣṣ al-nuṣūṣ*, composed in 782/1380–1, he gives a chronology of his works – not without some inconsistencies – beginning with the composition of the *Jāmi‘ al-asrār*. Most of these texts, certainly composed in Arabic, are also lost. However, some of his lost works may be summarized in later and preserved ones, especially in the extensive introductions (*muqaddimāt*) to the *Muḥīṭ al-a-ẓam* and the *Naṣṣ al-nuṣūṣ*. To be sure, the whole of his *Asrār al-sharī‘a*, except its introduction and appendix, is summarized in the sixth introduction of the *Muḥīṭ al-a-ẓam*. It could also be that *al-Arkān fī furū‘sharā‘i‘ ahl al-īmān* (“The Pillars, on the Branches of the Laws according to the People of the Faith”) is summarized in the same work, the “second rule” (*al-qā‘ida al-thāniya*) of which deals with branches of law (MA, pp. 537–599; 678–778). The *Muntakhab al-ta’wīl fī bayān kitāb allāh wa ḥurūfīhi wa kalimātihi wa āyātihi* (“Selection of the Spiritual Interpretation [of the Qur’an]. On the Clarification of the Book of God, its Letters,



Words and Verses”), mentioned in *Jāmi’ al-asrār* and in *Naqd al-nuqūd* (*JA*, pp. 3, 108, 106, 549; *NNMW*, p. 695), may be summarized in the third introduction (on the correspondences between the letters of the Qur’an, of the “book of the horizons,” and of the “book of souls”), the fourth (on the correspondences between the words of these three books), and the fifth (on the correspondences between the verses of these three books) of *al-Muḥīṭ al-a’zam*. Likewise, his work entitled *al-Jadāwil al-mawsūma bi-madārij al-sālikīn fī marātib al-‘arīfīn* (“Diagrams Containing the Degrees of the Spiritual Pilgrims. On the Ranks of Gnostics”), composed in vis-à-vis with the famous *Kitāb manāzil al-sā’irīn* by Khwāja ‘Abdullāh Anṣārī (d. 491/1097–98), may survive in the introductions of the *Naṣṣ al-nuṣūṣ*.

Some of Āmulī’s works are also summaries of others, an example being the *Naqd al-nuqūd*, completed in Najaf in 768/1367, which is a summary of the supposedly lost *Risālat al-Wujūd fī ma’rifat al-ma’būd* (“Treatise of Existence. Of the Knowledge of the Worshipful”), on existence, its necessity, its unity, and its manifestation in the multiplicity of existents, the latter probably composed just after the *Jāmi’ al-asrār* in 760/1359 (*JA*, p. 125); and the lost *Nihāyat al-tawḥīd fī bidāyat al-tajrīd* (“The Ultimate End of the Attestation of Divine Unity. On the Beginning of Disengagement”) was a summary of the surviving *Jāmi’ al-asrār*. Some works of Ḥaydar Āmulī reputed to be lost may remain as manuscripts in different public or private libraries, as it was the case of his *Risāla Raf’ al-munāza’a*, recently discovered and published. In the list of our primary sources, the works of Ḥaydar Āmulī will appear in their chronological order of composition.

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## Anselm of Canterbury

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### Abstract

Anselm of Canterbury (1033–1109), also known as Anselm of Aosta, Anselm of Bec, and Saint Anselm, was one of the most important thinkers of the early Middle Ages. He was thoroughly familiar with the Boethian logic of his time, and he contributed to some themes within the art of logic. His main contribution, however, was in the area of philosophical theology. Following the examples set by Augustine and Boethius, Anselm developed the idea of “faith seeking understanding” (*fides*

*quaerens intellectum*), which aims at elucidating the content of the Christian faith through rational analysis and by providing rational arguments for the central Christian claims. Anselm's method has been seen as paradigmatic for medieval theology, and he has been called the “Father of Scholasticism.” In addition to his methodological ideas, Anselm's best-known contributions are the argument for God's existence based on the notion “that than which a greater cannot be thought” in the treatise *Proslogion*, taken to be the earliest formulation of the ontological argument, and the satisfaction theory of atonement in the treatise *Cur Deus homo*. Other important themes in his philosophical theology include the concepts of will and free choice and the questions about the relation of free choice to sin, grace, predestination, and foreknowledge.

## Biographical Information

Anselm was born in the year 1033 to a family with a partly noble background in or near Aosta, a town situated in an Alpine valley in northwestern Italy, which at the time belonged to the kingdom of Burgundy. His father was Gundulf, his mother was Ermenberga, and he had one sister, Richeza. One of our main sources for Anselm's life, *Vita Anselmi* by Eadmer (an English monk who was Anselm's associate after 1093), discloses that the study of the liberal arts was Anselm's chief occupation some time in his youth, but Eadmer fails to give any details of Anselm's studies. He also tells us that Anselm later started giving himself to “youthful amusements,” which has led some commentators to infer, unnecessarily, that Anselm's youth was a misspent one. At some point Anselm's mother died, and after that Anselm's relation to his father grew difficult. At the age of 23, after a clash with his father, Anselm decided to leave his home country, and he crossed the Alps. Of the following 3 years, Eadmer only says that Anselm spent them “partly in Burgundy, partly in France.”

The year 1059 is a turning point in Anselm's life. At the age of 26, he arrived at the Benedictine



monastery of Bec in Normandy. At Bec, there was a school run by the prior of the monastery, Lanfranc, who was of Italian origin and had made a career as a teacher of the liberal arts in his youth. Anselm became Lanfranc's associate in the school at Bec, and a little later (1060) he decided to become a monk. In 1063, Lanfranc left Bec to become the abbot of a new monastery in Caen. Anselm was elected prior of Bec, and he served in this position for 15 years. In 1078, the founding abbot of the Bec monastery, Herluin, died. Anselm succeeded him and served as abbot for another 15 years, until 1093. Altogether, Anselm was "Anselm of Bec" for more than three decades.

In 1066, the Normans had conquered England. Lanfranc became the first Norman Archbishop of Canterbury. After Lanfranc's death, in 1089, King William II held the seat of archbishop vacant for several years to be able to expropriate ecclesiastical revenue. In the end, Anselm was nominated as archbishop. Anselm's tenure as Archbishop of Canterbury (1093–1109) was rife with heavy conflicts with the kings of England (William II and after him Henry I) about the relation of ecclesiastical and secular power (the investiture controversy). Because of the conflicts, Anselm was twice in exile: 1097–1100 and 1103–1106. During the first exile, Anselm went to meet the Pope in Rome and stayed in Italy for more than a year. Anselm died at Canterbury on April 21, 1109.

## Influences

Many commentators have emphasized Lanfranc's role in Anselm's intellectual development, suggesting that Anselm had received little training before he came to the school at Bec (see esp. Southern 1963, 1990). This view is to be rejected. As previously mentioned, Anselm was engaged in studies in his youth, and it is probable that he received thorough training in the liberal arts and at least some training in theology already in Italy. Some features of Anselm's philosophical and theological thinking are reminiscent of the Italian school discussions as attested by Anselm's elder contemporary Peter Damian. As for the 3 years that Anselm spent in Burgundy and France, the

most plausible scenario is that he was studying and teaching, as Lanfranc had done in the corresponding phase of his career. There are explicit references to contemporary academic discussions in Anselm's writings, and they assume familiarity with a more developed scholarly environment than the one existing in Normandy. Anselm already was a competent scholar when he arrived at the little school at Bec. Lanfranc hardly had any notable role in Anselm's intellectual education, but he perhaps influenced Anselm's decision to pursue a monastic career.

In Southern's construal (see Southern 1963, 1990), Lanfranc was an eminent dialectician who offered to Anselm a model of how dialectic can be applied to theology. Southern's evidence for this claim cannot withstand scrutiny (see Holopainen 1996), but it is important to accentuate the role of dialectic in Anselm's development. Dialectic was a central part of the academic culture at the closing period of the early Middle Ages. Some of the best minds of the eleventh century, from Gerbert to Peter Abelard, spent major parts of their lives studying dialectic. It appears that Anselm was familiar with the same set of sources that served as the starting point for Abelard's philosophy: the Boethian corpus of early medieval "old logic." It included Boethius' translations of Aristotle's *Categoriae* and *De interpretatione* as well as Porphyry's *Isagoge*, commentaries on them (one on *Categoriae*, two on *De interpretatione*, two on *Isagoge*), a commentary on Cicero's *Topica*, and textbooks on different areas of logic (categorical syllogistics, hypothetical syllogistics, topics, division). The Boethian corpus of dialectic was the most important part of the philosophical library at the time. It offered an array of tools, techniques, and principles that, apparently, could be used for discussing any topic from a rational point of view. Many of Anselm's contemporaries saw dialectic as the representative of reason.

Another group of texts that highly influenced Anselm are the writings on philosophical theology by Augustine and Boethius. The only one of Augustine's works that Anselm mentions by title is *De trinitate*, but he was familiar with a large number of his works. In particular, he had studied

carefully some of the “philosophical dialogues” that Augustine had composed early in his career, including *Soliloquia*, *De magistro*, and *De libero arbitrio*. Boethius’ work on philosophical theology includes *Philosophiae consolatio* and the group of five short treatises known as *Opuscula sacra*. The works by Augustine and Boethius offered to Anselm a model of theology in which rational analysis is a central ingredient, and it was rational analysis based on dialectical insight. Like Boethius, Augustine was thoroughly familiar with the art of dialectic and frequently made use of it in the context of philosophical theology.

Anselm had first-hand experience of the ancient sources mentioned. He was also familiar with contemporary academic discussions about the same texts and the questions raised by them, but it is difficult to ascertain to what extent he is indebted to his contemporaries because the evidence for the school discussions is fragmentary. Above all, Anselm is an independent thinker who worked out his own unified approach within a broadly Augustinian framework.

## Works

The main part of Anselm’s production consists of 11 densely written works (volumes I and II of *Opera omnia*, ed. Schmitt). Of them, all except one deal with topics pertaining to philosophical theology; the one exception, *De grammatico*, pertains to dialectic. Philosophically relevant is also a group of fragments known as the *Unfinished Work* or *Fragmenta philosophica*. In addition, Anselm left a collection of 19 prayers and 3 meditations, as well as a large collection of letters. Finally, there are collections of material based on Anselm’s oral teaching (edited in the *Memorials of St Anselm* 1969).

Six of Anselm’s works derive from the period when he was first prior and then abbot of Bec. The first two, the *Monologion* (*A Soliloquy*, c. 1076) and the *Proslogion* (*An Address*, 1077/1078), form a pair. Their main theme is the doctrine of God, but other important topics are also involved. The four other works that Anselm wrote at Bec are often referred to as his “philosophical dialogues.”

In the 1080s, he wrote a series of three connected dialogues: *De veritate* (*On Truth*), *De libertate arbitrii* (*On Freedom of Choice*), and *De casu diaboli* (*On the Fall of the Devil*). The fourth “philosophical dialogue,” the dialectical treatise *De grammatico*, derives roughly from the same period. In recent years, an early dating for *De grammatico* has been spreading: it is alleged that Anselm composed it c. 1060 when he was Lanfranc’s associate. The dating is based on Southern’s (1990) speculation about Lanfranc being an expert dialectician and Anselm not having any genuine interest in the study of dialectic. Neither of these claims is true.

Around the time he moved from Bec to Canterbury, Anselm was involved in polemics against the Trinitarian teaching of Roscelin of Compiègne. Anselm’s contribution is a treatise called *Epistola de incarnatione verbi* (*Letter on the Incarnation of the Word*). An early version of it was published when Anselm still was at Bec, in 1092; the final version was completed in 1094. In 1095, Anselm started working on a treatise in dialogue form that is commonly perceived as his theological main work, *Cur Deus homo* (*Why God Became Man* or *Why a God-man*). He finished it in 1098 in Italy during his first exile. Within the next years, he also composed the works *De conceptu virginali et de originali peccato* (*On the Virgin Conception and Original Sin*, 1099) and *De processione spiritus sancti* (*On the Procession of the Holy Spirit*, 1101). Anselm’s last work is *De concordia praescientiae et praedestinationis et gratiae dei cum libero arbitrio* (*On the Harmony of the Foreknowledge, the Predestination and the Grace of God with Free Choice*, 1107–1108), referred to in abbreviated form as *De concordia*.

Anselm’s works display a remarkable unity of thought. He had already consolidated the main features of his thinking before he published his first treatise at the mature age of 43.

## Dialectic

Anselm’s only dialectical treatise, *De grammatico*, deals with the semantics of terms

of a type called “denominatives” (sometimes also “paronyms”). In the Latin translation of Aristotle’s *Categoriae*, the term *grammaticus* served as an example of a denominative. As the term *grammaticus* can function both as a noun (“a grammarian”) and as an adjective (“grammatical”), the title of Anselm’s treatise cannot be translated directly. Anselm says of *De grammatico* that it is “not without use to those who need to be introduced to dialectic,” but the treatise is far from being an elementary textbook. A solid working knowledge of the different areas of Boethian logic is assumed throughout, and Anselm indicates at the end (*De grammatico* 21) that the treatise is related to contemporary academic debates. *De grammatico* is a contribution to the advanced study of dialectic, but the treatise has pedagogical objectives as well. Anselm takes pains to make the treatment as accessible as possible, and he purposely includes passages that serve to rehearse the techniques of logical concept analysis, sentence analysis, and argument analysis.

*De grammatico* reveals Anselm as a highly competent dialectician. Anselm makes constant but inconspicuous use of dialectical insights in other works as well, and his dialectically molded habits of thought give a philosophical tone to almost everything that he writes. One dialectical theme that particularly interests Anselm is modalities and the interpretation of modal expressions. He presents remarks about possibility, necessity, and so on, in many of his works. In this and other contexts, Anselm often points out that linguistic usage can be misleading and appeals to a distinction between “proper” and “improper” usage.

### Faith Seeking Understanding

The works by Augustine and Boethius offered to Anselm a model of philosophical theology in which dialectically based rational analysis is a central ingredient. From the same sources, he inherited a firm confidence in the harmony of faith and reason. The Christian teaching and the human reason testify to the same truth. The truth that faith proclaims has an intelligible structure

(*ratio fidei*, “reason of faith”), and believers can and ought to use their reason to explore and uncover that structure as far as possible. To express this idea, Anselm coined the dictum “faith seeking understanding” (*fides quaerens intellectum* – this was the original title of the treatise better known as the *Proslogion*).

Anselm was convinced that it is possible to reconstruct important parts of the Christian view of reality from a purely rational starting point. In his first treatise, the *Monologion*, he works to show how this can be done (see below). Anselm later states that he composed his first two treatises, the *Monologion* and *Proslogion*, to show that “what we hold by faith regarding the divine nature and its persons – excluding the topic of incarnation – can be proven by compelling reasons without the authority of Scripture” (*De incarnatione verbi* 6). However, Anselm did not allege that the whole content of faith could be established in this way. In his later treatises, he typically takes some of his assumptions or premises from authority. For example, in *Cur Deus homo*, he seeks to establish that it was necessary that God becomes man, given some general points about the background situation. Even so, rational analysis and rational arguments have a central role in all of Anselm’s works. He was dedicated to using reason under the guidance of faith: the content of faith provides fixed points that direct rational reflection. In the process, both reason and faith are transformed. On one hand, reason is led to scrutinize the validity of its own principles and at some points to qualify them. On the other hand, the items of faith that were formerly merely believed receive a rational grounding or at least become embedded in a network of rational connections that gives them intelligibility.

Anselm’s idea of faith seeking understanding is related to a Christian view of the human destiny. Man’s end is the vision of God in the life to come in heaven. In that vision, the chosen ones will see the truth (about all intellectual things) to the extent that God chooses to disclose it. Anselm characterizes understanding (*intellectus*) as “a middle-way between faith (*fides*) and sight (*species*)”; “the more anyone advances to understanding, the closer he comes to the actual seeing for which

we all long” (*Cur Deus homo*, *Commendatio operis*). In this overall framework, there is no fear that rational insight might make faith redundant. It is for their faith and not for their insight that the believers will get their reward in the life to come. What is more, the relevant kind of faith is not a mere holding true (“dead faith”) but an active striving (“living faith”): loving God and striving toward Him and loving the good and just and striving to put it into practice (*Monologion* 78). Faith’s quest for understanding is part of that striving.

Anselm’s methodological ideas have been seen as paradigmatic for medieval academic theology, and he has been called the “Father of Scholasticism.” On the other hand, Anselm was more confident about what reason can establish than the majority of his scholastic successors.

### The *Monologion*

The rational aspect of Anselm’s theology gets its most pronounced expression in his first treatise, the *Monologion*. Anselm there offers a bold attempt at reconstructing the basic tenets in the Christian idea of God, and of the creation in relation to God, on a purely rational basis. The Prologue and the first chapter contain explicit and emphatic remarks about the rational method to be used. Anselm’s intention is to proceed “by reason alone” (*sola ratione*) and “nothing at all in the meditation would be argued on Scriptural authority” (even though the content of it is consistent, Anselm contends, with the teaching of the authorities). Anselm claims that even a person who has not heard Christian preaching can infer many of the central tenets in it by reason alone if he is of at least average talent. He writes the treatise from the viewpoint of a person who investigates things that he does not yet know, disputing with himself in a silent “meditation.” The original title of the treatise was *Exemplum meditandi de ratione fidei* (*An Example of Meditating about the Reason of Faith*); the title *Monologion* was introduced some years later. As the treatise markedly differs from Anselm’s three meditations properly so called, one may ask

whether the characterization of the treatise as a “meditation” is Anselm’s attempt to appoint a legitimate place for his boldly rational endeavor in the monastic context.

The *Monologion* includes 80 tightly argued chapters. Anselm builds his argument on notions that any rational person in his view ought to accept, on one hand, and on claims that he has already established in the course of the treatment, on the other. Chapters 1–4 offer a series of arguments for the existence of a Supreme Being. For example, Anselm argues in Ch. 1 that all the things that are good are good through one thing which is good through itself, and this one thing is supremely good and the supreme of all existing things. Contrary to what is often alleged, Anselm did not see Ch. 1–4 as Four Ways of proving God’s existence. Instead, they are an initial phase in an extensive argument for the Christian understanding of God. It is only in the last chapter, Ch. 80, that Anselm considers God’s existence as proven. Before he arrives at this conclusion, he establishes to his satisfaction that the Supreme Being whose existence is proved in Ch. 1–4 has created everything else from nothing (Ch. 5–14). Further, it is established that the Supreme Being has properties of the kind that the Christian reader will recognize as the properties of the Divine Essence (Ch. 15–28). What is more, it proves to be the case that there is a Trinitarian structure in the Supreme Being, consisting of a “Father,” a “Son,” and their “Spirit” (Ch. 29–63, 79). Toward the end of the treatise (Ch. 68–78), the treatment is focused on the relation between the Supreme Being and creatures of a rational nature, i.e., humans and angels. Among other things, it is established that the Supreme Being is the proper object of human love, hope, and faith and that the final destiny of a human being depends on his or her relation to the Supreme Being. At the end (Ch. 80), the Supreme Being is identified as God. Even here, Anselm does not give up the rational point of view. He does not appeal to the Christian teaching about God but instead makes a claim about what people who postulate god or gods mean by the word “god” and then argues that the Supreme Being is the only being that can adequately meet this description.

## The *Proslogion* and Anselm's Argument

In the Preface to the *Proslogion*, Anselm describes the treatise in relation to his first treatise, pointing out two important differences between them. First, there is a difference in the complexity of argumentation: the *Monologion* includes “a chain of many arguments,” whereas the *Proslogion* will introduce “a single argument” (*unum argumentum*). Second, Anselm points out a difference in the mode of presentation: the *Monologion* was composed from the point of view of a person who investigates things that he does not yet know, whereas the *Proslogion* is composed from the viewpoint of a person who strives to elevate his mind to the contemplation of God and seeks to understand what he believes. The original title of the treatise, *Fides quaerens intellectum*, ostensibly refers to the last-mentioned aspect of the perspective chosen. The title that Anselm invented some years later, *Proslogion* or *Alloquium (An Address)*, is related to the circumstance that the person who speaks in the treatise addresses God and his own soul in turn.

In the *Proslogion*, Anselm discusses God's existence (Ch. 2–4) and the properties of the Divine Essence (Ch. 5–23) within a devotional exercise. (Altogether there are 26 chapters.) Philosophical commentators have largely concentrated on the part on God's existence (Ch. 2–4) and especially on Ch. 2. This chapter counts among the most famous pieces of philosophical text written in the Middle Ages: it includes the inference known as “Anselm's ontological argument” or simply “Anselm's argument.” It is taken to be the earliest formulation of the ontological argument for God's existence.

Anselm's argument is based on the characterization of God as “something than which a greater cannot be thought” (*aliquid quo nihil maius cogitari possit*). Anselm uses various slightly differing formulations of this expression; we shall abbreviate it X. Basically, the argument runs as follows. We believe that God is X. One can doubt whether there is any such being, because the Fool of the Psalms (Ps. 14: 1, 53: 1) denies God's existence. But when the same Fool hears the expression X being used, he understands what

he hears, and whatever is understood is in the understanding (*in intellectu*). Therefore, X exists at least in the understanding. However, it cannot be the case that X exists only in the understanding. For if it existed only in the understanding, it could be thought to exist also in reality (*in re*), which is greater. Therefore, if X existed only in the understanding, it would not be something than which a greater cannot be thought, that is, X would not be X. This is impossible. Therefore, X exists not only in the understanding but also in reality.

The name “ontological argument” goes back to Immanuel Kant. He was not familiar with Anselm and thought of some later thinkers instead. Some commentators insist that the name “ontological argument” should not be used of Anselm's inference because it is different from, say, Descartes' argument. This depends on what is taken to be essential to the ontological argument. Anselm's inference is different from some later versions in that it does not appeal to the “concept” or “definition” or “essence” of God. However, it is an a priori argument that seeks to deduce the existence of a being starting from an expression signifying that kind of being, and it derives the force it has from the meaning of the expression that is used.

Soon after the publication of the *Proslogion*, someone, traditionally identified as the monk Gaunilo of Marmoutier, wrote a short text *Pro insipiente (On Behalf of the Fool)* criticizing Anselm's argument. Anselm appended the critique and his rejoinder, often called *Responsio (Reply)*, to the end of the *Proslogion*. The considerations that Anselm presents in the *Responsio* elucidate his argument in many ways. A well-known part of Gaunilo's critique is the Lost Island counterexample: it is possible to use Anselm's strategy to argue for the existence of an island that is in every way excellent. Anselm rejects the counterexample as inappropriate and lets us understand that his argument does not apply to anything other than X, but he fails to offer any extended analysis of the matter.

There has been extensive dispute about the correct interpretation of the argument in the *Proslogion*. The traditional reading maintains that Anselm meant to introduce a strictly rational proof for God's existence. This view has been

challenged by fideistic and mystical interpretations of the treatise (see Hick and McGill 1967). The proponents of these interpretations can appeal to the fact that the *Proslogion* is a devotional exercise in which a believer strives to elevate his mind to the contemplation of God in prayer. Related to this, Anselm introduces the idea that God is X as a thing that “we believe” (*credimus*). The fideistic interpretation claims that Anselm’s aim in the *Proslogion* was to show the internal consistency of the Christian view by deducing articles of faith from other articles of faith, and this is said to be what the dictum “faith seeking understanding” actually means (Barth 1960).

Any adequate interpretation of the *Proslogion* needs to take the devotional character of the treatise seriously. From this it follows, among other things, that the common supposition that Anselm wrote the *Proslogion* in view of the Fool needs to be forsaken as absurd. Nevertheless, the traditional idea about the rational nature of Anselm’s proof can be shown to be correct.

Anselm makes it clear in the Preface that the argument that he will introduce in the treatise, the “single argument,” serves to prove God’s existence and “whatever we believe about the Divine Essence.” It is the single argument, and not the inference in *Proslogion* 2, that really deserves to be called *Anselm’s* argument. There is no scholarly consensus about what exactly Anselm refers to by the phrase “single argument.” It is clear, though, that a strategy of deriving divine attributes from the notion X is centrally related to it. Namely, Anselm believes that God’s attributes are of a kind that makes their bearer greater or more excellent: the Divine Essence is good, eternal, just, and “whatever it is better to be than not to be” (see *Monologion* 15; *Proslogion* 5; *Responsio* 10). Because of this, X can be proved to have any of the divine attributes, for if it lacks any such attribute, then it will not be X. Further, Anselm asserts that the ability to make correct value judgments belongs to the essence of rationality (*Monologion* 68). Consequently, on Anselm’s assumptions, it should be possible to present, starting from the notion X, a strictly rational demonstration for the existence of a being that

has all the attributes that the Divine Essence is believed to have.

Anselm does not explain why he chose to introduce the single argument by using it in a devotional exercise. One possible explanation is that his aim was to mold the attitudes of a conservative monastic audience toward the rational analysis of faith. In the *Proslogion*, Anselm does not yet say that understanding is “a middle-way between faith and sight” (cf. above), but the devotional exercise in the *Proslogion* in effect puts the search for rational arguments in this kind of framework (see Holopainen 2009).

### Will, Choice, and Freedom

In many of his later works, Anselm deals with issues related to will, choice, and freedom. The discussions are intricate and aim at solving philosophical problems related to the Christian doctrine. In *De libertate arbitrii*, Anselm seeks to establish that human beings always have a freedom, namely, “freedom of choice,” which makes them accountable for their good and evil deeds, even though it is the case that a sinner cannot turn away from sin without the help of the divine grace. The main task in *De casu diaboli* is to explain the fall of the angel that was the first creature to sin and to explain it in such a way that God will not in the least be responsible for his fall. An analysis of the functioning of the will is a central ingredient in the explanation. In *De concordia*, Anselm works to show that free choice is compatible with divine foreknowledge, predestination, and grace.

Freedom of choice is a freedom that belongs to all beings that have will and reason: to human beings, to angels, and to God. Anselm defines freedom of choice as “the ability to keep the uprightness of will for the sake of uprightness itself.” The ground for this definition has been laid in *De veritate*, where justice (or righteousness) is defined as “uprightness of will kept for its own sake.” A will is just (or righteous) if it always wills what it ought to will and it wills it for the very reason that it ought to will it. Freedom of choice is, hence, the ability of rational creatures to



keep justice, that is, to continue willing what they ought to will for the reason that it is what they ought to will. Anselm, thus, did not conceive freedom in terms of choosing between different alternatives. He explicitly rejects the suggestion that freedom of choice could be defined as “the ability to sin and not to sin,” and he claims that a being who is not able to sin is freer than a being who is able to sin.

Both human beings and angels always have freedom of choice. They always have the ability to keep the uprightness of will because nothing in the world, not even God, can prevent the will from willing what it ought to will; the will wills only what it wills to will. However, it is not always the case that rational creatures can *use* their freedom of choice. A will can keep uprightness only if it has uprightness, and this is not always factual. Nothing can take uprightness from a will, but the will itself can desert it by willing what it ought not, and any slightest breach will have this consequence. Once the uprightness is lost, the will needs the assistance of the divine grace to recover it (and the grace also constantly assists the will when it has uprightness).

Regarding divine foreknowledge, Anselm argues, following Augustine, that it actually guarantees human freedom: it is part of God’s foreknowledge that some of the things that he foreknows to occur will occur for the reason that human beings will freely choose them. Further, Anselm appeals to the nontemporal character of divine existence and claims, as Boethius had done in *Philosophiae consolatio*, that God’s knowledge is not really *foreknowledge* but knowledge of what is present.

## Atonement

Anselm’s best-known theological contribution is the satisfaction theory of atonement that he presents in *Cur Deus homo*. Anselm lays out a grand scheme of history directed toward the realization of a heavenly city in which a predetermined number of good angels and elect men will enjoy the presence of God. Sin threatened to destroy God’s

plan. Adam and Eve fell into sin, and thereby the whole human race was tainted by sin. Even the smallest disobedience by a creature is an infinite offense against God. In order that reconciliation between men and God is possible, a compensation for the offense is needed. It should be an infinite compensation, and it should be offered by a representative of the human race. Anselm argues that such a compensation is possible only if the second person of the Trinity becomes incarnated as a God-man: by his death, the God-man can offer satisfaction on behalf of the human race.

## Cross-References

- ▶ [Augustine](#)
- ▶ [Boethius](#)
- ▶ [Modal Theories and Modal Logic](#)
- ▶ [Peter Abelard](#)
- ▶ [Peter Damian](#)
- ▶ [Proofs of the Existence of God](#)
- ▶ [Realism](#)
- ▶ [Roscelin of Compiègne](#)
- ▶ [Trinity](#)
- ▶ [Will](#)

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## Apollonius of Tyana

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### Abstract

Apollonius of Tyana was a charismatic personality who lived in the second half of the first century CE. He achieved legendary status as a spiritual leader to whom works of magic and natural philosophy were attributed, and his works were known in Greek, Sanskrit, Arabic, and Latin.

Apollonius of Tyana's fame as a wise man, magician, and spiritual leader was such that he became a legendary personality from the early second century onward, with the result that it is difficult to piece together the facts of his life and writings. It is reasonably certain that he was active in Syria and the neighboring countries in the late first century CE, espoused a kind of Pythagorean philosophy, and, as a self-confessed "magician," cured people of various illnesses. He is probably the author of books *On Astrology* and *On Sacrifices*, to which references are made by later writers, but which have not survived. The details given in the early third-century *Life of Apollonius* by Philostratus, can sometimes be corroborated by independent evidence, but are embellished by rhetorical flourishes and colored by Philostratus' evident bias against magic and astrology. The

particular mix of divination by the stars, sacrifice to several gods, and magical cures that forms the core of his attested interests suggests that he is a late representative of the Babylonian tradition of omen-reading, of which a branch survived in Emesa, a Syriac city with which Apollonius is associated. This may also explain how his brand of Pythagoreanism included the worship of the Sun. Less certain are the accounts of journeys to Spain and India, but a fifth-century CE Sanskrit text refers to him as a sage. A corpus of letters in Greek endorsing his magical powers and promoting pagan Greek culture was written in his name, and he became a cult figure in several cities in Syria, and was worshipped by the Roman Emperor Severus Alexander. He became known as a spokesman for the wisdom of Hermes Trismegistus, in particular in the field of talisman making.

In this last capacity, Apollonius (usually in the form Balīnūs) became a prominent figure in Arabic literature, probably as a result of his veneration in Syria. A Greek text (the “*Book of Wisdom* addressed to his pupil Soustoumos Thalassos,” on talismans of the hours of the day and the night) was translated into Arabic as *The Greater Book on Talismans*, Balīnūs acquired the sobriquet *ṣāhib al-ṭīlasmāt* (*Master of Talismans*), and texts on this subject were attributed to him. Among these was a tablet made of emerald (*al-lauh al-zumurrudī*, *Tabula Smaragdina*) that purports to have been found by Apollonius in the hands of Hermes in an underground cave, and which gives, in enigmatic language, the creed of the “masters of talismans.” It was, however, adopted by alchemists as a mystical confirmation of their art, and was allegedly accompanied (in the same cave) by a book, which gives the cosmological basis for the practice of alchemy. This text, called the *Sirr al-khalīqa* (*The Secret of Creation*) is a kind of popular encyclopedia on natural philosophy, arranged according to the four Aristotelian causes (hence its subtitle: *kitāb al-‘ilal*, *The Book of Causes*). The first book, entitled *On the Creator and the Created*, deals with the material and formal causes. This is followed by books dealing with the final and efficient causes: book two on the effects of the higher beings, book three

on the causes of metals, book four on the causes of plants, book five on animals, and book six on the creation of man. Included in the *Sirr al-khalīqa* are questions about nature that continue the ancient Greek genre of *problemata*, and Nemesius of Emesa’s *On the Nature of Man* is a significant source for the book on man (a résumé of the work is included in an expanded version of the text). Throughout the book there is a concern to point out the underlying unity in all nature and the bonds connecting all things. The approach to nature is biological: the elements are alternately masculine and feminine, and from the mating of the masculine elements, fire and air, with the feminine ones, earth and water, everything generated in the universe is born. The description of the production of all metals from sulfur and mercury and the division between the “bodies” and the “spirits” of the metals are distinctly alchemical, and serve to introduce the alchemical recipes in other texts attributed to Apollonius or his pupils, such as the *Miftāḥ al-ḥikma* (*Key of Wisdom*).

Apollonius’ reputation as a magician and philosopher was known in the West (St. Jerome refers to “*Apollonius, sive ille magus, ut vulgus loquitur, sive philosophus, ut Pythagorici tradunt*”), which probably encouraged Latin scholars to seek out texts attributed to him (or to invent such texts). The *Sirr al-khalīqa* was translated under the title *De secretis naturae* by Hugo of Santalla in Tarazona in the mid-twelfth century (he correctly recognized the name “Apollonius,” though his place of origin, “Tyana,” became distorted into “Athawaca”), but the Latin diffusion of this work was limited. The texts on alchemy and talismans, however, had a better fortune. The *Key of Wisdom* was translated as the *Clavis Sapientie*, but attributed to “Artefius.” Other translations included *The Greater Book on Talismans* and books on talismans of the planets and the 28 lunar mansions, and corroborated Apollonius’ reputation (often under the name Belenus, Plinius, or even Plinius) as a Hermetic philosopher in the West. Additionally, Apollonius became the authority on a new kind of magic: that of acquiring mastery of the arts and sciences in a miraculously short time, which was popular in university circles, under the title “*ars notoria*.” The

talismanic texts were in turn translated into European vernaculars (the book on the lunar mansions can be found in English in a sixteenth-century manuscript, London, British Library, Sloane 3846). Philostratus' image of Apollonius was restored to the West through a Latin translation of Alamanno Rinuccini in 1473 and the Greek-Latin edition of Aldus Manutius of 1501–1504 (followed by a succession of further translations and adaptations), and from then on the figure of Apollonius became well established in western culture, and emblematic as the obverse to Jesus Christ in an increasingly secular society.

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## Cross-References

- ▶ [Alchemy in the Arab World](#)
- ▶ [Hermes Trismegistus](#)

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## Arabic Philosophical Texts, Jewish Translations of

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### Abstract

Many philosophical texts written in Arabic or Judeo-Arabic by Islamic, Jewish, and Christian authors were partially or totally translated into Hebrew during the Middle Ages. The translation movement began around 1150 and ended in 1400 circa; it involved several geographical areas and a number of translators. Some translations were made in Spain, by local Jewish scholars such as Judah ibn Cardinal and Solomon ibn Daud in the second half of the twelfth century; by Abraham ibn Hasdai, Shem Tov ben Isaac, and Shem Tov ibn Falaquera during the thirteenth century; by Joseph ben Joshua of Lorca, Hayyim ibn Vivas, Isaac ben Solomon Israeli, and Isaac Natan in the first half of the fourteenth century; by Solomon ibn Labi, Samuel ibn Motot, and Zerahyah ha-Levi Saladin in the second half of the fourteenth century. A number of translations were made in Provence in the period 1160–1300 c.; they involved a school of professional Arabic-into-Hebrew translators, the Ibn Tibbons, as well as some minor authors (Judah al-Harizi, Solomon ibn Ayyub, Isaac Albalag). Other translators worked in Provence in the first half of the fourteenth century: Qalonymos ben Qalonymos, Samuel of Marseilles, Todros Todrosi, Solomon of Melgueil, Qalonymos

Todrosi, and possibly Moses Narboni. Three Arabic-into-Hebrew translators worked in central and southern Italy during the thirteenth century: Jacob Anatoli, Zerahyah Hen, and Ahituv of Palermo. Some Arabic philosophical works were translated into Hebrew from their medieval Latin versions, especially in the fifteenth century.

In southwestern Europe, during the last centuries of the Middle Ages, many Jewish thinkers were interested in medieval Arabic philosophical texts. Since many of them could not read these texts in their original language, they had to read them in Arabic-into-Hebrew translations. For this purpose, in the period 1150–1400 c. a number of Jewish scholars engaged in translations, which included not only many philosophical texts written in Arabic by medieval Islamic philosophers, but also the key-texts of medieval Jewish philosophy in Judeo-Arabic (Middle Arabic written by Jews), and even some philosophical texts by medieval Arabic Christian authors. After 1400, since Arabic was apparently no longer known by European Jews, some Arabic philosophical texts were translated into Hebrew not directly, but from their medieval Latin versions. A very rich and informative inventory of almost all these translations has been made by Moritz Steinschneider (Steinschneider 1893:42–460), but some new texts have been found or identified later on. A general sketch of medieval Arabic-into-Hebrew translations appeared (Halkin 1971), as well as an historical study of the medieval Hebrew translation movement of philosophical works (Zonta 1996). Medieval Arabic-into-Hebrew translations of philosophical texts include works about physics, natural sciences, metaphysics, and ethics; however, also many non-philosophical, mostly religious works, as well as scientific works about astronomy and astrology, medicine, and other sciences were translated from Arabic into Hebrew. Finally, a great amount of Hebrew quotations of Arabic philosophical texts are found in the medieval Hebrew encyclopedias (Harvey 2000) and elsewhere, for example in Shem Tov ibn Falaquera's works (Zonta 2004).

The first period of translations covers the second half of the twelfth century, in two areas: Spain and Provence. It almost exclusively involves Judeo-Arabic philosophical and philosophic-theological texts. Two translators were active in Spain: Judah ibn Cardinal and Solomon ibn Daud. The former translated into Hebrew, before 1167, Judah ha-Levi's *Book of the Khazar*; only a fragment of this translation is extant (Cassel 1853:344–361). The latter, probably the son of the well-known medieval Jewish philosopher Abraham ibn Daud, was active in Toledo between 1180 and 1200; he translated Ibn al-Sīd al-Baṭalyūsī's *Book of Circles*, a work including a number of doctrines of the *Epistles of the Brethren of Purity* (Richler 1978). Other translators of Judeo-Arabic philosophical texts worked in Provence. Probably in Narbonne, before 1170, Joseph Qimhi translated Bahya ibn Paqudah's *The Duties of the Hearts*; only a short fragment of this translation, including part of chapter 7 of the work, is extant (Bahyah ibn Paqudah 1846: xx). Possibly in Lunel, around 1170, Judah al-Harizi translated part 1 at least of Moses ibn Ezra's *The Treatise of the Garden*, under the title *Garden of Perfume* (Dukes 1842); probably in the same period, al-Fārābī's treatise *On the Intellect* was reworked by an anonymous Provençal Jew (Freudenthal 2002). Still in Provence, a family of Jewish scholars from Andalusia, the Ibn Tibbons, began to operate as professional Arabic-into-Hebrew translators of philosophical texts. In 1160–1186 the first of them, Judah ibn Tibbon, wrote in Lunel his translations of *The Duties of the Hearts*, the *Book of the Khazar*, and Saadia Gaon's *Book of the Beliefs and Opinions*: all these translations were copied and published many times, and replaced the previous ones. Apparently, Judah also translated al-Fārābī's *Compendium of Aristotle's Sophistici elenchi*.

The thirteenth-century period of translations still covers both Spain and Provence, but two important examples of Arabic-into-Hebrew translators appear in central and southern Italy. In Spain, a number of Judeo-Arabic philosophical works were translated into Hebrew by anonymous scholars during this century. These translations include Isaac Israeli's *Book of Definitions*

(if Moses ibn Tibbon was not the translator of this version), his *Book of Spirit and Soul*, and an otherwise unknown short treatise *On the Elements* by Israeli (Steinschneider 1871–1872; Altmann 1956, 1957). Another Spanish scholar (Nahum ha-Ma‘aravi?) translated Joseph ibn Zaddiq’s *Book of Microcosm*, whose original Arabic text is now lost (Horovitz 1903). Other Spanish Jewish translators were active in this period. In the period 1210–1230, Abraham ibn Hasdai of Barcelona translated Pseudo-Aristotle’s *Book of the Apple* (*Liber de pomo*) and Israeli’s *Book of the Elements* (Fried 1900). Maybe in the same area Shem Tov ben Isaac translated, around 1260, Averroes’ *Middle Commentary on Aristotle’s De anima*; Shem Tov ibn Falaquera summarized in Hebrew, around 1270, Solomon ibn Gabirol’s *The Source of Life* (Munk 1859; Shelomoh ibn Gabirol 2001), and Pseudo-Empedocles’ *Book of the Five Substances* (Kaufmann 1899); Isaac Albalag translated in 1292 al-Ġazālī’s *Intentions of the Philosophers*. During the thirteenth century, another minor Spanish author, a certain Moses ibn Lajis, translated one or more of al-Fārābī’s short logical works. Probably during this century some other Arabic philosophical works were translated into Hebrew: the “shorter version” of the *Secretum secretorum* (Gaster 1907, 1908), and Moses ha-Levi’s *Metaphysical Treatise*. Finally, in thirteenth century Spain Qūstā ibn Lūqā’s treatise *On the Difference between Spirit and Soul* might have been translated into Hebrew not from the original text, but from its medieval Latin version.

At the beginning of the thirteenth century, in Provence, the main Judeo-Arabic philosophical work, Maimonides’ *Guide of the Perplexed*, was translated twice: in 1204 by Samuel ibn Tibbon, and before 1213 by Judah al-Harizi; the latter translation was much lesser known and was first published in the nineteenth century only. Around 1215, al-Harizi translated another Arabic philosophical work, Ḥunayn b. Ishāq’s *Sayings of the Philosophers* (Loewenthal 1896); in 1259, Solomon ibn Ayyub translated, in Béziers, Averroes’ *Middle Commentary on Aristotle’s De caelo*. However, the most prolific translator of that period was Moses ibn Tibbon, working in Provence (Montpellier) between 1240 and 1283.

Moses rendered from Arabic into Hebrew Averroes’ *Summaries of Aristotle’s Physics, De generatione, Meteorologica, De anima, De sensu, and Metaphysics*: three of these translations, made in the period 1244–1258, are available in critical editions (Averrois Cordubensis 1954, 1958; Ivry 2003). Moses also translated al-Fārābī’s *On the Political Regime* (Filipowski 1849:1–64) and, in 1255, his *Short Treatise on the Syllogism*; the *Book of Circles* by Ibn al-Sīd al-Baṭalyūsī (Kaufmann 1880), and Maimonides’ *Treatise on the Art of Logic* (Efros 1938:21–64). His work was completed by a relative of him, Jacob ben Makhir ibn Tibbon, who translated in 1289 Averroes’ *Summaries of Porphyry’s Isagoge* and Aristotle’s logical works, and in 1302 his *Summaries of Aristotle’s De partibus and De generatione animalium*. Other translations, made in Provence in the thirteenth century, are still anonymous, such as that of the short treatise *On Whether the Active Intellect Unites with the Material Intellect* by Averroes Junior, son of Averroes (Burnett and Zonta 2000), that of al-Fārābī’s treatise *On the Intellect*, and those of most of al-Fārābī’s short logical works. In Provence too, there was a case of an Arabic philosophical text translated, or better reworked into Hebrew via a Latin version: this is the Hebrew version of Pseudo-Avicenna (Ḥunayn b. Ishāq?)’s *De caelo*, by Solomon of Melgueil (Glasner 1996).

At least two non-Italian professional translators of philosophical texts from Arabic into Hebrew were active in Italy during the thirteenth century. Jacob Anatoli, a relative of Samuel ibn Tibbon working in Naples in 1231–1235, rendered into Hebrew Averroes’ *Middle Commentaries* on Porphyry’s *Isagoge* and Aristotle’s *Categories* (Averrois Cordubensis 1969), as well as those on the *De interpretatione* and *Prior and Posterior Analytics*. Zerahyah Hen, a Catalan Jew working in Rome in 1277–1290, rendered into Hebrew the Arabic *Book of the Causes* (*Liber de causis*) falsely ascribed to a number of authors (Rothschild 1994), a *Treatise on the Quiddity of the Soul* falsely ascribed to al-Fārābī (Freudenthal 2003), and Averroes’ *Middle Commentaries on Aristotle’s Physics* and *Metaphysics*. In Sicily, where Arabic was well-known among Jews, a



minor author, Ahituv ben Isaac, translated Maimonides' *Treatise on the Art of Logic* in Palermo, around 1280 (Efros 1938:65–100). In northern Italy, where Jews did not know Arabic, a renowned philosopher, Hillel ben Samuel of Verona, translated the *Book of the Causes* around 1260 from Gerard of Cremona's medieval Latin version (Halberstam 1874:41–42).

The third period of translations covered the first half of the fourteenth century; some of these translations were made in various Spanish places, but most of them were made in Provence. As for the Spanish translations, there is reliable information about three of them: between 1320 and 1340, Hayyim ibn Vivas translated Ibn Bājja's *Epistle of Farewell* for the Portuguese Jewish scholar David ibn Bilia (Hayoun 1990); around 1347, in Majorca, Isaac Natan translated Abū 'Abdallāh al-Tabrīzī's *Commentary on the Twenty-Five Propositions of Maimonides' Guide*; probably during the fourteenth century, Joseph ben Joshua Vives of Lorca translated Maimonides' *Treatise on the Art of Logic* (Efros 1938:101–129). The places where other fourteenth-century translators worked are still uncertain. In Spain or in Provence, Nissim ben Solomon translated Isaac Israeli's *Book of Definitions* (Hirschfeld 1896), and an anonymous author translated al-Tabrīzī's work mentioned above (Hayoun 1996). A number of Arabic-into-Hebrew translators were active in Provence, in the period 1310–1350 c. At least one of them was a sort of professional translator, in the style of the Ibn Tibbons: Qalonymos ben Qalonymos of Arles. In 1314, he rendered into Hebrew some of al-Fārābī's philosophical works: the *Enumeration of Sciences* and the *Propaedeutic to the Study of Philosophy* (Zonta 1992), as well as his treatise *On the Intellect*. Many of his translations involve Averroes' commentaries on Aristotle: Qalonymos translated, in 1313, Averroes' *Summaries of the Topics* and the *Sophistici elenchi*; in 1314, his *Long Commentary on the Posterior Analytics*; in 1315 circa, his *Long Commentary on the Physics* and that on the *Metaphysics* (the latter being "edited" by Moses of Beaucaire), as well as some of his *Questions on Logic*; in 1316, his *Middle Commentaries on the Physics*, the *De generatione* (Averrois

Cordubensis 1958), and the *Meteorology*; in 1317, his *Middle Commentary on the Metaphysics* – a translation revised by Qalonymos himself some years later. Most of Qalonymos' translations might have been made on behalf of a famous Provençal Jewish philosopher, Levi ben Gershom (Gersonides), who made use of them in his works. In the same period, other professional translators were active in Provence: Samuel ben Judah of Marseilles, and Todros Todrosi of Arles. In 1320–1322, Samuel translated Averroes' *Logical Questions*, including works by three of Averroes' followers (Abū l-Qāsim ibn Idris, Ḥajjāj ibn Ṭumlus, Abū 'Abd al-Rahmān ibn Tāhir); he rendered into Hebrew also Averroes' *Middle Commentary on Aristotle's Nicomachean Ethics* (Averroes 1999), and his *Paraphrase of Plato's Republic* (Rosenthal 1956). In the period 1330–1340, Todros translated al-Fārābī's *The Sources of Questions*, parts two and three of Avicenna's philosophical encyclopedia, *The Salvation*, and three of Averroes' questions on metaphysical subjects; he also rendered into Hebrew two series of Arabic commentaries on Aristotle's *Rhetoric* and *Poetics*: al-Fārābī's *Summaries* and, in Trinquetaille in 1337, Averroes' *Middle Commentaries* (Averroes 1842; Lasinio 1872). Other translators were active in Provence in this period: around 1320–1325, Moses of Beaucaire revised Qalonymos' version of Averroes' *Long Commentary on the Metaphysics* (Zonta 2001); before 1328 or 1330, Judah ben Solomon Todros translated al-Ġazālī's *Intentions of the Philosophers*, and Qalonymos Todrosi translated Averroes' *Refutation of the Refutation of the Philosophers*. Some other works are still in need of identification: the anonymous translations of Averroes' *On the Substance of the Earth (De substantia orbis)* (Averroes 1986) and of his *Physical Questions*, as well as those of al-Fārābī's *Compendium of Aristotle's Metaphysics* and *Exhortation to the Way of Happiness*, might have been made in fourteenth century Provence, but it is not clear by whom. The same is true for some anonymous Arabic-into-Hebrew translations, commented on by the Provençal Jewish thinker Moses Narboni, who might have even written them by himself. They include those of Averroes' *Commentary on*

*Alexander of Aphrodisias' De intellectu* (Davidson 1988) and of his *Epistle on the Possibility of the Conjunction with the Active Intellect* (Ibn Rushd 1982), probably written before 1340; that of al-Ġazālī's *Intentions of the Philosophers*, probably written before 1344; that of Averroes' *Confutation of the Confutation*, written in 1347 or before; that of Ibn Ṭufayl's philosophical tale *The Alive Son of Awake*, written in 1349 or before (Hayoun 2002). In the same period, in Rome, at least two Arabic philosophical texts were translated into Hebrew from their medieval Latin versions and commented on by the Italian Jewish philosopher Giuda Romano: Pseudo-Aristotle's *Book of the Causes* (Rothschild 1994), and Averroes' *On the Substance of the Earth*.

The Jewish communities in Provence, where most of the translations had been made, were partially dispersed by the 1348 plague. Only few Arabic-into-Hebrew translations of philosophical works were apparently made in the second half of the fourteenth century, and all of them were probably written in Spain. They include the anonymous version of Joseph ibn Waqqar's *Treatise Reconciling Philosophy and Religion* (Vajda 1962:119); Solomon ibn Labi's first Hebrew translation of Abraham ibn Daud's *The Exalted Faith*, made around 1370 (Abraham ibn Daud 1986); Samuel ibn Motot's versions of chapters 1–4 of Ibn al-Sīd al-Baṭalyūsī's *Book of Circles*, made in 1370 in Guadalajara (Kaufmann 1880), and of Ibn Daud's *The Exalted Faith*, made in 1391 and partially based upon Ibn Labi's one; Zerahyah ha-Levi Saladin's translation of al-Ġazālī's *Incoherence of the Philosophers*, made around 1400.

In the fifteenth century, the knowledge of Arabic as the language of science and philosophy seems to have been almost disappeared among Jewish scholars, even in Spain. As a matter of fact, only three Arabic philosophical works were translated into Hebrew in this period, and all these translations were apparently based upon medieval Latin versions. A Hebrew translation of al-Fārābī's *Summary of the Nicomachean Ethics* was probably based upon a lost Latin version; it is found in an anonymous supercommentary on Averroes' *Middle Commentary* on Aristotle's

work (Berman 1978:302–311) dating back to the first half of the fifteenth century. Before 1470, in Castilia or in southern Italy, an anonymous author (Baruch ibn Ya'ish?) rendered into Hebrew Averroes' *Long Commentary on Aristotle's De anima* from the Latin translation of Michael Scot (Zonta 1994). In 1471 or 1477 Eli Habbillo, an Aragonese Latin-into-Hebrew translator of philosophical works, translated Pseudo-Aristotle's *Book of the Causes* from Gerard of Cremona's Latin version (Rothschild 1994).

## Cross-References

- ▶ [Aristotelianism in the Greek, Latin, Syriac, Arabic, and Hebrew Traditions](#)
- ▶ [al-Baṭalyūsī, Abū Muḥammad ibn al-Sīd](#)
- ▶ [Ethics, Jewish](#)
- ▶ [Greek Texts Translated into Hebrew](#)
- ▶ [Logic, Jewish](#)
- ▶ [Moses Maimonides](#)
- ▶ [Natural Philosophy, Jewish](#)
- ▶ [Philosophical Theology, Jewish](#)
- ▶ [Philosophy, Jewish](#)

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## Arabic Texts: Natural Philosophy, Latin Translations of

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### Abstract

Natural philosophy, as one of the major divisions of medieval learning, consists of texts by both Aristotle and his commentators (in Greek and Arabic), and a large number of practical divisions. Arabic authors contributed considerably to both branches.

Philosophy in the Late Antique Greek schools consisted of three divisions, mathematics, natural philosophy and metaphysics, of which the second and third divisions were based on the works of Aristotle. These divisions (with logic regarded as a fourth, introductory division, or a tool to be used for the other divisions), had formed the structure of teaching that passed into Syriac and Arabic, but was largely lost to the Latin West. Latin scholars

were well aware of some of Aristotle's works on logic (the *logica vetus*) from the translations from Greek made by Boethius in the early sixth century, but it was not until the early twelfth century that the remaining works on logic, and the texts on natural science (the "*libri naturales*") and metaphysics began to be translated, by James of Venice, Burgundio of Pisa, Henricus Aristippus, and others; the process was completed in the late thirteenth century by William of Moerbeke. In the Arabic world, however, thanks to the translations made (often via Syriac) in the ninth century of the whole of the Aristotelian corpus, together with a mingling of Neoplatonic works, a philosophical tradition developed based on an intelligent critique of Aristotle. The leading exponents of this Arabic tradition were al-Fārābī, Ibn Sīnā, and Ibn Rushd.

When Latin translators wished to fill the perceived gaps in their knowledge of philosophy, they turned to the *Classification of the Sciences* of al-Fārābī (d. c. 950), which detailed each of the divisions of grammar and logic, mathematics, natural philosophy, metaphysics, politics, jurisprudence, and theology. In the section on natural philosophy are listed in order "eight enquiries" (*fuḥūṣ*), together with the books of Aristotle that deal with them:

1. The principles shared by all bodies, corresponding to Aristotle's *Physics*
2. The simple bodies out of which the universe is composed; *On the Heavens*
3. The processes of coming-into-being and passing away; *Generation and Corruption*
4. The accidents and affects of simple elements; *Meteorologica*, bks 1–3
5. The accidents and affects of elements in combination; *Meteorologica* bk 4
6. Stones and minerals; the *Liber mineralium*
7. Plants; *On Plants* (a work by Nicholas of Damascus drawing on Aristotle's doctrines)
8. On what species of animals share and what is proper to each species; *On Animals* and *On the Soul*.

Gerard of Cremona (1114–1187), who made a translation of this work of al-Fārābī, inaugurated

the program of natural philosophy in Toledo by translating *Physics*, *On the Heavens*, *On Generation and Corruption*, and the first three books of the *Meteorologica* from Arabic. Alfred of Shareshill (who lived into the early years of the thirteenth century) completed the *Meteorologica* by adding Henricus Aristippus' Greek–Latin translation of the fourth book, and his own translation of chapters from Ibn Sīnā's *Shifā'* (see below) on stones and minerals; he also translated the *De plantis* (or *De vegetabilibus*) of Nicholas of Damascus, which was based on Aristotelian material. Michael Scot completed the series by translating, in Toledo before 1220, the book on *Animals*. Alongside these texts of Aristotle were translated works of Arabic scholars. Gerard of Cremona himself translated al-Fārābī's *Commentary* (or *Introduction*) to *Physics* (the work is not extant), several treatises by al-Kindī concerning topics in *Physics* and in *Parva naturalia*, and a whole text, *De causis proprietatum elementorum quatuor* (*On the Causes of the Properties of the Four Elements*), written by an anonymous Arabic author, which deals primarily with questions of physical geography; this text was inserted into the *Libri naturales*, between *On the Heavens* and *On Generation and Corruption*. But the most significant Arabic text belonging to the Peripatetic tradition that aroused the interest of Latin scholars was Ibn Sīnā's *Shifā'* ("The Cure" scil. from ignorance).

This text became known in Toledo at the height of Gerard's career there. It is a large compendium of philosophy belonging to the Peripatetic tradition, in which Ibn Sīnā (d. 1037) carefully analyzes, emends, and develops Aristotle's doctrines in the light of the Greek and Arabic commentators, and the Neoplatonic works that he knew, and through his original insights. It is divided into four large units, each called a *jumla* or "collection," on logic, natural philosophy, mathematics, and on metaphysics. Natural science is divided into eight sections, each called a *fann* (or "subject"), and very similar to the divisions described by al-Fārābī: (1) on principles, movement, place and time, the infinite and the finite (i.e., physics); (2) on the heavens; (3) on generation and corruption; (4) on actions and passions; (5) on minerals

and meteorology; (6) on the soul; (7) on plants; and (8) on animals. The *Shifā'* was apparently brought to Toledo by the Jewish scholar Abraham Daud who collaborated with an archdeacon there, Dominicus Gundissalinus (fl. 1161–1190), on the translation of the section on the soul ("*Liber sextus de naturalibus*"). An unknown twelfth-century translator, in turn, translated the first two treatises (together with the opening of the third) under the title *Sufficientia*. Alfred of Shareshill translated two chapters on mineralogy and possibly the chapter on floods from section 5, while another Jew and Christian ("Salomon" and Juan Gonsalvez de Burgos) collaborated in the 1270s on translations of treatise 3 of section 1, and sections 2, 3, and 4 of the collection on natural science. The last section, on animals, was translated apparently from an abbreviated Arabic version, by Michael Scot (d. before 1236) for Frederick II Hohenstaufen. The translations of Salomon and Gonzalves had little impact, surviving in only one manuscript, but the other translations were widely copied, and read in conjunction with the *Libri naturales*. Albert the Great followed the model of Ibn Sīnā in writing his own works on the different divisions of natural philosophy. Roger Bacon's estimation of Ibn Sīnā as the *praecipuus imitator et expositor Aristotelis* ("the eminent imitator and elucidator of Aristotle"), shows the respect he was held in.

Dominicus Gundissalinus, aside from embarking on the translation of Ibn Sīnā's *Shifā'*, translated, with a certain "magister Iohannes," *The Aims of the Philosophers* of al-Ġazālī. This was a summary of the doctrines of Peripatetic philosophy based very largely on the compendium of philosophy written by Ibn Sīnā in Persian for his secular patron, the *Dānesh-Nāmeḥ*. Ramon Llull was later to paraphrase the opening section on logic in his own "*Compendium Logicae Algazelis*."

The culmination of the Greek and Arabic tradition of commenting on the works of Aristotle is found in the œuvre of Ibn Rushd of Córdoba (Averroes, 1126–1198). He wrote his commentaries on Aristotle's works in the forms of Long Commentaries, Middle Commentaries and Epitomes, and his writings became well known to

Jewish and Latin scholars soon after his death. In the field of natural philosophy, the Long Commentaries on *Physics*, *On the Heavens*, and *On the Soul*, and the Middle Commentaries on *On Generation and Corruption*, *Meteorologica*, bk IV, and *On Animals* were translated from Arabic in the early thirteenth century. Common terminology and style between all these translations except that of the *Meteorologica*, and the explicit attribution of *On the Heavens* to Michael Scot, suggest that he was responsible for the translations. Ibn Rushd's original work, *On the Substance of the Orb*, which explores the differences between the substances of the heavens, the sublunar world, and the soul, belongs to the same context.

Thus far, Arabic works on natural science have followed the Aristotelian tradition, and they appealed to the Latin West because they supported and enhanced this tradition. Dominicus Gundissalinus, aside from translating some of these works, wrote his own text *On the Division of Philosophy*. In this, he sought to bring together definitions of the different sciences that he found in his Latin sources (especially the *Etymologies* of Isidore of Seville) with definitions from Arabic sources, among which al-Fārābī's *Classification of the Sciences* is the most important. Thus we see, in the chapter devoted to "*scientia naturalis*," a section beginning "*Partes huius scientie naturalis sunt octo*" ("the parts of this natural science are eight"), which is simply a transcription of the relevant part of the *Classification*. Gundissalinus describes natural philosophy in his own words as "the science that considers only things which cannot be abstracted from matter, and which are in movement. . . it considers matter with the form which cannot be abstracted from matter. . . Its matter is body, not as being, but as substance, not in that it is composed of two principles, form and matter, but in that it is subject to movement, rest and change" etc. This Peripatetic natural science is theoretical. But this is not the only kind of natural science that we find among Arabic writers, and the Latin scholars who depend on them.

In the same chapter on natural science in Gundissalinus' *De divisione philosophiae*, immediately preceding the eight "parts", as listed by

al-Fārābī, is another classification of the "sciences" or "species of natural science", this time into (1) medicine, (2) astrological judgments, (3) nigromancy according to physics, (4) talismans, (5) agriculture, (6) navigation, (7) optics, and (8) alchemy. This division comes from an Arabic work known only in its Latin translation under the title *De ortu scientiarum* (*On the Rise of the Sciences*), and attributed variously to Aristotle, al-Farabi and Avicenna. Having stated that there is nothing aside from substance, accident, and the Creator of both, and that accidents are apprehended through the five senses, while substance is only apprehended through reason, with the mediation of accidents, the author explains how the four mathematical arts arose. He then turns to the "natural art" (*ars naturalis*) whose origin he explains as arising from the need to explain why substances change color, last for different lengths of time, and are healthy or ill. He goes on to say that the parts of the natural art

according to what the first wise men said, are eight: namely the science of judgements (astrology), the science of medicine, the science of nigromancy according to physics, the science of talismans, the science of agriculture, the science of the sea, the science of alchemy, which is the science concerning the conversion of things into other species, and the science of mirrors.

He states that astrology and medicine are the most important parts of this natural art.

That he uses "*ars*" instead of "*scientia*" in the heading is immediately significant; what we are dealing with is clearly the practical side of natural philosophy, an art or craft (probably *ṣinā'a* in Arabic). These sciences concern how to effect change in nature. By this art, one can "remove those causes (or "illnesses"; the word which is presumable in the Arabic original is *'ilal* which means both "causes" and "illnesses") which are harmful and increase those that are beneficial."

This applies most of all to medicine, but also to katarchic astrology in which the best times are chosen for embarking on an activity, to avoid misfortune and gain success. The early translators of Arabic texts on medicine and astrology were keen to emphasize that medicine belonged to "physics" (Gerard of Cremona's medical

translations were called by his students “*De physica*”), and that the study of the effects of the stars on sublunar beings belonged to “natural speculation” (Hermann of Carinthia describing the subject matter of Abū Ma’shar’s *Great Introduction to Astrology*).

Arabic texts on the other subjects mentioned in *On the Rise of Sciences* can also be recognized. “The science of nigromancy according to physics” would be “natural magic,” rather than the invocation of spirits or daimons (*rūḥāniyyāt*). Among the Arabic texts on this subject translated into Latin was the *Kitāb al-nawāmīs*, translated as the *Liber vaccae* (*Book of the Cow* of “Plato”), which operates only with animals (whether natural or artificial) and not with talismans or spirits. This is, rather, the subject of the next division: the “science of talismans (*imaginibus*).” Two Arabic texts on this subject were translated into Latin: one by Thābit ibn Qurra (836–901), in which the positions of planets in the signs of the zodiac are observed; the other attributed to Ptolemy, which is based on the rising of third parts (decans) of signs of the zodiac. Under the titles *Liber imaginum Thebit ben Cora* and *Opus imaginum Ptholomei*, they were frequently copied in the Middle Ages.

The next two practical sciences, agriculture and the science of the sea, are also found listed, alongside medicine, among the seven “mechanical arts” in the Latin tradition. However, when we consider the possible Arabic original terms, their identification as natural sciences becomes more reasonable. The first is probably *filāḥa*. This involves man participating with nature in producing crops out of seeds, grapes out of vines, etc., but one should also consider the wider meaning of *filāḥa* in the title of Ibn Waḥshiya’s *Kitāb al-filāḥa al-nabaṭīya* (*Nabataean Agriculture*) that included all kinds of magical recipes. Although it was not translated directly from Arabic into Latin, passages were known through being quoted in the magical compendium, *Ġayāt al-Ḥakīm*, translated in the mid-thirteenth century as “Picatrix.”

“*Scientia de navigando*” is presumably *milāḥa*, which would mean not only the knowledge of navigating, using a quadrant or ship’s

astrolabe and a chart, but also the prediction of good and bad weather to ensure the success of the voyage. Weather forecasting, the practical aspect of meteorology, is a separate genre within Arabic astrology, and two treatises on the subject by al-Kindī were combined into a single text in Latin under the title *De mutatione temporum* (*On the Change of Times*).

In alchemy, man imitates and speeds up the processes of change that naturally occur in natural substances. The Latin alchemical corpus depended entirely on that of the Arabs, among whom the names of Khālīd ibn al-Walīd, Jābir b. Ḥayyān, and Abū Bakr al-Rāzī figure as authorities. Alchemy, too, is concerned with substances coming into being and passing away, and changing color, while it can prolong life – all subjects of the natural art as defined in *On the Rise of the Sciences*.

The last science listed – optics, *De speculis*, could be regarded as natural philosophy in that it deals with the physiology of the eye, the nature of color, and the behavior of rays of light in a medium, all topics occurring in Ibn al-Haytham’s *Optics*, which was rendered into Latin by two unknown translators before the late thirteenth century. But in another list of the eight branches of physics, found in Daniel of Morley’s *Philosophia* (written between 1175 and 1187), the science is described as being about *burning* mirrors, a subject which Ibn al-Haytham also had dealt with in an Arabic text possibly translated by Gerard of Cremona. Thus, “optics” again is about the knowledge of how to effect change in nature – in this case by reflecting the light of the sun to cause something to burn.

Thus, we see how the Arabs contributed both to the theoretical natural philosophy in the West and to what were regarded as the practical branches of natural science. The former became firmly embedded in the curricula of western universities and the paths of their dissemination can be followed in detail. The latter (with the exception of certain branches of medicine and occasionally astrology) were not included in the teaching of the universities, and their diffusion is more difficult to trace.

## Cross-References

- ▶ [Alchemy in the Arab World](#)
- ▶ [Aristotle, Arabic](#)
- ▶ [al-Fārābī, Abū Naṣr](#)
- ▶ [al-Ġazālī, Abū Ḥāmid Muḥammad](#)
- ▶ [Ibn Sīnā, Abū 'Alī \(Avicenna\)](#)

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## Arabic Texts: Philosophy, Latin Translations of

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### Abstract

In the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, a vast body of philosophical and scientific literature by Greek and Arabic authors was translated from Arabic into Latin. The translation movement peaked with the School of Toledo and the translators Gundissalinus and Gerard of Cremona in the twelfth century and with the court of Frederick II and the translator Michael Scot in the thirteenth century. It was in the frontier regions between the Muslim and Christian realms, where learned individuals with the necessary linguistic skills were present, that the translations took place. In the area of philosophy, the impact of the translations can be seen in a renewed interest in the interpretation of the works of Aristotle and other Greek authors, shaped by their Arabic translators and interpreters, and in a transformation of the curriculum of philosophical learning as expressed in the teaching of the subject as well as in its conceptual shape. While it was mainly courts with their high-ranking patrons and rich resources that offered a social, intellectual, and institutional context for the translations, the later reception of the translated works took also place at universities. While some translators embarked on political careers or left, like Gundissalinus, their own, sometimes highly significant marks in the philosophical tradition of the West, other translators survive



only with their names. Jews played a particularly important role in these transmissions. Several philosophical works originally written in Arabic, in particular, by Averroes, have not been preserved in their original form but survive only in Latin translations. Even though religious texts were translated for polemical purposes, anti-Islamic motives did not affect attitudes to Arabic philosophy in the Latin West.

## Introduction

In the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, a vast body of philosophical and scientific literature by Greek and Arabic authors was translated from Arabic into Latin. The translation movement peaked with the School of Toledo in the twelfth and the court of Frederick II in the thirteenth century. In the area of philosophy, categories of texts translated include (1) Greek works (mostly by Aristotle and his commentators) previously translated into Arabic, (2) summaries and *quaestios* by Greek and Arabic authors which deal with questions arising from Aristotle's works, (3) systematic treatises on *falsafa* (most importantly Avicenna's *Shifā'* (*Cure*) and al-Ġazālī's *Maqāṣid al-falāsifa* (*Intentions of the Philosophers*)), (4) commentaries (most importantly, Averroes' commentaries on Aristotle), (5) doxography (Burnett 2005: 370–371). The recovery of Aristotle's books via Arabic happened at about the same time as the Latin translation of his works from Greek by James of Venice (fl. 1125–1150) and Burgundio of Pisa (d. 1193). The Arabic versions had the advantage of bringing with them a much longer tradition of interpretations, that is, in addition to the late antique works mainly of Alexander of Aphrodisias and Themistius, those by the Arabic authorities. Sometimes it was through the lemmata in Averroes' Long Commentaries that a work by Aristotle became widely available to the Latin readers, as was the case with the *Physics*, *De anima*, and the *Metaphysics*, whose Graeco-Latin '*vetus*' translation was in a sense superseded by Michael Scot's translations of Averroes' commentaries. On the other hand, the *De caelo*

became available for the first time through the translation of Averroes' commentary.

Not unlike the Greco-Arabic translation movement in 'Abbāsīd Baghdad in the eighth–tenth centuries, the origins of the Arabo-Latin translation movement lay in an interest in science and medicine. The geographical center was in the north-western Mediterranean where, in the late tenth century, Latin texts about astrology including excerpts from Arabic works circulated in Catalonia. The first well-known translator was Constantine the African (d. before 1098–1099), who brought books about medicine from Kairouan to the medical school in Salerno and then to the Benedictine monastery of Montecassino where he translated them. This project was continued in the first half of the twelfth century by Stephen of Antioch in Pisa. In addition to texts by Isaac Israeli (ninth–tenth centuries) and his disciple Ibn al-Jazzār, the most important of these works was the *Pantegni* by 'Alī b. al-'Abbās al-Majūsī (Haly Abbas). The translators went beyond the area of medicine with their interest in texts about natural science and established thereby a new field of learning which supplemented the seven liberal arts of the traditional curriculum. Alongside philosophy which gained importance in subsequent years, medicine and science, in particular astronomy and astrology, remained important areas of translation.

It was in the second quarter of the twelfth century that the interest in philosophy increased due to the attention devoted to it at the School of Chartres which already aimed at a combination of Plato's and Aristotle's doctrines, a tendency which was later supported by the philosophical literature translated from Arabic. Apart from northern Italy, the translators were active in modern-day Spain and France. The most famous among them were Hermann of Carinthia (fl. 1138–1143), Robert of Ketton (fl. 1141–1156), Rudolph of Bruges (fl. 1144), Hugo of Santalla (fl. 1151), and Raymond of Marseilles (fl. 1141). Hermann's own *De essentiis* (1143) was inspired by Arabic sources; his five essences (cause, movement, place, time, and *habitudō*) have parallels in works by Abū Bakr al-Rāzī, Pseudo-Apollonius, and al-Kindī. Furthermore, Hermann cites Abū

Ma'shar's *Great Introduction to Astrology* which he had translated 3 years before composing *De essentiis*.

Another trend that can be identified in this context is the significance of anti-Islamic polemics. In 1141, Robert of Ketton translated for Peter the Venerable of Cluny various Islamic texts, among them the Qur'an and the *Apologia of al-Kindī* (a tenth-century Christian, not to be confused with the Muslim philosopher of the ninth century mentioned above). The more literal translation of the Qur'an that Mark of Toledo completed in around 1210 had far less influence; it was Robert's translation that was printed for the first time in 1543. Even though the polemical tradition thus persisted, the Muslim identity of most Arabic philosophers did not constitute a problem for Christian translators and interpreters who challenged their views on purely philosophical grounds. Furthermore, works which Arabic authors had written on genuinely Islamic matters were not translated into Latin, which explains why, for example, Averroes as the author of the philosophical and medical texts translated into Latin is somewhat different from Ibn Rushd as the author of a much larger corpus of texts in Arabic.

### The School of Toledo and Gundissalinus

In the middle of the twelfth century, the geographical center of the translations from Arabic into Latin was established in Toledo which became home to a more professional enterprise. The city, conquered in 1085 by the Christian armies, offered a number of advantages: the availability of Arabic books, the predominance of the Arabic language, the presence of learned Latin clergy and of Jewish scholars who had escaped from the persecutions in Almohad al-Andalus. The "School of Toledo" produced translations of works of Aristotle and his Greek commentators from their Arabic versions as well as of later commentaries and more independent works originally written in Arabic. Its two protagonists were Dominicus Gundissalinus (or Gundisalvi) (c. 1110–1190), Archdeacon of Cuéllar (in the

Diocese of Segovia), and Gerard of Cremona (1114–1187). Both of them were assisted by native speakers of Arabic, among them Abraham b. Daud (Avendauth), a Jewish philosopher who had left Almohad Cordoba and who cooperated with Gundissalinus. While Gerard's translations reflect the interest in Aristotle himself and the "second teacher", al-Fārābī, which was predominant among Muslim philosophers of Spain, the texts translated in Gundissalinus' circle, most notably parts of Avicenna's *Shifā'*, al-Ġazālī's *Maqāṣid al-falāsifa*, and Ibn Gabirol's *Fons vitae*, mirror philosophical tendencies among the Jews of the Iberian Peninsula.

Al-Fārābī's *Enumeration of the Sciences* (*Iḥṣā' al-ʿulūm*) had an important impact on Gundissalinus as well as on Gerard. While the former based his own *De scientiis* on it, the latter used it as a program for his translation activities. As is obvious from a list of his translations posthumously compiled by his students, Gerard followed al-Fārābī's catalog, which offers short descriptions of Aristotle's works on logic and natural sciences, by translating the *Posterior Analytics* first and then proceeding with the *Physics*, *De caelo*, *De generatione et corruptione*, and *Meteora*, books I–III (Burnett 2001). Of particular significance is the fact that the place of Aristotle's *Metaphysics* among Gerard's translations was occupied by the *Liber de causis*, an anonymous treatise that circulated in Arabic under the title *Kitāb fī khayr al-maḥd* (*Book of the Pure Goodness*). The Latin version became enormously popular and, since 1255, part of the curriculum at the Faculty of Arts in Paris (Fidora and Niederberger 2001: 226). Based on Proclus' *Elements of Theology*, it presented a Neoplatonic cosmology and metaphysics. It is here that the Arabic contribution to the transmission of Greek philosophy becomes visible, since the Neoplatonic interpretation of Aristotle's philosophy and the assumption that Aristotle and Plato agreed on key philosophical matters were – although not unprecedented in the Latin West – part of the Arabic legacy. Thomas Aquinas, however, identified the author correctly with Proclus. Aristotle's *Metaphysics* only became prominent in the Latin West in the thirteenth century after the translation of Averroes'

*Long Commentary* which included the complete text in the form of lemmata, and later through William of Moerbeke's translation. The term "metaphysics", which had already appeared in manuscripts of Boethius' works, was established as a term for a philosophical discipline in the Latin West only through Gundissalinus' *On the Division of Philosophy* which was informed by various Latin and Arabic texts translated in Toledo. The impact of this text was even greater – Gundissalinus introduced here basic principles such as the division of disciplines according to their subject matter or that a science cannot demonstrate the existence of its own subject matter (Fidora 2003). While the sciences remain independent, they are also interrelated since they can be considered subordinate to one another. This principle had further implications for metaphysics. Gundissalinus endorsed Avicenna's argument presented in the *Metaphysics (Ilāhiyyāt)* of his *Shifā'*, that since metaphysics is concerned with proving the existence of God, its subject matter cannot be God, but rather being as being. Averroes was to disagree with Avicenna, assign the proof of the existence of God to the area of physics, and include God among separable beings as the subject matter of metaphysics (Bertolacci 2006, 2007). Later Latin authors continued to disagree about the subject. The distinction between essence and existence is another important concept derived from Avicenna's *Metaphysics*. His influence is obvious too in Gundissalinus' *De processione mundi*, which is also informed by Ibn Gabirol, Hugh of Saint Victor, Abraham b. Daud, and Hermann of Carinthia. Following Avicenna, Gundissalinus describes the first cause as necessary being from which all created beings, which have only possible existence, emanate. Another Farabian legacy mediated by Gundissalinus is the division of logic into eight parts including the *Rhetoric* and *Poetic*, and the distinction of five kinds of syllogisms.

The translations made in Gundissalinus' circle reflect his personal philosophical interests, in addition to the issues mentioned above, most notably, in the subject of soul and intellect. The Latin interest in these matters may have been inspired by Qusṭā b. Lūqā's *On the Difference*

*Between the Spirit and the Soul*, translated by John of Seville for Raymond, the archbishop of Toledo (1125–1152) (Burnett 2005: 376). While the text itself enjoyed great popularity, further texts were added from the Gundissalinus circle, among them the part on the soul from Avicenna's *Shifā'* and texts on the intellect by Alexander of Aphrodisias, al-Kindī, and al-Fārābī. The great importance of Arabic works suggests that Aristotelian philosophy may have been found wanting in this respect. An influential concept included in the *Shifā'* was the fourfold division of the states of the human intellect: the material, *in habitu*, *in effectu*, and the acquired intellect. While the first three stages are characterized by different degrees of potentiality, the acquired intellect is in actuality when it connects with the active intellect and considers the middle terms of the syllogism (Hasse 1999).

Related to this area was another original import from Arabic philosophy, namely, the notion of happiness involving divine knowledge as the conjunction of the individual human intellect with the active intellect as conveyed by Averroes and his son Abū Muḥammad 'Abdallāh in two texts translated in the thirteenth century (Burnett 1999a). The very concept of the active intellect as a separate entity is prominent among Arabic authors such as al-Fārābī, Avicenna, and Averroes, and following Avicenna, this active intellect has been identified with God by authors such as Vincent of Beauvais and Roger Bacon (Gilson's *Augustinisme avicennisant*), a theory rejected by others including Thomas Aquinas (Hasse 2000: 200–221).

Among Avicenna's contributions to Latin philosophy, the five "inner senses" (common sense, imagination, cogitative faculty, estimation, and memory) which are not present in Aristotle's works and are closer to Galen also deserve mentioning. Another import was the definition of the subject matter of logic as presented in the *Shifā'*, that is, as dealing with second-order concepts ("second intentions"), which made logic an independent discipline and not merely a tool. Post-Avicennian developments in Arabic logic, however, were largely ignored by the Latin recipients (Street 2005: 248). Likewise, philosophical concepts of prophecy which are prominent in

al-Fārābī's works remained unknown in the Latin West.

The program of the "School of Toledo" was continued by Alfred of Shareshill (late twelfth century), Michael Scot (left Toledo after 1217, d. before 1236), and Hermann the German (mid-thirteenth century). They merged the two traditions of Gundissalinus and Gerard and tried to complete the program extracted from al-Fārābī's list of philosophical disciplines. Hermann is credited with the translation of Averroes' Middle Commentaries on the *Poetics* (the only text relating to Aristotle's *Poetics* available in the Middle Ages), on the *Nicomachean Ethics*, and on the *Rhetoric* as well as Aristotle's *Rhetoric* proper, which Hermann supplemented with passages from the corresponding works by al-Fārābī, Avicenna, and Averroes. These translations reached Paris within a short period and some of them became very influential.

### Frederick II and Michael Scot

The milieu of Latin translations of Arabic philosophical texts changed considerably in the thirteenth century with secular rulers, most notably Frederick II Hohenstaufen (reg. until 1250) and Alfonso X of Castile and Leon (reg. 1256–1284), providing patronage and taking a personal interest. This was crucial for the transmission of Arabic philosophical and scientific ideas into western Europe.

Frederick hosted at his court Michael Scot, Theodore of Antioch (who translated the *Moamin* from Arabic for Frederick, arguably the most influential medieval text on falconry), and Jacob Anatoli who translated Averroes' Middle Commentaries on the *Isagoge*, the *Categories*, *De interpretatione*, and the *Prior* and *Posterior Analytics* from Arabic into Hebrew. Subject of the debates at court was also the *Guide of the Perplexed* which Maimonides had written in Arabic and of which Frederick may have commissioned a Latin translation. With the University of Naples, founded by Frederick in 1224, the emperor contributed to the creation of the intellectual context in which the ideas

included in the Arabic texts were most vividly received, debated, and adapted.

Michael Scot was probably the most important translator of the thirteenth century. Having started his career in Toledo, where he translated Aristotle's books on animals, he spent time in Rome and Bologna and established himself at Frederick's court in Sicily in the 1230s. In his Italian phase, Michael translated Avicenna's *Abbreviatio de animalibus*, Averroes' Long Commentaries on the *Physics*, *De caelo*, *De anima*, and the *Metaphysics*, the Middle Commentaries on *De generatione et corruptione* and parts of *De animalibus*, the Epitome of *De caelo*, *De animalibus*, and *Parva naturalia*, Averroes' *De substantia orbis*, and the treatise on the intellect by Averroes' son mentioned above. Because of their less literal style, these translations were more intelligible than earlier ones and became very popular. The books on animals, for example, were important sources for Albert the Great's works on the subject who based his *Quaestiones super libris de animalibus* on these translations. In addition to the translations, Michael left his own trace as the author of the *Liber introductorius* consisting of the *Liber quatuor distinctionum* (an introductory compendium of natural sciences), the *Liber particularis* which includes questions from Frederick, and the *Liber Physiognomie*. Preliminary studies of the text suggest that it is informed by Arabic sources. Michael's translations of Averroes' Long Commentaries are particularly important since they provided new translations of the complete texts of Aristotle's corresponding works.

Another key text for questions relating to soul and intellect possibly translated by Michael was Averroes' *Long Commentary on De anima* which is not preserved in the Arabic original. Averroes' commentary contained crucial material for later debates about Averroism and the Parisian condemnations of 1270 and 1277, in particular what is usually interpreted as the denial of the immortality of the individual soul in favor of an intellect common to all humanity and the resulting conflict with revealed religion. Another doctrine associated with Averroism is the eternity of the world that had already been the matter of great debate in

Arabic sources. Texts such as al-Ġazālī's *Maqāṣid al-falāsifa* or Maimonides' *Guide for the Perplexed* offered Latin authors a variety of arguments for and against this theory (Davidson 1987).

The project was continued under Frederick's son Manfred and Charles of Anjou. William of Luna translated at Manfred's court Averroes' Middle Commentaries on the *Isagoge*, the *Categories*, and probably *De interpretatione*, possibly also the *Prior* and *Posterior Analytics*, even though these texts did not exercise a great influence. Manfred himself is mentioned in the prologue to the text as having translated the pseudo-Aristotelian *Liber de pomo*, but he was probably only the patron. An enormously influential pseudo-Aristotelian text is the "Fürstenspiegel" *Secretum secretorum*, translated from Arabic into Latin by Philipp of Tripoli, a high-ranking man of the church. Philosophy was less important among the texts translated at Alfonso's court where the interest in astrology and astronomy dominated. In addition to this patronage, the exchanges between Latin scholars and Arabic native speakers became more frequent and vivid, and Latin scholars developed a more independent attitude to Arabic philosophy.

Translations mostly stopped at the end of the thirteenth century. A notable exception is the translation of Averroes' *Tahāfut al-Tahāfut* (*The Incoherence of the Incoherence*) in 1328 for Robert of Anjou, King of Naples. Until then, only Averroes' more strictly philosophical texts had been translated. Arabic philosophical texts were also used and translated among Catalan missionaries of the period. Ramon Llull (1232–1315) who campaigned successfully for the foundation of schools to teach Arabic to future missionaries composed a Latin prose and a Catalan verse version of the logic of al-Ġazālī's *Maqāṣid al-falāsifa*. In his *Pugio fidei*, the Dominican Ramón Martí (c. 1220–1285) used a variety of Arabic texts not available in Latin at that point, among them Fārābī's commentary on the *Physics*, Avicenna's *Pointers and Reminders* and *Kitāb al-najāt*, various texts by al-Ġazālī (*Tahāfut al-falāsifa*, *al-Munqidh min al-dalāl*, *Mīzān*

*al-'amal*, *Mishkāt al-anwār*, *Ihyā' 'ulūm al-dīn*, *Kitāb al-tawba* and *al-Maqṣad*), and Averroes' *Tahāfut al-Tahāfut* and *Damīma*. The writings of Albert the Great too show evidence of the knowledge of Arabic works which had not been translated completely into Latin.

The translations were resumed in the Renaissance due to the perceived necessity to revise the poor Latin style of the medieval versions. As in earlier centuries, Jewish translators and scholars were of great significance for the further transmission. At least 38 of Averroes' commentaries had been translated into Hebrew from the early thirteenth century onward, and scholars like Gersonides had written super-commentaries on them. In the Renaissance, Latin translations of philosophical texts originally written in Arabic were often based on Hebrew intermediary versions.

## Cross-References

- ▶ [Albert the Great](#)
- ▶ [Alexander of Aphrodisias and Arabic Aristotelianism](#)
- ▶ [Alexandrian Tradition into Arabic: Philosophy](#)
- ▶ [Arabic Philosophical Texts, Jewish Translations of](#)
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- ▶ [Dominicus Gundissalinus](#)
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- ▶ [Ethics](#)
- ▶ [al-Fārābī, Abū Naṣr](#)
- ▶ [al-Fārābī, Latin Translations of](#)
- ▶ [al-Ġazālī, Abū Ḥāmid Muḥammad](#)
- ▶ [al-Ghazālī's Maqāṣid al-Falāsifa, Latin Translation of](#)



- ▶ Ibn Rushd (Averroes), Latin Translations of
- ▶ Ibn Rushd, Muḥammad ibn Aḥmad al-Ḥafīd (Averroes)
- ▶ Ibn Sīnā, Abū 'Alī (Avicenna)
- ▶ Ibn Sīnā (Avicenna), Latin Translations of
- ▶ Isaac Israeli
- ▶ al-Kindī, Abū Yūsuf Ya'qūb ibn Ishāq
- ▶ al-Kindī, Latin Translations of
- ▶ Logic, Arabic, in the Latin Middle Ages
- ▶ Logic in the Arabic and Islamic World
- ▶ Mathematics and Philosophy in the Arab World
- ▶ Metaphysics
- ▶ Mirrors for Princes
- ▶ Moses Maimonides
- ▶ Natural Philosophy
- ▶ Natural Philosophy, Arabic
- ▶ *Nicomachean Ethics*, Commentaries on Aristotle's
- ▶ Parisian Condemnation of 1277
- ▶ Philosophical Psychology, Jewish Tradition
- ▶ Philosophy, Arabic
- ▶ Philosophy, Jewish
- ▶ Posterior Analytics, Commentaries on Aristotle's
- ▶ Proclus, Arabic
- ▶ Ramon Llull
- ▶ Roger Bacon
- ▶ Schools in the Twelfth Century
- ▶ Themistius, Arabic
- ▶ Thomas Aquinas
- ▶ Translations from Greek into Arabic
- ▶ Universities and Philosophy

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## Arethas of Caesarea

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### Abstract

Arethas is a representative of “the first Byzantine Renaissance” and a major figure in the transitional period of Byzantine intellectual history in the ninth and tenth centuries. He commented on ancient philosophical works and recognized the importance of philosophical learning. He provided a transcription of a complete copy of Plato’s works to which he added marginal notes. He is the author of a collection of scholia on Aristotle’s texts. His importance as a student of Aristotle’s works consists in his adoption of late Alexandrian Neoplatonism and his dependence on Porphyry’s ontology. Arethas promoted encyclopedic curiosity and encouraged the copying of ancient manuscripts. Much of our knowledge of Greek antiquity is the direct result of his work.

## Biographical Information

Arethas of Caesarea, scholar and politician, archbishop of Caesarea (from 902), born in Patras in the middle of the ninth century, died between

932 and 944. Together with Photios and Leo the Mathematician he represents what would later be called the “first Byzantine Renaissance” (Lemerle 1971). Arethas was preoccupied with the compilation of lexicons and the preservation of classical works. He copied, commented, and lectured on the texts of ancient philosophers (Aristotle, Porphyry) and played an important role in the transmission of the philosophical traditions of antiquity into Byzantium. He annotated the margins of classical texts with numerous scholia (many of which are preserved), and copied and commented on several other texts (the nearly complete surviving manuscripts of Euclid’s *Elements*, Pollux, Clement of Alexandria, Aelius Aristides, Athenaeus, Athenagoras, Dio Chrysostom, Epictetus, Hesychius, Julian, Marcus Aurelius, Pausanias, Strabo). He played an important role as a commissioner of philosophical manuscripts of Plato (Oxon. Bodl. Clarke ms.39, Vatic. gr. 1, Paris. gr. 1807) and Aristotle (Vatic. Urb. 35), which are among the most valuable testimonies to Plato’s and Aristotle’s texts (Wilson 1983). Arethas commented on works by Aristotle (*Categories*) and Porphyry (*Isagoge*), and he wrote critical notes on logic, ontology, and psychology. Arethas is also thought as one of the most scholarly theologians of the Church and an important compiler of the oldest extant Greek commentary on the *Apocalypse* (based primarily on that of Andrew of Caesarea). After 902, he turned toward various theological topics (his defense against the accusations of paganism). He wrote exegetical works, letters, homilies, and pamphlets. Arethas paved the way for the revival of Byzantine rhetoric, he rejected the ideal of plain speech, and followed Hermogenes of Tarsus in the belief that obscurity can at times be a virtue. Thus, his language is adorned with proverbs, quotations, allusions, and poetic lines. Among the ancient authors, Plato, Aristotle, and Homer are most often mentioned in Arethas’ works.

## Thought

Apart from the preservation of the ancient texts, Arethas deals with various philosophical issues

(metaphysics, anthropology). He is usually viewed as a Platonizing thinker, mainly because of the considerable editing and his extensive scholia on the Platonic dialogues (Westerink and Laourdas 1962; Brumbaugh 1961). The proof of his scholarly concern for Plato's texts are the marginal notes to Plato's works (Oxon. Bodl. Clarke ms.39). He has a certain ambivalence toward Plato, expressing sometimes criticism (*Charmides* 155D) and sometimes positive appreciation (*Phaedo* 114C). It is not sure whether he wrote a systematic explanation of Plato's treatises or whether these are only personal notes to certain issues or subject notes made in connection with sources that were available at that moment.

From the philosophical point of view, Arethas revived interest in Aristotle in Byzantine thought (Oehler 1964). He is the author of detailed comments on the first five chapters of Aristotle's *Categories* (up to 4b15) and on Porphyry's *Isagoge* (entire text). Arethas' text demonstrates dependence on earlier commentaries, though it became a supplement to the extant Neoplatonic commentaries (Kotzia-Panteli 1996). He wrote marginal notes in his text, which is the oldest surviving manuscript of Porphyry's *Isagoge* (Vatic. Urb. 35). He opposes Porphyry's critics and praises his clarity. Commenting on Porphyry, he identifies universals with genera and species, supposing that every difference, property, and accident is also a genus or a species (wisdom is an accident of Socrates but it is also a species of virtue). The commentary on the *Categories* shows that Arethas was using Aristotle's text primarily to expound within its framework the Neoplatonic ontology. In general, Arethas' scholia to Aristotle express ambiguities in his attitude toward the ancient philosopher; although in his *Letter to Stephanus* written about 907 (Westerink 1968, vol. 1, p. 325, line 15–27) he gives the impression of being close to Aristotle, his commentaries and some other letters (e.g. *Letter to Niketas*, written after 907) demonstrate Arethas' criticism of Aristotle.

Arethas frequently involved scribes who excerpted and adapted material from earlier commentaries, particularly in the case of the logical treatises that were widely used in higher education

in Byzantium. Although Arethas' attitude to Aristotle and his logic is not very clear, he is a critic of Aristotle on doctrinal issues that are considered fundamental to Christian thought (the theory of soul, substance). On the other hand with the help of Porphyry and the Neoplatonic commentators, he understands the importance of Aristotle's doctrine of categories.

Arethas' Christian thought and his distance from Aristotle can be seen in his treatment of the notion of the rational soul. Arethas rejects the doctrine of rational soul, which he considers to be Aristotle's, but which is actually never used by Aristotle himself. Arethas does not realize this mistake, which resulted from a misreading of *The Nicomachean Ethics (Letter to Niketas)*. The expression *logike psyche* comes from Neoplatonic thought (Plotinus, Proclus) and was discussed by Arethas and other Christian thinkers. Arethas' teaching on the rational soul is in agreement with the teachings of the Greek Fathers (Gregory of Nyssa) that the soul and the body are created simultaneously and their coexistence is definite from the very beginning. The rational soul does not have the attributes of the sperm or of the father of the rational being, but of God, because it is produced by God (Benakis 1972).

Arethas, just like many other Byzantine commentators after him (Psellos, Blemmydes, Sophonias, George Scholarios), raises the issue of the number of Aristotle's categories. According to Arethas, the category of substance should be placed first, because substance is by nature prior to the other categories. The priority of substance is characterized by indestructibility (substance is not destroyed when other categories are, but with the destruction of substance all categories are destroyed), self-existence (substance is prior to what exists depending on other things), and singleness (substance is single, the accidents are many, and one always precedes many). Arethas analyzes, too, the order of the categories and he reverses Aristotle's order to introduce the category of quality before the category of *pros ti*, which indicates the influence of Neoplatonic commentators (Ierodiakonou 2005).

Moreover, Arethas' scholium on *Categories* 2a11–19 provides him with the grounds to replace

Aristotle's distinction between the first and second substance with the Neoplatonic sixfold variety of the meanings of the notion of substance (Anton 1997). Arethas redefines substance in a theological way and he endeavors to incorporate the Plotinian theory of hypostatic beings. He thus moved away from his earlier Aristotelianizing Neoplatonic treatment of the *Categories* and tried to define substance as a genus of being in order to accommodate the divine being. He classified substances into simple substances, that is, soul, intellect, and God, and complex substances, that is, matter and species.

## Cross-References

- ▶ [Aristotelianism in the Greek, Latin, Syriac, Arabic, and Hebrew Traditions](#)
- ▶ [Natural Philosophy, Byzantine](#)
- ▶ [Photios of Constantinople](#)
- ▶ [Platonism](#)

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## Aristotelianism in the Greek, Latin, Syriac, Arabic, and Hebrew Traditions

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### Abstract

Aristotle was the most important ancient philosopher for all four main traditions of medieval philosophy: Greek philosophy from Byzantium; Latin philosophy; philosophy in Arabic (the work mainly of Muslims, but also Jews and Christians); and, from the thirteenth century, philosophy written by Jews in Hebrew. All these traditions drew, directly, or indirectly, on Aristotle as transmitted by the

Neoplatonic schools of late antiquity. But the way in which the Aristotelian texts were disseminated (in translation, except in Byzantium) and studied varied in each of these traditions. And, although all the medieval philosophers had it in common that they lived in cultures dominated by a monotheistic religion, the range of attitudes to Aristotle varied from one to another. This entry has the strictly limited aim of giving enough basic information about each of these circumstances to enable comparisons to be made. Fuller treatment of each of the areas it covers will be found elsewhere in the Encyclopedia. Readers will also find a fuller exposition of most of the particular view suggested here in Marenbon (*Medieval philosophy; an historical and philosophical introduction*. Routledge, London/New York, 2007; *Medieval philosophy. A very short introduction*. Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2016).

### Translations, Availability, and Methods of Study

Aristotle had his own school of followers in antiquity – Alexander of Aphrodisias (c. CE 200) was the most famous and talented of them, Themistius (c. 317–388) probably the last. But the transmission of Aristotle’s work to medieval philosophers was the result of his inclusion in the curriculum of the Neoplatonic schools, since Neoplatonism was the dominant school of philosophy in the ancient world from the third century onwards. The Neoplatonists believed that Aristotle and Plato did not disagree. Their apparent differences were the result of different subject matter: Aristotle concentrated on the world as it appears to the senses, Plato on supra-sensible reality. The study of Aristotle, especially his logic, was thus considered indispensable as a preparation for work on Plato, and it produced a large number of Aristotelian commentaries, a number of which survive. Porphyry (c. 232–305), the first of the commentators, was especially keen to read Aristotelian works in an Aristotelian way; some of his successors

tended, rather, to let their underlying Platonism tinge their reading even of his logical works.

The fullest, though not the most direct, medieval heirs of this tradition of Aristotelianism were the Arabic philosophers. The Platonic school at Athens had been closed by Justinian in 529 because it preserved pagan philosophy in an Empire by now strictly Christian. But the other great Platonic school, at Alexandria, remained open until the Islamic conquest in 641: first, its pagan teachers had been willing to compromise with the Christian authorities; then it came to be staffed by Christians. In the eighth and ninth centuries, there was a movement, encouraged by the ‘Abbāsīd caliphs, to take over into Arabic as much as possible of the Greek texts and learning that survived in Alexandria. The Arabs were helped in this enterprise by Syriac-speaking Christians, who had already translated some of Aristotle’s logic into Syriac, a Semitic language like Arabic (Hugonnard-Roche 2004). The Syriac scholars themselves concentrated on logic and, perhaps as a result of ecclesiastical pressure, favored a shortened logical curriculum, consisting of Porphyry’s *Isagoge*, the *Categories*, *On Interpretation*, and the *Prior Analytics* up to the end of I.7 (avoiding, therefore, modal syllogistic) (Gutas 1999). But the translation movement into Arabic was not restrained by such boundaries, encouraged by such men as al-Kindī (c. 801–866), the first of the Arab philosophers. Al-Kindī, as a result of translations he had commissioned and other ones, was thereby able to read considerable amounts of Aristotle, including his *Metaphysics*, although he was more deeply influenced by the Plotinian material transmitted under the misleading title of *The Theology of Aristotle*. The Baghdad Peripatetics, such as al-Fārābī (c. 870–950/951) and his pupil, the Christian Yahyā ibn ‘Adī, studied almost the whole Aristotelian corpus in detail, and produced both short, epitome-type commentaries and longer ones (e.g., al-Fārābī on *On Interpretation*), which comment on the text section by section, looking in detail at the philosophical difficulties it raises, in the manner of the late ancient commentators (Gutas 1988; Pasnau 2010, Appendix B.3).

The way in which Aristotle was studied changed forever in the mainstream Arabic tradition with Avicenna (before 980–1037). Although Avicenna did write a section-by-section commentary on Aristotle, which has been lost, his main works are all philosophical encyclopedias, longer or shorter, complex or more simple, in which he puts forward his own understanding of Aristotle. Although he usually follows the divisions of Aristotle's work (dedicating separate books, or chapters, to physics, metaphysics, and the soul, for example), what he provides, by conscious contrast with the Baghdad Peripateticians, is not Aristotle's doctrine, understood with the help of the late ancient commentary tradition, but a coherent philosophical system, with many original elements, strongly influenced by Aristotle. For most Islamic writers, Avicenna replaced Aristotle as the primary philosophical authority (although in logic there was a further move, in which Avicenna was left behind too, and the subject was taught through independent textbooks) (Street 2004, 2013, Sect. 1). The main, and as yet little investigated, philosophical tradition everywhere except in the Islamic West sought to combine Avicennian philosophy with *kalām*, the Islamic tradition of theological speculation. Independent study of Aristotle ceased and translations of his works did not circulate (Gutas 2002). In the West (Islamic Spain and the Maghreb), an interest in Aristotle's texts, in the line of al-Fārābī, grew up in the twelfth century. Its greatest exponent was Averroes (c. 1126–1198). Averroes made a series of paraphrase commentaries and short compendia of almost all Aristotle's works, and he wrote detailed, section-by-section commentaries on five works, including *On the Soul* and the *Metaphysics*. Averroes' lifetime's work of commentary is the last flourish of any but very indirect Aristotelianism in the Islamic Arabic tradition. It was almost totally forgotten in Islam until modern times, but it had a profound effect on Jewish philosophy and Christian Latin philosophy.

Until the end of the twelfth century, medieval Jewish philosophy was written in Arabic and its exponents worked within a broadly Arabic (as well as Jewish) culture. Although earlier Jewish philosophers had been influenced by

Neoplatonism, it was not until Abraham b. Daud (c. 1160) and Maimonides (d. 1204), both of whom were educated in Muslim Spain, that Jewish thinkers began to look at Aristotelianism as the major philosophical system, to be reconciled or distinguished from their own views. In the thirteenth, fourteenth, and fifteenth centuries, Jewish philosophy was carried on most vigorously in Hebrew, especially among the communities in southern France. There was an Aristotelian translation movement among these Jewish scholars, from the Arabic into Hebrew, but the texts they translated were not (with two exceptions: the *Meteorologica* and *On the Soul*) Aristotle's own, but Averroes' commentaries, all of which (except perhaps for the long commentary on *On the Heavens*) were put into Hebrew; also translated were some of al-Fārābī's short expositions of Aristotle (Zonta 1996; Pasnau 2010). This preference for an indirect approach to Aristotle has been attributed to the influence of a letter from Maimonides to Samuel ibn Tibbon, in which he describes Aristotle's works as "the roots and foundations of all the sciences," but also remarks that they cannot be understood with the help of commentaries, by Alexander of Aphrodisias, Themistius, or Averroes (Harvey 1992). But Maimonides did not say that they should neglect the texts themselves altogether in favor of the commentaries: maybe there were no Arabic versions of Aristotle's texts themselves available to them to translate. In any case, the Jewish writers made the shorter texts of Averroes and al-Fārābī themselves the subjects of "super-commentaries."

By contrast with Arabic speakers, the Greeks were the direct inheritors of the tradition of the late ancient schools, and there was no problem of translation for them. The basic course of Aristotelian studies was, however, quite restricted, including just Porphyry's *Isagoge*, the *Categories*, *On Interpretation*, and the *Prior Analytics* 1.1–7 (as in the Syriac schools) and the *Sophistical Refutations* 1–7, and extracts from the *Meteorology* and *On Generation and Corruption*. In logic, the tradition of ancient commentary was continued by scholars like Photios in the ninth century and Michael Psellos and John Italos in the eleventh century. In the twelfth century,



Eustratios and Michael of Ephesus expanded the range of Aristotelian commentary. Michael wrote commentaries on parts of the *Ethics* and *Metaphysics*, on various of Aristotle's books on natural philosophy and on the *Politics*; Eustratios wrote on parts of the *Posterior Analytics* and of the *Ethics*. All these commentaries reuse a great deal of old material – just as had been done in the ancient schools. Indeed, one form of Byzantine commentary consists simply of marginalia collected from a variety of sources, with an introduction added. But twelfth-century writers like Eustratios and Michael drew this type of material to make an integral running commentary on the text. The tendency of the Byzantine commentators to base themselves on earlier writers, and ultimately the ancient tradition, makes it a difficult matter to work out the respects in which they contributed their own thoughts (Ierodiakonou and Börje 2008).

Medieval Latin philosophers had two strands of access to Aristotle independent of Arabic philosophy. The first strand was due to the work of one man, Boethius (d. 524/526), a philosopher who lived in Ostrogothic Italy but, thanks to his aristocratic background, knew Greek fluently. He translated all of Aristotle's logical works (except the *Posterior Analytics* – or, at least, his translation does not survive) into Latin. These translations came only gradually into circulation in the Middle Ages: the *Categories*, *De interpretatione*, and Porphyry's *Isagoge* by the ninth century; the *Sophistical Refutations*, *Prior Analytics*, and *Topics* during the twelfth century. Boethius' translations of these works remained standard until the end of the Middle Ages. Boethius also wrote widely read commentaries on the logical texts, which drew on the tradition of interpretation in the late ancient Platonic schools, especially on Porphyry (see Marenbon 2009). The second strand was due to the work of various translators, working in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. Through the work of the twelfth-century translators (the best known was James of Venice), some of Aristotle's nonlogical works became available, in translations direct from the Greek, whole or part, by the early thirteenth century. The most important thirteenth-century translator, William

of Moerbeke (d. 1286), produced new or revised translations, from the Greek, of the whole Aristotelian corpus, and his versions became standard, except in the case of the logical works translated by Boethius. Before William's work, however, Latin thinkers had benefited from the third, Arabic-dependent strand of access to Aristotle. In the later twelfth and early thirteenth centuries, various nonlogical works of Aristotle's were put into Latin, in whole or part, from their Arabic versions. These translations would all be superseded by Moerbeke's ones from the Greek, and so this side of the Arabic strand was of limited importance. By contrast, the translation into Latin in the same period of parts (principally, the *Metaphysics* and *On the Soul*) of Avicenna's largest encyclopedia commentary, the *Shifā'*, and of many of Averroes' commentaries, including the long commentaries on the *Metaphysics* and *On the Soul*, had an enormous influence on Aristotelianism in the later Middle Ages. Although – mostly thanks again to William of Moerbeke – a selection of ancient commentaries on Aristotle became available in Latin, Boethius' role in introducing, explaining, and placing Aristotle's logic in context was played, for the nonlogical works, by Averroes (who was called, simply, the "Commentator") and, in a more general way, by Avicenna (see Pasnau 2010, Appendix B.1 and B.4; Brungs et al. 2017, 95–173).

Despite this debt to the Arabic world, the development of the Aristotelian tradition there could hardly differ more sharply from the ways in which Aristotle was studied in the Latin West. From the beginning, Aristotle's texts were central to the school curriculum, and they were commented on closely. Before c. 1200, when only Aristotle's logic was known, the study of logic – the central subject of the school curriculum – was based around these works (along with some by his translator, Boethius). From about 1250, the Arts Faculties of the universities adopted an Aristotelian curriculum, in which knowledge was divided according to his different works, and the study of each subject was the study of Aristotle's text. This intensive study of the Aristotelian texts is witnessed by an enormous number of medieval Latin commentaries on Aristotle, usually designed



for, or the products of, classroom teaching. From the ninth to the eleventh centuries, this commentary material usually took the form of marginal and interlinear glosses in manuscripts of the texts. From the twelfth century a large number of independent commentaries are found on the *Categories*, *On Interpretation*, and *Sophistical Refutations*. Normally they are anonymous, and very often survive in just one manuscript – the record of a particular teacher or student’s work, rather than a text disseminated in written form. In the case of the *Categories* and *On Interpretation* (and also Porphyry’s *Isagoge*), Boethius had written commentaries which drew on the ancient Neoplatonic tradition of commentary. These were, initially, very important sources for the twelfth-century commentators, although they soon started to develop ideas and discuss problems unthought of by Boethius (Marenbon 1993/2000). There was an important change in the most common form of Aristotelian commentary in the early thirteenth century – the period when the complete Aristotelian corpus was beginning to be studied and then became the basis of the Arts curriculum. Aristotelian commentaries began to be written in the form of *quaestiones*. These *quaestiones* would very often keep close to the text, and the solutions represent the Master in question’s view of Aristotle’s meaning, but they also gave the opportunity for ideas and problems to be raised which reflected current debates but were linked only loosely to the ancient text. There were, however, some important thirteenth-century commentaries in other forms. Albert the Great followed Avicenna in producing his own, discursive reconstructions of Aristotelian doctrine. Aquinas followed Averroes (and Boethius) in writing a series of detailed, sentence by sentence commentaries on Aristotle.

Aristotle formed the basis of the Arts curriculum up to and beyond the Middle Ages in Latin Europe. Even among those who consciously opposed scholastic modes of thought, there was a lively Aristotelian tradition, and a number of Averroes’ commentaries were translated for the first time (from the Hebrew) in that monument to Renaissance Aristotelianism, the *Juncta(s)* edition of 1550–1552 on Aristotle’s works with Averroes’ commentaries.

## Attitudes to Aristotle

In the early Islamic world (from the eighth to the eleventh centuries), there were two different methods of thinking about ultimate questions such as the constitution of the world, freedom and necessity, justice, and merit. One was *kalām*, a sort of philosophizing closely attached to problems raised by the Qur’ān and conducted in terms partly borrowed indirectly from the Greek tradition, partly invented by the Islamic thinkers themselves. Exponents of *kalām* divided themselves into many different schools, of which the most adventurous philosophically, and the most influential at the start, was that of the Mu’tazilites. The other method of thinking about these questions was that of Greek philosophy, introduced by al-Kindī in the eighth century. Al-Kindī was a Muslim and belonged to an important Arab family. He seems to have introduced Greek philosophy consciously as an alternative to Mu’tazilite *kalām*: it was a foreign importation, but one which, he tried to show, could be adapted to fit Islam. Although there were some thinkers in the tenth and eleventh centuries – particularly the Ismā’īlīs – who also followed a conciliatory approach, mainstream philosophy took a different direction. It centered increasingly on whose work was commented on in detail by Baghdad peripatetics, many of them Christian. The outstanding member of this school was al-Fārābī, a Muslim but one who, to judge by his work, accepted Islam because he saw in it a symbolic way, suitable for assimilation by the masses, of stating the truths which were demonstrated in their full and clear form by Aristotelian science (On the early period of Arabic Aristotelianism, see Rudolph 2012).

The most influential of all the Arabic philosophers, Avicenna, seems to have developed his rethinking of Aristotelian philosophy mainly in isolation from religious considerations, although he may have been influenced by some of the questions raised by the Mu’tazilites. He was willing, in line with his understanding of Aristotle, to deny the fundamental Islamic doctrines of the resurrection of the dead and the non-eternity of the world. For these views, Avicenna was fiercely attacked by al-Ġazālī (1058–1111), whose

writings had, and continue to have, enormous influence among Muslims. But, at the same time, al-Ġazālī was himself deeply influenced by Avicenna, and he played the pivotal role in infusing *kalām* with Avicennian philosophy. Although, then, Avicenna is the last major figure in the eastern Islamic tradition of Aristotelian philosophers, there continued into the late Middle Ages and beyond a stream of indirectly Aristotelian speculation – some of it conducted in commentaries on Avicenna – which now was part of, rather than a rival to, Islamic theology (Griffel 2009; El-Rouyaheb and Schmidtke 2017, 296 ff.).

In Muslim Spain and North Africa, as explained above, the tradition of direct study of Aristotle continued. Its outstanding representative, Averroes, was a dedicated Aristotelian who thought that the fundamental truth about the universe could be found just by the most careful scrutiny of Aristotle's meaning. But Averroes was not a covert freethinker, doing his day job as an Islamic judge just to keep up appearances. There is every indication that he agreed fundamentally with al-Ġazālī over when a Qur'anic text should be "interpreted" and its literal meaning rejected – when it was contradicted by a demonstration. He held, however, that a wider range of truths than al-Ġazālī accepted are demonstrable through Aristotelian science (Griffel 2000).

The first Jewish Aristotelian, Abraham b. Daud, believed that Aristotelian science and orthodox Jewish doctrine were compatible, and in his rabbinic works Maimonides professed the same view. There he argued that the rabbis of old had honored philosophy and arrived at the same truths as were professed by the philosophers of the Arabic Aristotelian tradition, but they had kept them secret so as not to reveal them to the mass of the people. Maimonides' most famous work – indeed, the most celebrated text in the whole tradition of Jewish medieval philosophy – the *Guide of the Perplexed* is, however, mainly directed toward the perplexities faced by the firm believer in the Jewish law who has also studied Arabic–Aristotelian philosophy and science. It is hard to be completely certain of how Maimonides resolves these perplexities: whether he has really retrenched from his earlier acceptance of almost

everything in Aristotelianism, or whether he continues in and even extends his earlier position, though in a covert manner, hidden from those who read too straightforwardly. Such was Maimonides' influence on subsequent Jewish thinkers, that the dispute over Aristotelianism in Jewish philosophy became in large part a dispute about whether or not to follow Maimonides. Since Maimonides himself was, from the beginning, interpreted in a more radical and a less radical way, the contours of the debate are hard to follow; some Jews criticized even Maimonides under a moderate interpretation for conceding too much to Aristotle, while for some of the most enthusiastic Jewish Aristotelians, he had not – even under a radical interpretation – gone far enough. But even a thinker like Moses of Narbonne (d. after 1362), who followed Averroes' Aristotelianism closely, shared with Averroes the feeling that Aristotelianism did not in fact contradict the fundamental principles of his own religion. There was, then, a flourishing thirteenth- and fourteenth-century tradition of Jewish Aristotelianism, learned mainly through Averroes. But, at the same time, there was consistent opposition to this whole philosophical tradition, which resulted, for example, in an unsuccessful attempt of banning Maimonides' works in the 1230s and, in 1305, the banning of Arabo-Greek learning to Jews aged under 25 in Catalonia. The greatest of all these Hebrew-language philosophers, Gersonides (1288–1344), took an independent stance and rethought philosophical problems, using Aristotelian positions and tools, but not feeling bound to them, in a way which eliminated most of the obvious clashes between religious orthodoxy and the results of philosophy. But the mood among Jews in the following century and a half became more generally and resolutely set against Aristotelianism, and against philosophy in general.

Suspicion of Aristotelianism – which was put under the general banner of "Hellenism," that is to say, sympathy for the pagan thought of Greece – was a constant feature of the Byzantine tradition. It did not prevent scholars from maintaining a tradition of Aristotelian exegesis, but it could make life difficult or worse for individual scholars. Whereas, for instance, Michael Psellos,

though accused of heresy, managed to escape condemnation, his student, John Italos, was not so fortunate. After a series of trials, he was condemned and his books burned. The charges against him were related to his use of Aristotelian logic in theology, and he was said, probably unjustly, not merely to have enquired into the doctrines of the ancients but to have accepted them as truths (cf. Clucas 1981).

As explained above, scholars in the medieval Latin West knew only a few Aristotelian logical texts until the mid-twelfth century. For this reason, questions about the compatibility between religious teaching and Aristotelianism, like those faced by Byzantine Christians, Muslims, and Jews, were not posed in the early Middle Ages. Although from time to time a religious thinker would cast doubt on the study of logic, or at least on its appropriateness as for monks, it was generally accepted that logic was valuable, or indeed essential, as a tool for presenting and defending Christian doctrine. It was only when it was misused that it became dangerous. And the tradition of logic, they recognized, was Aristotelian. But it was not just Aristotelian. A paraphrase of Aristotle's *Categories*, widely read from the ninth to eleventh centuries, was attributed to Augustine (helping, incidentally, to ensure the Christian respectability of the subject). The curriculum usual in the early twelfth century included two Aristotelian texts, and five others, four by Boethius and one by Porphyry. Although the best logicians, like Abelard, seem to have shown a special respect for Abelard and to have had suspicions, rightly, about Boethius' logical acumen, all three figures were generally treated on the same level as authorities. Questions about the relationship between Christian doctrine and pagan philosophy were indeed posed in this period, but in connection with Plato and writings in the Platonic tradition.

Once translations of his nonlogical works began to be disseminated, this easy acceptance of Aristotle as a logical authority was no longer possible. Some of the earliest evidence for the study of Aristotle's natural philosophy and his

*Metaphysics* are the prohibitions issued in 1210 and 1215 against the study of this material in the Arts Faculty of Paris. But the authorities did not do much to enforce these prohibitions by the 1240s, and – as noted above – by the 1250s the curriculum of the Arts Faculties in Paris and Oxford was based around Aristotle. In a way that contrasts sharply with the Islamic, Jewish, and Byzantine traditions, Aristotelianism was thus incorporated openly and institutionally into the scheme of education approved by the religious authorities and which also was responsible for the formation of theologians and Church leaders. Although this theological formation took place in the Theology Faculty, students had either to have taken the Arts course or, if they belonged to the mendicant orders, its equivalent in their own schools: theologians were thoroughly trained in Aristotelian philosophy, and their approach to theological problems was deeply affected by it.

This institutional adoption of Aristotelianism did not, however, prevent there from being tensions between Aristotle's views and Christian doctrine, in two areas in particular, one of which related primarily to the Arts Masters, the other to the theologians. Granted that the Arts Faculty was officially dedicated to the study of Aristotelian science, and that it was not its business to deal with matters of Christian doctrine, to what extent should Arts Masters be permitted to develop views which actually contradicted Christian doctrine? Two positions were especially at issue: the Aristotelian principle that the world – in the sense of the whole universe – is eternal (which clashes with the Christian doctrine that the world had a temporal beginning), and Averroes' reading of *On the Soul* in his long commentary, according to which there is just one Intellect for all humans (which contradicts the idea of individual immortality and so the whole Christian teaching about heavenly reward and punishment). Although none of the Arts Masters seems to have proposed that either of these positions was true without qualification, there was some in the 1260s – such as Siger of Brabant and Boethius of Dacia – who tried to find some way in which, in

their capacity as Arts Masters and so teachers of Aristotle, they could develop these and any other arguably Aristotelian views in their own terms, even if they acknowledged that, as a Christian, one must hold a different, incompatible view. Although this movement in the thirteenth century was crushed by ecclesiastical opposition, there remained until the end of the Middle Ages an important strain of “Radical Aristotelianism” or “Latin Averroism” in the Arts Faculties – of thinkers who, while acknowledging, at least verbally, the truth of Christian doctrine, looked to Averroes as the most reliable interpreter of Aristotle, even where his interpretations made his thought clearly unacceptable to Christians (Hayoun and De Libera, 1991). In order to prevent such speculations, the authorities obliged fourteenth-century Paris Arts Masters to swear that, if they touched in their philosophy on any subjects that also concerned the faith, they would give the answers demanded by faith and provide refutations of the arguments against the answer consistent with Christian teaching. Yet, even the cautious John Buridan, who taught for about 40 years in the Arts Faculty at Paris from c. 1320, makes clear that, for instance, the Christian teaching on the immortality of the soul does not follow from Aristotle’s position and must be accepted as a matter of faith (Sylla 2001).

For the theologians, the problem was, rather, the extent to which Aristotle’s God, as interpreted by the Arabic Aristotelians, was their God, at least in philosophical guise. By and large, Aquinas believed that he was. But in 1277, shortly after Aquinas’ death, a long list of propositions, many of them reflecting positions held by Arabic Aristotelians and their followers, were condemned in Paris. Although largely directed against Arts Masters, the condemnations indicate a growing awareness that Aristotle’s God, and the physical and metaphysical context in which the Arabic Aristotelian placed him, did not fit well with Christian belief. Late thirteenth- and fourteenth-century theologians, stimulated by their doctrinal requirements, although deeply learned in Aristotelian science and indebted to it for much of their thinking, rethought many aspects of

Aristotelianism: consider, for instance, Duns Scotus’ account of God’s contingent causality or Ockham’s nominalism.

## Cross-References

- ▶ [Arabic Philosophical Texts, Jewish Translations of](#)
- ▶ [Arabic Texts: Natural Philosophy, Latin Translations of](#)
- ▶ [Aristotle, Arabic](#)
- ▶ [Ibn Rushd \(Averroes\), Latin Translations of](#)
- ▶ [Logic, Arabic, in the Latin Middle Ages](#)

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## Aristotle, Arabic

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### Abstract

The Arabic translations of Aristotle, taken from the Greek or Syriac, fit into the framework of the assimilation of the Greek scientific and philosophical knowledge of late Antiquity in the urban Arabic–Muslim civilization of the ‘Abbāsīd East. According to some, they responded to a project of vast scale, whose social and political implications have been highlighted by D. Gutas. In the vast enterprise of reconstructing a philosophical corpus from which the birth and development of Arabic philosophy gets its substance, Aristotle would assume the title of “First Teacher,” vouching for all the intellectual heritage of the Greeks, viewed as a systematic knowledge compatible with the Muslim worldview. Together with Aristotle's own works, the Arabs translated an equally great amount of commentaries tracing back to late Antiquity, particularly to the School of Alexandria.

Schematically, the constitution of the corpus of the *Aristoteles arabus* accompanies three distinct moments in the Arabic–Muslim *falsafa*: (1) The era of the Baghdad philosopher al-Kindī (d. between 860 and 870) and his circle. This early *falsafa* is deliberately syncretical: it integrates Aristotle's cosmology and metaphysics to a creationist and emanationist worldview adaptable to Islamic religion, and the role of Aristotelian logic is still modest. (2) The translation school whose prominent figures were Ḥunayn b. Iṣḥāq (d. 873) and his son Iṣḥāq b. Ḥunayn (d. 910), between the end of the ninth and the beginning of the tenth century. Very much connected to medical knowledge, this school completed the translation of almost the whole of the Aristotelian corpus. (3) The Peripatetic School of Baghdad



(mid-tenth to beginning of the eleventh century), characterized by a predominant interest in logic. The so-called Baghdad Aristotelians focused mostly on the re-elaboration and correction of previous translations, as well as on philological work on them, with the notable exception of the *Posterior Analytics* (called in Arabic the *Book of Demonstration*), only then introduced into the corpus. The learned of this time give themselves up to an organization of the *Organon* using the Syriac versions and the Arabic versions of Ḥunayn and his school: an outstanding example is the MS Paris, BnF ar. 2346.

Knowledge of the stages of the translation movement and their key figures comes mostly from the biobibliographical works, a literary genre cultivated in the classical age of the Arabic–Muslim civilization. The earliest are the *Kitāb al-Fihrist (Book of the Catalogue)* by Ibn al-Nadīm (finished in 987) and, in Islamic Spain, the *Ṭabaqāt al-Aṭibbāʾ* by Ibn Juljul (d. 1009).

### Organon

The circulation of the *Organon* in Arabic was preceded by the Syriac assimilation of it, especially at the School of Edessa. The focus of this work was only on one section of the Aristotelian *Organon: Cat., De int., An. Pr.* (up to the end of chapter 7). Very early the Arabs had at their disposal a compendium to Porphyry's *Isagoge, Cat., De int., and An. Pr.*, perhaps translated from the Pehlevi (Middle Persian) by the courtier and secretary Ibn al-Muqaffaʾ (d. 760). This period (end of the eighth century) corresponds to a rebirth of the translations of logic into Syriac. To the six works of the *Organon* are added the *Rhetoric* and the *Poetics*, following the Alexandrian scholarly tradition. The work of the School of Ḥunayn counts as a direct extension of that of the Syriac circles.

### Categories

Coming after three earlier versions, the Syriac translation of the *Categories* by Ḥunayn b. Iṣḥāq

served as a model for the Arabic one, done by his son Iṣḥāq and preserved in the Paris MS just mentioned. The many glosses contained in this manuscript (probably by the hand of the Baghdad logician Ibn Suwār ibn al-Khammār, d. 1020) mention some ancient commentators of Aristotle not without giving quotations also from their works. Many others are mentioned in the bibliographical sources: Ammonius, Philoponus, Porphyry, Stephanus of Alexandria, Themistius, Theophrastus, Iamblichus, Simplicius, and a certain “Alīnūs” whose identity is dubious. None of these commentaries on the *Categories* are extant in Arabic. Instead, a direct prolongment of the ancient commentary tradition in Arabic is represented by the Nestorian doctor Abū l-Faraj ibn al-Ṭayyib (d. 1043; see the entry), who was a follower of the masters of the Baghdad school Ibn al-Samḥ et Ibn Suwār. This school perpetuated the tradition established in late Antiquity of having an introduction to philosophy placed before the *Categories*, in line with Olympiodorus (whose commentary, however, did not exist in Arabic) and Elias (David).

Muslim thinkers like al-Fārābī, Avicenna, and Averroes did not maintain these introductory treatises at the beginning of their writings on the *Categories*, although they did not ignore them. Al-Fārābī provides an example of this: in an epistle on *What must precede the learning of philosophy (Fī mā yanbaġī an yuqaddama qabla ta'allum al-falsafa)*, he offers a general introduction to philosophy in nine points (instead of ten, as in the Greek writings of this kind) akin to those of the Greek commentaries on the *Categories*.

Ancient discussions on the nature and number of the categories were taken up by Arab philosophers. In the *K. al-Maḳūlāt* of the *Shifāʾ*, Avicenna holds that the study of the categories is not a part of logic but rather of metaphysics, a position that becomes the rule in the subsequent tradition. According to Avicenna, the curriculum of logic proceeds from the study of simple expressions (*alfāz*) to that of propositions, but knowledge of the ten categories plays only a marginal role in logic, that is, insofar as it applies to the theory of definition. This doctrine is followed by



later thinkers, notably al-Ġazālī, who omits the study of the categories in all his works in logic.

### ***De interpretatione***

The *De int.* was translated by Ishāq b. Ḥunayn, probably from an earlier Syriac version by his father Ḥunayn. The *Fihrist* names the Greek commentaries of Alexander, Philoponus, Iamblichus, Porphyry, Galen, and Theophrastus, specifying that those of Alexander and Galen are lost, a remark that obviously does not imply that the others were accessible. We have, nonetheless, a fragment from Alexander's commentary (on *De int.* 16 a 27), edited by Badawī. It is possible to get an idea of the Greek sources available in the tenth century, thanks to the analysis devoted by F. Zimmermann to al-Fārābī's Long Commentary on the *De int.* This work can be traced back to a double set of sources, which could also have existed in the form of a unique piece, a kind of exegetical record compiled out of different texts: first, of glosses inspired to Porphyry, that we can identify from parallels between al-Fārābī and Boethius; and second, of extracts from other commentaries later than Porphyry's one(s), that could have been inserted between the Porphyrian glosses in the model. In fact, al-Fārābī's work reveals many parallels, both structural (division of the text) and doctrinal, with Ammonius and especially with Stephanus of Alexandria.

A lost commentary by Abū Bishr Mattā is mentioned, and Ibn Zur'a too is credited with a commentary. As for al-Fārābī, in addition to the Long Commentary, which has come down to us, he made also an abridgment, which is lost. The Long Commentary, because of the sources it uses, was particularly important for the Arab philosophers of later centuries, notably Avicenna: the part of the *K. al-Shifā'* devoted to the *De int.* owes much to al-Fārābī, whose exegesis also inspires greatly the section of Ġazālī's logical treatise *Mi'yār al-'ilm.* Averroes too, in his *Short Commentaries on Logic* (*al-Darūrī fī l-manṭiq*: ed. Butterworth 1977), draws from Fārābī's abridgment mentioned above; Averroes also wrote a paraphrase (Middle Commentary) on the *De int.*

### ***Prior Analytics***

In the Paris MS mentioned above, the translation of the *Prior Analytics* is attributed to Tadhārī, a name pointing perhaps to the Melkite bishop of Ḥarrān, Theodore Abū Qurra (d. 826), but more probably to Tadhārī ibn Baṣīl Akhī Iṣṭifān, a translator of the circle of Ḥunayn b. Ishāq. The notes in the Paris MS attest to fragments of four earlier versions, one of which is attributed to Yahyā ibn al-Biṭrīq, a translator of the Kindī's circle. The *Fihrist* also mentions two different commentaries of Alexander of Aphrodisias, and one of Philoponus. These would not have been complete and would end with the commentary of *An. Pr.* I, 7. The *Fihrist* mentions Themistius' complete commentary as well. In the glosses of the Paris MS, only the citations and mentionings of Themistius, as well as those ascribed to "Alīnūs" are presented. One *Quaestio* by Alexander on the conversion of propositions, and a treatise of Themistius can complete the picture of the exegetical material on *An. Pr.* at the disposal of the Arab readers.

The biographical sources mention several lost Arabic commentaries, such as al-Kindī's. Beginning in the tenth century, a renewal in the study of logic gave rise to the study of the *Prior Analytics* in their entirety, whereas the earlier tradition – as we saw before – read only as far as chapter 7 of book I. We know that Abū Bishr Mattā commented on the work in its entirety, and so did al-Fārābī, following in his footsteps. The former is lost, but references subsist in the margins of the Paris MS, while of the latter what remains is only an important fragment of the final part, in a MS housed in Tehran.

Several works on the "syllogism" remain in the Arabic literature, such as those of Ibn Zur'a and Avicenna: the latter constitutes one part of the Logic of the *Shifā'*. To the "syllogism" is also devoted one section, modeled on al-Fārābī's abridgment, of the treatise on logic by the Cairene philosopher, astronomer, and doctor 'Alī ibn Riḍwān (d. 1061 or 1068), the *Book on the Application of Logic in the Sciences and Arts* (*Kitāb al-musta'mal min al-manṭiq fī l-'ulūm wa-l-ṣanā'i*). Averroes, in addition to a section

inspired by al-Fārābī of his *Short Commentaries on Logic* (*al-Ḍarūrī fī l-mantiq*), devotes to the *An. Pr.* a paraphrase (*talkhīṣ*), as well as several questions (*masā'il*) to issues pertaining to this part of the *Organon*. Finally, Averroes' disciple Ibn Ṭumlūs (d. 1223) in his *Introduction to the Art of Logic* follows the path laid out by al-Fārābī.

### Posterior Analytics

We must wait for Ḥunayn's school for the theory of demonstration (*burhān*) to be introduced, thanks to Ishāq's Syriac version of the *Posterior Analytics*. Later on, this Syriac version was translated into Arabic by Abū Bishr Mattā, the head of the Baghdad school: it is Abū Bishr's version that is reproduced in the Paris MS. Some elements of Aristotle's doctrine of demonstration that feature in al-Kindī's writings could have been transmitted to him through a preexistent Syriac translation unknown to us. A paraphrased anonymous Arabic translation, echoing here and there Philoponus' commentary, peeps out in Averroes' commentary on the *An. Po.*: Averroes made use of the two versions, Abū Bishr's and the anonymous one. The latter also appears in the marginalia of the Paris MS, where it is attributed to a certain Marāyā. Ibn al-Nadīm's *Fihrist* mentions several commentaries, among which Themistius' paraphrase, translated by Abū Bishr Mattā. This one was then translated into Latin in Toledo, by Gerard of Cremona; it is much used by Averroes in his Long Commentary on the *An. Po.* Averroes mentions also a commentary by Alexander and one by Philoponus, whose fragments appear in the marginal glosses of the Paris MS; Alexander's commentary, cited only once by Averroes, could only have been known indirectly, through Philoponus'.

Many of al-Fārābī's writings are devoted to the *An. Po.*; as for Avicenna, the fifth part of the logic of the *Shifā'* focused on it. In this work, Avicenna stays the closer to Aristotle's text than in the other sections of his logic. Averroes' all three commentaries (the Short Commentary of the *Ḍarūrī*, the Middle, and the Long Commentary) are extant in Arabic, the last being incomplete. The editions of Aristotle's *Opera omnia*, along with Averroes' commentaries (Giunta

1562) include three Latin versions of the same text: that of Abraham de Balme, of Francesco Burana, and of Jacob Mantino, respectively (the last is incomplete), taken from the Hebrew. Also, Averroes devoted several *Quaestiones* to doctrinal issues of the *An. Po.*, which abide partly in Arabic, partly in Hebrew, and partly in the Latin translations of the Renaissance.

### Topics

The *Topics* were known in a Syriac–Arabic version from the times of the caliph Harūn al-Rashīd (d. 809). Subsequently, a Syriac translation was made by Ḥunayn, and the Arabic version by Yahyā ibn 'Adī (d. 974) was based on it, as well as that of Abū 'Uthmān al-Dimashqī, carried forward by Ibrāhīm ibn 'Abdallāh, and conserved in the Paris MS.

According to Ibn al-Nadīm, there must have existed in his time a work containing at least some passages of Alexander's commentary on the *Topics*, namely part of book I and books V–VIII of the commentary, as well as Ammonius' commentary on books I–IV. This work would have been translated into Syriac by Ishāq b. Ḥunayn and, on the basis of this version, into Arabic by Abū 'Uthmān al-Dimashqī. The *Kitāb al-baḥṭh* (*Book of Research*) attributed to Jābir b. Ḥayyān also contains a reference to Alexander's commentary. In addition, Ibn al-Nadīm is aware of a commentary by Themistius on the "topics" (*mawāḍi'*), which likely corresponds to books II–VII of Aristotle's work. According to the *Fihrist*, Abū Bishr Mattā commented upon the first book; there was as well a Long Commentary by al-Fārābī, which is now lost, whereas the abridgment is conserved. As for Avicenna, he devoted the sixth part of the logic of the *Shifā'* to the *Topics*. Averroes' Middle Commentary makes use of the works of his predecessors; its main source is Themistius' commentary.

### Sophistical Refutations

In addition to several lost translations of the *Sophistical Refutations*, we know of three

different Arabic versions extant in the Paris MS, whose attribution is discussed. The oldest in all likelihood traces back to al-Kindī's era, and it could be the work of Ibn Nā'ima al-Himṣī, the translator of the pseudo-*Theology of Aristotle*, while the most recent is attributable to Ibn Zur'a (d. 1008).

Ibn al-Nadīm's *Fihrist* makes no mention of extant Greek works other than a commentary by Alexander of Aphrodisias, which however seems not to have been used by the Arab commentators on the *Soph. El.* An abridgment by al-Fārābī is extant; the part of Avicenna's *Shifā'* dealing with this Aristotelian work is particularly brief, just as Averroes' Middle Commentary.

### Rhetoric

According to the Arabic bibliographical sources, there were three different versions of the *Rhetoric*, one being ancient and anonymous, and likely made from a Syriac text. The obscurities and errors of this translation lie in the background of several particularities of the exegeses of the Arabic authors. Another version is attributed to Ishāq b. Ḥunayn, and a third one to Ibrāhīm ibn 'Abdallāh al-Nāqid (d. about 940). The only version conserved in the Paris MS is the ancient translation, which is reproduced in the "edition" made by Ibn al-Samḥ, who collated among them and with a Syriac version several different copies of the Arabic text. An abridged version of the same translation, excluding chapters 15–17 from book II, did equally circulate. The long version was read and used in the commentaries by al-Fārābī and Avicenna, while Averroes' Middle Commentary relies on the short version. This one evidently represents an Occidental branch in the tradition of the text, since the Latin translation (the *Rhetorica*) made by Hermann the German in Toledo in the thirteenth century depends on it.

Aristotle's *Rhetoric* had no commentaries in antiquity. There is thus no direct contribution of the Greek commentary tradition to the Arabic exegeses of the *Rhetoric*, but many themes

which would be elaborated by the Arabic exegetical tradition were foreshadowed, albeit unsystematically, in the ancient exegeses of other Aristotelian logical texts, notably Elias' commentaries. This is the case, for example, for the characterization of rhetoric as a kind of expression that deals with statements equally possible; the idea that the suppression of a premise in the enthymeme (i.e., the rhetorical syllogism), serves to hide falsity; the characterization of the rhetorical argument as resting on an "immediate point of view" (*bādi' al-ra'y*) not subject to scrutiny; and, even more important, the enlarged conception of the *Organon*, extended to the *Rhetoric* and *Poetics*, and viewing these two as branches of logic properly speaking.

In the tenth century, al-Fārābī commented on the *Rhetoric* at least twice: in the Long Commentary and in an abridgment. The first, *Kitāb al-Khaṭāba*, is an exposition following chapter 2 of book I of Aristotle's work, and it explains how the object of rhetoric is articulated around the concept of the "immediate point of view." The beginning of al-Fārābī's Long Commentary (*Sharḥ kitāb al-Khaṭāba*) is preserved in Herman the German's *Didascalía in Rhetoricam Aristotelis ex glosa Alfarabii*, which conserves the prologue, written in the style of the Alexandrian introductory schema, and the commentary of the first lemma. Other more or less sequential fragments of al-Fārābī's text are found in 'Alī ibn Riḍwān's *Book on the Application of Logic in the Sciences and Arts* mentioned above (see "*Prior Analytics*"). In the eleventh century as well, Abū l-Faraj ibn al-Ṭayyib (d. 1043), the Nestorian philosopher known for his commentaries on Porphyry's *Isagoge* and on the *Categories* in the style of the Alexandrian introductions, composed a commentary on the *Rhetoric*, according to the bibliographer Ibn Abī Uṣaybi'a (d. 1270). Ibn al-Ṭayyib is the target of the criticisms of his contemporary Avicenna. The latter is the author of a commentary *On the Significations of the Book of the Rhetoric* (*Fī ma'ānī kitāb Riṭūrīqā*) in his early work *al-Ḥikma al-'arūḍīyya*; later on, he devoted to the *Rhetoric* a section of the logic of his *K. al-Shifā'*, more paraphrastic in style.

Averroes' writings – an abridgment included in the *Ḍarūrī fī l-mantiq*, depending on al-Fārābī's abridgment, and the Middle Commentary, written in 1175 – are dependent on the Arabic exegetical tradition of the *Rhetoric*, which has little or no Greek antecedents, as we saw before. The logician and doctor of the Almohad court Ibn Ṭumlūs (d. 1223), author of *Introduction to the Art of Logic (al-Madkhal ilā šinā'at al-Mantiq)*, quite dependent on al-Fārābī's abridgments, makes use also of Averroes' Middle Commentary, who according to some sources was his teacher.

### Poetics and Physics

See Carmela Baffioni's articles in this volume.

### De caelo

For this work, called in the Arabic tradition *On the Heavens and the World (al-Samā' wa-l-'ālam)*, the *Fihrist* of Ibn al-Nadīm mentions Yaḥyā ibn al-Biṭrīq's translation, which would have then been revised by Ḥunayn b. Ishāq. Another translation of part of book I would have been done by Abū Bishr Mattā. These data partially agree with the information given by the manuscript tradition. The *De caelo* was thus translated into Arabic for the first time within the Kindī's circle, to which belonged Yaḥyā ibn al-Biṭrīq. This is the most widespread version. We can distinguish between an Occidental tradition and an Oriental tradition. The Occidental tradition is represented by the text commented upon by Averroes, and reproduced in full in the lemmas of his Long Commentary on the *De caelo*; this text exists only partially in Arabic, since the original of Averroes' Commentary is extant only for the part of Aristotle's text running from I 7 to II 7; however, the Latin translation by Michael Scot has come down to us in its entirety. The Oriental tradition, on the other hand, is represented by a group of Iranian manuscripts of the seventeenth century, stemming from a version copied in Damascus in the twelfth century. Ibn al-Biṭrīq's text has been more or less consistently

revised in the twelfth century, and it is one of the three MSS of this version that served as the model for Badawī's edition. Finally, there is a fragmentary version (extracts from *De caelo* I 9–II 9) preserved in only one MS, accompanied with Abū l-Faraj ibn al-Ṭayyib's commentary, who is also likely the author of this Arabic translation, that was made not from Greek, but from Syriac. This translation is occasionally cited by Averroes in his Long Commentary.

Ibn al-Nadīm mentions the existence of a commentary of Alexander (only fragmentarily known in Greek), which was translated by Abū Bishr Mattā. Themistius' commentary, translated from Syriac into Arabic by Abū Bishr Mattā and revised by Yaḥyā ibn 'Adī, is no longer extant in Arabic, but one can read it in the Hebrew version done in the thirteenth century by Zeraḥyā Ḥen, which, in its turn, served as the model for a Latin translation in the sixteenth century.

Many Arabic works are specifically devoted to the *De caelo*. According to Ibn Abī Uṣaybi'a, Ḥunayn b. Ishāq composed an abridgment of the book *On the Heavens and Earth*. This work has been often identified with the *De caelo et mundo* supposedly translated in Toledo by Gundissalinus and attributed to Avicenna in the Latin medieval tradition, but this identification is dubious. The same Ḥunayn composed a treatise on the nature of light (*fī l-daw' 'alāḥaqīqatihi*), containing an exposition of the doctrine of motion from *De caelo* I 2. The bibliographies mention a commentary by al-Balkhī, a follower of al-Kindī, on the beginning of Aristotle's work. We are also told that al-Fārābī commented upon the *De caelo*, and that Ibn Zur'a did so on a part of book III. Abū l-Faraj ibn al-Ṭayyib's commentary mentioned in the sources probably corresponds to the one which accompanies the translation of the *De caelo* in the incomplete *unicum* MS Paris, BnF ar. 2281. We also know of a commentary by Abū Sahl al-Masīhī, a friend of Avicenna, who, in his turn, devoted the second part of the physics of his *K. al-Shifā'* to the paraphrase of the *De caelo*. Averroes composed an abridgment, a Middle Commentary and a Long Commentary. The only Greek commentary directly known by Averroes is Themistius'.

## Generation and Corruption

The biobibliographical Arabic sources mention three translations of the *De generatione et corruptione*, although none is extant. Probably, the work was known in some ancient version from the time of al-Kindī, who had written a *Clarification of the Efficient Cause in Generation and Corruption* (*al-Ibāna ‘an al-‘illa al-fā‘ila li-l-kawn wa-l-fasād*). Ishāq b. Ḥunayn’s translation, made on the basis of the Syriac version of his father Ḥunayn, is what the Latin version of Gerard of Cremona (d. 1187) and the Hebrew one of Zerāhyah Ḥen (d. after 1291) originate from. Another translator of the School of Ḥunayn, Abū ‘Uthmān al-Dimashqī, seems to have produced his own translation – mentioned by Ibn al-Nadīm – from the same Syriac version. Ibn al-Nadīm mentions a third Arabic version, that he attributes to Ibrāhīm ibn Bakkūsh, a little known translator who was a contemporary of Yaḥyā ibn ‘Adī.

The Arabic philosophers knew of several other Greek commentaries as well, notably Alexander of Aphrodisias’, which is lost in Greek and in the Arabic version as well, but was used by Averroes in his Middle Commentary on the *De generatione et corruptione*, and in his abridgment of the same work: so, Averroes’ Middle Commentary is a precious source for our knowledge of Alexander’s work. One of the writings belonging in the alchemical corpus attributed to Jābir b. Ḥayyān, the *Kitāb al-taṣrīf*, has equally revealed important quotations of Alexander’s work. If one has to trust Ibn al-Nadīm, the Arabic translation was done by Abū Bishr Mattā. Another partial translation would have been done by Qusṭā ibn Lūqā. Less certain are the traces that remain of Olympiodorus’ commentary, which would have been put into Arabic primarily by Uṣṭāth in al-Kindī’s times and in the tenth century by Abū Bishr Mattā, this time from Syriac. We also find mention of two different commentaries by Themistius, and one by Philoponus (the only one among these works whose original Greek text has come down to us). Philoponus’ commentary is also mentioned by Avicenna in a letter to al-Bīrūnī. Avicenna devotes the third section of the physics of his *Shifā’* to the topic of coming-to-

be and passing away. In the Muslim West, Avempace devotes an abridgment to the *De generatione et corruptione*, which counts as a source of inspiration for Averroes in his own Compendium, written before the Middle Commentary on this Aristotelian work.

## Meteorologica

There are two Arabic versions of Aristotle’s *Meteorologica*, neither of which is a literal translation. The oldest one is attributed to Yaḥyā ibn al-Biṭrīq by the Ottoman bibliographer Ḥajji Khalīfa. It was translated from Syriac. Ibn al-Nadīm’s *Fihrist* mentions another translation by Ibn Suwār, who is also the author of a work on meteorological phenomena (*al-āthār al-mutakhayyala fī l-jaww*) in which he directs the reader to his translation of Aristotle’s text for the second part of his work; however, the translation is lost. Ibn Suwār’s translation was in all likelihood limited to the chapters that Aristotle had devoted to the halo and rainbow, which form the focus of Ibn Suwār’s writing. It is thus the version attributed to Ibn al-Biṭrīq that is preserved, and was consulted by most Arabic authors. This translation is an adaptation, shorter than the original text, and adapted in several places for monotheistic purposes. It modifies the order of the chapters and incorporates sections from commentaries. This is the text that forms the basis of Gerard of Cremona’s Latin version. In addition, we know of a *Compendium* likely having as a model a Syriac version of an abridgment tracing back to the Hellenistic or Imperial ages, which was translated into Arabic by Ishāq b. Ḥunayn.

Ibn Suwār also translated from Syriac Theophrastus’ *Meteorologica*: this translation is extant. Alexander of Aphrodisias’ commentary was translated into Arabic, as well as Olympiodorus’. They are lost, but have left important traces in the subsequent Arabic literature. Samuel ibn Tibbon (d. around 1230) made use of Alexander’s commentary in inserting fragments in his Hebrew translation of Ibn al-Biṭrīq’s version, under the name *Otot ha-shamayim*. An Arabic commentary

attributed to Olympiodorus is preserved, but it is different with respect to the Greek commentary, which is extant and whose Arabic version is lost. What we have in Arabic is a different work, in all likelihood the Arabic version by Ḥunayn of a work originally in Greek or Syriac, that intermingled Olympiodorus' commentary and other sources (Pseudo-Olympiodorus).

Al-Fārābī is credited in one source with a commentary on the *Meteorologica*, but this work is lost. The Arabic authors considerably reorganized Aristotle's doctrines in this treatise. Even though the authenticity of book IV is not in doubt to Avicenna's eyes, nevertheless, following Alexander of Aphrodisias, he thinks that book IV should follow the *De generatione et corruptione*, and deals with it as with the fourth part of the *Physics*, devoted to actions and passions, under the title of *al-Af'āl wa-l-infi'ālāt* (*De actionibus et passionibus*): this part should be located, according to Avicenna, after the doctrine of generation and corruption and prior to the sections that are properly meteorological, that is, *al-Ma'ādīn wa-l-āthār al-'ulwiyya* (*Metals and higher traces*). Although not citing it literally, Avicenna read Ibn al-Biṭrīq's version, and his exposition is quite influenced by the writing of the Pseudo-Olympiodorus mentioned above. Avicenna's work then influenced the meteorology of the *K. Al-Mu'tabar* by Abū l-Barakāt al-Baġdādī. Averroes composed an abridgment of the *Meteorologica*, taking as his model a similar, less-refined work from his predecessor Avempace; Averroes also wrote a Middle Commentary that is a paraphrase of Ibn al-Biṭrīq's version. In his works, Averroes makes use here and there of Alexander's commentary as well as of Avicenna's and of that of the Pseudo-Olympiodorus.

### **De anima**

The information from Ibn al-Nadīm's *Fihrist* on the translations of the *De anima* are incomplete and difficult to interpret. The *Fihrist* knows of only one translator, Iṣḥāq b. Ḥunayn, and quotes the latter's account: Iṣḥāq would have made two successive versions of his translation, one

incomplete and done in all likelihood on the basis of the Syriac version of his father Ḥunayn, previously mentioned in the text; and a second, complete, that he made after he had found a better manuscript. The *Fihrist* adds that this manuscript "was the commentary of Themistius." If this passage is not corrupted, knowing that Themistius' work is a paraphrase that does not cite literally the lemmas of Aristotle's text, one is led to suppose that the MS contained the text of the *De anima* in addition to Themistius' commentary, unless this passage limits itself to refer, quite awkwardly, to Iṣḥāq's translation of Themistius' work, which is extant. The *Fihrist* also mentions (1) a commentary by Olympiodorus in Syriac, an information which is attributed to Yaḥyā ibn 'Adī; (2) a commentary by Simplicius in Syriac, existing "maybe in Arabic"; (3) an "Alexandrian abridgment" which has been identified by R. Arnzen as a Neoplatonic paraphrase of the *De anima*; this text circulated in one part of the tradition as *Ḥunayn's Book of the Soul*, and served as a summary of Aristotle's work combined with developments indirectly tied to Philoponus, possibly through Stephanus of Alexandria. Despite the attribution to Ḥunayn in part of the manuscript tradition, this work was certainly translated before Ḥunayn and Iṣḥāq, the style and vocabulary betraying the ways of al-Kindī's circle; finally, (4) an abridgment by Yaḥyā ibn al-Biṭrīq.

The extant documentation on translations, properly speaking, is found in the following texts: (1) A version preserved in Arabic, which was falsely attributed to Iṣḥāq ibn Ḥunayn by its editor, 'A. Badawī. Indeed, this text is a nonliteral and sometimes paraphrased version that has been traced back to al-Kindī's times by H. Gätje, who also attributed it tentatively to Ibn Nā'ima al-Ḥimṣī, the translator of the pseudo-*Theology of Aristotle*. Averroes sometimes cites this translation in his Long Commentary on the *De anima* (extant only in Latin) as "*alia translatio*" (2) A paraphrase by Avicenna, fragmentarily preserved in his *Book of Just Judgment* (*Kitāb al-Inṣāf*), citing the lemmas of the *De anima*: at the end of the text (after 431a14), these lemmas correspond to the aforementioned translation; as for the beginning of the text, they correspond, in Arabic, to



what we can read in Latin in (3) Averroes' Long Commentary on the *De anima*, which cites *in extenso* the Latin version of another Arabic translation of the *De anima*, that of Ishāq ibn Ḥunayn. Of the latter there is as well an Arabic–Hebrew version, done by Zeraḥyā Ḥen at the end of the thirteenth century. The comparison between the Arabic–Latin lemmas in Averroes' Long Commentary and in the Arabic–Hebrew shows that Zeraḥyā probably extracted the lemmas from Averroes' commentary. As for Avicenna, he commented on a composite version, constituted mostly from the version (or one of the versions) of Ishāq, and completed, as for the final part, with the translation of the Kindī circle. It is possible that that which was completed in this way was exactly that first version from Ishāq, which according to the *Fihrist* claims was unfinished. The version used by Averroes as the basic text for his commentary is different from Avicenna's, but the manuscripts of the Arabic–Hebrew version, that are identical to it, remark in the same place (431a14) that this is the end of Ishāq's translation, adding that it was completed by Abū 'Īsā (probably Ibn Zur'a). Thus, it seems that another supplement of the incomplete version did exist. Finally, it should be noted that the version used by Averroes in the paraphrase that constitutes the Middle Commentary differs here and there from that which forms the basis of the lemmatic exegesis provided in the Long Commentary.

The main Greek sources used by the Arabic readers of the *De anima* are Themistius' paraphrase in Ishāq's translation, mentioned above, and Alexander's *De anima*. The latter is no longer extant in Arabic, but is preserved in an unedited Arabic–Hebrew translation. Generally speaking, Alexander's doctrines as expounded in the *De anima* and *De intellectu* often prevailed over the reading of Aristotle's own work. Even if al-Fārābī had Aristotle's *De anima* at his disposal, he did not use it; the section on the soul in Avicenna's *K. al-Shifā'* recasts his reading of Aristotle within a synthesis of Alexander's and Neoplatonic doctrines. Avempace, who wrote a *Book on the Soul* (*Kitāb al-nafs*), as well as Averroes when he wrote his abridgment on the soul, did not refer to Aristotle's work, but primarily to Alexander.

### **Parva naturalia**

The small works gathered in the Latin tradition under the name *Parva naturalia* met different fates in the Arabic–Muslim world. The treatises were not translated in their entirety. The *Fihrist* of Ibn al-Nadīm mentions a book *On Sense and the Sensed*, in two treatises, and claims that there is no translation deemed worthy of mention, except than a small part glossed by al-Ṭabarī, a follower of the Baghdad scholar Abū Bishr Mattā.

We know of an Arabic version found in a unique MS from Rampur (India) by H. Daiber, lacking of the beginning: the text is a version in three books of six of the little works on natural history: *De sens.* (lacking in the MS), *De mem.*, *De som.*, *De ins.*, *De div.*, and *De long.*, that a compiler completed with Plotinian and Galenic elements: the edition of this collection, by R. Hansberger, is forthcoming. The comparison of this text with Averroes' commentary shows that the latter is a close paraphrase that should be classified as a Middle Commentary. The motley and clumsy version which was taken to be Aristotle's *On Sense and the Sensed* by all Arabic writers gave rise to the intense exegetical activity of these philosophers, whose outcome was the famous theory of the internal senses.

### **Zoological Treatises**

Aristotle's zoological writings circulated in the Arab world in a review called *Kitāb al-Ḥayawān* (*Book of Animals*) in which treatises (*maqālāt*) 1–10 correspond to the *Historia animalium*, treatises 11–14 to *De part. an.*, and treatises 15–19 to *De gen. an.* The Arab translation of the ninth century is attributed to Yaḥyā ibn al-Biṭrīq in the Arabic sources as well as in several manuscripts, but the analysis of vocabulary and style by the editors of these texts strongly questions this attribution. The lexicon presents similarities but also notable divergences with Yaḥyā's; however, the translator did in all likelihood belong in the same circle, that of al-Kindī, so that the name of Uṣṭāth can be advanced, that is, the translator of the *Metaphysics* for al-Kindī.

Aristotle's treatises *De motu animalium* and *De incessu animalium* were not read by the Arabs, but in his Long Commentary on the *De anima*, Averroes claims he had at his disposal an abridgment of the *De motu* included in Nicolaus of Damascus' summary of Peripatetic philosophy (Περὶ τῆς Ἀριστοτέλους φιλοσοφίας); the abridgment of the *De motu*, however, is not found in the Syriac version of this work which has come down to us. The three treatises (*Hist. an.*, *De part. an.*, and *De gen. an.*) were also summarized in Nicolaus' summary, probably available to the Arab writers in its entirety. The Arabic translation of the Περὶ τῆς Ἀριστοτέλους φιλοσοφίας is attributed to Ibn Zur'a (d. 1008). We also know of an abridgment falsely attributed to Themistius, translated by Ishāq b. Ḥunayn.

In addition to other abridgments completely lost, like that of Ibn al-Haytham (d. 1039) and that attributed to 'Abd al-Laṭīf al-Baġdādī (d. 1231), also Abū l-Faraj Ibn al-Ṭayyib composed an abridgment of the *Book of Animals* which is lost in Arabic, but is extant in the Hebrew version, as for the books corresponding to the *History of Animals*. The *Book of Animals* occupies an important place in Avicenna's *K. al-Shifā'*, where it represents the eighth section of the *Physics*, covering the set of the 19 books, including the *History of Animals*. In his exposition of the generation of animals, Avicenna presents the interesting peculiarity of holding a reconciliatory position between Aristotle and Galen on the role of masculine and feminine semen.

Books 11–19, corresponding to the *De part. an.* and *De gen. an.*, were particularly studied in the Muslim West, whereas the *Historia animalium* did not generate much interest. Avempace devoted a few treatises to books 11–19 (*K. al-Ḥayawān li-Abī Bakr Ibn Bājjā*), and Averroes made a paraphrase of them in the Middle Commentary (*Talkhīṣ tis' maqālāt min Kitāb al-ḥayawān*), lost in Arabic but extant in Hebrew, as well as in a Latin translation of the Renaissance. Contrary to Avicenna, Averroes argues for Aristotle's doctrine on animal generation, and devotes a long critique to Galen's position.

## Metaphysics

The oldest Arabic translation of the *Metaphysics*, made in the ninth century by a certain Uṣṭāth (Eustathius) for al-Kindī, is mainly known by the use Averroes makes of it in the Long Commentary on the *Metaphysics* edited by Maurice Bouyges S.J. after a MS housed in Leiden, which is the unique testimony of this crucial text. Uṣṭāth's translation contained most of Aristotle's text, with the exception of books A, K (which was not translated into Arabic), and N. For book *Lambda*, as well as Uṣṭāth's, Ibn al-Nadīm mentions a translation by Abū Bishr Mattā accompanied by Alexander of Aphrodisias' commentary (lost in Greek): this is the translation used by Averroes in his Long Commentary on the *Metaphysics* for book *Lambda*. Themistius' paraphrase, translated by Abū Bishr Mattā, is also preserved. Ibn al-Nadīm mentions several books of the *Metaphysics* translated by Ishāq b. Ḥunayn as well.

To the information given in the *Fihrist* we must add the mention of other translations echoed in Averroes' commentary. Bouyges claimed he could distinguish in these citations, designed as "second" and "third translation"-s, the traces of at least two translations other than Uṣṭāth's and Abū Bishr's ones, that are cited in the commentary. At one place, Averroes names the author of one of them: Yaḥyā ibn 'Adī. We do not have any other testimonies that Yaḥyā ibn 'Adī did this translation, but Averroes' mentions allow this possibility. As for the other version, Bouyges surmises that it could be the work of that Shamlī, otherwise unknown, who is mentioned by Ibn al-Nadīm. An annotation of the Leiden MS also names Ibn Zur'a as the author of another translation of Book *Lambda*. Of this book, another anonymous and incomplete translation exists, containing only chapters 6–10: its editor, 'A. Badawī, attributes it to Ishāq b. Ḥunayn, an attribution that, although not contradicting with the *Fihrist*, is purely speculative. This translation nears paraphrase in several places.

The version of Themistius' paraphrase of Book *Lambda* played a significant role in the Arabic philosophical tradition. This work is no longer

extant in Greek and seemingly was not known by Greek authors; on the contrary, it enjoyed a considerable diffusion among the Arab philosophers. The full Graeco-Arabic version is lost either, except for a small part, but it survives in its entirety in Hebrew, thanks to the translation by Moses b. Tibbon, achieved in 1255. Although the *Fihrist* indicates Abū Bishr Mattā as the translator, a MS attributes it to Ishāq b. Ḥunayn. Both attributions are accepted in modern scholarship.

Books A and N, missing from Uṣṭāth's translation were, according to A. Bertolacci, translated a bit later (end of the ninth century) by Nazīf ibn Ayman. Averroes also transmits the main part of book *alpha elatton* in Ishāq b. Hunayn's translation. In cross-checking the testimonies of ancient bibliographers and citations by the authors, we can infer that Ishāq's version would also include at least book B, Γ, Δ, Θ, H, I, and Λ. As for Book A, there are traces of a version other than Nazīf's (transmitted by Averroes), done by Uṣṭāth.

## Cross-References

- ▶ [‘Abd al-Laṭīf al-Baġdādī](#)
- ▶ [Abū l-Barakāt al-Baġdādī](#)
- ▶ [Alexander of Aphrodisias and Arabic Aristotelianism](#)
- ▶ [Alexandrian Tradition into Arabic: Philosophy](#)
- ▶ [al-Balkhī, Abū Zayd](#)
- ▶ [al-Bīrūnī, Abū Rayḥān](#)
- ▶ [al-Fārābī, Abū Naṣr](#)
- ▶ [Galen, Arabic](#)
- ▶ [Ibn Bājja, Abū Bakr ibn al-Sā’ig \(Avempace\)](#)
- ▶ [Ibn Rushd, Muḥammad ibn Aḥmad al-Ḥafīd \(Averroes\)](#)
- ▶ [Ibn al-Samḥ](#)
- ▶ [Ibn Sīnā, Abū ‘Alī \(Avicenna\)](#)
- ▶ [Ibn Suwār \(Ibn al-Khammār\)](#)
- ▶ [Ibn al-Ṭayyib](#)
- ▶ [Ibn Ṭumlūs](#)
- ▶ [Ibn Zur‘a, ‘Īsā ibn Ishāq](#)
- ▶ [al-Kindī, Abū Yūsuf Ya‘qūb ibn Ishāq](#)
- ▶ [Logic in the Arabic and Islamic World](#)
- ▶ [Philoponus, Arabic](#)
- ▶ [Plotinus, Arabic](#)
- ▶ [Porphyry, Arabic](#)
- ▶ [Themistius, Arabic](#)
- ▶ [Theophrastus, Arabic](#)
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## Aristotle, Arabic: Physics

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### Abstract

The *Physics* deeply influenced Arabic philosophy and science. It was translated into Arabic several times in the ninth and tenth centuries, but only the version by Ishāq b. Ḥunayn (d. 910) survived. Many Greek commentaries were known as well. The most important center for the study of the *Physics* was the Baghdad school of Yaḥyā Ibn 'Adī (d. 973) and his pupil Ibn al-Samḥ (d. 1027). The *Physics* was studied and commented by the most important Muslim philosophers.

### The Arabic Reception of Aristotle's *Physics*

The *Physics* deeply influenced Arabic philosophy and science, but Muslim authors often introduced new perspectives in front of Aristotle's doctrines.

The version by Ishāq b. Ḥunayn (d. 910), the only one survived, is transmitted in the Leiden MS (Bibliothek der Rijksuniversiteit, or. 583), which contains the transcription of lectures given in 1005, and is a witness of the continuity of the tradition of this work during the centuries. Ishāq quotes passages from the translations by Qusṭā b. Lūqā (d. 912) and by Abū 'Uthmān al-Dimashqī (d. 900).

The Greek commentaries on the *Physics* by Alexander of Aphrodisias (c. 200), Themistius (c. 320–390), and Philoponus (sixth century; called Yaḥyā al-Naḥwī, “the Grammarian”) were also known; the exegeses by Eudemos (fl. c. 320 BCE), Theophrastus (372–288 BCE), and Galen (131–201) are occasionally mentioned.

While a treatise by Alexander exists in Arabic, refuting Galen's position about a passage of the *Physics* stating that every moving object which is not moved by an external mover must have an internal mover (because when a part of it stops moving the whole stops moving), neither the Arabic paraphrase of Themistius nor the commentary by Philoponus survived (however, Books III–VII of this commentary are reported by Ishāq). A complete survey of the preserved Arabic commentaries, compared with each other and with the Greek commentaries, is given by Lettinck (1994).

A new approach is developed by Rashed (2009) regarding Thābit b. Qurra (d. 901). Despite the lacunous state of the sources, he demonstrates that Thābit was the first one to discuss Aristotle's *Physics* to elaborate an autonomous doctrine of motion. His providence-grounded conception of the world, however, did not make him accepted by theologians, while determined opposition by philosophers.

The most important center for the study of the *Physics* was the Baghdad school of Yaḥyā b. 'Adī (d. 973) and his pupil Ibn al-Samḥ (d. 1027). Besides the commentaries by Abū Bishr Mattā Ibn Yūnus (d. 940), Yaḥyā's teacher, and Abū l-Faraj Ibn al-Ṭayyib (d. 1044), the *Physics* was studied, mentioned, and/or commented by philosophers such as al-Fārābī (d. 950), Ibn Sīnā

(Avicenna, d. 1057), Ibn Bājja (d. 1138), and Ibn Rushd (Averroes, d. 1198).

Faith in a Creator God is claimed for Abū Bishr Mattā by Janos (2015). God's influence on heavens and his treatment of the "active nature" (as the final cause of motion and efficient cause responsible for creation) brings physical causality closer to metaphysics.

Al-Fārābī wrote an essay on the *Physics* under the title *On Changeable Things*, which is not preserved but was known to Ibn Bājja and Averroes. Avicenna dealt with the *Physics* extensively in his *al-Shifā'* and *al-Najāt*; he knew Philoponus' commentary but was independent from it.

Ibn Bājja was the first commentator on Aristotle in the Muslim West and the precursor of Averroes in this field. He often quotes Aristotle, sometimes deviating from Ishāq's version. As he seems familiar with Philoponus' ideas, he might have used Qusṭā's translation, which was accompanied with Philoponus' commentary. He was influenced by al-Fārābī and influenced Averroes.

Philoponus' ideas on place, the motion of physical bodies, and the eternity of the world differed from Aristotle's ones; they influenced the Arab thinkers and scientists. Ibn Bājja, too, differs from Aristotle in his commentary, for example, about the place of the celestial spheres and the universe as a whole. Sometimes his ideas were shared by Averroes, at other times he criticized them.

Ibn Bājja's commentary was not translated into Latin, but some of his theories were transmitted, thanks to some quotations of Averroes regarding the motion of a body in air or water, and the influence of the resistance of the medium on velocity; through the Hebrew translations of Averroes, Ibn Bājja's ideas were known to the medieval Jewish philosophers in Spain.

Ibn Bājja contributed to the discussion of three other subjects: (1) the divisibility of a body in motion or changing, (2) the idea that a motion does not have a beginning but does have an end, and (3) the question whether any motion or actuality must be preceded by a potentiality. He represents an important stage in the development of ideas about motion from Aristotle to Galilei.

Also Avicenna's concept of *mayl* (inclination) influenced the Latin West. Lettinck (2015) explores the chapters on movement in Aristotle's *Physics* as elaborated by Ibn Sīnā and Ibn Bājja.

Averroes wrote three commentaries on the *Physics*: the *Short* (1159), the *Middle* (1170), and the *Long Commentary* (1186). Only the first exists in Arabic, the *Middle* and the *Long* are extant in Latin and Hebrew translations. He relied on Ishāq's translation; he too was influenced by Philoponus and knew Avicenna's ideas well.

In recent years, the debate on Averroes' elaboration is reopened by Glasners' reference book (2009). The three commentaries on *Physics* cancel the old image of a servile interpreter of ancient doctrines in favor of that of the founder of a "new physics" grounded on the notion of "physical contiguity" (that substitutes Stoic continuity and atomistic discontinuity).

In a still wider perspective, Cerami (2015) examines Averroes' revival of Aristotle's theory of generation and corruption and considers his physics together with his theory of elements and his biology. These doctrines, strictly related, are shown in connection with his metaphysical theorization of essence.

## Cross-References

- ▶ [Abū Bishr Mattā Ibn Yūnus](#)
- ▶ [Alexander of Aphrodisias and Arabic Aristotelianism](#)
- ▶ [Alexandrian Tradition into Arabic: Philosophy](#)
- ▶ [al-Fārābī, Abū Naṣr](#)
- ▶ [Aristotle, Arabic](#)
- ▶ [Ibn Rushd, Muḥammad ibn Aḥmad al-Ḥafīd \(Averroes\)](#)
- ▶ [Ibn Sīnā, Abū 'Alī \(Avicenna\)](#)
- ▶ [Impetus](#)
- ▶ [Natural Philosophy, Arabic](#)
- ▶ [Themistius, Arabic](#)
- ▶ [Theophrastus, Arabic](#)
- ▶ [Translations from Greek into Arabic](#)
- ▶ [Yahyā ibn 'Adī](#)

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## Aristotle, Arabic: *Poetics*

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### Abstract

Though no Greek commentaries on the *Poetics* have come down to us, the work has a long tradition in the Byzantine and the Arabic world. It was translated at the end of the ninth century into Arabic.

While the most important Greek codex of the *Poetics*, the *Parisinus gr.* 1741, was written between the end of the ninth and the beginning of the eleventh century, the Arabic version known to us today is the one by Abū Bishr

Mattā Ibn Yūnus al-Qunnā'ī (c. 870/940), made from a Syriac version dating from around 700 CE, and perhaps relying on a preceding version by Ishāq b. Ḥunayn (d. 910). The bibliographers Ibn al-Nadīm (d. 995) and Ibn al-Qifṭī (d. 1248) speak of another translation by Yaḥyā b. 'Adī (d. 973), now lost, and of a commentary by Themistius (c. 320–390).

Jacopo Mantino's version in 1481 was made on the basis of the Jewish version by Tōdrōs Tōdrōsī (first half of the fourteenth century).

### The Arabic Reception of Aristotle's *Poetics*

Ibn Abī Uṣaybi'a (d. 1270) reports that the famous scientist Ibn al-Haytham (Lat. Alhazen, d. 1038) possibly wrote a treatise on the Greek and Arabic tradition of the *Poetics*. On this tradition, the scientist Abū l-Barakāt al-Baḡdādī (d. after 1164–1165) also wrote in his *Kitāb al-mu'tabar*; an abridgment of the work came by al-Khwārizmī, the tenth century author of *Maḡātib al-'ulūm* (*Keys of the Sciences*).

In spite of the rich poetical tradition of the Arabs, the *Poetics* (Chaps. 20 and 21 being considered in particular by Edzard 2007–2008) was completely misunderstood in the Muslim world, due to inadequacies in the available translation of the *Poetics*. Abū Bishr's version, which lacks the last part, is very literal, but it attempts to interpret Aristotle – and fails in its goal.

The Arabs were unfamiliar with any of the Greek tragedies and, consequently, they were hindered from catching the sense of Greek poetry and of the *Poetics* in its Greek application. Hence, a proper understanding of technical terms such as περιπέτεια or ἀναγνώρισις was impossible for them.

The religious beliefs of the Arabs hindered them from a full comprehension of the concept of *mimesis* itself. Nobody can be a creator, apart from God; the Arabic word for “poetry” is *shi'r* (originally “hair”), while the idea of “making,” contained in the Greek ποίησις, is completely absent. In addition, the Qur'ān strictly distinguishes prophecy

from poetry (69:40; 36:69) and denies poetry value because of its untruthfulness (26:224).

However, the Arabs were interested in Aristotle's *Poetics*, perhaps thanks to the influence of the Persian culture and vision of life. Even if it is impossible to find in the Arabic tradition of the *Poetics* any help for a critical knowledge of the original, the Arab elaborations of this work are noteworthy.

The Greek commentators had organized the *Poetics* and the *Rhetoric* as the final parts of Aristotle's *Organon*. This asset came to the Arabs via the Syriac tradition, and it explains why the *Poetics* took its new “logical” coloring in Arabic. (Against the previous current opinion, however, Hugonnard-Roche 2003, 208–209 claims that there is no evidence of a Syriac version of the *Poetics* preceding the early Abbasid era.)

According to the geographer al-Ya'qūbī (d. in the early tenth century), the philosopher al-Kindī (d. c. 870) wrote a short commentary on the *Poetics*. Al-Fārābī (d. 950) and Ibn Sīnā (Avicenna, d. 1057) provided logic-oriented accounts of the work, evaluating poetry in its relation to truth.

Al-Fārābī, who might have known Abū Bishr's translation, gave a short account of the contents of the work and a theoretical treatment of poetry in his *Kitāb al-shi'r*. For him, the poetical syllogism was used in the Sacred Books to make the truth attainable by everybody.

Avicenna, sometimes judged as more faithful on this issue to Aristotle than Averroes, studied the relation between *takhyīl* (“imaginative representation,” occurring in poetic syllogisms) and *taṣdīq* (“assent” that occurs in demonstrative syllogisms).

As to Averroes (d. 1198), who probably relied on al-Fārābī and Avicenna, two commentaries of his on the *Poetics* are known: the *Short* (written before 1153) and the *Middle Commentary* (1175). Perhaps his source was not Abū Bishr, but another version now lost.

The *Middle Commentary* is a treatise of aesthetics, on the rules that should produce a good *qaṣīda* (the classical ode of the Arabs). Arabic poets are critically examined; so, the Greek original is adapted to the Arabic tradition, where poetry plays a role in maintaining individuals' consciousness of their group and their contribution to its



virtues. Hence, “good poetry” coincides with “morally good” poetry, while the terms and concepts of “tragedy” and “comedy” are completely misunderstood, and substituted by the terms *maḥd* and *hijā*, respectively, “praise” and “satire.”

Still on Averroes’ understanding of the key-concepts of *Poetics*, Vagelpohl (2015) emphasizes al-Fārābī’s interest for the parts more connected with logic, discusses Ibn Sīnā’s position in the *Organon*, and, besides Averroes, takes into account his pupil Ibn Ṭumlūs (d. 1223). Though in the limited impact due to inadequate translations, literary criticisms in Qudāma ibn Ja’far (d. 948?) and Ḥāzīm al-Qarṭajannī (d. 1285) is examined. Vagelpohl also remarks that eulogy and satire are approached by al-Kindī already, as an “instance of transcultural transformation of knowledge” (p. 90). A wider perspective is explored by Forte (2011).

## Cross-References

- ▶ [Abū Bishr Mattā Ibn Yūnus](#)
- ▶ [al-Fārābī, Abū Naṣr](#)
- ▶ [Aristotle, Arabic](#)
- ▶ [Ibn Rushd, Muḥammad Ibn Aḥmad al-Ḥafīd \(Averroes\)](#)
- ▶ [Ibn Sīnā, Abū ‘Alī \(Avicenna\)](#)
- ▶ [Themistius, Arabic](#)
- ▶ [Translations from Greek into Arabic](#)
- ▶ [Yaḥyā ibn ‘Adī](#)

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## Arnaldus de Villanova

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### Abstract

Arnaldus de Villanova (Arnoldus de Villa Nova, Arnau de Villanova, Arnaldo de Villanova, Arnald von Villanova, Arnaud de Villeneuve), born in Aragon, died on September 6, 1311, in a shipwreck near Genoa, was a philosophically educated medical doctor, a prominent physician and outstanding lay theologian. He taught medicine at the University of Montpellier and was private physician of various sovereigns, like Peter III of Aragon, James II of Aragon, and several popes, inter alia. He authored approximately 100 medical works and made translations from Arabic, which were edited in the sixteenth century, as well as numerous alchemical writings erroneously attributed to him. He based his medical theories mainly on Galen and Avicenna (Ibn Sīnā), while his medical practice was firmly established on detailed observation and concrete experience. His theology was first shaped by Dominicans (Thomas Aquinas), but later was increasingly influenced by Franciscans (Peter John Olivi). His theses about the oncoming arrival of the Antichrist provoked severe controversies at the University of Paris. His eschatologically

motivated and apocalyptically designed spirituality targeted a rapid and likewise, broad reform of clergy and order and a strengthening of the laity within the church.

### Biographical Information

Arnaldus was born around 1238 as child of Catalan parents in Villaneuva di Jilóca close to Daroca, a city in the south of Aragon. From the year 1260, he studied medicine and theology in Montpellier. His wife Agnes Blasi, daughter of a merchant, also originated from this city, which belonged to Catalonia at that time. Arnald's daughter Maria became Dominican. Arnald himself took up a *studium linguarum* at the Dominicans and studied Arab and Latin, possibly also Hebrew, and certainly Humaniora. Soon he became a famous physician and advanced to the position of being personal physician of several rulers, like Peter III of Aragon, who in 1285 bequeathed the castle Ollers near Tarragona to him, as well as Alfonso III and James II of Aragon. To the latter, he dedicated his *Regimen sanitatis*, a book on health, which was passed on multiple times and finally became known all over Europe. Altogether, about 100 medical writings of Arnaldus were delivered to posterity among them numerous translations from Arab. From 1289/1291 to 1299, Arnald lectured medicine in Montpellier. There he worked at a place that established reputation not only for its highly regarded medical education institution, but also since the 1290s for the attachment of the controversial Franciscan theologian Peter John Olivi (Petrus Johannis Olivi), whom he loved discussing.

His multitudinous theological writings (Catalan and Latin) prove that Arnald received the spirituality of mendicant orders, the Dominicans, and – during the 1290s increasingly and eventually primarily – the Franciscan reformers, but he also placed his own emphasis. He died in a shipwreck near Genoa on the way from Naples to Avignon on September 6, 1311. By then, he had advanced to the personal adviser of the King of Sicily (Frederick III [II] of Aragon),

and presumably had been summoned by the pope, who sought medical aid from Arnald.

### Thought of Arnald de Villanova

First, Arnald de Villanova became known as a philosopher and theoretical and practical physician. He advocated the widespread Galenism as a basic principle, which he, and Hippocrates' works likewise, illustrated didactically, commented, and completed – thanks to numerous own observations and experiences. He composed collections of aphorisms, among them his late but famous and all over Europe copied *Parabola medicationis*, wrote a considerable number of textbooks, clinical monographies, as well as treatises about therapeutics and medical theory with practically oriented intention. He devoted himself to particular problems of the art of healing and sought manual-like and didactically reduced medical overview works. Altogether, he predominantly published works characterized by a strong inductive way of argumentation and oriented toward therapeutic effectiveness.

Moreover, the later editions of his medical achievements and the thereby found erroneous ascription of works present Arnald as a practical-oriented physician, who raised critical objection against superficial and hasty blending of philosophy and medicine, and in this regard polemicized against Averroes (Ibn Rushd) too. In particular, these are *Speculum medicinae*, *De intentionibus medicorum*, *De parte operativa*, *Liber de gradibus*, *De humido radicale*, *De simplicibus*, *De arte cognoscendi venena*, *Antidotarium*, *De vinis*, *De dosibus tyriacalibus*, and *De cura febris ethice*.

In the 1290s, Arnald increasingly advanced to a *homo spiritualis*. While Avicenna already understood medicine as a philosophical discipline and, moreover, perceived philosophy as therapy, “as cure from detrimental delusions,” Arnald adopted this view in a modified form. Cure for him meant turning toward salvation in Christ. His religiosity was not confined to religious service, prayer, family life, and *caritas* alone, but it imbued the entity of his existence, to which

belonged also his profession as a physician, an author, and – later more and more – a political actor. His writings *Introductio in librum Ioachim de semine scripturarum seu de prophetis dormientibus*, *Allocutio super significatione nominis thetogrammaton* as well as *De tempore antichristi et fine mundi*, and *Tractatus de mysterio cymbalorum* belonged to this period, while it is doubtful whether Arnald authored the apocalypse exposition *Expositio super apocalypsi*.

Thanks to his medical capabilities and accomplishments, Arnald gained special consideration of the pope at the beginning of the new century. Thus, he succeeded in presenting his idea of the imminent arrival of the Antichrist to Boniface VIII. Previously, his thesis raised a vehement conflict at the theological faculty of the University of Paris. Arnald's Antichrist tract was confiscated, and he was imprisoned for a short time and accused of heresy. However, pope Boniface VIII freed him. Pope Benedict XI took him to custody in Perugia but released him soon after. Arnald escaped to the court of Frederick III of Sicily. Frederick accommodated him friendly and called him the “new Plato.”

Arnald gratefully dedicated his newest work, *Allocutio christiani*, to the king. Here, Arnald expressed what and how a ruler had to be, had to do, and not to do, to be ruler in a true Christian sense. However, 1 year later – 1305 – the Catalan was back at the court of James II, who gladly received him and employed him as physician, personal adviser, and finally as ambassador. During this period, Arnald wrote *Antidotum*, referring back again to his earlier warning against the imminent arrival of the Antichrist, and *Informatio Beguinorum*, in which he took the side of the Beguines. For this, he was later, in 1316, condemned by the Holy Office. But even after his death, the pope defended Arnald. His sentence was invalidated, a fact that is often ignored even in specialist literature.

Clement V, James II, and Frederick III of Sicily employed Arnald's services during the last years of his life, as physician, as emissary, and as personal domestic and political adviser. His reputation as an influential character with

intensive spiritual concern qualified him as a contact and promising advocate for those who envisioned themselves as misunderstood, socially ecclesiastically marginalized, or even prosecuted in their mental-spiritual aspiration by clerical and secular powers. The Templars from Aragon asked him to support the existence of their order in front of the pope and against Philip IV of France; regrettably they failed, as we know. On the other hand, Arnald successfully supported the monks of Mount Athos and Ubertino of Casale.

Frederick III unwaveringly held on to Arnald; he defended him even against his brother's offenses and commendably sought to comply with the reform scheme of the Catalan physician in Sicily kingdom. He also was in close contact with King Robert. Robert did not have an open mind about the peaceful solutions proposed by Frederick, often submitted by Arnald, to nonviolently settle the present disputes between Sicily and Naples. Moreover, Arnald soon could count Robert to the friends of the spiritual and many "innovators."

In his theological-ascetic and spiritual-practical works, Arnaldus de Villanova declared himself impressed with the piety of the mendicant orders, namely the Franciscans. In them, he saw signs of hope for an emergence of a strong and convincing-efficacious Christendom. While he diagnosed the illness of the patient "mankind," he saw the medicine, the cure for the diseased body of Christianity in the practically lived spirituality of the mendicant orders, primarily in their option for the poor and the poverty. In doing so, Arnald presented an increasing tendency to rigorism, to the ideal of pure poverty advocated by the Franciscan Spirituals (*Spirituale*), and to a joachitically influenced end time expectance. However, he did not desire breaking with the church but a reform of the church. He sought convalescence of its head and limbs.

## Cross-References

- ▶ [Alchemy in the Latin World](#)
- ▶ [Galen, Arabic](#)
- ▶ [Ibn Rushd, Muḥammad ibn Aḥmad al-Ḥafīd \(Averroes\)](#)

- ▶ [Ibn Sīnā, Abū 'Alī \(Avicenna\)](#)
- ▶ [Medicine and Philosophy](#)
- ▶ [Peter John Olivi](#)
- ▶ [Theology Versus Philosophy in the Arab World](#)
- ▶ [Thomas Aquinas](#)

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## Athīr al-Dīn al-Abharī

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### Abstract

Athīr al-Dīn al-Abharī (d. ca 663/1265), was an Iranian philosopher and mathematician, contemporary of the philosopher and polymath Naṣīr al-Dīn al-Ṭūsī (d. 672/1273). He composed about twenty works in the fields of philosophy, especially logic, and mathematics, especially astronomy. Considered during his lifetime as a prominent mathematician, he promoted an active appropriation of Greek sciences in Islam. His *Kitāb Hidāyat al-ḥikma* (“The Book of Guidance for Philosophy”), commonly used in Iran and India as a textbook in philosophical instruction, is a perfect example of the late Peripatetic (*mashshāʿī*) tradition in Islam. Moreover, by integrating some ideas of Suhrawardī’s (d. 587/1191) “wisdom of illumination”, it prefigures future developments of Eastern Islamic philosophy in fourteenth-to-seventeenth centuries.

Mufaḍḍal b. ‘Umar b. Mufaḍḍal (d. ca 663/1265) was an Iranian philosopher and mathematician, contemporary of the philosopher and polymath Naṣīr al-Dīn al-Ṭūsī (d. 672/1273). He composed about 20 works in the fields of philosophy, especially logic, and mathematics, especially astronomy. Considered during his lifetime as a prominent mathematician, he seems to have been less concerned with metaphysical and theological questions. He promoted an active appropriation of Greek sciences in Islam, against many theologians who condemned them such as Ibn Taymiyya (d. 728/1328) in the following century. His *Kitāb Hidāyat al-ḥikma* (“The Book of Guidance for Philosophy”), commonly used in Iran and India as a textbook in philosophical instruction, is regarded as a jewel of the late Peripatetic (*mashshāʿī*) tradition in Islam. Al-Abharī was also among the first thinkers to

integrate some ideas of Shihāb al-Dīn Suhrawardī’s (d. 587/1191) “wisdom of illumination” within this philosophical tradition, pioneering the development of Islamic philosophy in the Eastern Islamic world during the fourteenth-to-seventeenth (?) centuries.

### His Life

Little is known about the life of Athīr al-Dīn al-Abharī. As indicated by his *nisba*, he was probably born in the city of Abhar, between Zanjān and Qazwīn in the North-West of Iran. Some recent scholars have referred to him as Abharī Samarqandī (Baghdādī, II, p. 296; Ziriklī (1986), VII, p. 279; Anawati (2014); Sarioğlu (2007)), but there is no historical evidence of his birth in nor his attachment to Samarkand (Muwaḥḥid, p. 586). The claim of G.C. Anawati making him a native of Mosul (al-Mawṣil) in Iraq, although followed by recent scholars (Sarioğlu; Thomas), must also be dismissed. This allegation stems from the fact that al-Abharī was educated by a famous scientist from Mosul, Kamāl al-Dīn b. Yūnus al-Mawṣilī (d. 639/1241–42), but al-Abharī himself indicated that he had gone to Mosul for this purpose (Ibn Khallīqān, V, p. 313; Muwaḥḥid, p. 586).

Athīr al-Dīn al-Abharī was in his youth a student of the famous theologian Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī (d. 606/1209) (Ibn ‘Ibrī, p. 254; Muwaḥḥid, p. 586), probably in Khurasān and the area of Khwārizm, in the city of Ghazna or Hirāt, where the master used to teach during his tumultuous life. It is likely that he received from him an “orthodox” Sunni instruction in theology (*kalām*), jurisprudence (*fiqh*), and Qur’anic exegesis (*tafsīr*), but also a wide instruction in philosophy, which al-Rāzī highly valued, especially logic and Avicenna’s *Ishārāt wa tanbīhāt*.

Under the threat of the Mongolian invasion, al-Abharī, like many scholars of his time, migrated to seek refuge. In 625/1228 he went to Irbil, then to Damascus, where he studied under the direction of a certain Muḥyī al-Dīn Muḥammad b. Sa‘īd b. Nadī. From there, he moved to Minor Asia (Anatolia), a place of refuge for many scholars in the seventh/thirteenth century, where

he spent a few years teaching and composing his works (Ibn Khalliqān, idem; Mudarris, p. 104; Muwaḥḥid, p. 587). Then he went to Mosul, where he studied mathematics, especially astronomy, under the direction of Kamāl al-Dīn al-Mawṣilī. Ibn Khalliqān says that al-Abharī worked on the *Almagest* with al-Mawṣilī while he was already a reputed scholar whose own works were studied in the *madrasas* (Ibn Khalliqān, idem). It is also said that the Sultan al-Kāmil al-Ayyūbī, which ruled Syria in 1237–38, submitted to him some thorny mathematical questions which the scholars of his court had not been able to solve; al-Abharī, with the help of his master, would have provided him with the solutions (Qazwīnī, p. 463; Muwaḥḥid, p. 587).

Athīr al-Dīn al-Abharī was a contemporary of the philosopher and mathematician Naṣīr al-Dīn al-Ṭūsī, who also studied mathematics and astronomy in Mosul with Kamāl al-Dīn b. Yūnus al-Mawṣilī. Abharī and Ṭūsī exchanged letters on various scientific issues; the text of one of these correspondences in Persian has been preserved (Mudarrisī, pp. 197–201; Muwaḥḥid, p. 587). The fact that Ṭūsī, unlike Abharī, was a Shī‘ī – first Ismaili, then Twelver – and a close ally of the Mongol regime does not seem to have hindered this scientific friendship. The assertion of some scholars according to which al-Abharī, like many astronomers of his time, practiced astronomy in the observation center of Marāgha, founded by Ṭūsī in 1259 and located not far from Zanjān, is not borne out by any direct testimony (Nasr, p. 81). This is probably due to a mix-up with one of Abharī’s students, the astronomer Najm al-Dīn Dabīrān Kātībī Qazwīnī (d. 675/1276–77), who cooperated with Ṭūsī in the construction and scientific work in Marāgha.

As for Abharī’s students, Dabīrān Kātībī Qazwīnī is known as the author of *Ḥikmat al-‘ayn* (“Wisdom from the Source”), a sum of Peripatetic (*mashshā’ī*) philosophy which has remained among the most commonly used in the teaching of philosophy throughout centuries (Aminrazavi and Nasr, pp. 253–266). In this work, many of Abharī’s philosophical views are presented (Muwaḥḥid, p. 587). ‘Imād al-Dīn Zakariyyā b. Maḥmūd Qazwīnī (d. 682/

1283–84), who probably followed Abharī’s teaching in Damascus, authored two famous books in the fields of geography and cosmography, namely, *Āthār al-bilād wa akhbār al-‘ibād* (“The Monuments of the Countries and the Stories of Men”) and *‘Ajā‘ib al-makhlūqāt wa gharā‘ib al-wujūdāt* (“Wonderful Creatures and Strange Beings”) (Bosworth; Id. and Afshar). Last, Ibn Khalliqān (d. 681/1282), the author of *Wafīyyāt al-a‘yān*, is also one of our main primary sources about Abharī’s life and works (Muwaḥḥid, p. 587).

For what concerns the date of al-Abharī’s death, the reports are divergent. Some scholars say he passed away in 660/1261–62 (Iqbāl, 500). Ḥājī Khalīfa hesitates between 663/1264–65 (II, pp. 1493, 1616), before 700/1300–01 (I, p. 206; II, p. 1750), and after 660/1261–62 (II, p. 953). The date of 700/1300–01 has to be rejected, due to the fact that Kātībī Qazwīnī refers to his master with a formula of eulogy in his *Ḥikmat al-‘ayn* (Qazwīnī, p. 245). The more likely is that his death occurred during the reign of Khān Hülegü, i.e., between 660/1261–62 and 663/1264–65 (Muwaḥḥid, p. 587).

## His Thought

Athīr al-Dīn al-Abharī’s works certainly played a key role in the conservation and revival of the Greek-Arab philosophical and scientific legacy in the late medieval and premodern period. In the field of logic, his compendium entitled *Isāghūjī*, an abridged translation of Porphyry’s *Isagogé* and, as such, an introduction to Aristotle’s *Categories*, gained an outstanding popularity and was the subject of numerous commentaries, the most famous of which being those of Shams al-Dīn Muḥammad b. Ḥamza al-Fannārī (d. 834/1430–31), Nūr al-Dīn ‘Alī b. Ibrāhīm al-Shīrāzī (d. 862/1457–58), and Zīn al-Dīn Zakariyyā b. Muḥammad al-Anṣārī (d. 910/1504–05) (See below, Primary sources). In addition to the developments on the concepts of genus (*jins*), species (*naw’*), specific difference (*faṣl*), quiddity (*māhiyya*), and individual (*shakhṣ*), which are almost translations of Porphyry’s *Isagogé*, the epistle treats of the modes of

representation (*taṣawwur*) and assent (*taṣdīq*), as well as of the five divisions of syllogism according to the Islamic understanding of Aristotle's *Organon*: demonstrative (*burhān*), dialectic (*jadal*), rhetoric (*khaṭāba*), poetic (*sha'r*), and eristic (*mughālaṭa*). Al-Abhari himself composed an autocommentary on this epistle called *Aqwāl*, and marginal glosses upon this commentary under the title of *Mughnī al-ṭullāb fī l-manṭiq* ("The Book that Enriches the Student in Logic"). For centuries, this work was used in seminaries throughout Persia and the Indian subcontinent as a text-book in philosophical instruction. It was translated in Persian in 1244/1828–29 by Abū l-Faṭḥ al-Shīrāzī under the title of *Mir'et al-manṭiq* ("The Mirror of Logic") which was printed many times in India. Parallely, it was published in Rome in 1625 with a Latin translation by P. Thomas Novariensis, under the title *Isagoge*, i.e., *breve introductorium arabum in scientiam logicae cum versione latina*. Al-Abhari's advocacy of logic must be evaluated in the context of a persistent opposition of Sunni theologians to philosophical sciences, which they considered as foreign, useless, and pernicious in the presence of Revelation, a tendency which would eventually culminate in Ibn Taymiyya's attacks against logicians (Ibn Taymiyya 1949). Moreover, Abhari was not only, in the field of logic, a faithful transmitter, but also an original thinker. In his *Tanzīl al-afkār fī ta'dīl al-asrār* ("The Descent of Reflections on Balancing the Secrets"), he presents his own views on the rules of logic and philosophy (*qawānīn al-manṭiq wa l-ḥikma*) and criticizes some commonly accepted principles (Hājji Khalīfa, I, p. 494). Naṣīr al-Dīn al-Ṭūsī wrote a commentary "balancing" (*ta'dīl*) Abhari's views on logic, under the title *Ta'dīl al-mi'yār fī naqd Tanzīl al-afkār* (Ṭūsī).

The importance of al-Abhari in the history of mathematics in Islamic world has been emphasized by many scholars. It is mainly due to his *Risālat Iṣlāḥ Uṣūl Uqlīdus* ("Epistle on the Correction of Euclid's *Elements*"), where he attempts to give a proof of the fifth principle or parallels postulate: "If a line segment intersects two straight lines forming two interior angles on the same side that sum to less than two right angles, then the two

lines, if extended indefinitely, meet on that side on which the angles sum to less than two right angles." Al-Abhari's demonstration is strictly identical to that of Naṣīr al-Dīn al-Ṭūsī, quoted by John Wallis in the seventeenth and by Giovanni Girolamo Saccheri in the eighteenth century (Rozenfeld, p. 147). The argument is based on three premises, the first of which is equivalent to the parallel postulate (Abhari, *Iṣlāḥ*, pp. 17–20; Rozenfeld, pp. 149–159). This demonstration is different of that attributed to Abhari in many sources (Jaouiche, pp. 116–118, 247–250).

Al-Abhari was also involved in the popularization of astronomy, as evidenced by his works in the field. He produced works such as treatises on the astrolabe, commentaries on earlier *zījas* (astronomical handbooks with tables), and at least one compendium of astronomy. He adopts the Aristotelian view that the celestial bodies do not undergo the changes that occur in the sublunary realm and maintains that stars are alive and have volition, which is the ultimate principle of their motion (Sarioğlu 2007). He also devoted many chapters of his treatises of general philosophy to astronomical issues.

In the field of philosophy, Abhari basically belongs to the Avicennian tradition of thought. To be sure, he authored two books, respectively, entitled *al-Ishārāt* ("Indications"), modeled after Ibn Sīnā's work of the same title, and *al-Maḥṣūl* ("Man's earned"), modeled after Ibn Sīnā's pupil Bahmanyār b. al-Marzubān's (d. 458/1067) *al-Taḥṣīl* ("Man's earning"). As for his other works in philosophy, most of them are organized into sections on logic, physics, and metaphysics, according to the classical division of philosophy inherited from Avicenna, with a more pronounced interest for the first two parts. Based on this plan, *Hidāyat al-ḥikma* is undoubtedly his most important work in this field, since it became one of the main text-books for generations of philosophers in the Iranian world. Among the numerous commentaries on this work, the two most significant are those of Kamāl al-Dīn Mīr Ḥusayn b. Mu'īn al-Dīn al-Maybudī (d. 909/1503–04), and of Ṣadr al-Muta'allihīn al-Shīrāzī, best known as Mullā Ṣadrā (d. 1050/1640). The former was a Sufi of Sunni obedience who faced severe opposition



after Shāh Ismā‘īl’s decree imposing Shī‘ism as official state religion in Iran. The latter was a gnostic Shī‘i who also faced the hostility of the jurisconsults (*fuqahā*) of his time because of his clear inclination towards philosophy.

In the lack of a critical edition of the *Hidāyat al-ḥikma*, al-Abharī’s ideas in physics, theology, and eschatology can be detailed by means of the commentaries of al-Maybudī and Mullā Ṣadrā, both of which skipping the first part on logic. The glosses of Mullā Ṣadrā, entitled *Sharḥ al-Hidāya al-athīriyya* (“Commentary on Athīr [al-Dīn’s] Guidance”), have recently been edited; they provide the essential of Abharī’s text and quote many passages of Maybudī’s commentary. The first part of the book, corresponding to the second part of the *Hidāyat al-ḥikma*, is devoted to physics and organized in three sections called *funūn* (sing. *fann*, litt. “art”). The first and lengthiest section is entitled “Lecture on Nature” (*al-samā’ al-ṭabī‘ī*, or *sam’ al-kiyān*), like the Arabic translation of Aristotle’s *Lessons on Physics* (φυσικῆ ἀκρόασις). It contains ten subsections supporting ten positions. The first one consists in a refutation of atomism, a theory adopted by the theologians of *kalām* in opposition to the Aristotelian natural philosophy; al-Abharī follows Avicenna’s refutation of *kalām* atomism in the *Physics* of the *Shifā’*, which was supported by Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī in a phase of his intellectual development (Shīrāzī, vol. 1, pp. 33–34; Dhanani 2015). The second one gives a proof of the prime matter (*hayūlā*, transliteration of the Greek ὕλη) defined as a substance disposed to receive the corporeal form (*al-ṣūra al-jismiyya*). Al-Abharī adopts Aristotle’s theory of hylomorphism, according to which each body is composed of two substances, form and matter, separable in the mind but inseparable in concrete external existence. Consequently, neither form can exist without matter, nor matter without form, since neither is the cause of the other’s existence (Shīrāzī, vol. 1, pp. 148–153). The fifth subsection gives a proof of the specific form (*al-ṣūra al-naw‘iyya*), i.e., the quiddity (*māhiyya*) of a multiplicity of bodies, in addition to the individual form (*Ibid.*, pp. 130–132). The sixth and seventh subsections treat the quiddity of the

undetermined place (*makān*) and the natural place of each body (*ḥayyiz*) (pp. 165–168). The eighth one argues that each body has a shape (*shakl*) by nature and not by constraints (*qāsir*) (p. 169). The ninth one is about motion and rest, which is one of the main disputed subjects between theological and philosophical doctrines. Abharī defines motion as the shift from potentiality to actuality and asserts that each body in movement (*mutaḥarrik*) has a mover (*muḥarrik*) different from its own corporality (pp. 177, 182). He distinguishes between motion in quantity (*ḥaraka fī l-kamm*), like growth; motion in modality (*fī l-kayf*), called transformation (*istiḥāla*), or change of state; motion in space (*fī l-ayn*), or movement from one place to another; and motion in position (*fī l-waḍ’*), like the circularity of the planets’ motions (pp. 191, 198–199). He also distinguishes between the essential motion (*al-ḥaraka al-dhātīyya*) and the accidental, and within the former, between natural, constrained, and deliberate (*irādī*) motion (p. 202). Finally, the tenth subsection is devoted to time (*zamān*), its existence (*anniyya*), and quiddity (*māhiyya*), which is another subject of lengthy debate between Islamic philosophers and theologians. Unsurprisingly, Abharī adopts Aristotle’s definition of time as the measure of movement and asserts that time, therefore, has neither beginning nor end (pp. 218–220).

The second section focuses on the celestial spheres whose movement is circular, which are not subject of generation and corruption, and the mover of which is separated from matter (pp. 227–331). The third section treats the elemental bodies (*al-‘unṣuriyyāt*), composed of the four elements of the world of generation and corruption, i.e., water, fire, air, and earth. Always by following Aristotle’s system, Abharī deals successively with meteorological phenomena (*al-āthār al-‘alwiyya*), minerals, plants, animals, and finally humans (pp. 325–441). He stresses that human beings possess, in addition to the vegetal and animal souls, a specificity which is the rational soul (*al-naḥs al-nāṭīqa*) (p. 417). According to the doctrine elaborated by al-Fārābī and Avicenna on the basis of Aristotle’s noetic in the third book of the *De Anima*, Abharī distinguishes the four

degrees of the intellective faculty (*al-quwwa al-'āqila*), which are the material or potential intellect (*al-'aql al-hayūlānī*); the habitual intellect or *intellectus in habitu* (*al-'aql bi-l-malaka*); the actual intellect or *intellectus in actu* (*al-'aql bi-l-fi'l*); and the acquired intellect (*al-'aql al-mustafād*) (pp. 418–419). Probably targeting Platonic philosophers, he stresses that the coming into existence of the soul is simultaneous to that of the body (*hāditha bi-hudūth al-badan*) and does not precede it (pp. 434–435). These developments upon human soul, which, according to the Aristotelian tradition, belong to Physics, nevertheless make a transition towards the second part of the work, devoted to metaphysics.

The *Divinalia* (*al-ilāhiyyāt*) of the *Hidāyat al-ḥikma* are divided into three sections. The first section deals with the categories of beings or the common definitions in metaphysics, in seven subsections: the universal and the individual; the one and the many; the prior and posterior; what is eternal and what is newly arrived (*al-qadīm wa l-hādith*), divided in eternal or new by essence (*bi-l-dhāt*) and in time (*bi-l-zamān*); the potential and the actual; the cause and the effect; and the substance and the accident (Shīrāzī, vol. 2, pp. 11–123). The second section discusses the issue of the Artisan's (*al-ṣāni'*) Knowledge and other attributes, in ten subsections (pp. 127–260). After giving a proof for the Necessarily Existent by virtue of its Essence (*al-wājib bi-dhātihī*) (1), Abhari argues that the Necessary Existent's existence is the same as its reality (*ḥaqīqa*) (2) and that its necessity of existence as well as its individuation (*ta'ayyun*) is identical with its Essence (3). He then gives a proof for the oneness of the Necessarily Existent by virtue of its Essence, according to the creed of *tawhīd* (4). He stresses that the Necessarily Existent by virtue of its Essence is necessary in all of its aspects (*jihāt*) (5), and it does not share its existence with contingents (6). For what concerns divine Knowledge, Abhari follows Avicenna's positions by asserting that the Necessarily Existent by virtue of its Essence knows its own Essence (7), as well as it knows the universal entities (8) and the individuals under a universal mode (9). As for God's other attributes, he says that the Necessarily

Existent by virtue of its Essence is willing and all-generous, which is attested by his creation of the world. The third section is devoted to the immaterial Intellects (*al-'uqūl al-mujarrada*) identified with angels (*al-malā'ika*), in four subsections (pp. 263–310). Following the view of the Neoplatonists on the procession of reality, Abhari states that Intellect is the first emanation of the One, by the intermediary of which Soul and Nature consecutively emanated, in virtue of the principle that “only one can come from one” (*ex uno non fit nisi unum*). He then says that immaterial Intellects are ten, one for each celestial sphere, the last of which is the active Intellect (*al-'aql al-fa'āl*) (2); that they are eternal *a parte ante* and *a parte post*, without beginning nor end in time (3); and that they are the mediators between the Creator and the corporal world (4).

The conclusion of the work (*khātima*) deals with the states of the afterlife (*al-ākhirā*), in six “guidances” (*hidāya*) (pp. 313–357). The author states that the human soul, after natural death, i.e., the separation from its natural body, remains unrelated with any other body; the doctrine of transmigration (*tanāsukh*) is strongly refuted, which is a commonplace of “philosophical orthodoxy” in Islam (1). He explains that the cause of happiness of the soul after death is the pure intellection of the intelligible, rising to the very intellection of the principle of all good, i.e., God (2); likewise, the cause of pain of the soul after death is the perception of negative realities (*manāfi'*) as they are negative (3). He asserts that the reason for the happiness and misery of souls after death is that the perfect souls break all bodily relationships and are transported to the world of Holiness (*al-'ālam al-qudsī*), when the unpurified souls remain veiled to happiness (*mahjūbūn*); however, the sufferings of the latter are doomed to vanish. This thesis, which was considered as heterodox, if not heretic, by Islamic theologians, would eventually be supported by Ibn 'Arabī (d. 638/1240) and part of his pupils. In short, this work leads from Aristotelian physics to a philosophical doctrine of resurrection, in which the influences of Avicenna and perhaps Suhrawardī are still to be examined.

Indeed, although Abharī's thought mostly remains within the frame of the Aristotelian tradition, some of his works, namely, *Muntahā l-afkār fī ibānat al-asrār* ("The Summit of Thoughts Concerning the Clarification of Mysteries"), and above all *Kashf al-ḥaqā'iq fī tahrīr al-daqā'iq* ("The Unveiling of Realities Concerning the Accurate Statement of Subtleties"), nevertheless reveal a clear influence of Suhrawardī's teaching (Aminrazavi and Nasr, pp. 267–268). To be sure, both works are quoted and commented by two famous disciples of Suhrawardī, Ibn Kammūna (d. ca 684/1285), and Shams al-Dīn al-Shahrazūrī (d. between 686/1288 and 704/1304) (al-Shahrazūrī, I, p. 42; III, pp. 244–245). Noteworthy, their organization differs from the conventional one in that they deal successively with logic, metaphysics, and physics. In the *Kashf al-ḥaqā'iq*, Abharī discusses several philosophical issues from an "Illuminist" (*ishraqī*) point of view and devotes a chapter on eschatology reproducing many passages written by Suhrawardī himself. In the field of epistemology, one may find in Shahrazūrī's *Rasā'il al-shajara al-ilāhiyya* this quotation of Abharī's "Unveiling of Realities": "Not all science is restricted to representation (*taṣawwur*) and assent (*taṣdīq*). The Science of the Creator, the Highest, as well as that of Intellects and Souls, which is their science in virtue of their essence, in short, the sciences coming from enlightenment and unveiling (*al-ishraqīyya wa l-kashfiyya*), to which the pure presence [of the known] is sufficient, do not proceed from these two divisions. However, if there is about the substitutive sciences (*al-tajaddudiyya/al-tajziyya*), I mean the knowledge of things in their absence, then they are restricted to them." (Shahrazūrī, I, p. 41; *Kashf al-ḥaqā'iq*, pp. 33–34) This is a clear echo of Suhrawardī's conception of knowledge by presence (*al-'ilm al-ḥuḍūrī*), which would be eventually developed by Shī'i thinkers in the late medieval and premodern periods such as Ibn Abī Jumhūr (d. after 904/1499), Mīr Dāmād (d. 1040/1631), and Mullā Ṣadrā.

In addition to being an outstanding mathematician and a skilled philosopher, Abharī was an accomplished poet, whose *diwān*, according to

the author of *'Urafāt al-'āshiqīn* (Awḥādī, p. 58), contained nearly 3000 verses. A quatrain in Persian of his composition is reported by Dāghistānī, I, p. 93). Abharī also wrote several works on dialectics (*jadal*). He seems to have criticized the kind of argumentation prevailing in the theology of *kalām*, in name of the superiority of the demonstrative reasoning (*al-qiyās al-burhānī*). In this respect, his thought was in the wake of the Aristotelian tradition as represented in Al-Andalus by the famous Ibn Rushd, alias Averroes (d. 595/1198).

In conclusion, Athīr al-Dīn al-Abharī was a great representative of the late Peripatetic school of thought in Eastern Islam, at the time of its renaissance following Naṣīr al-Dīn al-Ṭūsī's undertaking, but also integrates elements of "Illuminative" (*ishraqī*) philosophy, which has to be regarded as a reaction to Avicenna's philosophy. He was also and above all a resolute proponent of the autonomous development of the philosophical and natural sciences of Greek origin, opposing at the same time the Sunni theologians who condemned these sciences like Ibn Taymiyya, the Ismā'īli theologians who subordinated them to prophetic revelation like Abū Ḥātim al-Rāzī (d. ca 322/933–34), and the philosophers of the tradition of al-Kindī (d. 261/873), namely, Abū l-Ḥasan al-'Āmirī (d. 381/992), who placed the religious knowledge above the natural and mathematical sciences.

## Works of Athīr al-Dīn al-Abharī

### 1. Works on logic and philosophy:

- (a) *Īsāghūjī fī l-mantiq*, or *al-Risāla al-athīriyya fī l-mantiq*, with the commentary of al-Fannārī, Constantinople, 1263/1847; 1312/1894. See Ḥājī Khalīfa, I, pp. 206–208; GAL I, pp. 609–611; GAL, S, I, p. 841; Nūrūmand, pp. 313–320. English transl. of the Latin transl. by Edwin Calverley in *D. B. Macdonald Memorial Volume*, Princeton, 1933. French transl. of the Arabic by Anis Hani, *Le Philosophie*, 2004/1 (n°22), pp. 165–176.

- (b) *Hidāyat al-ḥikma* (“The Book of Guidance for Philosophy”), ed. M. Sa‘ādāt Ḥusayn, Karachi, Pakistan, 1432/2011 (not consulted). Quoted extensively in al-Maybudī, *Sharḥ Hidāyat al-ḥikma*, and al-Shīrāzī, *Sharḥ al-Hidāya al-athīriyya* (see below).
- (c) *Tanzīl al-afkār fī ta’dīl al-asrār* (“The Descent of Reflections on Balancing the Secrets”), on logic, physics and metaphysics (Ḥājjī Khalīfa, I, p. 494; al-Ṭūsī).
- (d) *Al-Zubda fī . . .* (Ḥājjī Khalīfa, II, p. 953; Mudarrisī, p. 105). This work is mentioned under three titles beginning by this word meaning “quintessence”: *Zubdat al-uṣūl* (“The Substance of Principles”) (Zāhidī, p. 6); *Zubdat al-kashf* (“The Substance of the Unveiling”) (Baghdādī, II, p. 469); and *Zubdat al-asrār* (“The Substance of the Secrets”) (Mudarrisī, p. 197). Organized in three sections on logic, physics and metaphysics. *Hidāyat al-ḥikma* could be an abridgment of this work. It was translated from Arabic to Syriac by Ibn ‘Ibrī alias Bar Hebraus (Mieli, p. 299).
- (e) *Muntahā l-afkār fī ibānat al-asrār* (“The End of Reflections on the Revelation of the Secrets”), on logic, physics and metaphysics. Ms. 2752, Kitābkhānah-i Majlis-i shūrāyi islāmī, Tehran.
- (f) *Khulāṣat al-afkār wa naqāwat al-asrār* (“The Quintessence of Reflections and the Purity of the Secrets”).
- (g) *Daqā’iq al-afkār* (“The Subtleties of Reflections”), on logic.
- (h) *‘Unwān al-ḥaqq wa burhān al-ṣidq* (“The Title of Truth and the Proof of Sincerity”), on logic, physics and metaphysics. Ms. 3134, Library of Istanbul University.
- (i) *Ishārāt* (“Indications”) (Ḥājjī Khalīfa, I, p. 97; Mudarrisī, p. 105).
- (j) *Risāla fī ‘ilm al-manṭiq* (“Treatise on the Science of Logics”), in Persian. Edited by Muḥammad Taqī Dānishpajūh with the *Hidāyat al-ḥikma*’s section on logic, Journal of the University of Tehran, *Du risāla dar manṭiq* (Two Epistles on Logic), 1349 h.s./1970–71.
- (k) *Al-Maḥṣūl* (“Man’s earned”) (Ḥājjī Khalīfa, II, 1616; Mudarrisī, p. 105).
- (l) *Kalīmāt ‘ashara* (“Ten Words”) or *Risālah-i mabdā’ wa ma‘ād* (“Treatise on the Origin and the Return”), an abridgment in Persian, ed. Muḥammad Bāqir Sabzawārī in *Čahārdah risālah* (“Fourteen treatises”), 1340 Sh./1961–62.
- (m) *Kashf al-ḥaqā’iq fī tahrīr al-daqā’iq* (“The Unveiling of Realities Concerning the Accurate Statement of Subtleties”), ed. Maqṣūd Muḥammadī, Dānishkādah-i Ilāhiyāt-i dānishgāh-i azād-i islāmī, Vāhid Karaj, 1277 Sh./1998–99; other ed. H. Sarıoğlu, Istanbul, 2001. (Ḥājjī Khalīfa, II, p. 1493; Ziriklī, VII, p. 279; Baghdādī, II, p. 469).

## 2. Works on mathematics and astronomy:

- (a) *Al-Majisī* (“The Almagest”), a compendium of astronomy (‘Azāwī, p. 265), probably identical to the work mentioned elsewhere under the title *Mukhtaṣar fī ‘ilm al-hay’a* (Abridgment of astronomy) (Anawati; Ziriklī, VII, p. 279; GAL, S, I, p. 844).
- (b) Two epistles on astronomy and astrology (‘Azāwī, p. 265).
- (c) *Ghāyat al-idrāk fī dirāyat al-aflāk* (“The End of Understanding Concerning the Knowledge of Spheres”), a treatise on astronomy (GAL, S, I, p. 844; Ziriklī, VII, p. 279).
- (d) *Iṣlāḥ Uṣūl Uqlīdus* (“The Correction of Euclid’s *Elements*”), in thirteen chapters (*maqāla*). Microfilm n° 540, Kitābkhānah-yi markazi-yi dānishgāh-i Tihrān [Central Library of the University of Tehran] (GAS, V, p. 111; Id., VII, p. 401).
- (e) *Sharḥ al-Zīj al-shāmīl* (“Comprehensive Astronomic Table”). Commentary of the astronomical handbook of Abū l-Wafā’ Muḥammad b. Aḥmad al-Būzajānī’s (d. 376/986–987) (Ḥājjī Khalīfa, II, pp. 968–969; GAS, VII, pp. 324–325).
- (f) *Al-Zīj al-ikhtiyārī* (“Selected Astronomic Table”), or *Al-Zīj al-athīrī* (“Athir [al-Dīn]’s Astronomic Table”) (GAL, S, I, p. 844).

- (g) *Sharīk al-aqtār* (“The Partner of the Diagonals”), on various logical and mathematical issues. The fifth chapter deals with the famous “liar’s paradox” (*jadhr al-aṣamm*) (Mudarrisi, p. 197).
- (h) *Risāla fī birkār al-quṭū* (“Epistle on the Compass of Sections”).
- (i) *Risālat al-astrulāb* (“Epistle on the Astrolabe”), or *Risālat fī ma’rifat al-astrulāb* (“On the Knowledge of the Astrolabe”).
- (j) *Risāla fī ‘ilm al-hay’a* (“Epistle on Astronomy”).
- (k) *Mukhtaṣar fī ‘ilm al-hay’a* (“Compendium of Astronomy”).
- (l) *Al-Zij al-muqannan* (“Codified Astronomical Table”).
- (m) *Al-Zij al-mulakkhḥaṣ* (“Abridged Astronomical Table”).

### 3. Works on dialectic:

- (a) *Tahdhīb al-nukat* (“The Correction of Wit Words”), on dialectics (*jadāl*). It is a critical commentary on a treatise entitled *al-Nukat fī ‘ilm al-jadal* (“Wit Words. On the Science of Dialectic”) authored by Abū Ishāq Ibrāhīm b. ‘Alī al-Shīrāzī (m. 476/1083–84). One manuscript of this work is conserved in a library of Medina (Dānishpajūh, Maktaba, p. 456).
- (b) *Al-Risāla al-zāhira fī ibtāl ba’di muqaddimāt al-jadaliyya* (“The Flourishing Epistle Concerning the Refutation of Certain Premises of Dialectics”) (Mudarris, p. 105), also known under the title *al-Risāla al-zāhira fī fasād muqaddimāt musta’lima fī l-jadal* (“The Flourishing Epistle Concerning the Corruption of the Premises Used in Dialectics”). Numerous mss are conserved (Markazī, Khaṭṭī, p. 149; Shūrā, V, pp. 269–270).
- (c) *Risālat al-masā’il* (“The Epistle of Questions”), dealing with eighteen questions debated between theologians and philosophers (Mudarrisi, p. 105; Shūrā, V, p. 272). One ms is conserved in the Library of the Islamic Council, Tehran.
- (d) *Al-Mughnī fī ‘ilm al-jadal* (“The Book that Enriches on the Science of Dialectics”), an compendium of rhetoric and dialectics (Ḥājji Khalīfa, II, p. 1750).

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## Atomism

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### Abstract

At first sight, the philosophical idea that the world is composed of atoms, notably embraced by Greek and Roman authors such as Democritus, Epicurus, and Lucretius, seemed to have disappeared during the middle ages. It has been frequently said that it only reappeared during the Renaissance and then in modern philosophy and chemistry. In fact, atomism never ceased to exist as a theory of matter, space and time, both in western Latin tradition and in the Arabic and Jewish medieval philosophy. Different versions of atomism were developed in these traditions: from theological explanations about the divisibility of the continuum, through physical theories of matter and time. The first detailed accounts of atomism come from the ninth- and tenth-century Arabic theologians of Baghdad and Basra, immediately followed by the Jewish schools, notably in Egypt. A similar revival of atomism appeared in the West from the twelfth-century philosophers of Chartres to the fourteenth-century Christian theologians of Oxford and Paris. Most of these medieval atomist theories have very little in common with ancient atomism, for they are usually linked with more complicated theological concerns, such as the eternity of the world,



creation, the existence of prime matter, and more generally the finiteness of created things. On the other hand, they are similar to Platonic and neo-Pythagorean conceptions of reality as constituted from units and numbers, or from atoms and collections of atoms, which are equivalent to units in matter and space.

It has long been thought, until the end of the nineteenth century, that there were no atomist theories in medieval philosophy and that ancient atomists, such as Epicurus or Lucretius, remained unknown until the Renaissance, before Poggio Bracciolini worked on the manuscript of the *De natura rerum* discovered by him in 1417. This view of the history of atomism has been challenged during the last two centuries. In the nineteenth century, Kurd Lasswitz and Léopold Mabilleanu already endeavored to make room for medieval theories in their essays on atomistic philosophy (Lasswitz 1890; Mabilleanu 1895). But it is only recently that many efforts have been made to show the existence of very important atomist theories of matter and time in the medieval Arabic philosophy and theology from the ninth to the twelfth century (Pines 1936; Wolfson 1976; Dhanani 1994) and the existence of thorough examinations of them in the Jewish and the Christian traditions (Maier 1949; Murdoch 1974; Pabst 1994; Pyle 1997).

The main dispute in the medieval Arabic natural philosophy opposed hylomorphism (i.e., that the world is composed of matter and form) to atomism (an ontology which accepts only atoms and properties). If the former ontology was accepted by most of the philosophers (*falsafā*), a majority of the theologians of the *kalām* (the *mutakallimūn*), notably in Basra and Baghdad, both on the Mu'tazilite's (a school of rational theology founded in the ninth century in Basra) and the Ash'arite's (another school founded by the theologian Abu al-Hasan al-Ash'arite against the Mu'tazilites) sides, accepted atomism (Rashed 2005). The first atomists seem to be the Basrian theologians Abū al-Hudhayl and al-Nazzām (ninth century). Abū al-Hudhayl posited the existence of a finite number of discrete atoms without

extension, without quality, and without corporeal nature (for they are the constituents of bodies) that can move through the vacuum. The only feature that can really define the nature of atoms is their place or location. Al-Nazzām accepted the main tenets of such a view but argued lengthily against one of its points, namely, that there are a finite number of atoms in a body or in a line. Indeed, al-Nazzām maintained that this is impossible because there are an infinite number of positions in a continuum, for if an atom does not have any extension, this must also hold for its place. Strangely enough, he thus maintained that there are an infinite number of atoms with a typical argument against atomism. Al-Nazzām was conscious that in this case Zeno's paradoxes of motion and dichotomy may apply, for it is impossible for something to pass through an infinite number of places. In order to explain the possibility of motion, al-Nazzām affirmed that atoms move by means of leaps, which signifies that motion is always discontinuous.

The philosophical discussions in the later *mutakallimūn* were about the magnitude of the atoms, their number (finite or infinite?), and their qualities but always under the aspect of the possibility of motion. They were also very interested about related topics such as the compatibility of atomism with Euclidian geometry, as it appears in one of the best summaries of these later discussions in Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī. The most vehement critic of atomism in the Arabic tradition was Abū Yūsuf Ya'qūb ibn Ishāq al-Kindī in the ninth century. Of course, Avicenna (Ibn Sīnā), al-Ġazālī, and Averroes (Ibn Rushd) also detailed long argumentations against the *mutakallimūn*'s atomism in order to restore the Aristotelian hylomorphism.

If the argumentation seems purely philosophical, the main motives for their acceptance of atomism were theological and were related to their explanation of the creation of the world by God. According to them, the world must have been created because if it were not, the world should have passed an infinite time, which is not possible. Most of their philosophical arguments to support atomism are mainly derived from Zeno's paradoxes and from John Philoponus' use of them

in his refutation of the eternity of the world. As a consequence, some of them, mainly the Ash'arites, thought that God can create and destroy the world whenever He wants, for He can destroy or create new aggregates of atoms at each instant of time. As a consequence, they contend that accidents cannot exist longer than one instant. Therefore this radical version of atomism – occasionalist and deterministic – denied the existence of real causality in the created world. It appears that Arabic atomism has very little in common with Democritus' and Epicurus' atomist theories, even if they were known to the *mutakallimūn*.

Important echoes of these discussions can be traced back in the Jewish medieval philosophy, both in the *kalām* and in the Neoplatonic schools. For example, in the ninth and tenth centuries, Saadhia Gaon (Wolfson 1946) and Isaac Israeli (Zonta 2002) both rejected the Arabic *mutakallimūn*'s atomism. During the following centuries, Judah Halevi, Ibn Daud, Maimonides, Gersonides, and Crescas also argued against Arabic atomism. Maimonides' criticism in Chaps. 71–76 of book I of his *Guide of the Perplexed* is probably the better-known among them and is mostly directed against occasionalism and continuous Creation of the World. As Tamar Rudavsky has shown (Rudavsky 2000), Jewish discussions about continua of space and time are related to the theological problem of creation, as was already the case in the Arabic tradition. Although denying the eternity of the world, they contend that creationism does not necessarily imply atomism about time and matter. This is problematic for them because their argumentation for the non-eternity of the world is reminiscent of Zeno's paradoxes and is probably derived from Philoponus' book *Against Aristotle on the Eternity of the World*, where Zeno's paradoxes are used against the eternity thesis. If the world were eternal, then an infinite time would have been passed through, which is impossible; therefore the world's temporality is finite in some sense. But this argument could also be used in favor of atomism and finitism, as will be the case in the Latin world, which we shall see later. Strangely enough they denied on the one hand the eternity of

the world with some kind of atomist argument while accepting on the other hand the infinite divisibility of the continuum.

If we now focus on western Latin philosophy, it appears that atomism never really ceased to exist during the Middle Ages. Concerning the myth of Bracciolini, it must be noticed, as Philippe has shown in his pioneering study (Philippe 1895, 1896), that Lucretius' poem was copied and discussed throughout the Middle Ages with no interruption from the era of the Church Fathers to the twelfth century. The same is also true for Epicurus, whose works were partially known through a still longer chain of intermediate sources (Cicero, Lactantius, St. Jerome, St. Ambrose, St. Augustine). In the twelfth century, John of Salisbury dealt with Epicureanism in his *Metalogicon* and in his *Entheticus*, where he tried to refute its principal tenets. On the contrary, we find a defense of Lucretius and the Epicureans in the works of William of Conches, notably in his *Dragmaticon philosophiae* where he quotes passages from Lucretius' *De natura rerum*.

The idea of a total eclipse of atomism from the Latin medieval philosophy and theology seems to derive from the violent reactions of the Church Fathers. Everybody has in mind Lactantius' repeated attacks, notably in his *De ira Dei*. It is true, indeed, that for a long period, ancient atomists were not discussed for their theories of matter as such but rather for the theological consequences of their views, and among them the negation of Divine providence, the impassivity of God, and the eternity of the world. In the twelfth century, when William of Conches decided to defend atomism, he tried to make it compatible with Christian theology. In his *Dialogue on Philosophy* (I, 6), he wrote:

When the Epicureans said that the earth consists of atoms, they were correct. But it must be regarded as a fable when they said that those atoms were without beginning and 'flew to and fro separately through the great void', then massed themselves into four great bodies. For nothing can be without beginning and place except God.

This atomist lecture of Creation has never been more detailed until the fourteenth century. What is more, some twelfth-century thinkers, such as

William of Champeaux and Peter Abelard, also defended the existence of indivisibles in the continuum in their commentaries on Aristotle's *Categories*, in the chapter on quantity (King 2004). Indeed, they suggested reading Aristotle's view on the continuum with Boethius' treatise *On Arithmetic*, which was a Latin translation of the neo-Pythagorean mathematician Nicomachus of Gerasa. Boethius presented a general theory of the derivation of magnitudes from points, which were thought of as units with a particular position in space and called "atoms." As a result, three-dimensional geometric figures, i.e., solids or bodies, are at the same time continuous and metaphysically constituted of points.

The divisibility of a continuum and the notion of infinite remained of great interest during the thirteenth century (Trifogli 2002), but no atomist theory of matter and time can be found during this period, except in Robert Grosseteste's metaphysics of light. Indeed, in his *De luce* and in his *Notes on the Physics*, the Bishop of Lincoln explains that God created the world from a single point of light multiplied infinitely in all directions. As a result, every part of the material world, and every magnitude, is composed of these points, which were multiplied in the first instant of the world (Lewis 2005). Grosseteste clearly defends the Boethian derivation of magnitudes from points, but with his metaphysics of light, he also gave a new theoretical tool in order to answer the many arguments against atomism coming from Aristotle's *Physics* and Arabic sources, such as Al-Ghazali's *Metaphysics*, which gives a summary of Avicenna's arguments against the *Mutakallimūn* (Robert 2017).

After the thirteenth century, the main sources for this renewal of intense reflections on atoms were not Epicurus or Lucretius, but rather Democritus through the newly translated texts of Aristotle into Latin where the composition and division of a continuous quantity are discussed (*Physics*, *On Heavens*, *On Generation and Corruption*). Can a continuum be divided infinitely? Is it composed of indivisibles? Aristotle argued against Leucippus and Democritus that if the world were made of atoms, it would be impossible to explain how they can form continuous

magnitudes. The world would be totally discrete. Atoms either have a magnitude or not. If they have it, they are divisible and then ad infinitum. But if they do not have any magnitude, they cannot form continuous magnitudes because they cannot be in contact (*Physics*, 231 a26–b6), for if two things are in contact they either touch (1) part to part, (2) part to whole, or (3) whole to whole. The two first possibilities must be rejected for atoms because they do not have any parts by definition. And if they touch whole to whole, it would mean that they are superposed, and therefore they cannot form a new magnitude. Contrarily to thirteenth-century Aristotelians, some fourteenth-century philosophers thought that a continuum can be composed of indivisibles and that it is possible to respond to Aristotle's arguments.

The first atomist – or indivisibilist – of the fourteenth century is Henry of Harclay, Chancellor of the University of Oxford in 1312, who defended the existence of an infinite number of indivisibles in any continuum when disputing a *quaestio* about the eternity of the world. His main argument consists in refuting the Aristotelian thesis about contact. Harclay affirmed that two points can touch if they are situated in contiguous places. It is not very clear whether this can explain continuity or only contiguity of atoms, but Harclay clearly asserts that a continuum is composed of points or indivisibles and that they are infinite in number. As in the Arabic tradition, atoms are primarily defined by their position. His successors at Oxford, among them Walter Chatton, William Crathorn, and John Wyclif, also accepted the indivisibilist analysis of the continuum problem but restricted it with the assertion that the number of indivisibles is finite (Zoubov 1959; Murdoch 1974; Kretzmann 1986; Robert 2009). One of their strongest and recurrent arguments is derived from one of Zeno's paradoxes, called "the metrical paradox of extension." This paradox – probably known to the medieval philosophers through Simplicius' commentary on Aristotle's *Physics* – runs as follows: an extended thing is either composed of extended or unextended parts; if we accept infinite divisibility of the continuum, then either the extended thing is composed of an infinity of extended parts and is therefore infinite in

extension or it is made up of an infinity of unextended parts, but we cannot explain how extension comes from non-extension. Chatton, Crathorn, and Wyclif accepted Harclay's basic arguments – that is, that indivisibles are firstly defined by their positions in the continuum – but they added the metrical paradox to conclude that the number of indivisibles must be finite. We find the very same kind of argumentation in Gerard of Odo, General Minister of the Franciscan order in 1329 (De Boer 2009). Nicolas Bonetus, another contemporary Franciscan theologian, and Nicholas of Autrecourt also used Zeno's paradoxes, but they finally accepted the infinity of atoms (Grellard 2004).

According to John Murdoch, fourteenth-century atomism is merely a response to Aristotle's anti-atomism, and no real traces of ancient physical atomism can be found in this fourteenth-century indivisibilist literature. Therefore atomism would only concern the geometrical continuum and would be only directed against new geometrical arguments (Murdoch 1974, 1982; see also Pabst 1994). At any rate, it is clear that from the divisibilist side – as in Thomas Bradwardine's, Adam Wodeham's, or Gregory of Rimini's works against the atomists and as in the Arabic tradition – the strongest arguments against atomism were geometrical. As an example, the incommensurability of the diagonal and the sides of a square was frequently used against the finite composition of the continuum. For example, assume that the sides of a square are composed of  $n$  points. If you draw all the parallels from each point of a side to its counterpart on the opposite side, the diagonal which intersects the parallel lines turns out to be composed of  $n$  points too. From a mathematical point of view, however, the diagonal of a square is incommensurable with its sides. According to its opponents, this mathematical argument proved that atomism was an absurd theory (Murdoch 1969). Atomists, however, developed real atomistic physics and even built up some strong criticisms of the mathematical tools used by anti-atomists. Indeed, Chatton, Crathorn, and Wyclif argued against the relevance of geometry to deal with the problem of the continuum. According to them, indivisibles must be

considered as elemental components of reality and not as mere unextended points (Robert 2009; Michael 2009). The most representative philosopher of this physicalist way of thought is undoubtedly Nicholas of Autrecourt (Grellard 2009), who explains generation and corruption, condensation and rarefaction, and generally all types of motion by the local motion of atoms. The main motive of Autrecourt's atomism is the defense of the eternity of the world, one of the reasons why he has been condemned by ecclesiastical authorities. In any case, their positions are never reducible to a mere reaction to Aristotle's arguments nor to a reconstruction of Democritus through Aristotelian doxography.

It becomes quite clear that all medieval atomists were influenced by the same Platonic and neo-Pythagorean theory of the derivation of magnitudes from points (Robert 2017). For this reason, one finds the same kind of theories in Arabic, Jewish, and Latin writings. Indeed, with the exception of Nicolas Bonetus and Nicolas of Autrecourt, medieval atomists believe that atoms are point-like entities, not corpuscles with a minimal magnitude or shape. As a consequence, medieval atomism is a mathematical conception of reality, in which atoms are like units from numbers. Even though they accept the existence of indivisibles, they do not refuse the existence of continuity in the material world. They do not accept, for instance, the existence of void. There is no gap in matter, time, and space, but all magnitudes must be composed of units, which can be called "atoms." From the fourteenth century onward, the defenders of this mathematical atomism will try to apply this mathematical analysis to the problems raised by Aristotle's *Physics*, giving rise to a more physical form of atomism.

## Cross-References

- ▶ [Adam Wodeham](#)
- ▶ [Gerald Odonis](#)
- ▶ [Henry Harclay](#)
- ▶ [Intension and Remission of Forms](#)
- ▶ [Isaac Israeli](#)
- ▶ [John Wyclif](#)

- ▶ [Moses Maimonides](#)
- ▶ [Natural Philosophy](#)
- ▶ [Natural Philosophy, Arabic](#)
- ▶ [Natural Philosophy, Jewish](#)
- ▶ [Nicholas of Autrecourt](#)
- ▶ [al-Rāzī, Fakhr al-Dīn](#)
- ▶ [Saadia Gaon](#)
- ▶ [Thomas Bradwardine](#)
- ▶ [Walter Chatton](#)
- ▶ [William Crathorn](#)

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## Augustine

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### Abstract

Augustine (354–430 CE) was born in North Africa and, except for a 5-year sojourn in Italy, lived out his life there. He is important for having defined the Christian heresies of Donatism, Manicheanism, and Pelagianism. His prodigious literary output includes *Confessions*, *City of God*, *On the Trinity*, and no fewer than five different commentaries on the first verses of *Genesis*. Augustine was the first important western philosopher to philosophize from a distinctively first-person point of view. His works include important replies to the threat of skepticism (“If I am mistaken, [still] I am”), a significant discussion of language acquisition, an epistemological theory of “illumination,” arguments for mind–body dualism, and the analogical argument for other minds. He has been credited (and debited) with introducing the notion of the will into philosophy. He made famous the problem of whether God’s foreknowledge is compatible with human free will. His subjective account of time has been particularly influential. His ethics gives important emphasis to the agent’s intention. Although he did not invent just war theory or the philosophy of history, he made significant contributions to both.

St. Augustine (Aurelius Augustinus) (354–430 BCE), Bishop of Hippo, was the first great Christian philosopher, and, until the ascendancy of

Thomas Aquinas at the end of the thirteenth century, he was the most influential Christian thinker in western philosophy. He was born in Tagaste (modern Souk Ahras, in eastern Algeria) in the waning years of the Roman Empire. He was educated in nearby Madaura and at the University of Carthage, where he studied rhetoric. In 383 he sailed for Rome and became professor of rhetoric at Milan. There he came under the influence of Bishop Ambrose, who baptized him in 387.

Augustine’s mother, Monica, who had followed him to Italy, rejoiced in his conversion. She joined him and various philosophically minded relatives and friends at a villa at Cassiacium, near Lake Como, where he wrote four of his earliest works, including his *Contra academicos* (*Against the Academicians*) and his *Soliloqua* (*Soliloquies*). Shortly after his mother’s death, he returned to Carthage in 388 and, after that, never left North Africa.

When Augustine became, first a priest, and then Bishop of Hippo (later Bône, now Annaba, Algeria) he sought to combine his pastoral duties with extensive writings in philosophy and theology. By defining three important Christian heresies, namely, Donatism, Manicheanism, and Pelagianism, he did probably as much as any single person to define Christian orthodoxy. Two of these three heresies, namely, Manicheanism and Pelagianism, are of special philosophical interest. The first is the view that there is a cosmic principle of evil and darkness coeval with, and equal in power to, the principle of goodness and light. Manicheanism can be seen as, in part, a radical solution to the philosophical and theological problem of evil. Pelagianism is captured by the slogan modern philosophers associate with Kant: “Ought implies can.” Against Pelagianism Augustine maintained that, after the fall of Adam, no human is capable of acting rightly apart from the gratuitous assistance, that is, the grace, of God. Adam’s fall produced “original sin,” which has afflicted all subsequent human beings.

No doubt the most popular of Augustine’s work is his *Confessions*, which is also the first significant autobiography in western literature. Next in influence is his mammoth *City of God*, in 20 books. This great work was initially a



response to those who said that the fall of Rome in 410 was the result of its Christianization. Enormous in scope, this work came to be regarded, in later centuries, as something of an encyclopedia of knowledge.

Of special importance, especially in the Middle Ages, is Augustine's *De genesi ad litteram* (*Literal Commentary on Genesis*). It is one of five commentaries Augustine wrote on the biblical story of creation. Of special significance to modern philosophy is Augustine's *De trinitate* (*On the Trinity*). Book 10 of that work had a clear and strong, though unacknowledged, influence on Descartes' *Meditations*.

Like the *Meditations*, some of Augustine's thought is expressed from the first-person point of view. In his *Soliloquies* he points out that he has coined the expression *soliloquia* for the soul's conversation with itself. Moreover, his *On Free Choice of the Will*, although it is now uniformly printed as a dialogue between Augustine and his friend and (later) bishop, Evodius, may also have been conceived as an inner dialogue. As Simon Harrison has recently pointed out (Harrison 2006, 31–50), the name "Evodius" does not appear in any of the manuscripts of this work and was first printed in Auerbach's edition of 1506. So the idea that this work is a dialogue between these two historical figures seems to be a Renaissance invention.

Augustine's literary output, produced with the aid of scribes, is prodigious. According to Chadwick, in his introduction to the *Confessions*, Augustine's works make up the largest body of writing left by any ancient author. Besides 100 books and treatises, there are some 200 letters and over 500 sermons. Three years before his death, Augustine catalogued and commented on each of his works in a volume he called the *Retractiones* (*Reviews*). They provide a final assessment, by the author himself, of his great opus.

## Skepticism

Augustine's earliest surviving work, his *Contra academicos* (*Against the Academicians*), is a response to skepticism. In young adulthood Augustine had been a Manichean "hearer," or

disciple. But, after 9 years in that role, he became disenchanted with Manicheism. About the time he left Carthage for Rome, he found himself attracted to the skeptical view of the "Academics," that is, the followers of Arcesilaus and the New Academy, who held that "everything was a matter of doubt and that an understanding of the truth lies beyond human capacity" (*Confessions*, 5.10.19). In the *Contra academicos* Augustine discusses the criterion for knowledge put forward by Zeno of Citium, according to which something can be known just in case it cannot even seem to be false. Augustine proposes a dilemma. Either Zeno's criterion can be known to be true, in which case it is false, or else it cannot be known to be true, in which case we have inadequate reason to accept it.

Augustine goes on to offer knowledge claims of his own that he dares the skeptic to reject, among them, certain logical truths, certain mathematical truths, and certain reports of immediate experience (e.g., "That tastes pleasant to me"). Especially interesting is his claim to know that the world exists. To the skeptic's taunt that he might be dreaming, Augustine responds that he will call "the world" whatever appears to surround him. In this way he introduces the idea of a phenomenal world, knowledge of which, he maintains, is impervious to skepticism.

No doubt Augustine's most famous response to skepticism comes much later, in Book 15 of his *On the Trinity* and in Book 11 of his *City of God*. Here is the latter passage:

In respect of these truths I have no fear of the arguments of the Academics. They say, 'What if you are mistaken?' If I am mistaken, I am [*Si fallor, sum.*] Whoever does not exist cannot be mistaken; therefore I exist, if I am mistaken. Because, then, I exist if I am mistaken, how am I mistaken in thinking that I exist, when it is certain to me that I am if I am mistaken (11.26).

The anticipation of Descartes' *cogito, ergo sum* is clear.

## Language

Wittgenstein begins his *Philosophical Investigations* with a quotation from Book 1 of Augustine's

*Confessions*, which seems to say that, as a young child, he learned the meaning of words by having the objects they name pointed out to him by his elders. Wittgenstein rejects this view of language acquisition. But, as Myles Burnyeat (1987) has pointed out, the passage Wittgenstein quotes is prefaced with these words:

It was not that grown-ups instructed me by presenting me with words in a certain order by formal teaching, as later I was to learn the letters of the alphabet. I myself acquired this power of speech with the intelligence which you gave me, my God (11.8.13).

And in Augustine's early dialogue with his son, Adeodatus, *Concerning the Teacher*, Augustine brings out, with examples, the ambiguity of ostension:

Augustine: Come now, tell me, if I, knowing absolutely nothing of the meaning of the word, should ask you while you are walking what walking is, how would you each me?

Adeodatus: I should walk somewhat more quickly.

Augustine: Don't you know that walking is one thing and hurrying is something else? (3.6).

It is by an inner illumination, Augustine, argues, that we learn what things are. Or, as it puts it at the end of his *Concerning the Teacher*, it is by Christ, the "Inner Teacher", that we learn. This is the Augustinian Doctrine of Illumination.

In Book 15 of Augustine's *On the Trinity* we get the idea that an "inner word," or concept, mediates between the word or words of a natural language and items in the world around us our words can be used to refer to. This development helps him resolve a puzzle he had raised already in the *Concerning the Teacher* about how two words can mean "as much" without meaning "the same," that is, how they can have the same extension without having the same meaning. (cit.)

The idea that thinking is inner speaking, found already in Plato's *Theaetetus* and *Sophist*, is also prominent in Augustine, again, for example, in Book 15 of his *On the Trinity*. But it is Augustine to whom, for example, William of Ockham refers when he develops his own idea of mental language in his *Summa logicae* 1.1.

## Epistemology

Augustine can be said to have an active theory of sense perception. "Active" in this context includes the idea that the eyes emit rays that touch the object of vision. "For it is not the body that perceives," he writes in *Literal Commentary on Genesis* 12.24.51, "but the soul through the body, which messenger, as it were, the soul uses to form in itself the very thing which is announced from the outside."

Augustine's theory of sense perception seems not to be "representational," if, by that term one means that it is an image or sense-datum that is the direct object of perception. In sensing a body, according to him, we immediately form an image of that body in our sense, yet we cannot distinguish between the form of the body we see and the form of the image we produce in our sense (*On the Trinity*, 11.2.3).

Augustine's account of knowledge is not based on the idea of abstraction, as we find in the Aristotelian tradition. Rather, as already noted, Augustine understands knowledge to be something arrived at by an intellectual illumination. He thinks that "intelligible realities," including especially a priori truths, cannot be learned, or even confirmed, in sense experience. All this, including the light metaphor so prominent in Augustine's idea of illumination, is very Platonic. But Augustine rejects Plato's idea that the soul might have been introduced to items in the purely intelligible realm before birth. "We ought rather to believe," he writes, "that the nature of the intellectual mind is so formed as to see those things which, according to the disposition of the Creator, are subjoined to intelligible things in the natural order, in a sort of incorporeal light of its own kind" (*On the Trinity*, 12.15.24).

## Mind–Body Dualism

When Plato has Socrates argue in the *Phaedo* that we have knowledge we could not have acquired in this life and therefore our souls must have existed before they took on this bodily form, he argues for soul–body dualism from an impersonal point of view. Such is also true of his other arguments for

soul–body dualism. Augustine, by contrast, argues for mind–body dualism in Book 10 of *On the Trinity* from a first-person point of view. He argues there that the mind (*mens*) is fully present to itself and so knows and is certain of its own substance or nature. However, he goes on, the mind does not know nor is it certain that it is air or fire or any other body that philosophers have theorized it to be; therefore, it is none of these things, that is nothing bodily (10.10.16).

Like Descartes, long after him, Augustine argues that the mind is something that remembers, understands, wills, thinks, knows, and judges (10.10.14). Augustine adds that the mind also lives, and in this he differs from Descartes, who supposes life to be a purely material phenomenon. But the difference between these two thinkers on whether life is a psychological function is not as great as it might seem to be. In truth, Augustine does not understand living to be, necessarily, anything physiological. One can ask whether there is life after death without asking about post mortem physiology.

Anticipating the critics of Cartesian dualism, Augustine himself poses for himself the philosophical problem of other minds, that is, the problem of how each of us can know that other living creatures have minds. Augustine's answer is a form of the Argument from Analogy. "Just as we move our body in living," he writes, "so, we notice, those bodies are moved" and so we come to think that there is present in another body "such as is present in us to move our mass in a similar way" (*On the Trinity*, 8.6.9).

## The Will

Albrecht Dihle (1982) and others have maintained that the concept of the will originated with Augustine. Certainly there is nothing exactly like the idea of the will to be found in Plato or Aristotle, whereas, by contrast, the notion of the will is prominent in Augustine. In *On Free Choice of the Will* Augustine writes that the will, which he thinks is the first cause of sin, is itself uncaused. "What cause of the will could there be?" he asks rhetorically, "except the will itself?"

(3.17.49.168). So the human will is free. It is also, he thinks, that component of our being that makes us moral agents, capable of sin, but also capable of moral rectitude.

In his efforts to define and reject Pelagianism, Augustine has to try to explain how the grace of God can influence a human will without destroying its freedom. To this challenge he responds that "free will is not made void through grace, but is established, since grace cures the will whereby righteousness is freely loved" (*On the Spirit and the Letter*, 30.52).

Another divine threat to human free will seems to be God's foreknowledge. Augustine's efforts to show that, contrary to appearances, God's foreknowledge is compatible with free will are most prominent in Book 3 of his *On Free Choice of the Will*. One of his responses is to say that we cannot will what is not in our power. So what we will is in our power, and, "since it is indeed in our power, it is free in us" (3.3.8.33). Evodius, Augustine's nominal interlocutor in that work, points out that the very same reasoning that leads us to suspect that God's foreknowledge of what we will choose to do should apply to God as well. His idea is that God's perfect knowledge should include what He will do, and yet God's will is perfectly free. Since God's foreknowledge does not rule out free will in God's case, it should not rule out free will in the case of a human agent either (3.3.6.23).

## God

In Book 2 of *On Free Choice of the Will* Augustine offers an argument for the existence of God. It is a purely a priori argument. Although it is not as important as Anselm's famous a priori argument in his *Proslogion*, it is not without interest. Augustine gets his interlocutor to admit that x is God if, and only if, x is more excellent than our minds and nothing is more excellent than x. He then states that truth is more excellent than our minds, perhaps on the ground that truth sits in judgment on our thoughts. He then concludes that either truth itself is God or there is something more excellent than truth and it is God. In either case, God exists.

Although Augustine's argument for the existence of God does not use Anselm's expression for God, "something than which nothing greater can be conceived," Augustine does sometimes use, in other contexts, expressions quite like that of Anselm, who was a professed Augustinian. Thus, for example, in *Confessions* 7.4.6 he writes: "Nor could there have been or be any soul capable of conceiving that which is better than you, who are the supreme and highest good."

Augustine made important contributions in the project of giving a philosophical account of the divine attributes. But perhaps his most influential contribution to this topic is his espousal of the idea that God is metaphysically simple, so that God is not only, for example, good and wise, God is God's own goodness and wisdom. Here is a passage on the divine simplicity from *On the Trinity*:

But God is not great by a greatness that is not that which he himself is – as if God were, so to speak, a partaker in greatness when he is great. For in that case greatness would be greater than God. But there cannot be anything greater than God. Therefore, he is great by that greatness which is identical with himself (5.19.11).

## Creation

Augustine wrote no fewer than five commentaries on the creation story in the book of *Genesis*. He rejects, or at least severely qualifies, the picture of God the Creator as a divine craftsman, which is, for example, in Plato's *Timaeus*. "You did not hold anything in your hand," he writes in *Confessions* 11.5.7, "of which you made this heaven and earth, for how could you come by what you had not made to make something?" According to Augustine God created heaven and earth out of nothing (*ex nihilo*). Although Augustine concedes that the opening verses of *Genesis* allow multiple defensible interpretations, he insists that nothing besides God exists, except through God's creation, not even space or time.

Interestingly, Augustine also, like Descartes, supposes that God sustains creation. If God's power "ever ceased to govern creatures," he writes,

their essences would pass away and all nature would perish. When a builder puts up a house and departs, his work remains in spite of the fact that he is no longer there. But the universe will pass away in the twinkling of an eye if God withdraws his ruling hand (*Literal Commentary on Genesis*, 4.12.22).

## Time

A philosopher's favorite passage from Augustine is very likely to be the discussion of the nature of time in Book 11 of the *Confessions*. "What, then, is time?" Augustine asks; "if no one asks me, I know; if I should want to explain it to a questioner, I do not know" (11.14.17). This passage is emblematic of philosophy. In a way, time is an everyday notion. We all know what it is. We also know how to tell time and keep our appointments. But we will be unlikely to be able to give an account of the nature of time that will satisfy a philosopher.

To begin his discussion of the nature of time Augustine draws on a perplexity to be found in Aristotle (*Physics*, 4.10), but not likely to be original even with him. Augustine draws it out to underline its importance. Times are long or short. He points out. But it is obvious, he thinks, that the past is no more and the future is not yet. Only the present exists. But, strictly speaking, not all of the present century, the present year, the present day even the present minute is ever really present. Strictly speaking, only the "now," conceived as a durationless divider between the past and the future, is ever present. But that is neither long nor short, so it cannot be time. Thus, if only the present exists, there is no time.

Augustine resolves this conundrum by looking inward. "It is in you, my mind, that I measure my times" (11.27.37). So time is the measure of something mental. That is, it is the measure of past events as remembered, future events as anticipated, and present events as experienced and held together in the mind. This is a classically subjective view of time.

This famous discussion of the nature of time is embedded in an account of God's creation of heaven and earth according to the beginning of

the Book of *Genesis*. Augustine wrote no fewer than five commentaries on the biblical creation story, the longest being his *De genesi ad litteram* (*Literal Commentary on Genesis*). In *Confessions* 11 he responds to the skeptical challenge (which he attributes in other works to the Manicheans), “What was God doing before he made heaven and earth?” His response is that, in creating heaven and earth, God created both time and place. Thus there was no “before creation” (11.8.15), nor was there any place where God made heaven and earth (11.5.7).

In the *Confessions* Augustine rejects the idea that time could be the measure of the movement of the heavenly bodies. In the other commentaries, however, he claims that time is the measure of motion. On perhaps the most plausible interpretation of these writings, his idea is that “unordered time” began with the thinking of the angels. But human time began with the creation of Adam’s mind.

## Evil

The problem of evil seems to have occupied Augustine’s thinking throughout most of his adult life. It is, no doubt, central to what he found attractive about Manicheism in his 9-year period as a Manichean disciple. If there is a cosmic principle of evil coeval with, and equally powerful to, the cosmic principle of good, then there is no philosophical problem of evil, that is, no philosophical problem about how it can be that evil exists. It is when we suppose, as Augustine came to believe, that “God is good and is most mightily superior” to everything else that the problem becomes acute. “Then where and whence is evil?” Augustine asks (*Confessions*, 7.5.7).

Augustine considers simply denying that evil exists. “Can it be,” he asks, “that there simply is no evil?” Then, he reasons, the fear of evil is unfounded. Still, an unfounded fear of evil would itself be evil (*ibid.*). Augustine returns a little later in *Confessions* 7 to embrace the Neoplatonic idea that evil has no real substance; instead it is privation and so, in a way, does not exist.

In various of his writings Augustine finds the root cause of evil in human free will. And he insists that having free will is necessary for moral agency. His idea is that, first, even though God created human beings and they created evil, God did not therefore create evil. Moreover, genuine moral agency is such an important good that God, in His goodness, gave it to human beings, despite his foreknowledge that Adam and his progeny would choose wrongly and create evil.

In *On Free Choice of the Will* Augustine’s interlocutor, Evodius, is not satisfied with this response. “Doesn’t it seem to you,” he asks Augustine,

If free will is given for acting morally, it ought not to have been possible to turn it to sinning. Shouldn’t it have been like justice, which was given to a human being for living in a good way? (2.2.4.8)

We might expect Augustine to argue that, quite possibly, even an omnipotent being could not grant human beings free will without the possibility that they would use it wrongly. But, toward the end of his life anyway, Augustine allows that the blessed in heaven will have the most perfect freedom of the will, which carries with it an inability to sin (*City of God*, 22.30). But, he argues, this perfect freedom could not have been given to Adam or his progeny, without letting them partake in God’s impeccable nature.

## Ethics

Augustine was an extreme intentionalist in ethics. In his *Commentary on the Lord’s Sermon on the Mount* he identifies three conditions necessary and sufficient for a complete sin: (i) suggestion, (ii) pleasure, and (iii) consent. The immediate inspiration for this account is the saying of Jesus, “Everyone who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart” (*Matthew* 5:28). On Augustine’s view, consent to perform a sinful action already constitutes a complete sin; no “outward” action needs to have been carried out.

His intentionalism leads him to worry about whether he is responsible for the acts of his dream

self (*Confessions*, 10.30.42). Although it seems to him unfair to count dreamt adultery as a sin, it is unclear how his various ethical and metaphysical commitments can allow him to escape moral responsibility for acts he commits in his dreams.

Drawing on a contrast between those things that are desirable in themselves with those things that are desirable for the sake of something else, Augustine says that things of the first sort are to be enjoyed (*frui*), whereas things of the second sort are to be used (*uti*). Vice, he says, is wanting to use what is meant to be enjoyed or wanting to enjoy what is meant to be used (*On Diverse Questions*, 83.30). In the end, it is only God who is to be enjoyed.

Augustine followed Ambrose in adding the Pauline virtues of faith, hope, and charity to the classical virtues of temperance, courage, wisdom, and justice. He offers an interpretation of each of virtues that makes each one an expression of the love of God. Thus, for example, temperance is love “keeping itself whole and incorrupt for God” and courage is love “bearing everything readily for the sake of God” (*On the Morals of the Catholic Church*, 15.25). In this way Augustine provides a Christian analogue to the idea of the unity of the virtues that one finds in Plato and Aristotle.

## Just War

Augustine was certainly not the first thinker to suppose that a war could be a just war if, and only if, it satisfied certain conditions. Requirements for justice in going to war (*jus ad bellum*) and requirements for waging a war justly (*jus in bello*) were already laid out by Cicero in his *On the Republic*. But Augustine’s views on this topic have had great influence on later thinkers and even politicians.

Although Augustine takes the biblical commandment “Thou shalt not kill!” to be quite a strict prohibition, he supposes it does not apply directly to a soldier in a just war or to an executioner carrying out a lawful order; they are only “an instrument, a sword in the user’s hand” (*City of God*, 1.21). According to him, a war is truly just

if either it is commanded by God or at least it is waged by legitimate authority for just cause with the right intention and with the right love. “The real evils of war”, he writes, “are love of violence, revengeful cruelty, fierce and implacable enmity, wild resistance, and the lust of power” (*Reply to Faustus*, 22.74).

## Philosophy of History

In *City of God* 12.14 Augustine illustrates the idea of eternal recurrence in history, which he attributes to Plato, but which most of us today link with Nietzsche. Augustine’s own conception of history is linear, starting with the creation of Adam and leading to the second coming of Christ. His account divides universal history into seven ages, analogous to the seven days of creation. He argues that divine providence, like divine foreknowledge, is compatible with human free will.

## Cross-References

- ▶ [Anselm of Canterbury](#)
- ▶ [Certainty](#)
- ▶ [Church Fathers](#)
- ▶ [Epistemology](#)
- ▶ [Mental Word/Concepts](#)
- ▶ [Platonism](#)
- ▶ [Proofs of the Existence of God](#)
- ▶ [Sense Perception, Theories of](#)
- ▶ [Skepticism](#)
- ▶ [Thomas Aquinas](#)
- ▶ [Time](#)
- ▶ [Trinity](#)
- ▶ [Will](#)

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## Augustine in Byzantium

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### Abstract

Up to 1281, when Maximos Planoudes, an erudite Byzantine theologian and scholar, who had been engaged in the discussions of the Byzantine with Roman Church and was well trained in Classical Latin, translated Augustine's *De trinitate*, Augustine's thought was almost totally unknown to the Christian East. The *De trinitate* was widely read and used; still, this was done almost exclusively from the theological viewpoint, most usually in the debates over Palamite theology and the quarrel between pro-Latin and anti-Latin theologians. A probable minor exception, Nicholas Kabasilas' use of the anti-skeptical "Augustinian cogito," does not alter this image. In the second half of the fourteenth century, Demetrios and Prochoros Kydones, motivated by their theological stands, translated also the *Homilies on John's Gospel* 94–96 and 99–100; five excerpts from the *Contra Julianum*; the *De*

*libero arbitrio* I, 1–90; eight *Epistles*; some small sections from the *De vera religione*; the *De beata vita* and the *Enchiridion sive de fide, spe et caritate*; Pseudo-Augustine’s *De decem plagis Aegyptiorum et de decem praeceptis*; Pseudo-Augustine’s (Fulgentius of Ruspe’s) *De fide seu de regula fidei ad Petrum*; the pseudo-*Soliloquia*; and Prosperus of Aquitania’s *Sententiae ex Augustino delibatae*. It was the first time that these texts became available to the Byzantine world; yet, as far as we know, they contributed nothing to Byzantine philosophy proper; they found a place only in theological disputes.

## Phases of the Byzantines’ Knowledge of Augustine

### From the Beginning Up to the Middle Thirteenth Century

Because of the gradually strengthened language barrier, the Latin Patristic literature was almost completely inaccessible to the Byzantines. Augustine’s texts were no exception to this rule. In the Byzantine literature from the sixth to the middle of the thirteenth century, his name occurs only from time to time, usually mentioned among other Patristic authorities, in the context of ecclesiastical history or of the history of dogma.

### From 1281 to the Middle Fourteenth Century

In 1281, Maximos Planoudes, an erudite Byzantine theologian and scholar, who had been engaged in the discussions of the Byzantine with Roman Church and was well trained in Classical Latin, translated (among several ancient Latin works) Augustine’s *De trinitate* in its entirety. The influence of the translation was considerable; yet, it was confined to the theological field, in the context of which it was produced. Most (if not all) of the readers of this text, such as Barlaam of Calabria (c. 1290?–1348), Gregory Palamas (1296–1357), Prochoros Kydones, Makarios Chrysokephalos (c. 1300–c. 1382), Joseph Bryennios (c. 1350–c. 1431), and George Scholarios – Gennadios II (c. 1400–1472 or shortly after), were primarily interested in

Augustine’s doctrine of the procession of the Holy Spirit. Most of them regarded the *De trinitate* as compatible with the Orthodox rejection of the *Filioque*. Palamas was also highly impressed by the soteriological theory of Book XIII, by the way Augustine elaborated Plotinus’ doctrine of the inapplicability of Aristotle’s Categories on God and used it in order to refute Eunomius’ Trinitarian doctrine (Books V–VII), by the Trinitarian images in the human soul as well as by some minor moral remarks. Palamas found Augustine’s doctrine of the way Categories (especially “relation”) can describe God as a useful tool in his polemic against the deniers of his distinction between God’s “essence” and “energies.” Nobody, however, showed any interest in the rich philosophical aspects of this work, especially Augustine’s doctrine of the human soul and its epistemological implications. The only probable instance of philosophical use of this work is Nicholas Kabasilas’ (c. 1325–post-1391) *Contra Pyrrhonem*, where skepticism is combated, *inter alia*, by means of an argument close to the famous “Augustinian cogito,” which occurs in many of Augustine’s works, the *De trinitate* included, too.

### Middle Fourteenth Century Onward

In the second half of the Byzantine fourteenth century, two issues dominated in almost every intellectual’s mind: the tug of war between Palamite and anti-Palamite theologians and the conflict between pro-Latins and anti-Latins. Demetrios Kydones (c. 1324–1397), who was both pro-Latin and anti-Palamite, and his brother, Prochoros (c. 1330–c. 1371), who was an anti-Palamite (officially condemned in 1368), translated into Greek certain Augustinian (and pseudo-Augustinian) writings in order to reinforce their theological positions. Demetrios, by so doing, was cumulating authoritative texts over texts where the *Filioque* was explicitly stated (and thus making the traditional apologetic strategies of the Greek theologians difficult to follow) or Palamas’ doctrine of the “divine light” was contradicted. The latter also holds true for

Prochoros. In particular, Demetrios translated four pieces as having allegedly been produced by Augustine: two genuine, that is, the *Homilies on John's Gospel* 94–96 and 99–100 (regarding the Holy Spirit) and five excerpts from the *Contra Julianum*, and two spurious, that is, Fulgentius of Ruspe's *De fide seu de regula fidei ad Petrum* and the late thirteenth century pseudo-*Soliloquia* (imbued with the devotional spirit of Augustine's *Confessiones*). In the pseudo-*Soliloquia*, written by Bernoaldus of Saint-Marien d'Auxerre in the first decade of the thirteenth century, probably translated in 1371–1373 and dedicated to the empress Helen Kantakouzene Palaiologina (1333/1334–1397; daughter of John VI Kantakouzenos and wife of John V Palaiologos), the translator believed that he found the sane doctrine of what “God's light” is, that is, not a strange sort of being “around God” but Jesus Christ himself (cf. Joh. 1, 9). Traces of influence of this work are seen in Nicholas Kabasilas' *De vita in Christo*. Demetrios also translated Prosperus of Aquitania's *Sententiae ex Augustino delibatae*, which consists of numerous genuine excerpts from Augustine's *œuvre*. Prochoros translated eight of Augustine's *Epistles* (132, 137, 138, 92, 143, 28, 147 in part, and 82), several of which touch themes of apologetics (Incarnation) and systematic theology. In some of them, it is stressed that God cannot be seen through the bodily eyes but only by pure heart. He also translated *De libero arbitrio* I, 1–90, and some small sections from the *De vera religione*, the *De beata vita*, and the *Enchiridion sive de fide, spe et caritate*, as well as Pseudo-Augustine's *De decem plagis Aegyptiorum et de decem praeceptis*. Investigation into the reasons why these texts were chosen by Demetrios and Prochoros for translation is still in process. In any case, both Palamites and anti-Palamites, as well as both pro-Latin and anti-Latin theologians, regarded Augustine as one of the greatest Fathers of the Church, though this was stressed particularly by the pro-Latins. Some of the above translations remain unedited or insufficiently edited. Offering a full account of their role in Late Byzantine thought requires that they all be properly edited.

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- ▶ [Demetrios Kydones](#)
- ▶ [Gregory Palamas](#)
- ▶ [Nicholas Chamaëtos Kabasilas](#)
- ▶ [Prochoros Kydones](#)
- ▶ [Thomism, Byzantine](#)

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## Augustine of Ancona

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### Abstract

Augustine of Ancona (Augustinus [Triumphus] de Ancona) (1270/1273–1328), an Augustinian friar, wrote at least 32 theological and philosophical works but is chiefly known

for his *Summa de ecclesiastica potestate*, a systematic argument for the supreme power of the pope in both temporal and spiritual affairs.

### Biographical Information

Augustine of Ancona studied at Paris and lectured there on the *Sentences* of Peter Lombard between 1302 and 1306. He then served as lector, probably at Padua, in a school of his monastic community, the Augustinian Order of Hermits. In 1313 or, more likely, 1315, he returned to Paris to lecture for 3 years as a master in theology. He became chaplain to Charles, son of King Robert of Naples, in 1322. He completed the *Summa de ecclesiastica potestate* by the end of 1326. The cognomen “Triumphus,” based on a supposed relationship to an ancient family of Ancona, is first used in 1581. It appears in the 1582 Rome edition of the *Summa*, along with an inflated biography of Augustine, later corrected by Ministeri (1951/1952).

### Thought

Augustine of Ancona's *Summa de ecclesiastica potestate* is distinctly a theological treatise, relying primarily on arguments from the Scripture, the church fathers, and canon law. Nevertheless, it is of interest for political philosophy in two ways: for its recurrent engagement with philosophical themes, especially natural law, and for its outline of a global political structure dependent on one supreme power.

Augustine considers the pope's power first in itself (qq 1–34), then in relation to the acts of temporal and spiritual dominion or lordship (*dominium*) for which it is ordained (qq 35–75), and finally in relation to the graded perfections of status resulting from such power (qq 76–112). All ultimate earthly authority is claimed for the papacy. The world as a whole (*tota machina mundialis*) is a single governmental unit (*principatus*) and should have a single ruler (q 22, a 3; q 49, a 2; q 60, a 4). The pope is the

intermediate between God and Christians (q 44, a. 1; cf. q 1, aa 1, 3–9), and, since Christ by his passion has merited judicial power over every creature, the pope’s authority extends to pagans and Jews as well (qq 23–24). He can correct, depose, or institute (without the request or consent of others) the rulers of any realm (q 46, aa 1–3). Anyone suffering unjustly may appeal to him from the sentence of any man whatever, whether king or emperor (q 45, a 3). The pope could not relinquish such power even if he wished to, for just as God cannot deny himself to be lord of all, so his vicar cannot exempt anyone from papal jurisdiction and cannot deny that he has universal *dominium*. To do so would be to fall into Manichaeism (q 61, aa 2–3). Accordingly, all rights are derived from God to men through the pope, and it is principally for him to maintain others in these derived rights (q 1, aa 3, 7–8; qq 44–46; q 75, a 1).

Virtually all recent discussion of the *Summa*, reviewed by Walsh (2000), has been sparked by Wilks’ 1964 monograph, *The Problem of Sovereignty in the Later Middle Ages: The Papal Monarchy with Augustinus Triumphus and the Publicists*. On the basis of theses such as those summarized above, Wilks argued that Augustine’s account of papal power amounted to a theory of “true sovereignty” (287). Critics of Wilks have sometimes charged him with anachronism in applying a modern concept, sovereignty, to a medieval author and have pointed to passages in the *Summa*, which seem to show that for Augustine the pope’s authority was not as absolute as Wilks made it appear. There are indeed important qualifying passages, as we shall see and as Wilks himself recognized, but it is not always clear that these are consistent with the maximalist theses above (Wilks thought not). Even if they are, Augustine’s claim that only papal authority comes immediately from God places the pope’s power on a distinctly higher plane than that of any other mortal. Considered in this light, the charge of anachronism seems ill founded.

The scholastic *quaestio* form of the *Summa* required discussion of positions counter to the one defended by the author. Augustine’s discussion of claims to authority made for councils of

the whole church was sufficiently substantial to make his work an important resource in the conciliar period (Walsh 1991). His account of papal authority in relation to natural law is complex. The pope should not be obeyed if he commands anything contrary to natural or divine law (q 22, a 1). Consequently, he cannot justly deprive pagans of political authority, although he can punish them for acting against natural law (q 23, aa 3–4); he cannot free slaves (q 22, a 5) or arbitrarily take one person’s property and give it to another (q 54, a 4, *ad 1*). Yet a papal precept binds more than the law of nature, since it binds not only potentially but also actually, not only universally but also particularly. Moreover, the “impressing” of the power of binding in the pope in Christ’s committal of the church to Peter (Matt. 16:18) is more unailing (*infallibilior*) than the impression in our minds of the law of nature, also made by God but only as a habit, which can fall into evil in its actual exercise (q 63, a 1; cf. q 60, a 1). On some matters, Augustine counsels restraint in the pope’s exercise of his unlimited power. If the pope orders one thing and the emperor another, the pope is to be obeyed, not the emperor. However, since all power is from God, the pope ought to maintain and govern – not abolish or undermine – secular rulers and kings (q 22, a 3).

The most fundamental apparent qualification of Augustine’s papal absolutism stems from his distinction between the perfection of the papal status and the possible imperfection of an individual pope (q 101, a 3). Augustine, who had been distressed at the election of Clement V, held that a faulty pope was subject to censure by any Christian (q 7, a 1). Further, a pope who fell into heresy was spiritually dead, *ipso facto* ceased to be pope, and could be declared deposed by others, most suitably by a general council (q 5, aa 1, 6; cp. q 22, a 1). The practical import of Augustine’s acceptance of papal heresy as a possibility is unclear, however, since there is no formal procedure in his system for determining the actual occurrence of such an event.

The papacy has been a fact on the ground in the world since at least the fourth century of the common era. Accordingly, Augustine of



Ancona's argument for the supreme power of the pope in both temporal and spiritual affairs has abiding relevance for theology, philosophy, and political thought as papacy and world go on, for it combines the subtlety and precision of mature scholasticism with a sense of issues in later thought that continue to concern us.

## Cross-References

- ▶ [Giles of Rome, Political Thought](#)
- ▶ [James of Viterbo](#)
- ▶ [John Torquemada](#)
- ▶ [Marsilius of Padua](#)
- ▶ [William of Ockham](#)

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## Avicbron

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### Abstract

From the eleventh century onward, the axis of philosophical production in Arabic gradually moved from eastern territories to Andalusia (Muslim Spain), which was also the main center of Jewish culture until at least the mid-twelfth century. One of the most original and representative figures in this period is Salomon Ibn Gabirol (1021–1058), author of very popular poems in Hebrew and not so popular



(though no less important) philosophical treatises in Arabic. We find exactly in one of these treatises, the *Fountain of Life*, the most characteristic expression of Ibn Gabirol's thought, i.e., the doctrine of universal hylomorphism: all beings, unlike God, are composed of matter and form (hylomorphism derives from the Greek terms *hyle* "matter" and *morphé* "form"); this is also true of spiritual substances (intelligences and angels), whose matter is not corporeal or sensible, but purely intelligible.

### Biographical Information

The scarce, essential biographical information on Salomon Ibn Gabirol (Abū Ayyūb Sulaymān Ibn Jabīrūl l-Qurṭūbī in Arabic) has a double source: the internal one of his poetical compositions; and the external one of the Arab bibliographer Ibn Sa'īd of Toledo (1029–1070) and the Jewish thinker Mosheh ben Ya'āqov Ibn 'Ezra (1055–1138).

Ibn Gabirol was born in Malaga around 1021, though his family originally came from Cordoba. He spent most of his life in Saragossa, distinguishing himself from the age of 16 in a series of poetical compositions of both a sacred and profane character. He was forced to leave the city because of a declared interest in philosophical enquiry, for which he was accused of heresy; he sought and obtained protection in Granada, under Shemuel ha-Nagid Ibn Nagrela, vizier to the local sovereign Habbus. He died prematurely in Valencia in 1058, when he was in his 30s, leaving a variety of writings, which as a whole can be classified on the basis of a precise linguistic distinction.

Reflecting the bilingualism of many Jewish thinkers of his day, Ibn Gabirol uses Hebrew for his poetical works and Arabic for his prose. On the one hand, he wrote a vast and popular collection of poems (*dīwān*), with over 500 compositions in various genres, and a grammar in verse (*'Anaq*), conceived specifically in order to extol the Hebrew language. On the other hand, he wrote philosophical works in Arabic: *The Improvement of the Moral Qualities* (*Kitāb iṣlāh al-aḥlāq*), written in Saragossa in 1045, is primarily an

ethical treatise with a psychophysiological bent that leaves no room for doubt as to Ibn Gabirol's religious and cultural identity (indeed the work is full of quotations from the Old Testament in support of his theses); the *Choice of Pearls*, of which only the Hebrew translation is extant, is a collection of proverbs, maxims, and parables taken from Arabic literature; the *Fountain of Life* (*Kitāb yanbū' al-ḥayāt*) is a work of pure metaphysics, freed from the theological or apologetic concerns that characterize so much of medieval Jewish philosophical production. No longer extant in the original Arabic (apart from a few quotations in Mosheh Ibn 'Ezra), the *Fountain of Life* has survived mainly in its Latin version: it was produced around 1150 in Toledo by Dominicus Gundisalvi and John of Spain, with the title *Fons Vitae* and ascribed to a certain "Avicebron". Given that the text had no bibliographical references, the Latin masters knew nothing of the author's actual identity, nor of his ethnic or religious background, and so they generally took Avicebron (or Avencebrol, Avicembron, Avicebrol, depending on the various deformations of the name in Latin due to the influences of the Iberian vernacular) to be one of the great Arab philosophers (*falāsifa*) or else an Arab who had converted to Christianity.

This misunderstanding persisted until the French scholar Salomon Munk demonstrated in 1846 that the Avicebron of the Latins could be identified with Ibn Gabirol, known in the Hebrew world as the author of famous religious compositions. And so the two figures, who until that time had enjoyed a parallel yet independent fame within a Hebrew and Latin context (it is now an indisputable fact that Ibn Gabirol's philosophical works were well known almost exclusively in the Latin world), were reunited in a single historical personage.

A Hebrew version of the *Fountain of Life*, with the title *Liqquṭim mi-sefer Meqor ḥayyim*, or *Extracts from the Fountain of Life*, also exists. It was produced around 1270 by the philosopher Shem Tov Ibn Falaquera with the purpose of reducing the work to its discursive nucleus. Apart from being later and shorter, the Hebrew version differs from the Latin in not being presented in the form of a dialogue (between a

*magister* and his *discipulus*), which instead characterizes the latter.

## Thought

In the history of ideas the doctrine of universal hylomorphism is most often associated with the name of Avicbron: all beings other than God, as is frequently repeated in the *Fons Vitae*, are composed of matter and form, even though it is impossible to find in simple, or spiritual, substances the same matter (corporeal matter) that characterizes composite, or sensible, substances. Yet how does Avicbron develop his thesis?

The *Fons Vitae* is divided into five books that focus on the conceptual pair of matter and form, analyzed according to a progressive broadening of the field of enquiry: the first book establishes the metaphysical and cosmological premises necessary for the definition of universal matter and universal form; the second examines universal corporeal matter as a substratum of corporeal form; the third demonstrates the existence of simple substances; the fourth shows that these too are composed of matter and form; and the fifth analyzes universal matter and universal form in themselves. This is not all, however: looking at the different ways in which matter and form are present in the different levels of the universe, Avicbron offers the reader a path of progressive ascent from the sensible world to the “flowering garden” of the intelligible world, as the only means of finally achieving the happiness and the end for which man was created. In this sense, the expression “*evasio mortis et applicatio ad originem vitae*” with which the fifth book ends expresses in the most efficacious and suggestive way possible the idea that only those who have undertaken the path of self-purification can reach not only the afterlife, but also, and above all, the Fountain of Life itself.

The overall scheme of the *Fons Vitae* is typically Neoplatonic and therefore legitimates the general evaluation of Avicbron as the most important heir of the Neoplatonic tradition in Jewish philosophy. The universe is ordered hierarchically, descending from the First Cause, i.e.,

God, in less and less pure degrees of perfection, starting from which it is possible to re-ascend (and know), up to a certain point. The First Cause is in itself unknowable: the only access to it is represented by its effects, which depend on the Will, rather than the essence, of God. The presence of the Will as a link between the First Cause and Creation is indispensable to Avicbron’s cosmos, in order to preserve the purity and transcendence of God, since it is only one of his faculties (in Latin *virtus*), i.e., the Will, that comes into contact with all the rest.

So, if these are the general coordinates of Avicbron’s discourse, it is easy to conclude that the first effects of the divine Will are universal matter and universal form, purposely introduced as the “roots” of the whole universe or, in other words, as the principles from which every being is composed. These are followed, in descending order, by the Intellect (the Neoplatonic hypostasis *Nous*); the Soul, subdivided into rational, animal and vegetable; and finally Nature, which represents the lowest level of simple substances, from which corporeal substance originates. Of course, the term “matter,” which the different substances in Avicbron’s cosmos have in common, takes on different meanings in reference to the various hierarchical levels of the real. It indicates, first of all, primary universal matter, which, at least potentially, is simple and devoid of form, and as such functions as a common substratum of the intelligible and sensible worlds; next, intelligible matter, which sustains the simple and spiritual forms of intelligible substances; corporeal matter emanating from Nature, which functions as a substratum of the *forma corporeitatis* and the form of quantity; then, in succession, the incorruptible matter of the heavenly bodies, the matter of primary elements, and finally, the matter of composite single substances.

The basic premises of the doctrine of hylomorphism are expounded by Avicbron mainly in the fourth book of the *Fons Vitae* and can be summarized in the following three points:

- The need to indicate as clearly as possible the difference between the absolute simplicity of the First Cause and the composite nature of

every one of its effects (both intelligible and sensible).

- The analogy between the inferior, or sensible, world, and the superior, or intelligible, one. The inferior world is made in the image of the superior one and flows from it. Therefore, if the inferior world has a hylomorphic composition, then inevitably, the superior one has the same composition. In other words, the superior world cannot in itself be devoid of those properties that it communicates to what is inferior.
- The absolutely innovative idea that matter, as the founding dimension of all reality, is not a principle of differentiation, as instead Aristotle maintains. If it is true that even spiritual realities differ, they evidently converge in something (in matter, to be precise) and are distinguished by their form. The conclusion is unequivocal: every level of reality is configured in the framework outlined by Avicbron as a progressive determination, or limitation, of primary matter, wrought by the different forms (whether spiritual or corporeal) that imprint themselves on this matter, establishing, in each case, its spiritual or corporeal nature.

To his disciple's objection that if everything were effectively composed of matter and form, it would not make any sense to distinguish between simple and composite substances, Avicbron replies (once again in strictly Neoplatonic terms) that some things are called "simple" not in an absolute, but only in a relative sense: every being is simple in relation to that which follows it and composite in relation to that which precedes it, with the result that simplicity can coexist, without any inconvenience, with the composition of matter and form. Nevertheless, if this is still not sufficient to demonstrate the omnipresence of the two elements, we can also recall that matter does not exist without form, just as form does not exist without matter, not even in the twinkling of an eye (*ictu oculi*). Matter needs form in order to be actualized, just as form subsists only where there is a substratum to be in-formed. Therefore, given that matter and form are never present at different times (except *in opinione*), and that every substance is both simple and composite, the obvious

consequence is that these two roots characterize every finite being and are found at every level of the universe.

The doctrine of hylomorphism became an important subject of debate in the Latin production of the thirteenth century. Certain Franciscan masters – for instance, Alexander of Hales and Bonaventure of Bagnoregio – while not referring directly to Avicbron, use the theory of hylomorphic composition in order to distinguish the First Cause from its effects, demonstrating thereby that only of God it is possible to predicate simplicity, in the full and perfect sense. Angels, on the other hand, though they too are called "simple" in that they are incorporeal, nevertheless possess intelligible matter (and hence an element in potency).

The case of the Dominican masters (Albertus Magnus and Thomas Aquinas) is the exact opposite. Avicbron is expressly indicated by them as the creator of an unfounded and erroneous doctrine that has to be radically contested. More precisely, the exigency underlying the doctrine of universal hylomorphism – i.e., the need to postulate a composition that distinguishes God from spiritual creatures – is recognized in all its importance but is transferred to a deeper level. Indeed, Aquinas sustains the idea that the composition of finite beings is not the physical composition of matter and form, but rather the metaphysical one of essence and being, in which essence functions as a potential substratum and being functions as actuality; and since, in simple substances, essence coincides with form, the true metaphysical caesura is not to be sought between what is really immaterial and what isn't, but instead between that which is above every form (God) and that which possesses at least a formal determination.

## Cross-References

- ▶ [Alexander of Hales](#)
- ▶ [Aristotelianism in the Greek, Latin, Syriac, Arabic, and Hebrew Traditions](#)
- ▶ [Bonaventure](#)
- ▶ [Essence and Existence](#)
- ▶ [Form and Matter](#)

- ▶ [Philosophy, Jewish](#)
- ▶ [Thomas Aquinas](#)

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# B

## Bahmanyār ibn Marzubān

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### Abstract

Bahmanyār ibn (al-)Marzubān is generally considered as one of the major first-generation students of Ibn Sīnā. He, however, presented ideas of his own. They show that he was not always blindly following the views of his “master.” His work was not unnoticed in the later Islamic and (Arabic) Jewish tradition.

### Life

Not much is known about Bahmanyār’s life. Even his precise name was the subject of a great deal of confusion both in medieval and modern sources. His name does not appear in Ibn Sīnā’s *autobiography/biography* complex and is never explicitly mentioned by the latter in any of his writings. The name Bahmanyār appears only in a small letter and a note addressed to Ibn Sīnā that have been included in the materials transmitted under the name *Mubāḥaṭāt* (Ibn Sīnā 1992: 145 and 175). But there is easily convincing evidence that there was an important exchange of letters between him and Ibn Sīnā. When the latter uses the expression *al-Shaykh al-fāḍil*, “the eminent

Sheikh,” he almost certainly is referring to Bahmanyār (Michot 1997: 146). From these letters one gets the impression that Bahmanyār was Ibn Sīnā’s most beloved pupil. But, at the same time, one sees signs of tension. Bahmanyār, obviously under the influence of Abū l-Qāsim al-Kirmānī (with whom the young Ibn Sīnā had had a controversy and whom he continued to despise until his death), reveals on several occasions to be critical of some of Ibn Sīnā’s (innovative) ideas. At least in one of these cases, Ibn Sīnā expresses his disappointment about Bahmanyār’s lack of loyalty (Ibn Sīnā 1992: 175–176). That Bahmanyār was a disciple of Ibn Sīnā is explicitly said by the classical biographer al-Bayhaqī, who states, moreover, that he was a Zoroastrian stemming from Azerbaijan (al-Bayhaqī 1996: 113–114). However, whether Bahmanyār was a Zoroastrian, as said by Rukn al-Dīn ibn al-Malāḥimī al-Khwārazmī (Ibn al-Malāḥimī al-Khwārazmī 2008: 14), or a Muslim, or maybe a Zoroastrian by birth, who, in his later life, converted to Islam, as did his maternal uncle to whom he dedicated his major work, *Kitāb al-Taḥṣīl*, remains an open question. Also his being an Azerbaijani by origin is not absolutely sure, especially if one accepts the identification of his father with the brother of the Sayyida who was mother of Majd al-Dawla (Michot 1992: 154). According to al-Bayhaqī, Bahmanyār died in 1066. Although most scholars accept this date, one cannot totally exclude an earlier one (al-Rahim 2009: 11).

## Works and Thought

Among Bahmanyār's works, his *Kitāb al-Taḥṣīl* is by far the most voluminous and best known. This compendium of philosophy consists of three parts: logic, metaphysics, and "science of the states of the essences of existent Beings" (*al-'ilm bi-aḥwāl a'yān al-mawjūdāt*). In spite of what Bahmanyār states at the opening of his work, namely, that he structures the work according to the structure of Ibn Sīnā's *Dānesh-Nāmeḥ* (Bahmanyār 1375H.S.:1), he presents a scheme that fundamentally departs from the latter. Most striking is his replacement of a metaphysics, labeled "divine science" by a metaphysics that is restricted to an ontology, and of a natural science ("physics" in the broad sense) by a science that encompasses both a discussion of God and of all parts of the natural sciences, excluding plants and animals (Janssens 2003, 2007; Eichner 2007: 156). Most telling is the fact that Bahmanyār, in sharp contrast with his "master," includes the discussion of evil inside the section "On Heaven." This does not mean that Bahmanyār consciously wants to mislead his reader in pointing to the structuring of the *Dānesh-Nāmeḥ*, but it makes evident that his affirmation has to be understood in a high qualified way. However, the many (implicit) uses of Avicennian works in the *Kitāb al-Taḥṣīl* make clear that for Bahmanyār Ibn Sīnā was a great thinker and a major authority. Nevertheless, the work contains several ideas that deviate from the (at least, mature) views of his master. In the overall restructuring that is proper to the *Kitāb al-Taḥṣīl*, one might see a tendency to re-Aristotelize Ibn Sīnā's "new" thought. Moreover, in spite of many similarities, one cannot but recognize the existence of differences between Bahmanyār and his "master." They concern such issues as, e.g., the consideration of the substance of a genus as the highest substance or the affirmation that the soul will undergo a change through death but remains similar to its previous status (Aminrazavi 1999: 333). Furthermore, Bahmanyār confers more importance upon the topic of sense knowledge and reduces the strict separation between sense and intellectual knowledge (Sebti 2012: 526). Finally, he makes self-

perception the core idea of his theory of knowledge and no longer attributes to it an anthropological function, i.e., the guarantee of one's personal identity, as his "master" had done (Sebti 2005–2006: 209). Hence, Bahmanyār is clearly not following Ibn Sīnā in every respect. This raises at once the question in which sense he really was a disciple of the latter. This question becomes even more pertinent if one accepts that Ibn Sīnā speaks to him using the term "Shaykh." Such address is, and was, normally only used with regard to someone older and/or higher in rank.

A very critical attitude on the part of Bahmanyār toward his so-called master comes also to the fore in several written exchanges, preserved in the *Mubāḥaṭāt*. Inside them one does not find only letters that in all likelihood are part of a larger, systematic correspondence between Ibn Sīnā and Bahmanyār, but, moreover, several critical questions posed by the latter (and Abū l-Qāsim al-Kirmānī?) to the former, as well as a small letter and note (Reisman 2002: 221–240). In the very same *Mubāḥaṭāt* is included what is maybe a "summary," *talkhīṣ*, by Bahmanyār of Ibn Sīnā's *Ilāhiyyāt* of the *Shifā'*, but this is still in need of further verification (Reisman 2002: 43, 253). The text has circulated in an independent manner (but with an additional chapter that – surprisingly – deals with the distinction between material soul and soul in act) under two different titles: *Fī ithbāt al-mabda' al-awwal* ascribed to Ibn Sīnā and *Mawḍū' al-'ilm al-ma'rūf bi-mā ba'd at-tabi'a* ascribed to Bahmanyār (Mahdawī 1954: 259; Bahmanyār 1851).

Whether Bahmanyār was involved not only in the transmission of Ibn Sīnā's *Ta'līqāt*, *Notes*, as indicated in one of the recensions, but also in their compilation, is questionable (Gutas 2014, 162–164). Indeed, the presence of an outspoken flavor of oral teaching in the work, as well as its belonging to Ibn Sīnā's late period given its including supercommentaries on earlier major works, makes it unlikely that Bahmanyār is their author. Even if Ibn Sīnā in all likelihood returned for a short period (or, maybe, even several short periods) to Rayy during his stay in Isfahan, nothing indicates that he was giving classes there. As seen, his major contacts with Bahmanyār, who



seems to have stayed in Rayy (as was the case with Abū l-Qāsim al-Kirmānī), were by letters.

The treatise *Maqāla fī (ārā' la-mashshā'in fī) umūr al-nafs wa-quwāhā*, which has been preserved in one single manuscript, deals mainly with the perception of the souls of humans and stars. In his exposition of Bahmanyār's thought, Muḥammad Bāqir al-Khwānsārī (d. 1895) refers to one of the latter's works under the title *Kitāb al-bahja*. He suggests that the main topic of this work is God's self-knowledge and, moreover, stresses that according to it knower and known are identified with each other in God (al-Khwānsārī 1972: II, 158). Thus far no manuscript of this work (under the given, or a similar, title) has been found. Moreover, the very succinct information that al-Khwānsārī provides offers no guarantee that he had direct access to the work. He might have derived the given quotation from an earlier source, all the more likely since one finds mention of the work, albeit differently entitled, *Kitāb al-bahja wa-l-sa'āda*, also in Mullā Ṣadrā al-Shīrāzī and al-Narāqī. As to al-Khwānsārī's ascription of a few gnomic sayings to Bahmanyār, it is clearly based on al-Bayhaqī. Whether this ascription is correct or not is hard to say. Similarly, the precise qualification of the *Kitāb al-zīna fī al-mantiq*, which is mentioned by al-Bayhaqī, as being part of the *Kitāb al-Bahja* or of the *Kitāb al-Taḥṣīl* (Rescher 1964: 157), or as an independent work, cannot be decided given its actual loss. Another lost work seems to be the *Kitāb fī l-mūsiqā*, which al-Bayhaqī mentions. Finally, the treatise *Risāla fī marātib al-mawjūdāt*, as well as an incomplete version of it entitled *Faṣl min Kitāb fī ithbāt al-'uqūl al-fā'āla wa-l-dalāla 'alā 'adad-hā min ithbāt al-nufūs al-samāwīya*, is ascribed in the manuscript tradition to Bahmanyār and has been edited under his name (Bahmanyār 1851). However, it turns out to be identical with the *Risāla fī ithbāt al-mufāraqāt*, which is recognized as a work of al-Fārābī by many scholars based on the testimony of numerous manuscripts. The very content of the treatise, namely, the discussion of four material substances, i.e., the Necessary Being, the Active Intelligences, the celestial souls, and the human souls, is clearly more conforming to the title

*Risāla fī ithbāt al-mufāraqāt* than the one that is linked with Bahmanyār's name, i.e., *Risāla fī marātib al-mawjūdāt*. However many uncertainties remain, all the more since the treatise (under the former of the two titles) has also been attributed to another of Ibn Sīnā's pupils, namely, to Ma'sūmī (Daiber 1989: 502). But if it turns definitely out that the work is not Bahmanyār's, it is not easy to explain why a work by one of the giants of classical Arabic philosophy has been transmitted under a slightly modified title with the name of one who is generally considered to be a lesser thinker. However, Bahmanyār's influence is clearly more important than was commonly thought until recent times.

## Influence

Al-Lawkarī (d. ca. 1123), who may have been a direct pupil of Bahmanyār, quotes almost *verbatim* in his major work *Bayān al-ḥaqq bi-ḍimān aṣ-ṣidq* many passages of the latter's *Kitāb al-Taḥṣīl*, although without mentioning this (Janssens 2012). This practice is well attested in the part covering the *Isagoge (Madkhal)* of logic (Al-Lawkarī 1986) and the part entitled "Universal science" of the metaphysics (Al-Lawkarī 1995). In spite of these many quotations, al-Lawkarī, contrary to Bahmanyār, remains faithful to Ibn Sīnā's "new" metaphysical project. His integration of chapters based on the logic or physics of the latter's *Shifā'* can always be explained by explicit remarks in this work. Another possible use of Bahmanyār is maybe present in the first section of the appendix attached to the metaphysics, where one finds two almost literal quotations of the *Risāla fī marātib al-mawjūdāt/ Risāla fī ithbāt al-mufāraqāt*. However, as already indicated, this latter turns out to be more likely a Farabian work.

Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī (d. 1210), in his *Jawābāt al-masā'il al-bukhāriyya*, which is clearly one of his earliest works, mentions twice Bahmanyār's name. In both he refers to the *Kitāb al-Taḥṣīl*, but in the first he mentions in addition the *Mubāḥaṭāt* (al-Rāzī 2014: 14, 55). In the former of the two, al-Rāzī detects a valuable supplement to Ibn Sīnā's

argumentation insofar as it expresses explicitly what is only implicit in Ibn Sīnā's very wording of it (Shihadeh 2014: 387–388). In the latter, he indicates that Bahmanyār mentions a little of what Ibn Sīnā had said in a more outspoken way. All in all, al-Rāzī presents Bahmanyār as remaining fundamentally in line with Ibn Sīnā's thought, having offered at best elements of clarification. In his later works, al-Rāzī seems no longer to make any explicit reference to Bahmanyār, but an implicit use cannot be excluded; on the contrary, such use looks likely in his two interpretative and expository works of Avicennian philosophy, i.e., *al-Mabāḥith al-mashriqiyya* and *al-Mulakhkhaṣ fī l-ḥikma* (Eichner 2009: 151, n. 11).

‘Abd al-Laṭīf al-Baghdādī (d. 1231), in his *autobiography*, points out that he summarized Bahmanyār's *Kitāb al-Taḥṣīl* (Ibn Abī Uṣāybi‘a 1965: 685; Martini-Bonadeo 2013: 122), but he does not say why he did it. The work seems to have been lost.

As to Athīr al-Dīn al-Abhārī (d. 1265), he is credited with a work, entitled *Kitāb al-Maḥṣūl*, that would have been modeled after the *Kitāb al-Taḥṣīl* (Mudarris Raḍawī 1975: 184). It also seems no longer to be extant. Hence, it is difficult to know whether the link with Bahmanyār's is real or is based only in a resemblance in title.

For the Jewish thirteenth-century philosopher of Baghdad, Ibn Kammūna (d. 1284), in his philosophical *summa*, *al-Jadīd fī l-ḥikma*, Bahmanyār's *Kitāb al-Taḥṣīl* forms one of the major sources, although Ibn Kammūna never mentions this or even points to it (Eichner 2009; Naji 2011: 148). In his commentary on al-Suhrawardī's *Talwīḥāt*, at least one passage reveals a similar use (Eichner 2009: 176).

In the school of Shīrāz, at least three thinkers paid attention to Bahmanyār's major work. Jalāl al-Dīn Dawānī (d. 1502), in his *Ḥāshiya*, quotes the *Kitāb al-Taḥṣīl*, namely, a passage where Bahmanyār states that in what is existent (*mawjūd*), being (*wujūd*), is external to it (Pourjavady 2016: 422). This affirmation can be seen as a particular (re-)formulation of the Avicennian idea of the so-called accidentality of existence to essence. Shams al-Dīn Khafrī, on his

turn, in his *Risāla fī l-hayūlā*, refers to the very same work in order to emphasize that Bahmanyār has explicitly stated that a body is individually one, while Ibn Sīnā had claimed that it is numerically one (Khafrī 2015: 108). Khafrī sees neither a complete identity nor a radical opposition between both affirmations. Hence, he seems to consider Bahmanyār as having offered formulations of his own, but these remain more or less in line with the views of his “master.” Finally, Najm al-Dīn al-Nayrīzī (d. ca. 1536) uses in several of his commentaries on earlier works, as, e.g., al-Abhārī's *Hidāya*, Taftāzānī's *Tahdhīb*, and al-Shurawardī's *al-Alwāḥ al-‘Imādiyya*, Bahmanyār's *Kitāb al-Taḥṣīl* as a source text, but most interesting is the fact that he read Bahmanyār's work together with one of his masters, i.e., Ġiyāt al-Dīn al-Dasthakī, as mentioned in the *ijāza* he received from the latter (Pourjavady 2011: 56,113,127,135). This indicates that the *Kitāb al-Taḥṣīl* was considered at the time to be interesting and valuable enough to be included in a teaching curriculum.

Also in the school of Isfahan, Bahmanyār figures as a major source, as evidenced by three of its major representations, i.e., Mīr Dāmād, Mullā Ṣadrā, and Sayyid Aḥmad ‘Alawī. The former of the three, Mīr Dāmād (d. 1631), quotes in *al-Qabasāt* Bahmanyār's *Kitāb al-Taḥṣīl* on several occasions (Rizvi 2016: 452). He refers to Bahmanyār in using the expression “his (i.e., Ibn Sīnā's) student” (Mīr Dāmād 2015: 140–141) and hence suggests the presence of a very close connection between the thoughts of both these thinkers. With regard to the second, and undoubtedly most famous of them, i.e., Mullā Ṣadrā al-Shīrāzī (d. 1640), Bahmanyār's works are among his most influential sources (Bonmariage 2016: 466). Indeed, Mullā Ṣadrā, several times in different works, quotes *verbatim* passages of the *Kitāb al-Taḥṣīl*. Moreover, he not seldom quotes elements of Bahmanyār's correspondence with Ibn Sīnā, as preserved in the *Mubāḥaṭāt*, although it is not clear on which basis – and, as is apparent, not always in a trustworthy way – Mullā Ṣadrā links letters or questions present in the latter specifically with Bahmanyār's name (Janssens 2014: 88–90).

The use of both works is well attested in Mullā Ṣadrā's opus magnum *al-Asfār al-arba'a*, but is present also in, e.g., his (super-)commentary on al-Suhrawardī's *Hikmat al-Ishrāq* (Mullā Ṣadrā/Corbin 1986: 470, 477, 492, 503, 588) or in his marginal glosses on the *Ilāhiyyāt* of Ibn Sīnā's *Shifā'* (Mullā Ṣadrā 1382H.S.:408, 438–439). Although Mullā Ṣadrā often presents Bahmanyār as Ibn Sīnā's disciple, he points now and then to important differences between them. Sometimes he finds the former's view even superior to that of his "master," as, for example, with regard to the very conception of the human life in the hereafter (Mullā Ṣadrā 1375 H.S.:300). However, on other doctrinal issues, e.g., the relation between "being" and "quiddity," Mullā Ṣadrā finds Ibn Sīnā's exposition more trustworthy than Bahmanyār's, who, notwithstanding his clear debt to Ibn Sīnā's wording, missed on this issue the deeper intention of his "master" (Mullā Ṣadrā 1967: 11–12; Jambet 2002: 94–98). At least on one occasion, Mullā Ṣadrā points to Bahmanyār's *Kitāb al-bahja wa-l-sa'āda* (Mullā Ṣadrā 1386HS: VI, 65). He quotes one single sentence that figures also inside the somewhat larger quotation of the same work that al-Khwānsārī offers. Finally, Sayyid Aḥmad al-'Alawī (d. 1638), in his commentary on Ibn Sīnā's *Shifā'*, appears to have an intimate knowledge of Bahmanyār (Nasr 2015: 261). With an explicit reference to the *Kitāb al-Taḥṣīl*, he quotes a passage of the latter, which concerns the qualifications of God's knowledge as active and is used by al-'Alawī as a valuable supplementary piece of information on what might appear as an inconsistency in Ibn Sīnā, namely, between the formulation in the *Ishārāt* and that in other of the latter's works (al-'Alawī 2015: 279).

In the eighteenth century, the Shi'ī thinker Muḥammad Mahdī Narāqī (d. 1794), in his commentary on the *Ilāhiyyāt* of Ibn Sīnā's *Shifā'*, refers to Bahmanyār most of the time by name, but on one occasion under the designation *Ṣāhib al-Taḥṣīl* (Narāqī 1986: 234, 290, 296). From these scanty remarks, one gets the impression that Narāqī detects in Bahmanyār a thinker who has expressed ideas that were not present in Ibn Sīnā, and therefore can be considered, at least with

regard to a few specific points, as worthy of attention in their own right. It has to be mentioned as well that in the Twelfth Investigation of his *Qurrat al-'Uyūn*, he quotes a sentence of the *Kitāb al-bahja wa-l-sa'āda* while presenting it expressly as a work of Bahmanyār (Narāqī 2010: 442). It is striking that this sentence is exactly the same as the one quoted by Mullā Ṣadrā.

Generally speaking, one detects two periods in which Bahmanyār's thought has received particular attention: the thirteenth century and the seventeenth–eighteenth centuries. On the one hand he appears as a proper "disciple" of Ibn Sīnā, but, on the other hand, also as a critical judge of the latter's thought, who did not hesitate to formulate "new" and "different" views with regard to some particular items. Even if his name seems to have been almost ignored for some time (but future search might reveal still undetected uses, both explicit and implicit), it is clear that his philosophical work was considered to be worthy of attention, both as a source of clarification and in its own right.

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## al-Balkhī, Abū Zayd

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### Abstract

Despite Abū Zayd al-Balkhī’s (d. 934 CE) extensive and multifarious bibliography, he is known today almost exclusively as an author of geographical works and the founder of the so-called Balkhī School, a type of geographical writing that combines – highly stylized – regional maps of the Islamic world with detailed descriptions of its provinces, including information on climate, agriculture, etc. Regrettably, Abū Zayd’s geographical work is lost, surviving only in later adaptations, as are almost all his works dealing with the Hellenistic scholarly, particularly philosophical, heritage on the one hand and with Islamic theology and Qur’anic scholarship on the other – the latter an object of some praise from his contemporaries and later biographers. Abū Zayd’s wide-ranging interests (which include topics of traditional Arabic culture) are shared by al-Sarakhsī (d. 899 CE), and both their “encyclopedic” outlooks belong to the tradition of the “philosopher of the Arabs,” al-Kindī (d. soon after 870). Three fragments of works by Abū Zayd that are preserved as quotations – first on the definition of politics, second on the question of free will vis-à-vis divine determination, third on the typology of religious idols – show his independence of thought and ability to apply adequate categories; his one surviving monograph on the *Welfare of Body and Soul* is a witness to his limpid, elegant style and his virtuosity in integrating the Arabic–Islamic heritage, distinct elements of Sasanian political and ethical thought, and the Hellenistic philosophical and scientific tradition.

## Life

Abū Zayd Aḥmad b. Sahl al-Balkhī is, along with Aḥmad b. al-Ṭayyib al-Sarakhsī, a prominent follower of “the philosopher of the Arabs,” al-Kindī. Though he is likely to have missed al-Kindī – born around 850 in a village near Balkh (halfway between today’s Kabul and Bukhara), he came to Baghdad only as a young man, that is, very close to, or after, al-Kindī’s death – he shares with him and his circle a keen interest in all branches of the Hellenistic scholarly heritage, particularly in philosophy, but also an encyclopedic approach to a number of indigenous Arabic–Islamic subjects. Abū Zayd spent 8 years in Baghdad studying philosophy, astrology and astronomy, medicine, the natural sciences, and Qur’anic disciplines. For unknown reasons, he did not stay on in the political and cultural capital of the Sāmānid ruler to act as one of his viziers at his court in Bukhara, but returned to Balkh, where he worked as a teacher, and eventually to an estate in his native village, profiting from a stipend of the local ruler of Balkh and his learned vizier, Abū l-Qāsim al-Ka’bī (d. 931) with whom he conducted a scholarly correspondence. His known pupils are the great philosopher and physician Abū Bakr al-Rāzī (d. 925, or later, whose prescription for Abū Zayd’s rose allergy is preserved), Abū l-Ḥasan al-‘Āmirī (d. 992), and a little known author of a conspectus of the sciences, Ibn Farīḡūn. Abū Zayd died in 934.

## Works

Arabic bibliographical scholarship has collected an impressive list of his writings – all of them lost, except a full-scale work on physical and mental hygiene, three fragments on diverse topics, and a few brief quotations. For classical Islamic scholarship, Abū Zayd’s merits lie, besides his exemplary prose style, in his mastery of theological subjects, that is, exegesis of Qur’anic passages or a study of the names and attributes of God. Today, he is best known as an early representative of Islamic geography, the eponym of the so-called

Balkhī School. Unfortunately, his geographical work is not extant and survives only in the later geographical descriptions by al-Iṣṭakhrī (d. 934) and Ibn Ḥawqal (d. after 973). Abū Zayd’s Geography is said to have consisted of 20 regional maps accompanied by descriptions; its principal new feature being, beyond the data of physical geography, a special interest in climate, agricultural produce, and their impact on the *géographie humaine*.

Abū Zayd’s smooth and elegant style, his appeal to the tastes of the educated court official, and his balance between technical terminology and common ethical sense can best be studied in his sole extant monograph on the *Welfare of the Body and the Soul*. Its first part treats the principles of the interaction between the four elements, seasons, bodily elements, temperaments, etc., and the traditional “non-natural” factors of health, among them food, drink, sleep, bath, and gymnastics, including a quite sophisticated chapter on music therapy. The second, shorter, part of the book on the hygiene of the human soul deals with four mental disorders: anger, fear, sadness, and hallucinations. The concept of interaction between body and soul, and particularly Abū Zayd’s demonstration of how the bodily disposition and dietetic and behavioral measures may correct an unstable condition of the soul, constitute a remarkable contribution to contemporary discussions between ethics and medicine in the Alexandrian tradition and Islamic theology. Obviously, Abū Zayd’s psychosomatic concept and his physiology are indebted to Galen’s writings; his ethics of the equilibrium between extremes (Greek *mesotēs*, Arabic *i’idāl*) and his types of principal mental diseases are largely due to al-Kindī’s reception of Aristotelian and Neoplatonic concepts. In some contexts, notably in his discussion of themes in poetry and songs, we also find consideration of old Arabic Bedouin ideals, but more pervasive is Abū Zayd’s concern for the welfare of the ruler and his entourage, which he sees as a prerequisite for the welfare of his subjects and which is a distinct echo of Sasanian political thought and court ethics.

In a fragment, preserved in an anthology of the great littérateur al-Tawḥīdī (d. after 1009), Abū



Zayd defines politics (*siyāsa*) as a craft which serves the cultivation of a country and protects its inhabitants. The “product” of politics, he says, is owed to five causes (*ʿilal*): the material cause that corresponds with the affairs of the subjects; the formal cause: their general welfare; the active cause: the ruler’s concern for the affairs of his subjects; the intentional cause: the perpetuation of the general welfare; and the instrumental cause: the employment of incitement and intimidation (*tarḡīb wa-tarḡīb*, echoing the Qur’ānic *raḡaban wa-raḡaban*, sura 21, verse 90). As an illustration of how these causes are valid for other crafts, too, Abū Zayd names architecture and medicine, where, for instance, the material cause is earth, clay, stones, and wood for the former, and the human body for the latter, etc. Another parallel between politics and medicine lies in the double function of both the ruler and the physician, to maintain and to restore order. The combination of the four established Aristotelian causes with the Neoplatonic instrumental cause may be due to al-Kindī’s understanding of Proclus’ commentary on the *Timaeus* (cf. I 263, 19–30, Diehl (ed)) or of the *Theologia Aristotelis*, and the parallelization of architecture and medicine as practical crafts is a common feature of the classification of sciences and arts in late antiquity. The inclusion of statecraft, however, especially the usage of terms such as *maṣlaḥa*, “common welfare,” and the pair *tarḡīb-tarḡīb*, is a feature of Abū Zayd’s own characteristic design to combine three traditions of political thought: Hellenistic, Islamic, and Iranian.

Another fragment of Abū Zayd takes the games of backgammon and chess as examples of the principles of deterministic thinking (*jabr*, “compulsion”) versus free will (*qadar*). Determinists, the backgammon players, he says, would attribute the source of human action to God or to the influence of the celestial spheres, and the proponents of free will, the chess players, would hold the individual good or bad choice responsible for a person’s fate. In the medieval discussions, notably among Islamic theologians, on the relative admissibility of chess and backgammon, chess was mostly given precedence. Abū Zayd refrains from offering his own

preference, and his noncommittal and rational report on both positions is as remarkable as his analysis of the types of, and motives for, the veneration of heathen idols, preserved in a Qur’ān commentary of Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī (d. 1209). However, it has been suggested that Abū Zayd’s analysis of the principles of chess might be interpreted as “an argument in favor of Muʿtazilism, as against the ‘orthodox’ Muslim *nard* view of the world, and it could have been the brilliant invention of one of the proponents of Muʿtazilah views” (Rosenthal *Gambling* 167).

Although Abū Zayd’s orthodoxy has been attested to by his contemporaries, later Islamic scholarship has neglected his memory. This is shown by how small the extant part of his considerable œuvre is and how ambiguously later biographers have labeled him. For all of them, the range of his scholarship was notable, but some hesitated whether to list him as a philosopher or a littérateur, others wavered between putting him into philosophy or theology, yet others admired his ability to combine both, *ḥikma* and *sharīʿa*. This multiple outlook is precisely a central feature of the scholarship as it was conducted in the Eastern provinces of the Islamic Empire in the few decennia between al-Kindī and al-Fārābī.

## Cross-References

- ▶ al-ʿĀmirī, Abū l-Ḥasan
- ▶ Aristotle, Arabic
- ▶ Ethics, Arabic
- ▶ Galen, Arabic
- ▶ Ibn Farḡūn
- ▶ al-Kindī, Abū Yūsuf Yaʿqūb ibn Ishāq
- ▶ Proclus, Arabic
- ▶ al-Rāzī, Fakhr al-Dīn
- ▶ al-Sarakhṣī, Aḥmad ibn al-Ṭayyib
- ▶ al-Tawḥīdī, Abū Ḥayyān

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## Barlaam of Calabria

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### Abstract

Barlaam of Calabria (c. 1290?–1348) was a theologian, philosopher, and mathematician. Born Orthodox in Calabria (South Italy), he fled to Byzantium to join Greek monasticism. Commanding both Greek and Latin and well versed in ancient Greek, Patristic, and Byzantine literature, he was recognized by most Greeks as a sage both in profane and religious matters. His attack, however, on Gregory Palamas, a leading spiritual authority at the Mount Athos, and on his peculiar trend of “hesychasm,” led to a condemnation of Barlaam by the Byzantine Church. Turning back to the West, he converted to Catholicism and became a bishop. Clashing with a strong Byzantine tradition, he highly evaluated philosophy, regarding Platonism as compatible with Christianity and Aristotle as compatible with Platonism. Though fond of Neoplatonic literature, he had no taste for its mystical aspect; instead, he regarded moral purification

and acquisition of scientific knowledge as means of one's "assimilation to God."

## Life

Barlaam was born Orthodox in Seminara (Calabria). Ordained monk and priest, he was eager to live in some Greek coenobium imbued by genuinely ascetic spirit. He reached Greece through Arta (c. 1325); he then reached Thessaloniki and Constantinople. Though commanding both Greek and Latin, no Latin influences are traceable in him; his intellectual formation was based almost exclusively on a thorough knowledge of ancient Greek, Patristic, and Byzantine literature. Though admired for his philosophical and scientific (astronomical and mathematical) skills, in 1330 he was fiercely attacked by Nikephoros Gregoras as "arrogant" and a "Latin ignorant." Also admired for his theological erudition and being *hégoumenos* of the Monastery of Our Saviour, he was probably appointed by emperor Andronikos III (1328–1341) and patriarch John Kalekas (1334–1347) as the representative of the Orthodox party in the discussions of the Byzantine Church with two papal legates held in Constantinople (1334–1335). His numerous treatises *Against the Latins* date from these years. Bad feeling as well as his peculiar method of refuting the *Filioque* (which seemed as threatening the Orthodox position alike) provoked a reaction by Gregory Palamas, who described him as a "Latin agent." From 1336 onward, he was engaged in the so-called hesychast controversy, by attacking the psychophysical method of "omphalicism" (probably deriving from the Sufi tradition). After coming back from a failed diplomatic mission to the West (1339), Barlaam published his *Against the Massalians*, where he described Palamas' doctrine of "seeing" God by means of the bodily eyes as a revival of the Massalian heresy. A synod held at Constantinople in 1341 condemned his anti-Palamite views and writings (the latter were destroyed) and exiled him. Turning back to the West, he was converted to Catholicism; in 1342, he was appointed bishop of Ierax

(Seminara). He then wrote some epistles and speeches on behalf of the Catholic doctrines. He was for a short while in personal contact with Petrarch (1304–1374), whom he taught some rudimentary Greek. In 1346, he was sent by Pope Clement VI (1342–1352) to Constantinople to discuss with the Byzantines a unionist project.

## Thought

Most of Barlaam's philosophical ideas should be gathered from his theological and scientific works, the only purely philosophical work among his indisputably genuine writings being the short *Solutions to the Questions Addressed by George Lapithes* (c. 1334).

Barlaam regarded religion and philosophy as two distinct yet compatible ways (i.e., faith and reasoning) of reaching the same end, that is, truth. Placing reason side by side with revelation amounted to a revival of the Early Christian doctrine of "seminal reasons." Since, however, this clashed with the established Byzantine stereotype that "Hellenism" (i.e., fervently studying and ranking ancient Greek philosophy high) was an attitude incompatible with Christianity, Barlaam was presented by Palamas as a "crypto-pagan." Still, Barlaam explained that most of the ancient philosophical schools failed to raise themselves above the realm of the sensibles. Only Platonism did it; thus, it is the only philosophy compatible with Christianity. Neither the Stoic nor the Epicurean attendants of St. Paul's speech in Athens converted to Christianity but only Dionysius the Areopagite, whom Barlaam regarded as a Platonist in view of the *corpus Dionysiacum*. The close affinities of this *corpus* with Proclus made Barlaam feel free to integrate into his writings numerous terms and doctrines from several Proclan works (*Elements of Theology, Platonic Theology, Commentaries on Alcibiades, Parmenides, Timaeus* et al.) and eclectically combine them with Christianity. Barlaam did the same with Plato's texts (e.g., *Euthyphro, Phaedo, Phaedrus, Timaeus, Republic*) as well as with those by many other Neoplatonists (Porphyry, Iamblichus,

Syrianus, Olympiodorus), along with some Byzantine Neoplatonizing authors (Michael Psellos, Michael of Ephesus, Eustratios of Nicaea).

Doing philosophy has two prerequisites. (1) One must purify one's soul by "mortifying its passions." This is necessary, because the human soul is impeded on the one hand by the bodily needs, which tend to turn it into a slave of theirs, and on the other by the senses, which provide it with data which can show to the right direction only if carefully used. (2) One must get rid of the prejudices inserted into one's soul by the social environment and scrutinize one's mature views lest one mistakes a false statement for true. Barlaam presents Socrates as the ideal of living philosophically and adopts verbatim Proclus' elaboration of this ideal (firmly believing in one's own wisdom leads one astray from truth more than just lacking any belief at all, since it amounts to a "double ignorance," i.e., ignorance both of truth and of one's own ignorance). Discerning truth from falsehood can be achieved by using Aristotle's "dialectic," that is, by carefully evaluating the opposite doctrines on any matter. This, however, is a hard task, because falsehood often takes the appearance of truth. This results from one's own desires, which cause wishful thinking, as well as from a basic feature of reality, that is, its being divided into an intelligible and a sensible realm, the latter being a foggy reflection of the former. Man participates in both, "phantastikon" being the "mediator" between the intellect and the bodily senses.

True knowledge results from "direct acquaintance." Since, however, most men's knowledge derives either *ex auditu* or inferentially, error lurks everywhere. Still, although he states that detecting truth on intelligible realities, such as God's triunity, by means of syllogisms is impossible, because premises are meaningful only inasmuch as they describe things known by acquaintance, he did not share the radical skepticism of Nikephoros Gregoras; he only wanted to qualify what is accessible to humans (and how) and what not.

Aristotle's philosophy is in the main compatible with Platonism. Aristotle's logic is an indispensable tool for any high human activity

(philosophical, scientific, theological, and political). Aristotle's categories (which regard meaningful words) apply only to the realm of sensibles; using words to describe the intelligible realm can be only metaphorical (yet not fully univocal). Demonstration by syllogisms regards philosophical and scientific (strictly speaking, only mathematical and, probably, astronomical) statements. "Dialectical" conclusions regard natural science; as Plato says, any theory of nature is, in the best case, just a "plausible description," because, in contrast with mathematics, where deduction is possible, natural science uses induction. The remaining branches of Aristotle's philosophy are compatible with Platonism and Christianity; for most of Aristotle's statements regard the sensible beings and cannot, therefore, clash with Plato's tenets on what lies beyond sense experience and above discursive thought.

Knowledge consists in grasping the "reasons of beings," that is, the species of beings the sensible reality consists of as well as the regular activities of these beings. In this respect, Barlaam adheres to the Neoplatonic doctrine of the "universals" as preexisting in God's mind, inhering in the sensible beings, and grasped by means of philosophy and science. This knowledge is a sort of knowledge of God, inasmuch as it shows that the rationality of the creature reflects the wisdom of its Creator ("natural theology"; I Cor. 1, 21). Barlaam looks indecisive on whether the mind extracts the "reasons of beings" from the sensibles (Aristotle) or sense experience just "awakes" or "digs out" (i.e., renders conscious) what is innately yet implicitly present in the soul (Plato, Proclus).

Barlaam knew that Proclus and some of the contemporary "hesychasts" accepted a higher (nondiscursive) knowledge, "enthusiasm," or "ecstasy," but he rejected it, for he adhered to Synesius of Cyrene's idea that "Hellenic philosophy" differs from "barbaric philosophy" (i.e., Christian monasticism) inasmuch as the former deems knowledge as a quality of the *pars intelligibilis* of the human soul, whereas the latter naively claims that purifying the *pars passibilis* affords humans (even uncultivated humans) direct access to the things divine.

A Latin *Ethica secundum Stoicos* is of doubtful authenticity. If genuine, it must have been written after 1342, probably in the context of Barlaam's contact with Petrarch, whose moral thought is Stoically colored. Its main point is that the most important virtue is not *scientia* (which is left out from the prerequisites of happiness) but *constantia* (the Latin equivalent of the Greek *eupatheia*), which is attainable only through "extirpating" (not just "moderating") passions.

## Cross-References

- ▶ [Gregory Palamas](#)
- ▶ [Nikephoros Gregoras](#)
- ▶ [Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite](#)

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## Bartholomaeus Arnoldi de Usingen

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### Abstract

Bartholomaeus Arnoldi (b. c. 1465, d. September 9, 1532) (also called Usingen after his birthplace) began as a philosopher in the *via moderna* school and later became a member and a theologian of the Order of Augustinian Hermits. Together with Jodocus Trutfetter, he was the most prominent philosopher in Erfurt in the early sixteenth century. Usingen's main authorities were John Buridan, William of Ockham, Gregory of Rimini, Peter of Ailly, and Gabriel Biel. The focus of his teaching was on a "common view of the *via moderna*," which was strongly involved in semantic–metaphysical questions. Usingen stressed the importance of logic as a necessary tool for gaining scientific knowledge, but it was his works on natural philosophy, in particular, that were respected by his contemporaries. In natural philosophy, he generally followed the tradition of Buridan. His discussion on the theory of supposition follows Ockham. On the relationship between theology and philosophy, he strongly posited the unity of truth by allowing certain theological truths a sufficient degree of plausibility as truths in natural philosophy. This view was partly based on Lawrence of Lindores.

Usingen began his studies at the University of Erfurt in 1484. He became a Bachelor of Arts in 1486 and Master of Arts in 1491. Together with his colleague Jodocus Trutfetter, he was active in an influential quodlibet disputation in 1497. In 1498, he became a member of the council of the Faculty of Arts and afterward was active in several official positions. During 1504, he was the dean of the faculty. Usingen joined the Augustinian hermits in 1512 and was promoted to doctor of theology in 1514. He became actively involved in the German Counter-Reformation and, in particular, opposed the Wittenberg reformers. In 1522, he became an archdeacon. He was forced to leave Erfurt during the Peasants' War in 1525 and ended up in Würzburg, where he stayed at the local Augustinian monastery. During his last years, Usingen followed the local bishop in visitations to the monasteries and even participated in the Diet of Augsburg in 1530, where he was appointed as a member of the commission to examine the Augsburg Confession and where he contributed to the writing of the Catholic Response. He died in Würzburg in 1532.

Along with his teaching activities, Usingen frequently published textbooks on the liberal arts that were reprinted several times. His compendium on natural philosophy was reprinted in Erfurt as late as 1543. Johann Eck made use of Usingen's writings in his philosophical works written in Ingolstadt in the 1510s. As a philosopher, Usingen belonged to the *via moderna* school, as did all his colleagues at the Faculty of Arts in Erfurt. After becoming an Augustinian friar, he distanced himself from scholastic philosophy, and from 1517 onward, he did not publish any books on philosophy. Instead, he wrote several theological treatises, most of them directed against the Wittenberg reformers. Already during his time as a Master of Arts, he had shown a strong affiliation with humanists, and as a theologian, his ideal was that of a humanist-oriented theology, which based its argumentation exclusively on the Scriptures and the Church Fathers.

As a follower of the *via moderna*, Usingen was committed to respecting certain authoritative writers and to adopting some key doctrines.

These authorities included, above all, Buridan and Ockham but also such authors as Gregory of Rimini, Peter of Ailly, and Gabriel Biel. None of the authorities were uncontested in the *via moderna* school at the time; on some points of doctrine, their views were disagreed with. As for the contents of the doctrine, the more or less commonly held views of the *via moderna* are also found in Usingen's writings. These include the use of the principle of parsimony, a moderate nominalist view of universals, and the denial of a real distinction between the powers of the soul as well as between the entities denoted by the Aristotelian categories other than substance and quality. He seems to have elaborated the views of the school to some degree, particularly the theory of signs. In his discussion of individual topics, Usingen frequently refers to the "common opinion of the *via moderna*."

For Usingen, logic is a science that provides scientific knowledge with a methodological basis. There is also a certain inner order to the logic itself, which places the logic of terms ("old logic") ahead of propositional logic ("new logic"). Usingen seems to reformulate some of his definitions of key logical concepts, such as that of universals, in a manner that points to some underlying changes in his conception of metaphysics and semantics. In his logic, he devotes special attention to the properties of terms and bases his account on supposition on Ockham's views.

In natural philosophy, Usingen also focuses on presenting the "common view of the *via moderna*." In some cases, he chooses to present or even defend conflicting views on a particular question (see, e.g., the probable arguments for and against the view that there is a real distinction between quantity and substance in his *Exercitium physicorum*). The authority of Peter of Ailly and Buridan over Ockham is evident, for example, in his discussion of species in psychology and his adherence to Buridan's theory of sense perception. On the relationship between natural philosophy and theology, Usingen offered a solution that strongly suggested a consonance of truths among diverse sciences. Disagreement between the views of some philosophers and the revealed



truths of theology were not to be attributed to distinct sources of truth but to these philosophers' deviance from the true natural light of reason. Usingen's view of the matter was also based here on the tradition of the *via moderna* and especially the views of Lawrence of Lindores. Usingen, in addition, wrote a commentary on the Latin grammar of Donatus, which gives a semantic reading of basic grammatical concepts such as terms and the modes of signification.

## Cross-References

- ▶ [Gabriel Biel](#)
- ▶ [Gregory of Rimini](#)
- ▶ [Jodocus Trutfetter](#)
- ▶ [John Buridan](#)
- ▶ [Peter of Ailly](#)
- ▶ [William of Ockham](#)

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## Basil Bessarion

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### Abstract

Basil Bessarion (c. 1400/1408–1472) was an eminent scholar and philosopher of late Byzantium, engaged in the theological and philosophical controversies of his time, such as those regarding the union of the churches, the procession of the Holy Spirit, and the question of how the philosophies of Plato and Aristotle compare. After the end of the council at Ferrara/Florence, Bessarion left Byzantium and settled in Italy where he made a career as a cardinal. He was an avid collector of manuscripts, which he left to the Republic of Venice, now preserved in the Bibliotheca Marciana. Bessarion recommended to the West the study

of the classical philosophers from the original. His work *In calumniatorem Platonis* is a detailed exposition of Platonic philosophy and an attempt to place it in its historical framework. Bessarion's views on substance, the soul, on cognition, and the divine are mainly inspired by the Neoplatonists.

Bessarion was born at Trebizond between 1400 and 1408, originally named Basil. He was educated in Constantinople and Mystras by teachers like George Chrysococces and George Gemistos Plethon, and he became a monk in 1423 when he acquired the name Bessarion. After spending some years in the monastery of St. Basileios in Constantinople, Bessarion became bishop of Nicaea in 1437 in Asia Minor. Bessarion was invited to attend the council of Ferrara/Florence in 1438/1439 and was very active in supporting the union of the Greek Orthodox Church with the Latin Catholic, maintaining that their difference is minimal. Bessarion eventually sided with Catholicism and Pope Eugenius IV, who made him cardinal, yet he kept the Orthodox manners and rituals. Bessarion spent the rest of his life in Italy, appointed to several ecclesiastical positions, while he was twice a candidate for the papacy (1455, 1471). In 1465, he acquired the title of Patriarch of Constantinople by Pope Pius II.

Bessarion was strongly engaged in the contemporary theological and philosophical debates, such as on the union of the two Churches, on the procession of the Holy Spirit, the debate on the value of the philosophies of Plato and Aristotle, as well as on the question of the immortality of the soul and the divine providence. He wrote theological treatises in support of the union of the two churches (*Oratio dogmatice de unione, Encyclica ad Graecos*) and on the Holy Communion, arguing against the Greek-Orthodox positions (*De sacramento eucharistiae*; Mohler 1923: I.211–247), and rhetorical works such as the *Praise for Trebizond (Laudatio Trapezuntis)*. In the field of philosophy, Bessarion contributed a Latin translation of Aristotle's *Metaphysics*, presumably relying on the version of William of Moerbeke

(Wilson 1992, p. 58), while he also composed a summary of Aristotle's *Physics*. Most notable is his long treatise *In calumniatorem Platonis*, published in 1469, where he meant to discredit the attack against Plato by George Trapezountios in his *Comparationes philosophorum Aristotelis et Platonis* (published in 1458), which criticized Plethon's condemnation of Aristotelian philosophy in his work *On the Differences Between Plato and Aristotle (De differentiis)*. Philosophically important is also his treatise on *Whether Nature Deliberates or Not (De natura et arte)*, written in 1458 but published in 1469 as the sixth book of his *In calumniatorem Platonis* and a reply to Plethon about Aristotle's view of substance (Mohler 1942: III.148–150; see below).

Bessarion also translated into Latin Demosthenes' *First Olynthiac* and Xenophon's *Memorabilia*. The reason behind the translation of the former was to remind his compatriots of their duty to liberate Byzantium from the Ottomans, allegedly analogous with the duty of resistance to the Macedonians argued by Demosthenes. Xenophon's work on the other hand was translated presumably because it was considered a guide to ethical action, a kind of protreptic (Wilson 1992, pp. 57–58).

Bessarion became famous as a collector of manuscripts of Greek authors, which he left to the Republic of Venice, making the core of the later Bibliotheca Marciana (Mohler 1923: I.408–415; Labowsky 1979). The inventory of the Bibliotheca lists 482 manuscripts (Wilson 1992, p. 62). Bessarion was assisted by a number of copyists employed by him, such as Michael Apostoles and Demetrios Trivolis (Mioni 1994, p. 238). Most importantly, Bessarion often added comments to manuscripts, showing remarkable acumen about textual criticism and matters of interpretation. Bessarion had a circle of students and copyists (Wilson 1992, p. 66), and he was in contact with many intellectuals of his time. He had mastered both Greek and Latin, and he circulated his works in both languages, although the Latin version was probably taken care of by his secretary Niccolo Perrotti (Monfasani 1981, 2008). Bessarion died in Ravenna in 1472 and was buried in Rome.

## Philosophy

Bessarion's more important philosophical works are the *In calumniatorem Platonis* and the *De natura et arte*. The former is a long and scholarly work, consisting originally of four books (Monfasani 1976). The first book refutes Trapezountios' criticisms of Plato, arguing that Plato was very erudite and covered all parts of philosophy (Monfasani 2008). Bessarion also puts Plato's philosophy in its historical framework; he adopts the view of later Platonists like Numenius and ancient Christian apologists that Plato borrowed from the wisdom of Moses and also that he shared several Pythagorean doctrines, another ancient view, which was also defended by Plethon. In the second book, Bessarion sets out to show that Plato's philosophy comes closer to the Christian doctrine than that of Aristotle, although he acknowledges that neither of them arrived at it. In order to substantiate this claim, Bessarion offers a detailed exposition of Plato's philosophy, in which he presents the most significant doctrines of Plato, making also reference to the relevant ones of Aristotle. Bessarion is not polemical to Aristotle, arguing that the defense of Plato should not entail the rejection of Aristotle (*In calumniatorem*, II.3). In his third book, Bessarion aims to show that Plato's doctrines had many followers, including Aristotle. A large part of this book deals with theology, the questions of divine providence, and the immortality of the soul, connecting Plato with Thomas Aquinas, Albert the Great, and Averroes (Mohler 1942: III.6.3–6.4, 10.9, 15, 17.2, 21.7). The final book takes issue with Trapezountios' claims that question the morality and usefulness of Platonic philosophy, such as the claim that Plato exhorts the youths to a life of pleasure and that he supports the sharing of wives. Bessarion argues that Plato must be judged by the standards of his time, which was ignorant of the Christian teaching (IV.3). The work as it appeared in 1469, revised by Niccolo Perotti, included two more books (Monfasani 2008). Book five criticized George of Trebizond's translation of Plato's *Laws*, while book six contained Bessarion's treatise *On Whether Nature Deliberates or Not* (*De natura*

*et arte*; Mohler 1942: III.92–147, Mariev et al. 2015).

This treatise addresses a topic much discussed at the time (Monfasani 1976, pp. 166–167). Replying to Plethon but also to George of Trebizond, who argued that nature acts for an end but does not deliberate, Bessarion defends the view that nature does deliberate when acting for an end, and he also argues that on this issue, Plato and Aristotle are in accord on the role and the status of nature (Chap. 2, "That Plato and Aristotle hardly disagree with each other on the nature's deliberation to the eyes of the careful student of their works, even if they may appear so"). Bessarion takes position on the perennial philosophical issue of how nature differs from the intellect that he identified with God (Chap. 7, "Reply to George's Question as to how intellect and nature differ"). Bessarion argues that the intellect is different from nature by being a moving cause of nature and yet, he claims, both intellect, that is, God, and nature deliberate albeit differently. Nature, Bessarion claims, is the instrument of the intellect, through which the latter gives, completes, and perfects things (Mohler 1942: III.132), a view reminiscent of Plotinus' argument in *Ennead* III.8. This is the view that George of Trebizond challenged, while Bessarion attributes different kind of deliberation to nature and to God, arguing that "deliberation" can mean both "investigating," which pertains to nature, and "reasoning or thinking," which pertains to God (Chap. 5, "Another refutation of the contrary view that seeks to show that the nature does not deliberate and does not do things for an end" Marchetto 2015, pp. 743–748; cf. Mohler 1942: III.114–122). Bessarion further maintains that the Christian fathers also acknowledge that God deliberates and on this, he argues, they agree with Plato (Marchetto 2015, pp. 749–750).

On the question of substance, Bessarion defends Aristotle against Plethon in his attitude to consider as substances the individual things, while he maintains that the universals, the Platonic Forms, exist essentially as concepts in the intellect (*Against Plethon on Aristotle About Substance*, Mohler 1942: III.149–150). Bessarion adopts an interpretation of the Forms that goes back to Neoplatonists from Porphyry

onward. According to this interpretation, the Forms are either “in the things” (*en tois pragmasi*), determining the nature of things, or applied “on the things” (*epi tois pollois*), being concepts in the human intellect by means of which man cognizes, and also “before the things” (*pro tôn pollôn*), being causes and models of everything that there is. Bessarion argues that Aristotle preserves all these uses of Forms, as he accepts immanent Forms, concepts, and also a first god who thinks (Mohler 1942: III.150), which means that Bessarion adopts the interpretation of later Platonists according to which the transcendent Forms exist only in the divine mind, in God.

Bessarion was important in the history of philosophy first for his attempt to introduce the classical Greek philosophical tradition to the westerners and also for raising the standards for the scholarly study of classical philosophers in the West. His detailed presentation of Platonic philosophy in his *In calumniatorem Platonis* was the first of its kind in the Latin world, and it was also the first to deal at length with later Platonists, such as Plotinus, Porphyry, and Simplicius, preserving long quotations from them. Unlike the medieval students of Aristotle, Bessarion makes the study of Greek philosophers from the original a requirement, while he also puts emphasis on the knowledge of the relevant philosophical tradition, ancient and medieval, before treating a philosophical question.

## Cross-References

- ▶ [Metaphysics, Byzantine](#)
- ▶ [Plethon, George Gemistos](#)
- ▶ [Thomism, Byzantine](#)

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## al-Baṭalyūsī, Abū Muḥammad ibn al-Sīd

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### Abstract

Ibn al-Sīd was the first significant western Muslim philosopher whose works have survived. His main works are *The Book of Questions* and *The Book of Circles*; both show the introduction into the western Muslim world of themes of the *falsafa* that originated in ninth- to tenth-century Baghdad. In particular, the *Book of Circles* counts as an evidence of the circulation of an emanatist metaphysics of clear Neo-Pythagorean bent, as the one witnessed in the encyclopedia of the Ikhwān al-Ṣafā'.

### Life

Abū Muḥammad ibn 'Abdallāh ibn al-Sīd al-Baṭalyūsī is the first *faylasūf* or *ḥakīm* (i.e., follower of the philosophical doctrines) of the western Muslim world whose written works have survived. Born in Badajoz in 1052 at the court of the Aḫṣid prince al-Muẓaffar, his education benefited greatly from the flowering arts and literature of the city under this *Taifa* prince. It is not known what kind of philosophical education he had, but he received primarily literary and grammatical training. After the city was taken by the Almoravids, he took refuge in Teruel, where he held the office of Secretary (*kātib*) to the local sovereign. He retired to Toledo, Zaragoza (before 1110, where he met the young Ibn Bājjā, or Avempace), and finally ended up in Valencia where he died in 1127.

### Works

Ibn al-Sid was the first author to explicitly seek to harmonize religion with the "sciences of the Ancients." He is best known for his many philosophical and grammatical works. His main works are a commentary on a classical source of Arabic literary art, *Adab al-Kuttāb* (*The Secretaries' Guide*) of Ibn Qutayba, entitled *al-Iqtidāb* (*Improvisation*), and a treatise on the dogmatic differences in Islam, *al-Inṣāf fī al-asbāb al-mūjiba li-khtilāf al-umma* (*The Equitable Judgment on the Causes Originating Discrepancies in the Community*).

In addition, he wrote two books of philosophical content. The first of these was the *Kitāb al-Masā'il* (*The Book of Questions*), which is a compilation of questions written in a sometimes lively and personal style. Several questions relate to philosophy. In the most important of these, he narrates that he had a visit from a friend who told him he regretted having heard the reciting of two verses of Abū l-Walīd al-Waqqaṣhī, a learned Mu'tazilite, then deceased, who was suspected of heresy. These verses were ambiguous and seemed to emphasize the futility of religion. Ibn al-Sīd then begins to explain to his friend that these words may also be understood differently. Referring to al-Fārābī, he shows that philosophy and religion come together as for their ultimate goal. The two channels differ only by the means used to reach this goal, namely the cognition of truth. One is concerned with demonstration and the other with persuasion and imagination. The reason for the existence of these two complementary, though distinct, modalities of science (*'ilm*) is the inequality of human nature. Some humans are not equipped with a power of understanding sufficient to reach the truth through demonstration: thus, religion establishes the same truths by means of persuasion. This is a theme that would subsequently be taken up by Averroes.

Religion need not be demonstrated by apodictic reasoning, since it is, according to the teaching of al-Fārābī, based on different modes of rhetorical persuasion. Its foundations, its



“demonstration,” as explained in the continuation of this text, is exterior to the discourse, and consists in the miracles accomplished by the Prophet. One can thus conceive of the coexistence of two models of truth that do not interfere with one another, namely that of the Law, “followed by persuasion and imitation,” and that of philosophy. The latter remains dependent on the maintaining of religion, because the acquisition of philosophy necessarily requires a habit of virtue that cannot be instilled by anything but religion.

Another “Question” reflects a controversy with Ibn Bājja, which was likely to have taken place in Zaragoza during Ibn al-Sīd’s stay in the city. Ibn al-Sīd accused Ibn Bājja of unreasonably reducing the grammatical notions of “theme” and “rheme” of the utterance (*mubtada’* and *khavar*) to the logical notions of “subject” and “predicate.” The latter imply an ontological relationship of inherence of the predicate in the subject, while the utterance on the linguistic level tells nothing about such a relation: instead, it is an act inscribed in the proper order of language, independent of categorical logic. Ibn al-Sīd testifies to a rejection of the introduction of logical concepts in grammar, stating that “their aim is not the same.” This debate introduced into Hispanic-Muslim territory the theme of the famous controversy held in Baghdad, between the logician Abū Bishr Mattā and the grammarian al-Sirafī (see the entries on ► [“Translations from Greek into Arabic”](#) and ► [“Abū Bishr Mattā ibn Yūnus”](#) in this volume).

The second philosophical book is the *Kitāb al-Ḥadāi’q* (*The Book of Circles*). This book, divided into seven chapters, is the first relatively systematic presentation known in Andalusia of a Graeco-Arabic emanationist metaphysics inspired by Neoplatonism, which Ibn al-Sīd notably refers to “Socrates, Plato, Aristotle.” The symbolism of the three degrees of emanation, that is, the Intellect, Soul, and the body, as interlocked circles where the Agent Intellect, the universal Soul, and the human being, respectively, occupy the tenth place, the concept of man as a microcosm, the numerological determinism controlling the procession of beings, with the prominent place given to the Decade, all this refers to a source

inspired by Neo-Pythagoreanism, namely the encyclopedia of the “Brethren of Purity” (Ikhwān al-Ṣafā’), a major source of the early western Muslim *falsafa*. The general framework of the metaphysical “system” presented by Ibn al-Sīd is clearly dependent on al-Fārābī. The procession of beings from the One (explained in chapter 1) occurs through a process of successive mediations (*tawassuṭ*). The “secondary causes,” that is, the intellects moving the spheres, are distinguished, as in al-Fārābī, from the Agent Intellect that informs and enlightens the human intellect. The perfection of the human being, treated in chapter 3, consists in the return toward its principle. This requires an ascension through the degrees of the theoretical sciences, that is, mathematics, physics, metaphysics, and theology. This intellectual training produces the union of the human with the Agent Intellect, and allows the human to join a “boundary” between the inferior world and the world of separated beings. Overall, the work shows a high degree of eclecticism. The tradition of the “Sages”, whose doctrines Ibn al-Sīd wants to expound – as stated in the prologue – generates a kind of timeless continuum where Greeks are not distinguished from Muslims, included the theologians (*mutakallimūn*). This is illustrated by the fifth chapter, dealing with certain issues of negative theology (i.e., whether we can positively predicate the attributes of creatures of God, or we should limit ourselves to deny their opposites) with references directly issued from the treatises of *kalām*. The theme of the final chapter, i.e., proofs of the immortality of the soul, reflects the author’s concern to harmonize his doctrine with religious teaching.

*The Book of Circles* had a significant posterity in medieval Jewish thought, from Bahiya ibn Paquda to Isaac Abravanel. It was translated twice into Hebrew, and in particular by the famous Samuel ibn Tibbon (c. 1271). It was likely known, in the Almohad period, by Ibn Ṭufayl. In the thirteenth century, the fourth *Sicilian Question* by Ibn Sab‘īn, *On the Soul*, follows verbatim the arguments of the last chapter of *The Book of Circles* on soul’s immortality.



## Cross-References

- ▶ [Abū Bishr Mattā ibn Yūnus](#)
- ▶ [al-Fārābī, Abū Naṣr](#)
- ▶ [Ibn Bājja, Abū Bakr ibn al-Sā'ig' \(Averroes\)](#)
- ▶ [Ibn Rushd \(Averroes\), Latin Translations of](#)
- ▶ [Ibn Sab'īn, 'Abd al-Ḥaqq](#)
- ▶ [Ibn Ṭufayl, Abū Bakr \(Abubacer\)](#)
- ▶ [Ikhwān al-Ṣafā', Encyclopedia of](#)
- ▶ [Kalām](#)
- ▶ [Philosophy, Arabic](#)
- ▶ [Theology Versus Philosophy in the Arab World](#)
- ▶ [Translations from Greek into Arabic](#)

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## Being

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### Abstract

The notion of being is the most fundamental notion in medieval metaphysics, but in some ways also in medieval theology, logic and epistemology. Given its centrality, it would be impossible to provide here even a sketchy historical survey of the variety of ways in which medieval authors handled this notion. Therefore, this article will rather survey those paradigmatic characteristics of the medieval notion that make it most difficult for contemporary philosophers to approach it.

## The Semantics of *Ens*, *Esse*, and *Est*

According to medieval philosophers, the notion of being is simple, indefinable, and in some sense precedes all other concepts we have. This, however, does not mean that it cannot be clarified. For instance, the notion of propositional conjunction

is also simple and thus indefinable in terms of other, simpler concepts. Still, the notion can be clarified by describing the semantic function of the word expressing it in the following manner: the word “and” in English has the function of joining two propositional clauses in such a way that the conjunctive proposition expressed by the resulting compound sentence is true if and only if both propositions expressed by the clauses of the compound sentence are true. Likewise, we may provide a similar clarification of the notion of being through first characterizing the semantic functions of the words expressing it as these functions were typically conceived by medieval philosophers.

The English word “being” translates both the present tense active participle form “ens” and the infinitive form “esse” of the Latin verb “est,” corresponding to the English verb “is.” Just like the English verb, the Latin verb functions both as a copula, joining subject and predicate into a proposition, and as an absolute verb, asserting the existence of the thing referred to by the subject.

Influenced by the post-Kantian/Fregean mantra according to which “existence is not a predicate,” many contemporary philosophers might be inclined to part company with their medieval colleagues already at this point. However, this oft-quoted slogan in the sense in which it is trivially true is simply irrelevant, whereas in the sense in which it is clearly relevant, it is simply false. For, in the sense in which it expresses the claim that the verb “be” and its cognates (including “exists” and its derivatives) used in the sense in which they express a Fregean second order concept (a concept that operates on other concepts) do not express a first order concept (a concept true of things), the slogan is trivially true. But in that sense it is irrelevant, as it says nothing about how medieval philosophers could or could not use the verb “est” and its cognates (cf. Klima 2004). However, in the sense in which the slogan would claim that medieval philosophers could not have possibly used “est” and its cognates as a predicate, the slogan, though clearly relevant, is simply false, for our medieval colleagues just did use them as such. Indeed, they did so consistently,

and reflectively, within the framework of some truly intriguing semantic considerations.

One question that immediately crops up if one reflects on the syntactic role of “est” both as a copula (*esse tertium adiacens*) and as an absolute predicate (*esse secundum adiacens*) is whether it is a mere coincidence that it is the verb expressing existence that is used in both roles, both to copulate subject and predicate (to distinguish the resulting proposition from a mere list of names) and to predicate the actual existence of something. The question was already systematically considered by Abelard, who deployed an impressive array of arguments concerning the issue. However, his preferred theory, which would provide a noun-phrase/verb-phrase analysis of all categorical propositions (and thus would accord the copula the function of merely turning a nominal predicate term into a verb phrase), did not catch on, and did not have followers in the thirteenth century (cf. Jacobi 1986; King 2008).

The typical thirteenth century analysis followed Aristotle’s considerations, not only in the *Peri Hermeneias* known to Abelard, but also in Aristotle’s later recovered works, especially the two *Analytics* and the *Metaphysics*, along with Avicenna’s and Averroes’ immensely influential interpretations of Aristotle’s doctrine. These considerations suggested both that the copula is essential in all predications for joining two noun-phrases in a proposition (thus, even a verb is supposed to contain an implicit copula, and so is to be analyzed into a copula-plus-participle construction, such as “A man runs” = “A man is running”) and that the sense of the verb “est” even in its copulative function is somehow related to or is even derivable from its existential sense. The idea is neatly expressed by Thomas Aquinas in his commentary on Aristotle’s *Peri Hermeneias*:

The reason why [Aristotle] says that the verb ‘is’ co-signifies composition is that it does not principally signify composition, but secondarily; for it primarily signifies what occurs to the mind in the way of actuality absolutely: for ‘is’, uttered absolutely, signifies being in act, and hence it signifies as a verb. However, since actuality, which the verb ‘is’ principally signifies, is in

general the actuality of every form (whether it is a substantial or an accidental actuality), when we want to signify any form or act to actually inhere [*inesse*] in a subject, we signify this by means of the verb ‘is’, either absolutely [*simpliciter*] or with some qualification [*secundum quid*]. . . (*In Perihermeneias* lb. 1, lc. 5, n. 22).

So, on Aquinas’ view, the verb “est” primarily signifies an act of being (*esse* or *actus essendi*) of that to which it is attributed (whether it is its substantial act, as in “Socrates is” or “Socrates is a man”, or some accidental act, as in “Socrates is wise” or “Socrates is tall”), and only secondarily signifies the composition of subject and predicate. Taking the verb “est” to signify an act of being (*esse*) is based on an analogy with any other verb that signifies some act, just as the verb “currit” (“runs”) signifies an act of running (*currere*) (cf. *In De hebdomadibus* lc. 2, n. 22). Thus, when “est” is used as an absolute predicate, when it is to be analyzed into copula and participle just as any other verb, as in “x est” = “x est ens”, then “est” signifies the substantial act of being of x (as does the nominal predicate “ens”), and it is the actuality of this act of being that verifies the predication. However, when “est” is construed with another predicate as the copula, as in “x est N”, where “N” is some noun-phrase, then it still primarily signifies existence, although in a sense somehow modified by the content of the predicate, which signifies a form of the subject. In that case, the act of being signified by “est” is the act of being of the form signified by the predicate, which is the substantial act of being of the subject, provided the form signified by the predicate is the substantial form of the subject, or an accidental act of being of the subject, if the form signified by the predicate is an accidental form (cf. Klima 2002a).

### From Semantics to Metaphysics

We can have a better understanding of this somewhat obscure point, if we consider how Aquinas conceives of the modifications of the sense of “is” imposed on it by different predicates in different categories, relating his theory of the copula to his conception of *the analogy of being*, the semantic

theory that the term “ens” is neither univocal, nor equivocal, but analogical, because it applies to several things of different kinds neither in exactly the same sense (as the term “animal” applies to cats and mice), nor in utterly diverse, unrelated senses (as the word “bat” applies to flying mammals and baseball bats), but in different, yet related senses (as the word “sees” applies to the eye and to the mind). Thus, according to Aquinas, beings (*entia*) come in different varieties, expressed by the different, yet related senses of the verb “est”, signifying the different ways in which these things are, on account of having their characteristic way or mode of being (*modus essendi*) (cf. Klima 2002b).

In his commentary on the *Metaphysics*, Aquinas writes:

being cannot be narrowed down to something definite in the way in which a genus is narrowed down to a species by means of differences. [...] Being must then be narrowed down to diverse genera on the basis of a different mode of predication, which flows from a different mode of being; for ‘being [*esse*] is signified,’ i.e., something is signified to be, ‘in just as many ways as something is said to be a being,’ that is, in as many ways as something is predicated. And for this reason the first divisions of being are called predicaments [i.e., categories], because they are distinguished on the basis of different ways of predicating. Therefore, since some predicates signify *what* [something is], i.e., substance; others *of what kind* [something is, i.e., quality]; and yet others *how much* [something is, i.e., quantity]; and so on; it is necessary that for each mode of predication, being should signify the same [mode of being]. For example, when it is said that a man is an animal, ‘is’ signifies [the mode of being of] substance; and when it is said that a man is white, ‘is’ signifies [the mode of being of] quality; and so on. (*In Metaphysicam* lb. 5, lc. 9, n. 5)

The main point of this passage is that the division of being into the categories is not like the division of a genus into its species by means of specific differences, which is the division of a univocal term. This point is made even more explicit in the following passage:

There are two ways in which something common can be divided into those that are under it, just as there are two ways in which something is common. There is the division of a univocal [term] into its species by differences by which

the nature of the genus is equally participated in the species, as *animal* is divided into *man* and *horse*, and the like. Another division is that of something common by analogy, which is predicated according to its perfect concept [*ratio*] of one of those that divide it, and of the other [s] imperfectly and with qualification [*secundum quid*], as being is divided into substance and accident, and into being in actuality and in potentiality, and this sort of division is, as it were, midway between [the division of something] equivocal and [something] univocal (*In Secundum Sententiarum* d. 42, q. 1, a. 3).

So, Aquinas' idea seems to be the following. Every predication we make is a predication of being, but, depending on the predicate we use, it is a predication of being with some qualification or other. Thus, for instance, when I say "Tom is a cat" or "Jerry is a mouse", these predications assert the being of Tom cat-wise and the being of Jerry mouse-wise, respectively. This is because what the predicates of these predications signify are the respective essences of Tom and Jerry, which determine their modes of being, namely, cat-life and mouse-life, respectively. But as the above-quoted passage from the *Commentary on the Metaphysics* indicates, this idea is extended to all categories, including all nine categories of accidents. Indeed, the idea is further extended to all predicates, which may not even signify accidental forms, such as privative predicates, which signify rather the lack of such forms, and relational predicates that do not signify real inherent relations of things, but rather mere relations of reason. Such *significata* of predicable terms, then, were regarded by Aquinas (and practically everyone else working in the same semantic framework) as specifying the mode of being of an altogether different realm of entities, whose being consists in their being conceived by reason (*cuius esse est intelligi*), though not without some foundation in reality namely, beings of reason (cf. Klima 1996).

Thus, for Aquinas, the verb "est", both as an absolute predicate and as a copula, signifies existence (*esse*). As an absolute predicate, as in "Tom is" or "Jerry is" it signifies the acts of existence (*esse*, or *actus essendi*) of the things of which it is

predicated. But since these acts of existence are determined by the essences which they actualize and which are signified by the same things' essential predicates, the verb can also signify the same acts of existence when it joins the names of these things to their essential predicates, as in "Tom is a cat" or "Jerry is a mouse". But then again, when the verb copulates accidental predicates to their subjects, then it will signify the acts of being of their accidents, its sense now being determined to express the peculiar mode of being (*modus essendi*) of accidents, as in "Tom is black" or "Jerry is grey". And for the same reason the same verb will express yet another sense of being when its sense is determined by what is signified by a privative predicate, or any other predicate signifying some being of reason (*ens rationis*), as in "Tom is blind" or "Jerry is desired by Tom".

Accordingly, in Aquinas' view, the different analogical senses of being, related to its primary sense (expressing existence absolutely speaking) closely reflect the different ways in which things are: their *modi essendi*. In this way, his doctrine is akin in spirit to the theories of the modists (*modistae*), whose main tenet was that different ways of being are reflected in corresponding ways of understanding (*modi intelligendi*), expressed, in turn, in corresponding ways of signifying (*modi significandi*) (cf. *modistae*; Ebbesen 1998; Marmo 1999; Zupko 2008).

However, even the modists did not think that one could simply "read off" one's ontology from one's syntax, and neither did Aquinas, nor any other medieval thinker. On a general level, nearly everybody would hold that the ways in which things exist are reflected somehow in the ways in which we think, which in turn are reflected in the ways in which our words signify. But the important metaphysical differences between individual thinkers of the period can actually be characterized by the different ways in which they would depart from a simplistic "mirroring" interpretation of this "modistic principle": the different ways in which they think the structure of language and thought diverges from the structure of reality.

For instance, Aquinas insists time and again that Plato's main error concerning universals was

his failure to realize the difference between *modi essendi* and *intelligendi* and *significandi*: just because we have universal words and concepts, it does not mean that there are corresponding universal things, for our universal words and concepts represent only singular things (since every really existing thing is singular), but in a universal manner. So, there are certain words and concepts representing things in some way, but there are no things existing in the same way: things exist in one way (singularly and materially) and are represented in another way (universally and immaterially) (*Summa theologiae* I, q. 85 a. 1 ad 1). Therefore, the “modistic principle” in its simplistic, “mirroring” interpretation cannot be upheld by any philosophers who reject a naïve Platonic conception of universals, as did all major thinkers in the thirteenth century. The differences among these thinkers were always in the finer details.

### The Analogy Versus Univocity of Being and the Thesis of Real Distinction

Although Aquinas’ theory of the analogy of being seemed to cohere well both with Aristotle’s teaching and with the requirements of religious and theological language about God, many authors challenged the view that the sense of “being” would vary with whatever it is attributed to. To be sure, thirteenth-century authors agreed that different kinds of things existed in radically different ways. Indeed, based on Aristotle’s considerations in the *Categories* alone, it was taken for granted that the mode of being of substances (namely, subsisting on their own without inhering in an underlying subject) is radically different from (indeed, opposite to) the mode of being of accidents (namely, inhering in an underlying subject) (see the entry on “► [Substance, Accident, and Modes](#),” this volume). And of course it was also generally held that the way God exists is infinitely more perfect and, hence, is radically different from the way limited creaturely natures can exist. But there were differences in how individual authors interpreted these differences themselves in their metaphysics and theology, and how they thought these differences are properly

reflected in thought and language, in their semantic considerations.

For Aquinas (who was influenced on this point by Avicenna’s doctrine), the ultimate difference between God and creatures is the real distinction between essence and existence in creatures and the identity thereof in the absolutely simple God. It is precisely this famous “thesis of the real distinction” that prompts Aquinas to think of creaturely natures as imposing diminishing determinations on being, which without such a limitation is unlimited:

A created spiritual substance has to contain two [principles], one of which is related to the other as potency to act. And this is clear from the following. It is obvious that the first being, which is God, is infinite act, namely, having in Himself the whole plenitude of being not contracted to the nature of some genus or species. Therefore it is necessary that His being itself should not be an act of being that is, as it were, put into a nature which is not its own being, for in this way it would be confined to that nature. Hence we say that God is His own being. But this cannot be said about anything else, just as it is impossible to think that there should be several separate whitenesses, but if a whiteness were separate from any subject and recipient, then it would be only one, so it is impossible that there should be a subsistent act of being, except only one. Therefore, everything else after the first being, since it is not its own being, has being received in something, by which its being is contracted; and thus in any created being the nature of the thing that participates being is other than the act of being itself that is participated (*De spiritualibus creaturis* q. un., a. 1).

Thus, for Aquinas, creaturely essences impose a limitation, and so a diminishing determination on being itself (as it would be found in God, without any limitation), precisely because of the real distinction between essence and existence in creatures, whereas the divine essence does not impose such a limitation on divine being, precisely because they are really one and the same infinite reality. It is this order of reality of the different modes of being that is reflected in the different, analogically related senses of “being”,



expressing an analogical notion of being. The reason for this parallelism between different modes of being and the analogical senses of “being” seems to be that predications of “being” of any creature *x* of nature *N* may be viewed as a predication of “IS” in the unlimited sense (in which it only applies to God) with the added diminishing qualification referring to *N*, determining precisely the sense of “being” in which it can apply to a creature of nature *N*; that is to say, “*x* is a being (of nature *N*)” if and only if “*x* IS-with-respect-to-*N*” (cf. Klima 2002c).

However, motivated either by Averroes’ interpretation of Aristotle, or by Augustine’s Neoplatonic theological doctrine, philosophers, such as Siger of Brabant, as well as theologians, such as Henry of Ghent, rejected a real distinction of essence and existence even in creatures, arguing that existence cannot be something really distinct, added to essence as another “thing” (although Giles of Rome held precisely this view in his debate with Henry of Ghent) (cf. Lambertini 2008). Consequently, these authors had a different interpretation of both the Aristotelian metaphysical doctrine of the analogy of being between substance and accident, and the philosophical-theological doctrine of the difference between God and creatures. However, if essence and existence are not really distinct in creatures, then essences cannot act as diminishing determinations on existence in the way Aquinas conceived.

On Henry’s view, essences in themselves, as they are eternally in the divine mind, have their own eternal essential being (*esse essentialiae*), grounding the eternal truths of essential predications (such as “Man is an animal”). However, these essences are realized in actual existence in the creation of singulars, in which their acts of actual existence (*esse actualis existentiae*) are intentionally distinct (are represented by different intentions, that is, concepts), but not really distinct from the essences of these singulars (although, as Henry insists, this distinction is not *merely* a conceptual one) (cf. Porro 2008). But then this conception breaks the strict logical relationship of the Thomistic conception between different modes of being and the different analogical senses of the term “being” in which it is truly predicable of

different sorts of entities of different natures. If different creaturely natures are not construed as adding diminishing determinations to their distinct acts of being, then the analogically related notions of being are not regarded as derivable from a primary notion through extension by the addition of diminishing qualifications. Rather, different notions of being are arrived at simply through the specification of different kinds of beings in terms of their different natures. However, this move, at least in principle, gives rise to the possibility of abstracting some generic notion of being univocally applying to several kinds of entities, just as we can abstract generic notions of different specific natures, and so, the more specific notions of being expressing the different ways of being in which things of different natures exist are just different specifications of the original, confused, unlimited notion, applying to all.

To be sure, Henry still insists that our intellect cannot form a single concept that would equally apply to God and creatures, on account of the infinite essential difference of perfection between God and creatures. But, at the same time, he also granted that we at least appear to have a single concept of being applying to God and creatures, because we just tend to confuse the two different ways of abstracting the notion of being that applies to God and the notion of being that applies to creatures, resulting in a concept of being which is “something analogous common to Creator and creature, containing under itself being as principle and being as produced (*commune analogum ad creatorem et creaturam, continens sub se ens principium et ens principiatum*)” (Henry of Ghent 1520: *Summa*, art. 21, q. 3, f. 126rD).

Nevertheless, this conception quite clearly opens up the possibility of another departure from the “modistic principle”: different modes of being do not demand different senses of the term “being” to express them, for all these different modes can be apprehended indifferently by a single concept, providing the meaning of a single univocal term, allowing reasoning about any being as such, without a risk of the fallacy of equivocation. In fact, this was precisely one of the main motivations for Duns Scotus to endorse a theory of the univocity of being, as opposed to



the Thomistic theory of the analogy of being, or rather as more directly opposed to Henry's conception of two distinct, yet analogically related notions of being (cf. Scotus 1950: *Ord.*, 1, d. 3, pars 1, q. 1–2, n. 26–56; Dumont 1998).

Consider the following syllogism: Anything that is a bat is a flying mammal; any baseball bat is a bat; therefore, any baseball bat is a flying mammal. The argument is clearly not valid, insofar as the premises are true, because in the sense in which a flying mammal is a bat, a baseball bat is not a bat. The argument is vitiated by the fallacy of equivocation. But this holds, apparently, not only in the case of equivocal terms, but also in the case of analogical terms. Consider the following argument: Everything that is healthy is alive; but the food on your plate is healthy; therefore, the food on your plate is alive. Clearly, unless you are about to consume something that is alive, the food on your plate is healthy only in the sense that it makes you healthy, but not in the sense that it is alive and well. However, it is only in that sense of “healthy” that the first premise can be true. So, an argument of this sort is fallacious even with analogical terms. Accordingly, if “being” cannot be predicated of God and creatures in the same sense, then, apparently, all arguments arguing from creaturely being to divine being are fallacious (which would render absolutely all arguments about God fallacious, provided that all predications are just variously determined predications of being, and all our cognition derives from our cognition of creatures).

To be sure, Thomists could still respond, as for instance Aquinas' great commentator Cajetan did, that some analogical terms still possess sufficient unity to secure the validity of reasoning with them. Take for instance the following argument: Whatever is seen is cognized; this mathematical problem is seen by the intellect; therefore this mathematical problem is cognized. Clearly, in this piece of reasoning, the minor premise is true only in the secondary sense of “see,” in which it applies to the intellect, whereas the major premise is true whether “see” is taken in the bodily or in the intellectual sense. By contrast, consider the following argument: Whatever is seen is colored; this mathematical problem is seen by the intellect;

therefore this mathematical problem is colored. In this case, the major premise is true only in the bodily sense of “see,” whereas the minor premise is only true in the intellectual sense, and that is why there is fallacy in the argument. However, in the previous argument there is no fallacy precisely because the major premise is true in both related senses (cf. Hochschild 2007).

Nevertheless, however the case may be with the debate between Thomists and Scotists, it is clear that Scotus' doctrine is another step away from a simplistically interpreted “modistic principle,” although in the opposite direction: just as the order of being need not precisely match the conceptual order (that is, every distinction of concepts need not have a corresponding real distinction among beings), so different modes of being need not be reflected in different (although possibly related or “partially identical”) concepts. Thus, Scotus' doctrine of the univocity of being, while still recognizing different modes of being in reality, simply allows the possibility that the intellect can form a simple concept indifferently representing them all, without there being a simple, common reality directly and adequately represented by this concept. Viewed from this perspective, Scotus' move seems to fit squarely into a general trend in late-medieval philosophy: the elaboration of ever more refined accounts of just how the conceptual order may differ from the real order, culminating in fourteenth-century nominalism.

Although Scotus' treatment of the notion of being may be regarded as a part of this trend, his treatment of universals in general still seems to harken back to “the modistic principle”: common terms of our language apply to several, numerically distinct singular things of the same kind, because these things share a common nature, which, to be sure, is not some numerically one real entity on a par with the singulars themselves, but still has its own “less-than-numerical unity” and its corresponding mode of being, preceding any act of the intellect conceiving it. Yet, Scotus' treatment of “being” indicates that, at least from a semantic point of view, there is no real need to posit such common natures to account for the universal mental and linguistic representation of

singulars. Thus, his younger contemporary Henry of Harclay could rightly insist, precisely on the basis of Scotus' own doctrine of the univocity of being, that our intellect is capable of forming concepts that indifferently represent singulars of the same kind without representing a single common entity (whether it is supposed to be numerically or merely less-than-numerically one). It is precisely this idea that seems to have been seized upon by William Ockham, to be worked out in detail in his nominalist philosophy and theology (Henninger 2006).

### From Metaphysics, Back to Semantics

Given its centrality in the semantic framework in which it was articulated, it is no wonder that the notion of being took on so many varieties and gave rise to so many metaphysical problems. After all, in this framework, all true predications are taken to be verified by the actual being of the *significata* of our predicates, whether those *significata* are taken to be the natures or substantial forms of substances, or their accidental forms, their quantities, qualities, relations, actions, passions, times, places, positions or habits, or even not any genuine forms, but rather the lack thereof, that is, privations, or other beings of reason, such as negations or relations of reason. In fact, we may add to the list of such "quasi-entities" demanded by this framework the *significata* of entire propositions, variously called *dicta*, *enuntiabilia*, or *complexe significabilia*, etc. (Nuchelmans 1973, 1980).

In general, one may say that in this framework there is some "nonchalance" toward admitting semantic values (as they called them, *significata* and *supposita*, cf. Read 2008) of our expressions in our ontology, relegating the task of sorting them out to metaphysics. And this is precisely what thirteenth-century metaphysicians do: they make various classifications of various sorts of beings (based primarily on Aristotle's system of the categories), and ever more refined distinctions and identifications among the semantic values of various expressions in different linguistic categories, leading to a burgeoning ontology of entities and

quasi-entities, having different degrees of reality (or unreality, for that matter), and different, sometimes rather obscure criteria of identity or distinctness (or quasi-identity and quasi-distinctness: see the above-mentioned examples of Scotus' less-than-numerical-unity, or Henry of Ghent's intentional distinction, let alone Scotus' formal distinction, or Suarez's modal distinction) (see Suarez 1947).

The following table provides a general overview of the varieties of being entertained by medieval philosophers working in this framework, sketching out "the big picture" of the ontology or "quasi-ontology" (containing also various sorts of quasi-entities) of what may be termed the framework of the realist "via *antiqua* semantics" in contrast to the nominalist "via *moderna* semantics," emerging in the works of William Ockham and his followers, such as John Buridan, Albert of Saxony, Marsilius of Inghen, Peter of Ailly or Gabriel Biel (Table 1).

Given the immense complexity of the resulting ontology, one can certainly understand Ockham's complaint, according to which his contemporaries are guilty of "multiplying beings according to the multiplicity of terms. . . which, however, is erroneous and leads far away from the truth" (Ockham 1974:169; see also page 171, where Ockham explicitly claims that this is the root (radix) of the errors of "the moderns").

To be sure, Ockham's charge is not exactly justified. After all, as we could see, even earlier authors could reduce the ontological commitment of their theories by either identifying the semantic values of expressions across different categories (as when following Aristotle, they declare that action and passion are the same motion, or when they identify relations with their foundations in the categories of quality or quantity, etc.) or by assigning them some "diminished" ontological status, by relegating them to some class of "quasi-entities." However, it is true that earlier authors, taking it for granted that our meaningful words are meaningful because they express concepts whereby we conceive of something, never worried about assigning semantic values to our phrases, and took it to be a *metaphysical task* to sort out the ontological status, identity, and

**Being, Table 1** The “quasi-ontology” of “*via antiqua* semantics”

	Past	Present	Future	
Real beings	Ten categories of real entities, possible in the past	Ten categories of real entities, possible in the present	Ten categories of real entities, possible in the future	Possible
	Ten categories of real entities, actual in the past	Ten categories of real entities, actual in the present	Ten categories of real entities, actual in the future	Actual
“Quasi-beings” in <i>esse intentionale</i> , <i>esse objectivo</i> , <i>esse rationis</i>	Individual quasi-entities (privations, relations of reason), <i>significata</i> of propositions, actual in the past	Individual quasi-entities (privations, relations of reason), <i>significata</i> of propositions, actual in the present	Individual quasi-entities (privations, relations of reason), <i>significata</i> of propositions, actual in the future	
	Individual quasi-entities (privations, relations of reason), <i>significata</i> of propositions, possible in the past	Individual quasi-entities (privations, relations of reason), <i>significata</i> of propositions, possible in the present	Individual quasi-entities (privations, relations of reason), <i>significata</i> of propositions, possible in the future	Possible
	Individual quasi-entities (privations, relations of reason), <i>significata</i> of propositions, impossible in the past	Individual quasi-entities (privations, relations of reason), <i>significata</i> of propositions, impossible in the present	Individual quasi-entities (privations, relations of reason), <i>significata</i> of propositions, impossible in the future	Impossible
	Universals			Abstract

Note that I am using the designations of “*via antiqua* semantics” and “*via moderna* semantics” slightly anachronistically, to designate two radically different ways of construing semantic theory in late-medieval philosophy and theology, which I take to be the conceptual basis for the historically somewhat later separation of the two *viae* as the altogether different ways of doing philosophy and theology, leading to the so-called *Wegestreit*, the historical “quarrel of the ways” in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. For a detailed historical discussion of the late-medieval separation of the *via antiqua* and the *via moderna*, see Moore 1989. For the impact of the separation of these two ways on the emergence of “the battle of the faiths,” *Glaubenskampf*, in the age of the Protestant Reformation, see Oberman 1977

distinctness of these semantic values, leading to the ever more rarified metaphysical and theological questions in this framework.

Ockham’s real innovation, therefore, consisted not so much in producing a simpler ontology (since that, in principle, would have been available to his predecessors as well), but rather in reining in any unwanted “ontological excesses” *already in his semantics*. That is to say, the real novelty in Ockham’s approach is the elimination of unwanted ontological commitments, not only through metaphysical argument (resulting in identifying the semantic values of different expressions across categories or relegating them to some diminished ontological status), but rather through semantic analysis, which has remained ever since the most powerful weapon in the conceptual arsenal of nominalist philosophers (cf. Goodman and Quine 1947).

Just by way of a quick illustration, let us consider a simple example of how commitment to such quasi-entities as privations comes about in the older framework, and how Ockham can get rid of it through logical analysis (cf. Klima 1993). Take the privative term “blind”, which can obviously be true of something only if the thing in question lacks sight, that it could and ought to have by nature (namely, an animal that ought to have sight, but lacks it for some reason or other). In the older framework, if the predication “Jerry is blind” is true, then this is so, just as in the case of every other true predication, because what the predicate signifies in the subject is actually there in the subject (which is precisely the actuality that the word “is” signifies). But precisely because for blindness to be there is for the corresponding sight not to be there, the being of blindness cannot be taken to be being in the same sense as the being of

sight; therefore, blindness has to be a being in a different sense, a being of reason. And similar considerations apply to all sorts of privations, negations, or relations of reason, thus opening up the “quasi-ontological” realm of beings of reason in this framework.

Ockham, on the other hand, uses logical analysis to show that for the true predication of the term “blind” and similar privative terms we need not posit any such quasi-entities. As the nominal definition of the term shows, this syntactically simple term must have a complex concept corresponding to it in the mind, namely, the concept properly expressed by the nominal definition “animal not having sight.” Now, in this phrase, there are two *absolute* terms (terms applying equally and indifferently to whatever they signify, on account of being subordinated to the corresponding absolute concepts), namely, “animal” and “sight.” There is also a *connotative* term (signifying some of the things it signifies primarily and others secondarily, connoting them only in relation to the former, on account of being subordinated to a connotative concept), namely, the term “having”, primarily signifying the things that have something and connoting the things had by them. Finally, there is the syncategorematic term “not,” which does not signify anything in external reality, only the mental concept of negation, which is a mental act, merely modifying the representative function of the categorematic concept with which it is construed (cf. Klima 2006). Thus, the complex connotative concept to which the term “blind” is subordinated will signify animals, while connoting their sight; however, on account of the implied negation it will only apply to animals that do not have sight. Thus, on this analysis, the sentence “Jerry is blind” will be true just in case Jerry is one of the animals that do not have sight, just as it should be. However, the important difference of this analysis from the former is that this analysis does not require the actuality of some quasi-entity, namely, the privation of Jerry’s sight: the term “blind” applies to Jerry simply because he does not have sight, which is just what the negative connotation of the term requires. But this negative connotation is effected through the term’s signifying only

positive, real entities, namely, animals, their sights, and a positive quality of the mind, namely, the syncategorematic concept of negation.

Without going into further details, perhaps, even this brief illustration will suffice to indicate how, through such and similar analyses, Ockham is eventually able to come up with a much simpler, reduced ontological picture (see Klima 1999). In his semantics, all our linguistic expressions are mapped onto an ontology containing only two really distinct categories of entities, namely, entities belonging to the category of substance, and entities pertaining to the category of quality, some of which, however, are qualities of the mind, namely, those naturally representative mental concepts whereby we conceive of objects of our cognition (i.e., the categorematic concepts that provide the sense of our categorematic terms) or those mental concepts that merely have the function of modifying the representative function of the former (i.e., our syncategorematic concepts, providing the meaning of our syncategorematic terms).

As we can see, the semantic construction of the *via antiqua* certainly demanded the mapping of language onto a rich and complex structure of semantic values, accorded with different degrees or modes of reality, expressed perhaps in correspondingly distinguished senses of “being” (*ens*), among those who endorsed a strong doctrine of the analogy of being, such as Aquinas and his followers, or without such distinctions, among those who endorsed the doctrine of the univocity of “being,” such as Scotus and his followers. In any case, the rather “cavalier” assignment of semantic values to all linguistic items in any syntactical category in this semantic framework left it to metaphysics to sort out into which ontological categories these semantic values fall, and whether they are distinct or identical. Indeed, the latter questions led to distinctions among various forms of distinctions as well, ranging from numerical and real, to less-than-numerical, intentional, formal, modal, or mere conceptual distinctions. Nevertheless, the metaphysical strategies of distinguishing various modes of being and/or senses of “being” and allowing the identification or quasi-identification of semantic values of

expressions in various categories could in principle yield in this framework a real ontology (i.e., an ontology of real entities, not considering any quasi-entities) no more profligate than the parsimonious nominalist ontology of Ockham, acknowledging only two distinct categories of singular entities, namely, substances and qualities.

Ockham’s genuine innovation, therefore, was not so much in ontology per se, but rather in the ways and strategies he applied to reduce ontological commitment in the semantic theory itself. Thus, for him, the reduction of ontological commitment, in contrast to the via *antiqua* strategy, was not a separate metaphysical task to bring metaphysical order to a burgeoning quasi-ontology of “recklessly” assigned semantic values, but rather the direct task of semantic theory itself, carefully working out the mappings of distinct linguistic categories onto a parsimoniously construed ontology, containing only real entities in the “permitted” categories.

Thus, Ockham’s ontology can be represented by means of the following, much simpler diagram, cutting the former diagram in half, and reducing its inner contents as well (Table 2).

In this diagram, quasi-entities are gone: the phrases apparently designating them are all analyzed in terms of their nominal definitions, containing only phrases that denote or connote entities in the “permitted” distinct categories of substance and quality. A similar strategy allows the reduction of really distinct real categories from ten to just two. In fact, Ockham’s approach is so successful that one wonders why he even needs two categories. In principle, a simple homogenous category, the category of substance, would do for the purposes of his semantics.

As Marilyn Adams has convincingly argued (notably, on the basis of a passage from Buridan’s

*Questions on Aristotle’s De anima*, see Adams 1989:283–285), the need to posit a distinct category of quality stems from the need to explain genuine alteration as a change in quality, without having to resort to a “quantitative” analysis of it in terms of an atomistic physics. Thus, although logical analysis alone would allow a reduction of ontology to a single category, further considerations in metaphysics and physics do necessitate further ontological distinctions.

Indeed, it is precisely such further, metaphysical and physical reasons that prompt the great “systematizer and legitimizer” of Ockhamist nominalism, John Buridan to depart from Ockham’s ontology, despite sharing virtually the same semantics (see the entry on “► John Buridan,” this volume).

To be sure, despite the nominalist project of “ontological reduction,” in the nominalist semantic framework itself there is still what contemporary philosophers would identify as “quantification over non-existents,” and hence *ontological commitment* to some “weird entities.” However, in general, in medieval logic, quantification was not regarded as carrying ontological commitment. What we can refer to and quantify over may have been something, could be something, or, possibly, will be something, but if it is not actually one among the things presently populating our universe, then it is not anything, i.e., it is literally *nothing* (cf. Klima 2001:197–226, 2009:143–174). Thus, in the nominalist logical framework *to be* is simply to be identical with one of the actually existing things. Accordingly, although the affirmative copula in this framework still carries “existential import,” it does not *predicate* existence (whether absolutely or as qualified by the *significata* of the predicate). Rather, it is merely a syncategorematic sign of the identity of the *supposita* of the terms of an affirmative

**Being, Table 2** Ockham’s ontology

	Past	Present	Future	
Real beings	Two categories of real entities, possible in the past	Two categories of real entities, possible in the present	Two categories of real entities, possible in the future	Possible
	Two categories of real entities, actual in the past	Two categories of actual real entities	Two categories of real entities, actual in the future	Actual

proposition. Therefore, perhaps paradoxically, the verb “est”, functioning as a copula, does not even express the notion of being. In this sense, nominalist logic completely broke the strong links assumed in the older framework between the various modes of predication (construed as various ways of saying that something is), and the various ways in which things are.

## Cross-References

- ▶ [Albert of Saxony](#)
- ▶ [Essence and Existence](#)
- ▶ [Gabriel Biel](#)
- ▶ [Giles of Rome, Political Thought](#)
- ▶ [Henry of Ghent](#)
- ▶ [Ibn Rushd, Muḥammad ibn Aḥmad al-Ḥafīd \(Averroes\)](#)
- ▶ [Ibn Sīnā, Abū ‘Alī \(Avicenna\)](#)
- ▶ [John Buridan](#)
- ▶ [Marsilius of Inghen](#)
- ▶ [Peter Abelard](#)
- ▶ [Peter of Ailly](#)
- ▶ [Siger of Brabant](#)
- ▶ [Substance, Accident, and Modes](#)
- ▶ [Thomas Aquinas](#)
- ▶ [Thomas of Vio \(Cajetan\)](#)
- ▶ [William of Ockham](#)

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## Bernard of Clairvaux

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### Abstract

Bernard, abbot of Clairvaux 1115–1153, was one of the most eloquent preachers and spiritual writers of the medieval period. His

involvement in public affairs led him into conflict with two of the most distinguished schoolmen of his day, namely, Peter Abelard (1079–1142) at the Council of Sens (1141) and Gilbert of Poitiers (1076–1154) at the Council of Reims (1148). Nonetheless, he offered his own understanding on what he calls *consideratio*, strongly shaped by his reading of Augustine and other Church Fathers, of enormous influence over subsequent centuries. In particular, his emphasis on the role of experience and of desire for God in the spiritual life, and on the nature and character of love, would offer a perspective on the path to wisdom very different from that associated with either Aristotle or Boethius.

## Biography

Bernard (1090/1091–1153), born to a noble Burgundy family, decided to join the fledgling monastic community at Cîteaux, along with a group of companions, in around 1113. Stephen Harding had established a new monastic community there in 1098, dedicated to strict observance of the *Rule of Saint Benedict*, free from the accretions of monastic practice that had grown up over the centuries – such as had happened at Cluny. According to his friend and biographer, William of Saint-Thierry (*Vita prima* 4, PL 185, 237C), his arrival there with more than 30 companions transformed the struggling community. In 1115, he was befriended and consecrated abbot of a new daughter house at Clairvaux by William of Champeaux, bishop of Châlons (1113–1121) and previously a distinguished teacher of grammar, dialectic, and rhetoric. Although he had previously founded a community of canons regular at Saint Victor, William spent much time until his death in 1121, in the company of Bernard, either at Châlons or at Clairvaux. By the early 1120s, he was emerging as a powerful voice in supporting the cause of monastic reform, not least through his *Apologia* – a devastating critique of worldliness in the monastic order – dedicated to William of Saint-Thierry in around 1121/1122 (according to Holdsworth

1994). He also became an important advocate for the cause of just war, in his *De laude novae militiae*, written for the Order of Knights Templar. He was a prolific writer of letters and, during the 1130s, became closely involved in supporting Pope Innocent II against a rival claimant, Anacletus II, to the papal throne. In Lent 1140, the more philosophically trained William of Saint-Thierry urged him to act against the influence of Peter Abelard, whose theological ideas, he feared, might provoke schism in the church. The situation was aggravated by the enthusiastic support Abelard received from Arnold of Brescia, expelled from Rome at the II Lateran Council, held in 1139. This led to Bernard confronting Abelard at the Council of Sens on May 25, 1141 and writing many influential letters to Rome that secured Abelard's condemnation by the Pope (Mews 2002). In 1145/1146, Pope Eugenius III (the first Cistercian Pope and a protégé of Bernard) asked him to preach the Second Crusade, following the loss of the short-lived colony at Edessa. In 1148, he was urged by admirers to act against Gilbert of Poitiers, whose sophisticated analysis of the theological writings of Boethius was construed by some critics as being as dangerous as that of Peter Abelard. These ultimately unsuccessful forays into public life may have harmed his wider reputation, but they did not detract from his enduring popularity as a writer and theorist of the spiritual life.

## Thought

Little is known about Bernard's education at Châtillon prior to his becoming a monk at Cîteaux. William of Saint-Thierry would later recall that he gained his most important insights not from reading or from teachers but rather from the experience of solitude, gained from meditating "in woodland or field" (*Vita prima* 4, PL 185, 240CD). Monasticism provided a creative framework by which Bernard could channel his literary and spiritual energies, as well as formulate his own form of philosophical reflection, framed in terms of interior reflection rather than of academic enquiry.

Bernard was always interested in the need for authenticity in the religious life and the importance of *consideratio* or sustained reflection (Michel 1993). In an early work (1118/1119; Holdsworth 1994), the *De gradibus humilitatis et superbiae*, he builds on Benedict's relatively impersonal reflection on the stages of humility to reflect on the example presented by Christ in humbling himself to death. By overcoming personal obstacles, "they may cross over through contemplation to the third level of truth" (*De gradibus* 19; *SBO* 3:30). He was critical of monks who pursued vainglory rather than interior wisdom.

The first grade of pride is curiosity. You can see this in various ways: if you see a monk, in whom you had previously trusted well, standing, walking sitting everywhere, beginning to wander with his eyes, his head erect, ears attentive, you know the unchanged interior character of a man from external movements (*De gradibus* 28; *SBO* 3:38).

The monk praises fasting, commends vigils, elevates prayers above everything, disputes fully but uselessly about patience, humility or each of the virtues, so that you may say that the mouth speaks from the abundance of the heart, and that the good man offers good things from his good treasury (*De gradibus* 41; *SBO* 3:48).

His observations about false monasticism provide some of his most poignant insights and help explain his continuing popularity down through the centuries in an ascetic milieu.

In another early treatise addressed to William of Saint-Thierry, the *De gratia et libero arbitrio*, Bernard addresses a doctrinal issue, that of grace and free will, drawing firmly on the teaching of Augustine and the intellectual traditions of the school of Laon. He analyzes the nature of the free will or judgment that defines our humanity. This capacity for freedom is what defines us, as made in the image of God. He considers the various pressures acting against free will and the need for active consent to a good will. Everything good comes from divine grace but cannot be received without active choice on our part.

Bernard acquired perhaps the most distinctive aspect of his thought, his fascination with the Song of Songs as an account of the desire of the soul for the Word of God, through his encounter

with the commentary on that work of Origen, preserved in the Latin translation of Rufinus. Origen's writings had been little studied prior to the late eleventh century, having been officially condemned (apart from those approved by Jerome) in the fifth century. Bernard's discovery of Origen's commentary provided a new impetus for his reflection on the Song of Songs as a medium for reflecting on love and spiritual transformation. In the prologue to that commentary (In Cant. Prol. 2), Origen had spoken of the interest of the Greeks in composing many dialogues *de amoris natura* but sought to correct deficiencies by framing his reflection in terms of the Song of Songs – a treatise that he considered to focus on the contemplation of divinity, the ultimate focus of “true philosophy.” Origen's commentary, in which *amor* was used interchangeably with *dilectio* and *caritas* (even though Origen recognized that in scripture, the term *amor* was often replaced by *dilectio* and *caritas*), helped Bernard interpret the Song of Songs as the springboard for his own reflection on the spiritual life, in which he placed new attention on the role of experience. William of Saint-Thierry recalled the intimacy of the moment, when they were both convalescing at Clairvaux and debating the spiritual nature of the soul and the remedies offered by virtues against the vices (*Vita prima* 12, PL 185, 259B; dated to 1128 by Verdeyen 1992: 570, but perhaps earlier, following Holdsworth 1994). Bernard began to speak about the Song of Songs, very likely inspired by their reading of Origen, whose writings were preserved at Clairvaux.

Bernard was interested in the Song of Songs for what it had to say about the transformation of the soul in its desire for God. In his *De diligendo Deo*, composed probably in the early 1130s, he makes the first attempt in Christian tradition to write a treatise about loving God. While God should be loved for his own sake, he acknowledges that initially human beings love themselves for their own sake. Man must come acknowledge the supreme dignity that they have been accorded as creatures of free will made in the image of God. Self-knowledge is the most important path of any inquiry. Even those who did not know Christ were able to recognize that God should be loved for his

own sake, although this could not be achieved by their own effort (*De diligendo Deo* 6; *SBO* 3:123). He is acutely aware of the selfishness of human nature unredeemed by grace. This greed has to be subject to reason, in order to be transcended. Rather than urge the study of philosophy, he argues that the transformation takes place through loving God. Whereas William of Saint-Thierry had emphasized the gulf between carnal and spiritual love, Bernard focuses on the evolving stages of different kinds of love, beginning with love of self, evolving to love of neighbor, initially for one's own sake but subsequently for the sake of God. Man loves God initially for one's own sake, then for God's sake, and then only finally does man love himself for the sake of God.

Bernard started to compose his sermons on the Song of Songs during the mid-1130s, continuing to work on them over the next two decades. He sought to provide not a formal exegesis of its text but a reflection on the core themes of desire for God and the visiting of the soul by the Word of God. Because he was addressing monks rather than students of philosophy, he had no need to acknowledge formal sources of inspiration other than scripture. Nonetheless, his commentary was profoundly shaped by Origen's recasting of Platonist philosophy within the framework of the Song of Songs. In particular, he was excited by the bride's opening exclamation, *Osculetur me osculo oris sui* (Cant. 1:1) as a way of understanding scripture as a whole. The first kiss was the desire of those who longed for Christ, the second was that of Jesus as man, the third the anticipated mystery of the incarnation, and the fourth the incarnation itself (*super Cantica* 2; *SBO* 1:8–13). In a late sermon (*super Cantica* 74.3; *SBO* 2:241), he speaks of his having been frequently received visited by the Word, as a moment of mystical understanding that helped him understand scripture and Christian tradition. While Abelard emphasized the role of reason and the need to understand words in understanding God as supreme good and Hugh of Saint Victor the value of physical *sacramenta* as manifesting God's grace, Bernard highlighted the role of personal experience in this process. Although not the first monastic author to do so, his use of the

language of experience, of which he had great literary command, was of enormous influence within a monastic environment in creating an image of the self as alienated from its true goal (Pranger 1994). While more educated monks in the twelfth century would continue to study systematic works of philosophy and theology within a monastic context, his writings helped shape a more interior, devotional spirituality, employing the literary artifice of the devotional prayers and meditations of St Anselm.

Bernard's fame as a preacher led him to be increasingly involved in public affairs. In Lent 1140, William of Saint-Thierry – alarmed by reports of Abelard's influence within the Church – composed a detailed analysis of his theological errors to Bernard, who responded by addressing to Pope Innocent II a treatise of his own (*Epist.* 190; *SBO* 8:17–40) on the various errors of Peter Abelard, in large part derived from the writing of William of Saint-Thierry and a summary of texts, excerpted by an aide, very likely Thomas of Morigny. The final list of 19 heresies imputed to Abelard, agreed to by a meeting of these authors, was circulated by Bernard at the end of his *Epist.* 190 (Mews 1985). Whereas in the *De gradibus humilitatis et superbiae* he had inveighed against the spirit of *curiositas* in other monks, he now turned his rhetorical skills to caricature Abelard as embodying intellectual arrogance. He accused Abelard of undermining divine omnipotence and minimizing the significance of the redemption brought about by Christ's death. Misunderstanding Abelard's emphasis on the goodness of the Holy Spirit and reserve toward the doctrine of original sin, he painted his adversary as an arrogant philosopher, unwilling to submit himself to the discipline of the Christian faith.

In sermon 36 on the Song of Songs, written around the time of his confrontation with Abelard, Bernard defends himself against charges of anti-intellectualism:

Perhaps I might seem excessive in criticizing science as if rebuking learned men, and in prohibiting the study of letters. Far from it! I am not unaware of how great a service to the Church learned men have made, whether to refute adversaries or to instruct the simple (*super Cantica* 36.1; *SBO* 2:4).

He insists that his criticism is reserved only for those who misuse science by seeking self-aggrandizement or *curiositas*, or seeking knowledge for its own sake, and fail to pursue the only true *scientia*, that of self-knowledge, "because this is what reason, usefulness, and order, demand" (*super Cantica* 36.5; *SBO* 2:7).

Bernard composed his last major work, *De consideratione*, between 1148 and his death in 1153, as a treatise addressed to Pope Eugenius III, urging him to turn from public affairs and engage in *consideratio*, mature reflection "that purifies the mind... confers knowledge of human and divine affairs... hunts down truth, scrutinizes what seems to be true, and explores lies and deceit" (*De consideratione* 1.8; *SBO* 3:403). In particular, he reflects in relation to the four virtues that *consideratio* guides the mind into conformity with virtue (*De consideratione* 1.10; *SBO* 3:405). While he addresses Eugenius, reminding him that he is still a man, even though he has been elected Pope, the treatise can be read as a reflection on his own struggle to free himself from the trials of public life. The final end of consideration has to be oneself (*De consideratione* 2.6; *SBO* 3:414). After reflecting on the corruption, wealth, and legalism that have crept into the Church and the curia in particular, he devotes a long final book to reflecting on the third kind of consideration, namely, that which goes beyond its first and second kinds, namely, practical (*dispensativa*) and reflective (*aestimativa*) to that which is speculative (*speculativa*) and frees itself for contemplation (*De consideratione* 5.4; *SBO* 3:469). He concludes the work by laying out his understanding of God, employing the formula of St Anselm "that than which nothing better can be thought" (*De consideratione* 5.15–16; *SBO* 3:479). What Abelard had presented as *theologia*, Bernard refers to as *consideratio*, his considered reflection on how God may be transcribed, what Origen had described as the goal of true philosophy. His response to the question "What is God?" offers reflection on divine simplicity. Speaking of God's charity, majesty, and wisdom, he observes "It is not disputation but sanctity that comprehends them, if, however, what is incomprehensible can in any way be comprehended" (*De consideratione* 5.30; *SBO* 3:492). This leads

him to reflect on contemplation, as distinct from consideration, namely, admiration of divine majesty, observation of the judgments of God, the recollection of divine blessings, and the expectation of what is to come.

Bernard never called himself a philosopher and stood in an ambiguous relationship to those who pursued philosophical enquiry. His public criticism of both Peter Abelard and Gilbert of Poitiers led to him being considered as an anti-intellectual by his critics. Yet, there was much that was philosophical about his reflection on the role of experience and the limits of reason (Brague 1993).

## Cross-References

- ▶ Augustine
- ▶ Church Fathers
- ▶ Gilbert of Poitiers
- ▶ Hugh of St. Victor
- ▶ Peter Abelard
- ▶ William of Champeaux

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## Bero Magni de Ludosia

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### Abstract

Bero Magni de Ludosia, a Swedish philosopher who lived c. 1409–1465, taught only at the University of Vienna. His two major surviving commentaries, on Aristotle's *De anima*



and *De generatione*, are based, respectively, on John Buridan and Marsilius of Inghen. Bero's extensive discussions defend Aristotelian doctrine, such as explaining away 46 examples of sensory illusion. As well he digresses into other areas, such as Buridan's Ass, the Liar's Paradox, and the earliest known appearance of Ockham's Razor in the form "Entities should not be multiplied beyond necessity."

Bero Magni de Ludosia (Björn Magnusson, in Swedish) was born about 1409 in Lödöse, before isostatic rebound the major seaport of western Sweden. He was educated at the cathedral school in nearby Skara, and was likely a promising scholar, for he was sent off to study at the University of Vienna in 1429, an exile from which he never returned. He became a respected, long-serving professor of the Arts; he began theological studies, but never acquired the doctorate. Occasional visits to the Papal Curia are also recorded before his death in 1465 (Kihlman 2011a).

Relative much is known of his teaching, since the records for a number of his teaching years have been preserved. He undertook the usual courses expected of an Arts Master: classes on the *Ars vetus*, *De generatione*, the *Physics*, and others (Ferm 2011). Of these courses it is his commentaries on the *De generatione* and the *De anima* which have survived – in the case of the latter a *disputata*, indicating instruction conducted for students of his *bursa* in the afternoon after the regular lectures.

A few others of his works are extant: two academic speeches, two sermons, a commentary on the *Doctrinale* of Alexander of Villa Dei, and a grammatical tract, the *Verba communia*. One sermon raised a controversy, for in it he referred to the *vulvae virginalis*, which was perceived as unnecessarily rude; his defense prevailed, since the offending passage could be shown to be a quote from the pseudo-Augustine (Gejrot and Kihlman 2011: 13).

Bero never returned to Sweden, but his library did, as witnessed by a list of books donated to the cathedral library of Skara (Kihlman 2011b). The

information supplied by this list further confirms the interests of a Viennese professor – although oddly no copies of Aristotle's *De anima* or *De generatione* were included. Bero was remembered a century after his death in by the chronicler Olaus Magnus, who called "the wise Bero" an example of the "brilliant talent in Scandinavia" (Olaus Magnus 1555: 70).

Bero is most important as an interpreter of others' works: John Buridan in the case of the *De anima* and Marsilius of Inghen in the case of the *De generatione*. Writing a century after Buridan, Bero represents the mature stage of the domination of Buridan's thought in the schools of Central and Eastern Europe. Bero follows Buridan's question titles exactly, and his conclusions are often verbatim those of Buridan. Yet in the course of discussion, Bero takes every opportunity to expand upon Buridan's arguments and supplements them with many intriguing and interesting observations; Bero's commentary is one of the longest (122,000 words) surviving *De anima* commentaries of the Middle Ages.

Bero's comments, presented as illustrations for his students, also provide definitive early interpretations of Buridan's ideas. A good case in point concerns the famous Buridan's Ass. Schopenhauer, among others, looked in vain for the example in Buridan (Rescher 2006: 127 n. 26); it is in fact in Buridan's *De caelo* commentary (Buridanus 1996: 50), in Bero formulated in terms of a dog equally attracted to ten portions of meat. It derives from Aristotle's case (Aristotle's *De caelo* II,13 295b32) of a man equally hungry and thirsty, who would fasten at a midpoint between food and drink. Much later commentators have debated whether the intent of the medieval example was to show that animals are slaves to their desires, or to argue for intellectual determinism, or even to ridicule Buridan (Kaye 2005). Bero's presentation is unambiguous: it is an argument that the senses do not supply freedom and that an animal lacking in intellect is unable to choose among equal sensory inputs. Bero's use shows the earliest stage of the diffusion of this philosophical paradox.

Bero's *De anima* commentary allows for digressions upon other interesting topics. *De*



*anima* Book III,6 430a6-7, gave grounds to explore the Liar's Paradox, otherwise traditionally addressed in medieval *Sophismata* or *Insolubilia*. Bero introduces the Liar's Paradox as a counterexample to the correspondence theory of truth and transfers it to the sphere of the mental. Bero begins with the notion of a mental entity which causes its own existence. Such an entity is "concept"; whenever "concept" is thought, it creates its own existence. But what happens when I think "I am thinking a false concept" or "The thought I am thinking is false"? Even more puzzling, is it possible for God to conceive the concept "This concept is false"? If so, has He created a concept that is true or one that is false? In the realm of concepts, we are also God-like in being able to create the existence of something, a concept, merely by thinking of it. What do I create when I think "This concept is false"? Am I thinking something true, or am I thinking something false? Bero's treatment is a rebuke to those who claim that the Liar's Paradox cannot occur in mental language (Dutilh Novaes 2008: 254).

Bero offers six different explanations for the Liar's Paradox, taken from John Buridan, Thomas Bradwardine, Albert of Saxony, and John Wycliffe. Bero's own original solution is similar to the move called *mediantes* by Bradwardine (2010: 90), that an insoluble proposition has no truth value or perhaps a third value other than truth or falsity – thus in violation of the principle of excluded middle. Bero Magni says that "all [insoluble propositions] are doubtful, so that in this life they cannot naturally be known whether they are true or false," implying that insolubles have truth-values now, just that we do not yet know them. Discussion of the Liar's Paradox has not been found in any other *De anima* commentary.

The expansiveness of Bero's commentaries allows for elaboration of traditional themes. One such is the listing of sensory illusions, raised as disconfirmation of Aristotle's perhaps ill-advised claim that our senses are never deceived about direct and immediate sensations (*De anima* II, 6 418a12). Many apparent counterexamples are well known throughout the history of philosophy: the stick which seems bent in

water, the apparent size of the sun, and a square tower which seems round at a distance. Other examples rather are natural phenomena which are difficult to explain: bioluminescence, mirrors, and the rainbow. A number of such examples were later used by Descartes but for a more confrontational purpose; Bero in all instances defends Aristotle.

Bero Magni's other major surviving commentary, on Aristotle's *De generatione et corruptione*, treats the expected Aristotelian topics: how the things of the world come into existence, the four causes and the four elements. But besides these issues, Bero addresses puzzles and curiosities which seem to challenge Aristotelian theory, such as: How can semen create a complete human? Why does black hair turn gray? How does wine change into vinegar? Bero also engaged the superstitions of the day: How can frogs and flies be created by spontaneous generation out of mud? How can the salamander survive in fire? How can swifts spend the winter under water?

The recovery of Bero's thought helps to clarify the historical record. For instance, Bero provides conclusive proof that Ockham's Razor, in the form "Entities should not be multiplied beyond necessity" (*entia non sunt multiplicanda sine necessitate*), often claimed to be post-medieval (see Maurer 1978: 247–248), was indeed current in the Middle Ages. Bero in his *De generatione* commentary presents this exact form, as does Master Thomas' *De anima* commentary, which accompanies Bero's in their sole manuscript (Andrews 2016: 279 n. 33).

Bero also lies behind an early printed work, the *Verba communia*, an incunabulum of 1489, which is a grammatical treatise perhaps arising out of his classroom teaching. It consists of a hexameter verse commentary on the *verba communia*, passive verbs with both passive and active senses; this in turn is accompanied by a prose commentary. It is not clear how much of this text is authentically Bero.

The complete recovery of the works of Bero Magni, one of the earliest philosophers from Sweden, will help to clarify the full extent of the Swedish contribution to European intellectual history.

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## Berthold of Moosburg

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### Abstract

Berthold of Moosburg was a fourteenth-century German Dominican. He was called to direct the Dominican studium in Cologne in 1335, where he was involved in resolving the crisis caused by the conviction of Meister Eckhart's doctrines (1329). The doctrinal solution proposed by Berthold is contained in his commentary on Proclus's *Elements of Theology* (*Expositio super elementationem theologiam Procli*), the only medieval commentary on Proclus, a veritable summa of Neoplatonism. Berthold's project was to promote the return to the Neoplatonic tradition of the German Dominicans, dating back to Albertus Magnus. He demonstrated that the Albertine school was an autonomous and unitary cultural identity that had its roots in ancient wisdom, of which Proclus, according to Berthold, was the most outstanding exponent. Berthold sees in the Greek diadochus a "divine man" who

could scan the divine properties, which are present in the totality of the real world, and therefore ascend to God only by means of the natural reason. In the same way, according to Berthold, the philosopher who studies Proclian theorems performs a cognitive ascent which leads him to the contemplation of God. This is possible by virtue of the presence in man of a divine faculty, i.e., the “One of the soul.”

The few data available about Berthold of Moosburg’s life date to the period between 1316 and 1361. He was one of the most prominent Dominican lecturers teaching in Germany in the fourteenth century, and his career was that typical of an intellectual belonging to the Dominican order. He studied abroad, in Oxford (1316), was lecturer in Regensburg in 1327, and from 1335 to 1343 held the prestigious office of “chief lecturer” (*lector principalis*) at the *studium generale* in Cologne, a position which had previously been occupied by such figures as Albertus Magnus and Meister Eckhart. He had to leave Cologne when the Dominicans were expelled by the city authorities (1346–1351) as the result of a dispute over their incomes. Berthold seems to have spent these years in Nuremberg, where his presence is attested in 1348 as “vicar of the preaching friars for Bavaria.” After this date we find his name only in the testamentary papers of a Beguine, for whom he was the executor until 1361, when he renounced his assignment in favor of another executor.

He most likely wrote his monumental work *Expositio super Elementationem theologiam Procli*, a commentary on Proclus’s *Elements of Theology*, during his stay in Cologne. This is in fact the only work by Berthold which has been handed down to us, if we exclude some glosses to a text by Dietrich of Freiberg concerning the determination of the poles of a rainbow.

Berthold, who was a contemporary of John Tauler (1300–1361) and Henry Suso (ca. 1295/97–1366), belonged to that group of young intellectuals who were directly involved in the crisis and the discussions caused by the trial for heresy brought against Meister Eckhart, which ended in

1329 with the promulgation of a conviction bull (*In agro dominico*). Appointed director of the Cologne *studium*, Berthold contributed to resolving the post-Eckhartian crisis by promoting a return to the philosophical tradition of the German Dominicans, which could be traced back, through Ulrich of Strasburg and Dietrich of Freiberg, to Albertus Magnus. He carried out his philosophical project by commenting on Proclus’s *Elements of Theology*, that is, by choosing a Neoplatonic work – instead of an Aristotelian text, as was usual at that time – which had had limited influence in Parisian scholasticism but was much-appreciated from a doctrinal point of view at Albertus Magnus’s school in Cologne (by Dietrich of Freiberg and Eckhart), definitely oriented toward Neoplatonism. Berthold ushered in the most mature phase of Proclus’s reception, also using the commentary on Plato’s *Parmenides* and the *opuscula*. In particular, the great novelty introduced by Berthold was the use of the *opuscula*, having understood its importance for ethics and anthropology.

In the *Expositio* Berthold gathers the doctrines of the principal authors of the Neoplatonic tradition – from Augustine and the Pseudo-Dionysius to the contemporary German Dominicans (Albertus Magnus, Ulrich of Strasburg, and Dietrich of Freiberg) – in order to construct a unitary system, a veritable *summa* of medieval Neoplatonism.

In the prologue Berthold states the reasons for his decision to comment on Proclus’s work. The metaphysics contained in the *Elements of Theology* is a “divine philosophy,” made up of 211 theorems, which deals with God and the divine properties. These theorems describe reality according to the twofold movement, typical of the Neoplatonic doctrine, of procession from the One and return to him. Reality, produced by God, is described by Berthold from a “natural” point of view. He deals with the natural order of totality made up of a series of symmetrical planes, identical to each other in terms of essence and different in terms of being: these are Proclus’s four maneries, i.e., One, intellect, soul, and body.

Berthold maintains that, by means of the philosophy contained in the Proclean theorems, man

performs the ascent which leads him to the contemplation of the “divine exclusively divine,” that is, of the highest good. Man returns to the final perfection for which he was created, that is, to beatitude, and becomes not only blessed but also divine. The aim of Proclus’s work thus lies in performing a gradual ascent which, starting from the real world – which is divine by participation – reaches the divine world, which is such by essence. In particular, he who contemplates, i.e., the philosopher, grasps the divine realities by means of that cognitive principle which enables him to perform the ascent. Said principle is the “One of the soul” (*unum animae*), which possesses absolute superiority compared to every other principle within us.

Berthold asserts that Proclean henology is superior to Aristotelian ontology because it does not stop at the dimension of being, as happens in Aristotle’s metaphysics. Actually, Proclus, like Plato and the pre-Socratics, exalts a super-intellective knowledge produced by the “One of the soul,” which grasps the principles of principles, i.e., the supreme beings (*super-entia*) and, above all, the first good. Berthold points out the limits of Aristotle’s metaphysics: it has failed because its range of investigation is confined to the plane of being and because it has not been able to see in man the presence of that divine principle – by far superior to the intellect – which enables him to know the divine things. Therefore, the “One of the soul” becomes for Berthold the reason for the superiority of Platonic thought over all other philosophies.

Berthold sees in Proclus an example of “divine man,” the most prominent representative of those pagans who scanned the divine properties (*invisibilia Dei*) by means of the natural reason so deeply as to ascend to God. The German Dominican wants therefore to tie his commentary to ancient wisdom, as is also demonstrated by his frequent use of the Hermetic writings. From the Asclepius Berthold derives the concepts of “macrocosm” and “microcosm,” and through the Hermetic definition of man as “link between God and the world” (*homo nexus dei et mundi*), he explains how man is the connection point between the two planes of reality, the material and the divine.

The topics mentioned so far do not exhaust the problems tackled by Berthold in his *Expositio*, which amounts to nearly 2000 printed pages (the critical edition in eight volumes is now complete), but they are crucial points in Berthold’s doctrine which echo the typical doctrines of the German Dominican school, i.e., of Albertus Magnus’s school. For example, Berthold explains the structure of the Proclian cosmos by means of the “fluxus-doctrine” of Albertus Magnus and Ulrich of Strasbourg, namely, as a causal emanation of the first principle, which, as light, spreads everywhere producing the multitude of the beings. The latter are identical to the first principle in essence but manifold in terms of existence. In order to explain how this emanation takes place, Berthold resorts to Dietrich of Freiberg’s theory of essential causality. Moreover, the doctrine of the divine man had already been developed by Albertus Magnus in his theory of the intellect. However, Berthold develops it further, concentrating his attention on the Proclian concept of the “One of the soul,” which he takes from the *opuscula*. In many passages of the *Expositio*, Berthold identifies the “One of the soul” with Augustine’s “profundity of the mind” (*abditum mentis*) and with Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite’s “union” (*unitio*, translation of Greek *henosis*) surpassing the nature of the soul. This identification had already been partially stated by Dietrich of Freiberg in defining the agent intellect and by Eckhart in describing the “ground of the soul” (*grunt der sêle*). Therefore, Berthold operates a speculative synthesis of all his sources and transforms the doctrine of the divine man into the theoretical bond of the German Dominican school. The principal source for the *homo nexus dei et mundi* theorem and other Hermetic doctrines is again Albertus Magnus. However, the writings ascribed to the mythical figure of Hermes Trismegistus were often used in the early fourteenth-century Germany in connection with Proclus’s philosophy because the Neoplatonic and Hermetic doctrines were thought to derive from an ancient wisdom and to be the product of a philosophical revelation granted to a chosen few.

Berthold’s *Expositio* elaborates a synthesis of medieval Neoplatonic tradition and takes stock

of the German Dominican school in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries. By inserting the doctrines of his German predecessors into the vast panorama of ancient and medieval Neoplatonism, Berthold consolidates the cultural identity of the Albertine school and emphasizes its autonomy and unitary character. The recourse to Neoplatonism thereby assumes the attributes of a cultural plan carefully elaborated by the German Dominicans and overtly contrasting with Parisian scholasticism, which in those same years was engaged in interpreting Aristotle's texts.

Berthold's attempt to expand on the speculative tenets of the Albertine school by means of the *Expositio* failed soon after his death due to opposition from Thomists and orthodox followers of Eckhart. A century later this tradition would be revived, thanks to Nicholas of Cusa, an admirer of Berthold's commentary, who mentions him in his *Apology of the Learned Ignorance* together with the exponents of Christian Neoplatonism, in dispute with the Aristotelian school.

## Cross-References

- ▶ [Albertism](#)
- ▶ [Dietrich of Freiberg](#)
- ▶ [Greek Texts Translated into Hebrew](#)
- ▶ [Hermes Trismegistus](#)
- ▶ [Meister Eckhart](#)
- ▶ [Proclus, Arabic](#)
- ▶ [Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite](#)
- ▶ [Ulrich of Strasbourg](#)

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## al-Bīrūnī, Abū Rayḥān

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### Abstract

Al-Bīrūnī, Abū Rayḥān Muḥammad ibn Aḥmad was one of the most original minds of the Muslim world, and by the encyclopedic scope of his interests, perhaps of the whole Middle Ages. In contrast to many less important scientists of the Muslim world, he left no impact on Western scholasticism. The titles of his works amount to 148, but only a part of them is still extant. They deal with astronomy and astrology, geography and geodesy, mathematics and calendar reckoning, mechanics, mineralogy and pharmacognosy, and history of religions and culture. Being a committed Muslim, he was at the same time an enthusiastic admirer of the Greek thinkers. His Arabic style is sometimes sarcastic, especially when dealing with Muslim theologians who rejected obvious facts. Remarkable is also a cautious use of experiments, which are not to prove some preconceived ideas but to falsify them.

From his native region at the Amu Darya river, he did not travel further westward than to the Caspian Sea, but he had the opportunity, when accompanying military excursions, to become acquainted with the religion and customs of the Hindus, whose beliefs and sciences he censures from the standpoint of both his Muslim conviction and Greek science.

Al-Bīrūnī was born in 973 CE in Kath, a city on the Amu Darya river, the ancient Oxus, then the capital of Khwarezm. Although, as it seems, of humble origin, he was fortunate enough of being educated at the court of the ruling Khwarezm-Shahs, where one of the princes, Abū Naṣr Maṣṣūr ibn 'Irāq, a leading mathematician of the time, taught him the elements of geometry and astronomy. Very early in his youth, he began with astronomical observations and the construction of the necessary instruments. Due to political conflicts, he had to settle temporarily in Persia, first Rayy, near modern Teheran, where he had the opportunity to participate in the observations with a large mural sextant. Here in Rayy lived 100 years earlier the great physician and alchemist Abū Bakr al-Rāzī. Al-Bīrūnī compiled a bibliography of his works while not failing to distance himself sharply from his heresies.

Later, he had to settle in Gurgān at the southern coast of the Caspian Sea, where he dedicated to the sultan Qābūs his *Chronology*. In this book, he discusses the astronomical foundations of calendar reckoning of all the people and religions known to him. It contains a lot of interesting details of cultural history. Remarkable in this context is also his intimate knowledge of the Bible. Back in Khwarezm, he became, as a counselor of the ruling Khwarezm-Shah, involved in the inner politics of the country that was threatened and in the end occupied by the sultan Maḥmūd of Ghazna, who extended his empire from Afghanistan to Persia, Georgia, and the whole Central Asia. Al-Bīrūnī was deported together with other intellectuals to Maḥmūd's residence in Ghazna, present-day Ghazni. Here he could continue his astronomical observations. For a woman named Rayḥāna who hailed also from Khwarezm, he



wrote an *Introduction into the Art of Astrology* in the form of questions and answers. From a mountain that offered a far-reaching sight over the Indus plain, he measured the circumference of the earth with a method that was already used by the Caliph al-Ma'mūn (r. 813–833). Either willingly or unwillingly, he accompanied the repeated military incursions into Punjab, where Maḥmūd pillaged the temples and took rich booty of gold and slaves. The fruit of al-Bīrūnī's observations is a great monograph on the Hindus, their language, literature, religion, and customs. He finds most of this bizarre and the state of their astronomy below the standard of Greek science. He even learnt Sanskrit and tried, with the help of indigenous assistants, to translate some basic mathematical and astronomical texts into this language for the benefit of Hindu colleagues who were, though, unwilling to learn something new. With Maḥmūd's son and successor Mas'ūd, he was, as it seems, on friendly terms as he dedicated to him a huge astronomical handbook which bears therefore the title *The Mas'ūdic Canon*. A description of precious stones and metals, written in a more entertaining style and nowadays called *The Mineralogy*, was dedicated to Mas'ūd's successor al-Mawdūd. In an earlier tract, he had determined with a specially designed vessel the specific weight of 18 such substances. The last big work is a pharmacognosy, a list of 1,116 articles, where he equates about 4,500 names in 27 languages of plants and mineral substances used in therapy and diet. The arid philological subject appears sometimes enriched with interesting anecdotes. He left it partly unfinished when he died in 1048 CE in Ghazna.

Al-Bīrūnī was one of those enlightened intellectuals in the Muslim world, who were firm adherents of the Greek scientific heritage that came down to them via the Alexandrian school of late antiquity and the indefatigable activities of the Syrian and Arab translators working in ninth-century Baghdad. In a sarcastic style, he censures often those people who did not share his belief in the primacy of the Greeks. Typical for a medieval intellectual, in general, are derogatory remarks on his mother tongue, the now extinct Khwarezmian. He praises instead the Arabic language that he had

to learn later in life as the only suitable medium for the cultivation of the sciences. Sometimes, he stands out by a new and daring approach to geodetic and astronomical problems. While celestial globes with the pictures of the Greek constellations were widely in use, he was the first to construct a terrestrial globe, that is, a model of the Northern Hemisphere with a diameter of 5 m where he could combine the geographical latitudes and longitudes of the cities with their distances in miles as reported by travelers. While being in Kath, he determined in collaboration with a colleague in Baghdad the longitudinal difference between the two cities. This was possible by a lunar eclipse, which was to be observed at different times of the day in both places, in Kath 1 h earlier, what corresponded to 15°. In a special treatise on the various types of the astrolabe, he mentions one which was constructed on the conception that the sphere of the fixed stars rests immobile while the earth is rotating on its place in the center. He adds that this would not be impossible on mathematical grounds, but he sees difficulties in bringing this in accord with the physical realities. Occasionally, he made a cautious use of experiments, but not to prove some preconceived ideas, as was often the case in Greek science and later on, but to falsify them when showing that the observed facts did not tally with them.

In a correspondence with his younger colleague Avicenna, he shows certain dissatisfaction with Aristotle's natural philosophy, while the latter feels obliged to defend the great master. Al-Bīrūnī touches on a variety of questions: When the heavy elements earth and water gather around the center of the universe and the water is less heavy, why does it not cover the earth equally from all sides? Air and fire are, according to Aristotle, absolutely light, while air is less light. Here al-Bīrūnī puts forward the alternative that both may possess also heaviness and that the air, while being heavier, presses the sphere of fire against that of the moon. We all know that the cold lets bodies contract, while warmth causes them to expand. But why do glass vessels shatter when water contained therein freezes? And why does ice swim on the water despite its solid

“earthy” nature? When water evaporates, does it really become air or are its particles only scattered in the air? This leads to the question of the existence of a vacuum, what both try to solve with the help of experiments. Al-Bīrūnī thinks that a vacuum in the air is necessary when one assumes a corpuscular nature of light. Al-Bīrūnī defends not only a physical but also a mathematical atomism, arguing that otherwise one side of a square and the diagonal would be of equal length, as both consist of the same, that is, an infinite number of parts.

In the correspondence, he articulates also his Muslim faith. He doubts the eternity of the world and defends the creationism of the Alexandrian Christian thinker John Philoponus, whom Avicenna on the other hand treats as a hypocrite. Al-Bīrūnī contradicts even the opinion that our cosmos should be the only exemplar of its kind and accuses Avicenna, who follows Aristotle in this respect, of trying to limit God’s omnipotence. It may be that his skepticism toward these basic tenets of the Aristotelian and Neoplatonic mainstream as prevalent in Arabic philosophy has earned him the nickname al-Bīrūnī, which sounds like the so-called *nisba*, which was usually given to a person after his birthplace. But a place called Bīrūn or Bērūn cannot easily be determined. The Bīrūniyyūn were in Arabic transcription the philosophical sect of the Pyrrhonists, whose radical skepticism was known through doxographies or occasional remarks of Galen of Pergamum.

He shows his truly scientific outlook when dealing with the reports about wondrous and unexplained phenomena, as, for example, Saint Elmo’s fire on high sea or strange therapeutic methods of the Indians or the fire that appears at Easter in the Church of the Holy Sepulchre in Jerusalem. He refrains from rash statements and leaves the question open until more evidence may be found. On the other hand, he is nevertheless, seen in the context of his time, an outstanding representative of historical criticism when he analyses, for example, the tendentiousness of the legends told by the Persians about Alexander the Great.

Due to the wideness of his interests, it proves to be difficult to appreciate equally all his various achievements. The last monograph by Pavel G.

Bulgakov about his life and works appeared in 1972 in Russian and was not translated into any other language.

## Cross-References

- ▶ [Abū Bakr al-Rāzī, Muḥammad ibn Zakarīyā’ \(Rhazes\)](#)
- ▶ [Alexandrian Tradition into Arabic: Medicine](#)
- ▶ [Alexandrian Tradition into Arabic: Philosophy](#)
- ▶ [Doxographies, Graeco-Arabic](#)
- ▶ [Ibn Sīnā, Abū ‘Alī \(Avicenna\)](#)
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## Boethius

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### Abstract

Anicius Manlius Severinus Boethius, a late ancient Roman thinker, profoundly influenced western medieval philosophy, literature, and the liberal arts. Boethius translated and commented on a number of important Aristotelian logical works. These translations and commentaries provided the foundations for early medieval logic, philosophy of language, and metaphysics. Boethius' short theological treatises are remarkable for the way in which they apply Greek philosophical concepts to Christian doctrine. His *Consolation of Philosophy* is a vivid synthesis of Stoic, Aristotelian, and especially Neoplatonic ethics and philosophical theology. It is a masterpiece, whose literary qualities as well as its philosophical material have influenced generations of humanists.

## Biography

Anicius Manlius Severinus Boethius was born into a Roman aristocratic family in the second half of the fifth century (c. 475–477 CE). For most of his life, Boethius lived and worked in Rome, where he was appointed consul in 510 CE and, perhaps subsequently, prefect. These traditional offices were mostly symbolic. The Ostrogothic king Theodoric ruled Italy from Ravenna. In 522 CE, Boethius accepted the appointment of Master of Offices at Ravenna and became one of Theodoric's most important functionaries. Shortly thereafter Boethius was accused of treason and practicing black magic. Boethius might have been the hapless victim of low-level political intrigues and rivalries, but some historians speculate that Boethius was active in a plot to undermine Theodoric. In the event, Theodoric was convinced that Boethius was guilty and he sentenced Boethius to death. Boethius was executed sometime between 524 and 526 CE. The time that Boethius remained imprisoned before his execution was sufficient for composing his most famous work, the *Consolation of Philosophy*.

## Works and Thought

In addition to the *Consolation*, Boethius produced a number of important translations and treatises. He translated most, if not all, of Aristotle's *Organon* as well as Porphyry's *Isagoge*. He composed commentaries on several of the works that he translated, a series of handbooks on various topics in logic, a series of handbooks on the mathematical sciences, and five short theological treatises.

1. Translations. Boethius planned to translate and comment upon all the known writings of Plato and Aristotle (in *De int.* 2nd edn. 79–80). However, Boethius only managed to complete a fraction of his proposed project. Boethius might have produced a complete translation of Aristotle's *Organon*. Versions of his translations of the *Categories*, *On Interpretation*, *Prior Analytics*, *Topics*, and *Sophistical Refutations* survive and have been critically edited

in the *Aristoteles Latinus* series (Minio-Paluello et al. 1961–1975). Many scholars believe that Boethius finished a translation of Aristotle's *Posterior Analytics*, but if it ever did exist, it is now lost. In addition to the *Organon*, Boethius translated Porphyry's *Isagoge*, which is traditionally taken to be an introduction to Aristotle's logic. Those works of Aristotle that did not get rendered into Latin by his hand were, by and large, lost to the West until the latter part of the twelfth century.

Boethius labored over his translations. Some of them seem to have gone through several editions. Boethius aimed for accuracy over elegance, and by most estimates, he succeeded at rendering Aristotle's thoughts in a rigorous and faithful manner (Barnes, in Gibson 1981; Ebbesen 1990).

2. Commentaries. Boethius managed to comment on Aristotle's *Categories*, Aristotle's *On Interpretation* (twice, once in introductory form and once in intermediate), Porphyry's *Isagoge* (twice, first based on Marius Victorinus' translation and later in a version based on his own translation), and Cicero's *Topics*. He may have commented on at least some of the rest of the *Organon*, and he may have composed a greater commentary on the *Categories*, but only fragments of unknown authenticity survive (Hadot 1959).

Boethius' commentaries on Aristotle and Porphyry belong to the tradition of Neoplatonic commentaries on these logical works. Boethius' commentary on the *Categories* by and large follows Porphyry's shorter question and answer commentary. His greater commentary on *On Interpretation* primarily follows Porphyry's now lost commentary on that same work.

While Boethius tends to follow Porphyry, he is well aware of the views of other Neoplatonists. At least one scholar has argued that Boethius attended lectures at the Neoplatonic school in Alexandria (Courcelle 1948, 299–300 [= 1969, 316–318]). However, the current consensus is that Boethius probably learned about Neoplatonism in writings that he would have come across in Italy and that he did not study in Egypt or Athens.

The commentary is a genre that places a premium on passing on the received wisdom of a particular school. Boethius' commentaries are no exception to this general rule. One should not expect to find Boethius' most original and creative work in his commentaries. However, one should be careful before subscribing to Shiel's (1958) thesis that Boethius merely cobbled together the material that he found in the scholia of his manuscripts of Aristotle. Boethius probably had to make decisions about what to include, what to omit, and what to emphasize (Barnes, in Gibson 1981; Ebbesen 1990). Furthermore, there are a number of excurses scattered throughout Boethius' commentaries that do not appear to be merely copied from his source material.

Perhaps the most famous digression is Boethius' treatment of the problem of universals in his second commentary on Porphyry's *Isagoge* (in *Isag.* 2nd edn., I, 10–11, 159–167; English translation in Spade 1994). Therein Boethius developed a series of intriguing arguments in favor of the conclusion that universals do not exist outside the mind. The main thrust of these arguments is that something exists outside the mind only if it is a unity, but universals cannot be a unity and also exhibit the property of universality, viz., to be common to many things. Boethius, then, posed a dilemma for those who believe that universals do not exist outside the mind. We surely have concepts that are universal. But if these concepts do not represent the world as it truly is, then these concepts appear to be empty and false. Boethius offered a solution that he attributed to the third-century Aristotelian philosopher Alexander of Aphrodisias. The mind is capable of considering things in a manner different from that in which they exist. In particular, the mind is able to consider and compare the features of concrete particulars without reference to the particular, even though these features cannot actually be separated from the particulars. By abstracting features in this manner, the mind is able to construct universal concepts. Hence, while universals do not exist in things as something common to many, the concept of a universal – since it is abstracted from things in the right way – can be truthfully attributed to many things.

3. Logical Handbooks. In addition to his commentaries, Boethius wrote several handbooks on logic. Five of these treatises survive: *On the Categorical Syllogism*, *Introduction to the Categorical Syllogism* (incomplete), *On Division*, *On the Hypothetical Syllogism*, and *On Topical Differences*. Boethius planned to write an overview of the study of logic entitled *On the Order of the Peripatetic Disciplines*, but no such work survives.

*On the Categorical Syllogism* and *Introduction to the Categorical Syllogism* introduce the student to the forms of valid syllogisms presented in Aristotle's *Prior Analytics* and *On Interpretation*. These treatises were quickly superseded by Aristotle's work once it became available again in the West.

*On Division* presents an introduction to the logical exercise of "division" and its correlative process "collection." Division is a process of resolving wholes into parts; collection is a process of determining what items are contained by some whole. Hence, Boethius' presentation of division requires that he discusses the varieties of parts and wholes. Boethius' remarks about parts and wholes were instrumental in the development of medieval mereology (see the entry on ► "[Mereology](#)" in this Encyclopedia).

For historians of logic, Boethius' treatises on the hypothetical syllogism and the topics are perhaps the most interesting. In part, this is due to the fact that they are almost the only surviving late ancient treatments of these important fields in the history of logic.

Boethius' treatise on the hypothetical syllogism is the only surviving late ancient treatment of the conditional. Superficially, the treatise appears to present a version of the propositional logic that is credited to the Stoics. This impression has led to some puzzlement over Boethius' peculiar views about the conditional. For example, Boethius appears to have assimilated  $p \rightarrow \neg q$  to  $\neg(p \rightarrow q)$ , whereas modern logicians sharply distinguish these propositions from one another (Barnes, in Gibson 1981). But as Christopher Martin (1991) has shown, uncritically representing Boethius' claims about conditionals

in terms of propositional logic is highly misleading. In order to have a propositional logic, one must have the concepts of propositional content and propositional operations. According to Martin, Boethius had neither. Rather, Boethius worked with a muddled version of Aristotelian term logic. Once this fact is grasped, one is in a better position to appreciate the remarkable innovations of the twelfth century. Peter Abelard and his fellow twelfth-century logicians, not Boethius, were the true heirs to the Stoics.

The treatise on topical reasoning, along with his commentary on Cicero's *Topics*, gives us a rare glimpse into the late ancient understanding of this complex outgrowth from Aristotle's *Topics*. Topical theory focuses upon the discovery of dialectical arguments. Boethius' discussion of the topics breaks down into two parts. One part consists of a list of key terms (the *differentiae*) that the dialectician seeks in order to construct an argument that will settle a dispute. The other part consists of a list of the "maximal sentences" that are associated with each *differentia*. The maximal sentence is a general proposition concerning the key term that will help the dialectician to construct his proof. Boethius noted that there are two different lists of topical *differentiae*, one handed down from Cicero and another handed down from Themistius, and he took it upon himself to show that these two lists really coincide.

As with his logical commentaries, most scholars believe that Boethius' textbooks are largely derivative. Some are believed to be adapted from earlier Greek works. For example, it appears that Boethius consulted Porphyry's commentary on Plato's *Sophist* and perhaps some earlier Aristotelian material when he composed his *On Division*. In other cases, Boethius may have had a greater hand in the selection and presentation of the material. It is possible that *On Hypothetical Syllogisms* is, as Boethius himself claimed, his most original work.

4. Handbooks on the Quadrivium. In the ancient world, music and astronomy (or astrology), in addition to arithmetic and geometry, were considered mathematical sciences. Boethius appears to have coined the term "quadrivium"



to denote these four sciences. There is some historical evidence that Boethius composed treatises on all four topics. However, only Boethius' treatises on arithmetic and music (in part) survive. There are a few fragments of a book on geometry that some have attributed to Boethius (Folkerts 1970), but this attribution has been questioned (Caldwell and Pingree, in Gibson 1981).

Boethius' book on arithmetic is in large part a translation with elaborations of a book by the second-century Neo-Pythagorean scholar Nicomachus of Gerasa. It is concerned with the abstract properties of number.

Boethius' treatise on music is probably also dependent upon the work of previous, mostly Greek, authors, but the arrangement of the material seems to be at least in part attributable to Boethius himself (Caldwell, in Gibson 1981).

##### 5. *The Theological Tractates* (Opuscula Sacra).

Over the course of his career, Boethius composed five short treatises on theological topics. Several of these were written in response to theological disputes that were raging during Boethius' lifetime (see Chadwick 1981, chapter 4).

*On the Trinity* (Opusc. I) and, in much more superficial manner, *Whether the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are Substantially Predicated of the Divine* (Opusc. II) deal with the unity and diversity of the Trinity. In these works Boethius aimed to show that statements involving the Trinity are not statements about God's substance, since that would compromise the unity of God. Yet, sentences pertaining to the Trinity are not merely figurative. Rather, the Persons are real features of God, and there is a real difference between the Persons.

To extricate himself from this dilemma, Boethius proposed a third way to predicate something of God – namely, by predicating certain *non-accidental relatives* of God (Opusc. I, 5; Opusc. II, 3). If the Persons are relatives, then the Persons are real aspects of the Divine, but they in no way compromise God's substance. Boethius devoted the rest of *On the Trinity* to the defense of the notion of a non-

accidental relative. He allowed himself a caveat, however: if one cannot fully comprehend the way in which the Persons are non-accidentally related to one another and to God, this is a function of the fact that God is transcendent and his nature is ultimately and ineliminably obscure to us (Opusc. I, 6).

The treatise *How Substances Can Be Good in That They Are When They Are Not Substantial Goods* (Opusc. III), which is known in the Middle Ages by the title *On the Hebdomads*, is perhaps the one work, apart from the *Consolation*, that has attracted the most scholarly interest (see Hadot 1963; MacDonald 1988; Nash-Marshall 2000; Marenbon 2003, and the bibliographies in the latter two works).

Boethius intended to explain how a corporeal substance is good in that it exists, even though it is not a substantial good. He began by presenting a list of terms and "rules" (*regulae*) that may or may not be axioms or even premises in his overall argument (Schrimpf 1966; De Rijk 1988). He then presented a dilemma. To illustrate Boethius' dilemma, let us pick a concrete example of a corporeal substance – say, an apple. The apple cannot be good by participation in the good, for if the apple were good by participation, the apple would be good in virtue of something else. It would not be good in virtue of itself. But this appears to conflict with a Neoplatonic thesis about being: everything that exists is good merely in virtue of the fact that it exists, which seems to entail that every independent being – i.e., substance – is good in virtue of itself. So, it seems that the apple must be good by substance, not participation. Yet, Boethius continued, there are reasons to reject the claim that the apple is good by substance. Anything that is predicated of God denotes God's substance. God is good. Hence, God's substance is the good. By hypothesis, the apple is also good in substance. Given that God's substance is not shared by anything other than Himself, it follows that the apple is God.

Boethius resolved the dilemma by, in effect, forging a middle way between its horns. He invited the reader to imagine the impossible scenario where God does not exist. In this scenario, it would be clear that the apple's existence is one thing and its goodness is something separate. The



apple's substance is not the good. Nevertheless, the apple in fact derives its being (*esse*) from God, and it derives its goodness from God in so far as He is the First Good. The apple is good merely in virtue of the fact that the First Good wills that the apple exists. Hence, it is proper to say that the apple is good in that it is, even though it is not a substantial good.

*On the Catholic Faith* (Opusc. IV) is a straightforward confession of Christian principles. It contains very little of the philosophical concepts and principles that inform the other theological treatises. In the past some have questioned the authenticity of Opuscula IV. The current consensus is that Boethius is the author.

In *Against Eutyches and Nestorius* (Opusc. V), Boethius applied his Aristotelian tools to the Incarnation. The orthodox position is that Christ is one person who consists in two natures. But a person seems to be an individual substance – a view reinforced by Boethius' preferred definition of a "person" as "an individual substance of a rational nature" (Opusc. V, 3, 171, 172) – and it is difficult to comprehend how any individual substance can have two natures. It is this difficulty that motivates the solutions that Nestorius and Eutyches, respectively, endorsed and which Boethius attempted to undermine in favor of the orthodox position.

Nestorius' position that Christ consists in two natures and in two persons is repugnant because either it entails that Christ is a universal or it entails that "Christ" is no more than the name of an aggregate. Boethius thinks that neither result is acceptable (Opusc. V, 4).

Eutyches argued that, because there is only one person who is Christ, there can only be one nature. But if Eutyches is right, which nature is now present in Christ? There seem to be only three options: (1) the two natures combine to form a divine nature, (2) the two natures combine to form a human nature, or (3) the two natures combine to form a new nature, which is neither human nor divine. The first and second options are ruled out because there is no common substrate that can stand under the exchange of corporeality for incorporeality or vice versa. The third possibility is ruled out since a rational substance must either

be corporeal or incorporeal (Opusc. V, 6, 497–541).

Hence, we must assert that Christ is one person who consists in two natures. Boethius attempted to make this intelligible by resorting to an analogy. The person of Christ is something like a gem-encrusted crown, which retains both the gem's nature and the gold's nature (Opusc. V, 7, 595–607). Just as the crown is one thing consisting both from and in two natures, Christ can consist in two natures.

6. *Consolation of Philosophy*. The *Consolation* is Boethius' masterpiece. In it we find a thinker at the height of his intellectual and poetic powers. The work presents a vivid outline of a systematic, monotheistic theology and theodicy, which is inspired by Aristotle, the Stoics, and most of all the Neoplatonists. From the beginning, commentators have noted that the *Consolation* has a lack of unambiguously Christian doctrines. This has prompted a number of commentators, from the Middle Ages forward, to worry that Boethius was really a pagan. Most modern commentators, however, point out that there is nothing in the *Consolation* that would be objectionable to a Christian with Platonic sensibilities.

The setting of the *Consolation* is a prison where the character Boethius is awaiting execution. Boethius finds himself tormented not only by his current situation but also by the more general suspicion that wicked people thrive, whereas the virtuous suffer. A personification of Philosophy offers to cure Boethius of his current distress. Despite appearances, Philosophy will argue, Boethius has lost nothing of true value, happiness is still within his grasp, and it actually is not the case that wicked people flourish at the expense of the virtuous.

In Book II, Philosophy argues that Fortune by her very nature is fickle. Humans have no claim on the goods that Fortune gives them. Hence, they should not lament the loss of those things that Fortune takes away.

In Book III, Philosophy discusses the nature of the Good and its relation to human happiness.

Philosophy reminds Boethius that one must distinguish between true happiness and the image of happiness (III.1). All humans strive for true happiness. The problem is that most humans either have a distorted understanding of true happiness or they go after happiness in the wrong manner. Philosophy shows how the paths that are commonly thought to lead one to happiness (such as the paths of acquiring money or political power) fail to produce true human happiness (III.3–8).

In the latter part of Book III, Philosophy gives an account of true happiness. She shows that there is an intimate connection between unity, existence, and goodness. In very rapid succession, she demonstrates that the highest Good exists and that God is identical to the highest Good. The highest Good is the source of all other goods. God's creations are by nature inclined to these goods because they are images of the creative source of everything. Something exists only insofar as it is one. If it is divided into many, it will cease to exist. This is why all creatures strive to preserve themselves. What an *x* strives for is the good for *xs*. Thus, the good is encoded into the very essences of creatures. To be happy, humans must discover their true nature and strive to realize fully that nature.

Despite agreeing with Philosophy's propositions to this point, the character Boethius has not yet forgotten his sorrow. At the beginning of Book IV, he asks how evil is possible when God is good – a problem Boethius finds especially troubling because Philosophy has just asserted that the world and all its affairs are governed by Providence. Philosophy answers the character Boethius by showing that the virtuous are always powerful and the vicious always ultimately without power. Both the virtuous person and the vicious person aim for the Good. But while the virtuous person achieves the Good, the vicious person does not. Given that one is powerful only if one achieves what one aims for, the vicious person is not powerful (IV.2). Indeed, Philosophy adds, humans who actively choose evil abandon their true nature. They are no longer human beings, but rather irrational animals with a human shape. Hence, the vicious are punished for turning away from the Good, whereas the virtuous are rewarded. While Boethius suffers

now, he has not lost the Good (IV.6). Philosophy adds that every hardship is part of the plan and in the end is a good. A bad change in fortune, such as the one Boethius now suffers, is an opportunity to improve one's wisdom and virtue (IV.7).

At the end of Book IV, Philosophy discusses the relation between Fate and Providence. She argues that they are really two aspects of the same thing. Providence is the law of Nature viewed from the perspective of the simplicity of the Divine Intellect. Fate is this same law viewed from the perspective of the complexity of the Divine Will's effects (IV.6). But this only prompts Boethius to raise a further worry: if everything is due to Providence, is there any room for chance (V.1)? For if there is no room for chance in the scheme of things, then there seems to be no room for freedom of the will. Philosophy rejects the notion that some event might be the result of random, uncaused motion, yet claims that there is room for freedom of judgment (V.1.8). Free deliberation is a necessary component of rationality. Hence, insofar as one is a rational being, one is a free being. Given that God is the perfect rational being, God is perfectly free. A human who exercises her rational capacities as they should be exercised is relatively free (V.2).

Given that God is the perfect rational being, God knows everything, including all future events. This prompts the character Boethius to voice his final worry: divine foreknowledge appears to be incompatible with human freedom, for if God knows what will be the case in advance, then what will be must happen (V.3). But if what will be must happen, then there seems to be no room for free human choices, for one's choice is free only if one could have done otherwise. Boethius continues by articulating the repercussions of this line of thought. But if what I will do tomorrow is not something I could refrain from doing, how can I be punished or rewarded for doing what I do? In other words, Divine foreknowledge seems to threaten the very basis of retributive justice.

Philosophy tries to get to the heart of Boethius' worry. It cannot be that Boethius is worried that somehow the fact that God knows that some event *E* will occur is the cause of *E*'s occurrence (V.4). The fact that *E* occurs causes the knower to know

that E occurs, not vice versa. If knowing that E occurs does not cause E to occur, then foreknowing that E occurs will certainly not cause E to occur. An action will be free and contingent provided that the agent is free.

Philosophy's considered diagnosis is that Boethius believes there is something fundamentally incoherent about the notion that a future event can be both contingent and foreknown (V.4.21–23). If someone knows that some event E is occurring, then he knows that E is occurring determinately. For if one were to comprehend an indeterminate event as if it were determinate, in no way could this be said to be knowledge. Only what is necessary can occur determinately. Hence, if God knows E is occurring, then E is necessary. But a future contingent event is, by definition, not necessary. Therefore, if God knows that a future event will occur, that future event cannot be contingent. It is logically impossible that there be any future contingent events that are foreknown.

Lady Philosophy responds to this worry by attacking the claim that someone knows that E occurs only if he knows that E determinately occurs. Philosophy insists, instead, that a knower does not know *x* as *x* is in its nature; rather, the manner in which *x* is known is dependent upon the power and nature of the knower (V.4–5). For example, a creature who possesses only the five senses will grasp the spherical properties of a ball in so far as these properties are manifested in this bit of matter. A creature with the power of imagination will be able to grasp the three-dimensional properties of the ball abstracted from the ball's matter. A rational being, such as a human, from its universal perspective can grasp the three-dimensional structure of the ball as it is manifested in a number of particulars. In other words, the senses grasp the spherical properties of the ball materially. The imagination grasps the same properties abstractly (yet particularly). And reason grasps these properties universally. God's mode of understanding is superior even to reason. His understanding transcends universality and views the one simple form itself (V.4.30).

Philosophy applies this principle to the problem of foreknowledge (V.6). Humans dwell in a world of constant change. Things only ever

partially exist at any one moment in time. Future things and their properties are especially obscure to us. Hence, we perceive them as if they were indeterminate and, thus, contingent. God, in contrast, does not exist in part by part fashion. He exists completely and all at once in what we might describe as an eternal "now." From God's perspective, all things and events have the same status. What I did yesterday, what I am doing now, and what I will do tomorrow are all comprehended by God as if these events are settled and determinate. Hence, from God's perspective all events, including future events, are perceived as if they were determinate and necessary. But one cannot infer that some event is in its nature necessary from the fact that the event is known in a determinate manner.

Philosophy concedes that there is a legitimate sense in which one can know something only if the facts have been settled, and so if Boethius insists on saddling her with the word "necessity," he may in the following sense (V.6.25 ff.). I can only know that there is a coffee cup on the table to my left if it is settled that there is a coffee cup and it is now to the left of me. It is even true that there is a sense in which if I know that there is a coffee cup to my left, it is necessary that there is a coffee cup to my left. If there were no cup there, I could not be said to know that it is there. But it does not follow from this "conditional" necessity that the cup is necessarily to my left on the table, where I mean by this that it could not have been the case that the cup were to my right (or that there was no cup at all). Clearly, the fact that I know that the cup is sitting to my left does not entail that stronger claim of "simple" necessity. Likewise, it does not follow from the fact that God knows that I will steal a bagel tomorrow morning that I could not have refrained from stealing the bagel simpliciter. All that the claim about foreknowledge entails is that if God knows that I steal the bagel tomorrow, then I in fact steal the bagel tomorrow. This is compatible with the notion that I could have done otherwise.

It is not clear whether Philosophy has really addressed the substance of Boethius' puzzle, for Philosophy's solution seemingly ignores the question whether any events really are contingent. When Philosophy lists the various grades of

knowing, she suggests that the higher grades are superior to the lower grades because they come closer to revealing things as they really are (V.4). Presumably God's mode of existing and knowing things is superior to our mode of existing and knowing things. But this suggests that events really are fixed and necessary, despite the fact that humans comprehend them as if they were contingent.

The *Consolation* ends with a brief summary of the results of their investigation and an exhortation to follow the path of righteousness (V.6.44–48). Some believe that Philosophy has more or less succeeded at consoling the character Boethius. But other scholars are not so sure. Boethius consciously appropriates some of the stylistic elements of Menippean satire, another ancient literary genre exhibited most notably by Petronius' *Satyricon*. Menippean satire is associated with works that ridicule those who pretend to make authoritative claims to wisdom. Hence, it has been suggested that the *Consolation* should be understood ironically as an account of the insufficiency of philosophy to provide consolation (Relihan 2007). A somewhat less extreme interpretation is that philosophy can provide arguments and solutions to many problems, but it cannot give us comprehensive understanding of ourselves and our place in the universe (Marenbon 2003).

## Influence

Boethius' works have had a tremendous influence on subsequent generations of philosophers, humanists, and poets in the medieval West.

Boethius' commentaries and handbooks provided the foundations of the liberal arts curriculum in the medieval West. His handbooks on arithmetic and music were studied with keen interest continuously and well into the fifteenth century (White in Gibson 1981). Boethius' commentaries on the Aristotelian logical corpus as well as his logical handbooks provided not only the foundations of medieval logic but also medieval philosophy of language. In particular, the semantic theory that Boethius sketches in his greater commentary on Aristotle's *On Interpretation* greatly influenced the development of the

philosophy of language and mind in the Middle Ages. Even after the recovery of Aristotle's *Analytics*, *Topics*, and *Sophistical Refutations*, two of Boethius' logical handbooks, *On Division* and *On Topical Differences*, continued to be studied for some time afterward in the western universities (Lewry, in Gibson 1981).

Boethius also played a decisive role in the development of metaphysics in the early medieval centuries. Boethius' commentaries on the *Organon* and his theological treatises provided the concepts and principles needed to develop accounts of, for example, identity and difference, individuation, and the ontological status of universals.

Boethius' remarks on individuation provide a good example of the nature of his influence on medieval metaphysics. In his commentaries and theological treatises, Boethius hinted at four distinct theories of individuation. The first suggestion was that individuation is caused by all (or some specific set of) the thing's accidental forms (Opusc. I, 1, 56–63; In Isag. 2nd edn. III, 11, 235–236). The second suggestion was that individuation occurs when forms occupy different locations at the same time (also Opusc. I, 1, 56–63). Thirdly, Boethius suggested that individuation is due to matter (Opusc. I, 2, 102–110; cf. Opusc. V, 3, 213–220). And finally, Boethius suggested that a special form individuates things. Plato and Socrates are both human beings in virtue of a substantial form of humanity, but Plato has a formal component, "Platonity," that no other thing has, and Socrates has "Socrateity" (in *De int.* 2nd edn, 136–139). Boethius only hinted at these theories of individuation, he never gave a fully developed theory of individuals or individuation. However, the scattered remarks on individuals found in Boethius' works were picked up and developed into fully formed theories by subsequent generations of medieval philosophers (Gracia 1984; King 2000).

Boethius' *Opuscula* did not find a place in the formal curriculum of the major universities in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries. Nevertheless, they were studied and they influenced subsequent philosophers in a number of ways (Gibson in Gibson 1981). Boethius' discussion of substantial goods in *Opuscula* III is one of the first in a long

line of treatises on the “transcendentals,” that is, properties that are possessed by a thing merely in virtue of the fact that it exists. Boethius’ suggestion that the Christian doctrines of the Trinity and Incarnation are, at least to some degree, amenable to logical analysis inspired other philosophers to try their hands at unraveling some of the deepest “mysteries” of Christianity.

The *Consolation* is without question Boethius’ most popular and enduring work. It has become a classic whose influence is felt far beyond the Middle Ages. The *Consolation* was not studied formally at universities, but it was studied and commented well into the sixteenth century. The *Consolation* was translated into vernaculars such as Old English and Old High German, and it influenced some of the greatest poets of the Middle Ages, including Chaucer, Dante, and Boccaccio. The discussion of foreknowledge and freedom, along with the particular interpretation of Divine eternity that Philosophy employs to develop her solution, has inspired generations of philosophers and theologians, from the Middle Ages to the present day.

## Cross-References

- ▶ [Being](#)
- ▶ [Boethius’ \*De Topicis Differentiis\*, Commentaries on](#)
- ▶ [Future Contingents](#)
- ▶ [Happiness](#)
- ▶ [Mereology](#)
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- ▶ [Time](#)
- ▶ [Trinity](#)
- ▶ [Universals](#)

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## Boethius of Dacia

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### Abstract

Boethius of Dacia was a Master of the Arts Faculty of Paris in the 1260s and 1270s of the thirteenth century. He was one of the main targets of the 1277 condemnation. His main contribution lies in the definition of both the limits and autonomy of philosophical inquiry and in his high appraisal of the figure of the philosopher.

Boethius of Dacia was a Danish Master of the Parisian Arts Faculty that was active in the 1260s and 1270s of the thirteenth century. Nothing more is known about his life, except that he might have entered the Dominican Order, judging by his inclusion in the fourteenth-century catalog



of Dominican authors composed by Stams. Together with Siger of Brabant, Boethius was arguably one of the most representative and influential philosophers of the Arts Faculty, his reading of Aristotle often being labeled as “radical Aristotelianism.” Siger and Boethius have also been identified as main targets of the 1277 condemnation by the Paris bishop Stephen Tempier of 219 propositions supposedly held by members of the Arts Faculty of Paris. Although Boethius is not cited by name in the condemnation, scholarship has traced 14 propositions of the condemnation back to statements diffused by various works by Boethius. Moreover, a “Boethius” is named in one manuscript of Raymond Lull’s *Declaratio* and in two manuscripts containing listings of condemned articles. His importance at the Faculty of Arts is attested by the fact that some of his works were abridged by Godfrey of Fontaines. There are no details about his academic career after 1277, it being impossible to know whether it was forcibly interrupted or even whether Boethius was still a Master at that time.

Apart from a set of questions on Priscian (*Modi significandi*), Boethius’s surviving output can be divided into commentaries on Aristotle, namely on the *Physics*, *Meteorology*, *On Generation and Corruption*, and *Topics*, and short treatises which cover different domains of philosophy, such as ethics (*De summo bono*), metaphysics (*De aeternitate mundi*), natural philosophy (*De somniis*), and logic (*Sophismata*). Recently, a commentary on the first two books of *On the Soul* has been attributed to Boethius and published under his name; however, doubt regarding the correctness of this attribution has been raised as well (Costa 2011). Boethius also commented on the *De animalibus* and on the *Perihermeneias* – as he himself explicitly states. Unfortunately, these commentaries have not reached us. His works were mostly transmitted in manuscripts that were either anonymous or under other authors’ names, which can be partly attributed to the fact that his name was associated with the condemnation. This could be why he was forgotten for more than six centuries. Analysis of his thought was long conditioned by anachronistic views of his positions and by various

historiographical categories, “Latin Averroism” being the first category used to label his work: scholarship used to refer to a set of philosophical theories supposedly defended by Arts Masters from the late thirteenth century onward who lectured on the *corpus Aristotelicum* through the interpretation put forward by Averroes and who totally supported Aristotle’s philosophy, regardless of its contrast with Christian views. According to this historical reconstruction, these “Latin Averroists” were opposed by theologians with an Augustinian–Platonic orientation, who simply rejected Aristotle whenever he spoke contrary to Christian teaching and allowed the use of philosophy only if integrated into theology. This reconstruction started to fade out with the first edition of Boethius’s *De aeternitate mundi* in 1954. Ever since, scholarship has disputed the very notion of “Latin Averroism,” as many of the theories advanced by the Arts Masters – including those put forward by Boethius himself – had their origins in Albert the Great and Thomas Aquinas’ writings. Scholarship has also disputed the identification of the doctrinal content of this philosophical current with the condemned propositions by Bishop Tempier (see Fioravanti 1966).

Despite these controversies, the theological conception underlying the condemnation – that any discipline has significance only if subordinated to theology – is certainly in contrast with Boethius of Dacia’s works. This is most apparent in his *De aeternitate mundi*, where Boethius strongly argues for the autonomy of philosophical inquiry as well as for precise delimited borders between the different branches of philosophy. For this reason, his works should be seen against the institutional and doctrinal background both before and after the statute of 1272 forbidding the Arts Masters to deal with theological issues. (Boethius’s relationship with this statute remains an open question; it is not clear whether he was at its origin or whether he was its target and he reacted to it.) Unsurprisingly, therefore, at the Arts Faculty, his methodological approach was not a unique one, as the numerous Aristotelian commentaries produced there have the same approach, one of leaving aside theological issues and commenting exclusively in terms of Aristotelian principles.

For Boethius, the principles of philosophy do not derive from another superior field but originate from generalization of empirical experience, which means that they do not hold the same degree of absoluteness as the principles of Christian teaching. Nonetheless, Boethius argues that any branch of knowledge can have a scientific status insofar as it exclusively follows its own principles, without considering the principles of other domains, such as Christian principles. Moreover, each particular science has to infer all of its conclusions from its own principles, regardless of their inconsistency with respect to conclusions inferred from principles of other domains. Analysis of the subject matter of a given science has to be carried out strictly within the borders of that science, but this does not prevent two different sciences from studying the same subject from different perspectives. As Boethius states in his commentary on the *Topics* (Book IV, q. 5), there is no contradiction in the fact that the utterance “homo est animal” can be regarded as necessary in grammar and probable in dialectics. While two sciences may come to opposing conclusions, this does not invalidate those conclusions. This sharp specialization *avant la lettre* has a twofold consequence: philosophical inquiry is limited to its principles, but precisely for this reason it is autonomous of every other domain. Applied to particular sciences, this means that the principles of each science are also its limits. Against the unity of knowledge, Boethius champions an “epistemological pluralism” (Bianchi 2003). The plurality of results reached by the different sciences is all legitimate and, in terms of their domain, true. Far from being a defense of a “double truth,” which Boethius never made, Boethius’s epistemological approach shows that the accusation in propositions 90, 113, and 184 of Tempier’s condemnation is theoretically mistaken. This is where the notion of “double truth” is expressed, that an utterance can be considered true according to philosophy and false in terms of faith, and also the reverse. However, this ignores a principle of Aristotelian logic that Boethius conscientiously observes: it is no contradiction at the same time to assert a predicate in a relative sense (*secundum quid*) and deny it in an absolute sense (*simpliciter*).

Boethius makes use of this distinction in his *De aeternitate mundi*, and this, in all probability, is what was targeted in proposition 90 (that the natural philosopher has to deny absolutely the world’s creation, while the believer can deny the world’s eternity). For Boethius, the natural philosopher can hold the eternity of the world in terms of the principles of his science. But this thesis cannot be sustained if taken in an absolute sense (*accepta absolute*), that is, outside the limits of natural philosophy; in such case, it is false (Bianchi 2003). Therefore, the notion that the world began to be, and that there was a first motion, is true according to faith and in an absolute sense; indeed, it is heretical to state otherwise and any attempt at rational demonstration is senseless. Although Boethius declares that the philosopher has the competence to deal with every aspect of reality and might dispute everything that can be rationally discussed, an idea targeted in proposition 145 of Tempier’s condemnation, he argues that the question of whether the world began at some point or has always been eternal cannot be determined by the philosopher: neither the natural philosopher, nor the metaphysician, nor the mathematician can reach a conclusion. The natural philosopher is not competent insofar as nature is the object of his science, and in nature everything is produced by way of generation, not creation. As generation presupposes a preexistent matter, the natural philosopher cannot argue for the Christian notion of creation, the existence of a first man, and the doctrine of resurrection and the numerical identity of the resurrected body (this last idea is targeted in propositions 17 and 18 of the condemnation). Likewise, the mathematician cannot consider the beginning of motion because the principles of his science remain the same whether the world is eternal or created. Finally, advancing a solution close to that of Aquinas in his *Sentences* commentary and to Siger of Brabant, Boethius argues that the metaphysician cannot consider whether the world began to be, because this was caused by God’s will *ab aeterno*, and metaphysics does not extend its inquiry to the divine will (being an individual which does not belong to any species, the First Cause can only be considered as an individual *qua* individual, and for this

reason it cannot be the object of scientific knowledge; see Ebbesen 2005). Further, the metaphysician cannot explain creation as he is unable to prove that an effect (creation) has not been immediately produced by its cause (God), assuming that its cause had all of the possible requisites to produce it.

What Boethius, following Aquinas, does not accept is the theoretical confusion between the ontological and the temporal dimensions of creation. The notions of “to be created” and “to be eternal” are not logically incompatible: the absolute dependence upon God is what distinguishes the state of being a creature, regardless of its temporality or eternity – this dependence lies both in its constitutive act and in its permanence in being. Having been created does not necessarily involve being temporally finite. In this way, Boethius does not reject creation because, following Aquinas, he does not equate eternal with uncreated.

The autonomy of natural philosophy is the grounds for Boethius’s *De somniis*, devoted to the delicate question of divination by dreams and whether the resulting knowledge can be regarded as scientific. The topic had previously been addressed in Aristotelian terms by Averroes and Albert the Great, who rejected scientific status for foreknowledge by dreams, as man does not hold in himself the principles of this knowledge, this being given by an external agent – the Agent Intellect for Averroes, a superior influence for Albert. Nonetheless, for both authors foreknowledge is possible only when the senses are withdrawn and the soul becomes more spiritual (*magis spiritualis*). In contrast, Boethius deals with the topic from the viewpoint of the natural philosopher: his explanations remain exclusively on a naturalistic, psychophysiological level, leaving aside the study of those cases depending upon divine will.

With regard to the different kinds of connections between dreams and foreknowledge, Boethius deals briefly with some kinds of dreams that do not produce divination. This is the case of dreams that seem to foretell an event and are nothing more than a random coincidence, and those dreams that might genuinely be causes of

future events, but only because thoughts occurring to a man while asleep might have as their effect the production of a phantasm, whose effect remains after awakening and leads that man to act in a similar way to that “preconceived in his dream.” The core of his exposition focuses on dreams that are signs of future events, whether those dreams involve external causes (such as the influence of some constellation) or causes internal to man, from both body and soul (as in the case of a strong passion). Boethius supplies a naturalistic account, based on Aristotelian natural philosophy. For all these cases, his account reveals numerous similarities with Aquinas’ treatment of the lawfulness of divination (*Summa Theologiae*, IIa-IIae, q. 95, art. 6). The causes of such dreams may be vapors originating from overheated nourishment, vapors that interfere with the organ of the imagination, or phantasms resembling the passions by which the body is affected. In contrast to Averroes and Albert, for Boethius the body is requisite that makes possible the occurrence of dreams as signs of future events. The explanation is thus built up in terms of natural causes and effects, that is, strictly within the borders of natural philosophy. And as with other sciences, it is possible to trace the cause from its effect, which makes it possible to diagnose and prevent the harmful effects of passions to which dreamers are subject.

Boethius’s epistemological principles, such as the limits of scientific knowledge and his view of science as a kind of archipelago made up of various self-coherent systems, are further asserted in his writings on logic and grammar. First, those principles can be related to his sophism *Omnis homo de necessitate est animal* and to his commentary on Aristotle’s *Topics*, where he denies that a proposition – tautologies included – can be true if its referent does not exist. This means that the philosopher cannot deal with the *figmenta mentis*, as Boethius repeatedly stresses throughout his writings, and principally that each scientific proposition on contingent objects is not strictly speaking necessary, being valid only with regard to the principles of its science and to the field in which it can be applied (Ebbesen 2000, 2005). Second, Boethius extends his idea of science to

grammar. Together with other *modistae*, such as Martin of Dacia, Boethius considers grammar as a science, its principles being the “modes of signifying” (*modi significandi*), that is, the ways in which a lexical notion, in addition to its essential reference, can express different values. These principles are rooted in reality, as they reflect the “modes of being” (*modi essendi*), which are conceptualized by the intellect in corresponding “modes of understanding” (*modi intelligendi*). As a result, the structure of grammar is universal, while the different particular languages are accidental. Boethius’s idea that grammar is universal and substantially identical in all languages is profoundly connected with his strong emphasis on the naturalness of human language (Rosier-Catach 2012). This is most apparent in his answer to the classical question as to which language children raised in isolation would speak and whether they would share the same common language. For Boethius, such children would be able to communicate and express their concepts to one another because they share the same grammar. This position was not followed by successive commentators, and some of Boethius’s affirmations were even the explicit object of criticism by the anonymous author of the text *Innata est nobis*, who felt that Boethius had merged the notions of *locutio* and *grammatica* (see Sekizawa 2010).

Boethius is extremely concerned with establishing a narrow connection between scientific knowledge and reality (Marmo 2009). This can be illustrated by calling attention to his disagreement with Martin of Dacia regarding a crucial logical issue, namely the question of the signification of terms and the truth value of general assertions (Mora Marqu ez 2014, 2015): for Martin, and for the greater part of the commentators on Aristotle’s *Perihermeneias* writing in the first half of the thirteenth century, a general assertion – such as “*homo est animal*” – is true if it expresses an intellectual composition of elements that are concordant, irrespective of their actual existence. Boethius opposes this view, reasoning that the truthmaker of general assertions is necessarily rooted in external reality. In so far as signification is concerned, existence does not necessarily mean actual existence, for to exist or

not is an accident and, therefore, is not part of the essence of a thing. The essence of a man does not change whether he exists or not. By contrast, concerning truth, actual existence is the necessary requisite to assess the truth of a general assertion.

This narrow connection to reality can be further noted by pointing to Boethius’s disagreement with Martin of Dacia regarding the connection between the three modes (*essendi*, *intelligendi*, *significandi*): against Martin’s claim of the strict derivative connection between them, Boethius maintains a certain degree of autonomy between terms and signification of terms. This permits him to explain terms such as *nihil* or, generally, empty terms: a “mode of signifying” of a term does not necessarily derive from the signification of that term. However, while this solution solves this particular issue, it seems to undermine the foundation of grammar on reality, which, for Boethius, is the essential requisite for science. Hence, he provides a further solution in the same work – a solution to be followed by succeeding *modistae*, such as John of Dacia: he distinguishes between extramental entities (where the correspondence between “modes of being” and “modes of signifying” can be maintained through the mediation of the “modes of understanding”) and entities having only a mental existence (where only the correspondence between “modes of being” and their “modes of understanding” has to be observed because, in this case, “modes of being” and “modes of understanding” coincide).

A further divergence between Martin and Boethius concerns the fact that the latter defends a relationship of similarity, not of identity, between the modes (see the entry on Martin of Dacia). If the modes were the same thing, albeit accidentally different, then, according to Boethius, from the existence of the “mode of existing” of a thing, it would be possible to derive immediately the corresponding “mode of signifying,” and, therefore, everything that is signified would have a corresponding extramental reality, which is false, as the case of *nihil* shows. Thus, the “modes of signifying” are rather signs of the “modes of being” from which they derive and have as substrate of inherence the expression endowed with meaning (*dictio*) and not, as for Martin, the

signified thing. In this way, for Boethius it is possible that many properties of one thing are not signified by the “modes of signifying” of its *dictio*, or, in other words, not all the possibilities of meaning are expressed in grammar. Hence, grammar does not provide an exhaustive account of the whole structure of language, which means that, like all the other sciences, grammar has a limited range.

A full understanding of Boethius’s conception of philosophy is provided in his *De summo bono*, probably written around 1270, where he deals with the question of human happiness on strictly philosophical grounds, without any use of theological categories. In this short work, Boethius advances ideas also present, albeit in condensed form, in his commentary on Aristotle’s *On Generation and Corruption* and in the anonymous *Metaphysics* commentary influenced by him (ed. Fioravanti 2009). Drawing partly on the first book, but predominantly on the tenth book of Aristotle’s *Nicomachean Ethics*, Boethius enquires how man can reach happiness in this life and what this happiness consists of. His answer is that the kind of happiness accessible to man in this life can be reached through the activity of the highest faculty of the soul, that is, the speculative intellect, which is the divine element of man. This activity, according to Boethius, consists in carrying out philosophical speculation, its aim being the full knowledge of truth, including the knowledge of the First Cause of the universe, God. As the object of this happiness is God, the most honorable being, the activity of those who devote their lives to the knowledge of truth is not only the most enjoyable activity but also the most honorable kind of life. For this reason, those devoted to philosophical speculation – the philosophers – will be praised as a superior class of men worthy of being honored, a statement which echoes proposition 40 of Tempier’s condemnation. This activity is temporally limited, but it resembles the happiness of the afterlife. Although Boethius states that the “intellectual happiness” of this life is neither a necessary requisite nor a preparation for happiness in the afterlife, which he refuses to deal with, the fact that he affirms that those who are happy in this life are “nearer” to happiness in

the afterlife could be read by Christian authorities as rendering the lives of theologians and Christian saints useless, or at least inferior to those of the philosophers. In any case, Boethius does not tackle “the ultimate end,” happiness in the afterlife, in this work and limits to a small number of men the possibility of reaching philosophical happiness. This extreme intellectualist anthropology was based more on Albert the Great, Michael of Ephesus, and Eustratius’ commentaries on the *Ethics* than on Averroes (Bianchi 2002). Moreover, it was not exclusive to Boethius, but was asserted in the late thirteenth-century commentaries on the *Ethics* and by Peter of Auvergne in his two commentaries on the *Politics*. It, therefore, became common at the Arts Faculty of Paris.

## Cross-References

- ▶ [Albert the Great](#)
- ▶ [Godfrey of Fontaines](#)
- ▶ [Martin of Dacia](#)
- ▶ [Modistae](#)
- ▶ [Parisian Condemnation of 1277](#)
- ▶ [Siger of Brabant](#)
- ▶ [Sophisms](#)
- ▶ [Thomas Aquinas](#)
- ▶ [Universities and Philosophy](#)

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## Boethius' *De topicis differentiis*, Commentaries on

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### Abstract

Boethius' *On Topical Differences (De topicis differentiis)* is a monograph in four books on topical argumentation, that is, argumentation based on so-called *topoi* or *loci* (literally: "places"). The seminal treatment of this subject is found in Aristotle's *Topics*, but Boethius'



treatise served as the main foundation of medieval theorizing in the field for almost two centuries before the gradual rediscovery and introduction of Aristotle's text. In this way, Boethius defined some of the basic features of the medieval approach to the issue, and as a consequence came also to influence the medieval interpretation of Aristotle's *Topics*. This article surveys the surviving medieval commentaries on *On Topical Differences* and their approach to two questions raised by Boethius' text, namely, what loci are and how they function.

Roughly, two dozen medieval commentaries on Boethius' monograph are known to be extant. The earliest of these date, as far as can be gathered, from around the end of the eleventh century, but from the discussions they contain, it appears that they were not the first to have been written. Interest in Boethius' text seems to have peaked in the twelfth century, and more than half of the extant commentaries were composed in this period. Little more than a handful of commentaries from the thirteenth century are extant, and no proper commentary from after 1300 has come down to us.

Only a few of these extant commentaries are, at this point, available in modern editions, and it is at the present stage of research not possible to establish more than a very rough chronology of the material. By far the larger portion of the commentaries have survived only in more or less fragmentary form, are found only in a single manuscript, and lack, as is often the case with medieval commentaries, a clear indication of the identity of their author, their place of provenance, and date of composition. But there are a few exceptions. Some of the commentaries do indeed have an ascription in the manuscripts or can on other grounds be attributed to a known medieval philosopher. In chronological order these are: an incomplete commentary attributed to Peter Abelard (1079–1142); a commentary on books 1–4 by Nicholas of Paris (fl. c. 1240); a fragment of a commentary by Martin of Dacia (d. 1304); and a commentary on books 1, 2 and 4 by Radulphus Brito (c. 1270–c. 1320). With the exception of

Nicholas of Paris' commentary, these have all been edited (Peter Abelard 1969; Martin of Dacia 1961; Radulphus Brito 1978). An anonymous commentary (Anonymous 2005) should perhaps be attributed to Arnulfus of Laon (fl. c. 1087), who was a contemporary of and seemingly associated with Roscelin of Compiègne. This commentary might well be the earliest of those extant.

According to Boethius, the aim of his work is to show which loci there are, what their differences are, and which loci are suitable for which syllogisms. To this end, he will give two lists of loci, which he will then compare, and he will show how one list can be reduced to the other (books II–III). Finally, because not only dialecticians but also rhetoricians avail themselves of loci, he will discuss rhetorical loci (book IV). All of this is prefaced by an explication of the basic concepts of the discipline, culminating in the concept of the locus (books I–II). On the whole, Boethius' discussion is rather sketchy and leaves much open to interpretation.

Following Cicero, Boethius defines the locus as "the basis of the argument" (*sedes argumenti*).

According to Boethius, a locus consists of a maximal proposition (*maxima propositio*) and a topical difference (*locus differentia*). A maximal proposition is described as a proposition that is self-evident (*per se nota*) and which is not provable by something else but whereby other propositions can be proved; Boethius' initial example of such a proposition is "If equals are removed from equals, equals remain." The topical difference (*locus differentia*) is likened to the specific difference and is said to be that whereby maximal propositions are differentiated. For example, as the species *man* is differentiated from other species of animal by the specific difference *rationality*, so the maximal proposition "That to which the definition of the genus does not belong is not a species of the genus defined" will be differentiated by the topical difference *from the definition*.

One of the central questions Boethius' text posed for its medieval interpreters was what type of items loci – or topical differences – are. Often, the answer to this question would be determined

by that given to a more general one, for example, what type of items does logic deal with?

Shortly before the turn of the twelfth century, logicians were in disagreement about the correct way of reading the ancient logical texts available at the time, some thinkers preferring to expound the texts as treating of words (*in voce*), others as treating of things (*in re*). This discussion is evident in the commentary perhaps attributable to Arnulfus of Laon. Here Boethius' text is subjected to a thoroughgoing *in voce* reading, according to which the loci are linguistic items, the maximal propositions being sentences, and the topical differences single words. Central to the interpretation is a distinction between two levels of language. On the first level, we find words such as "man" and "animal," which are names of things, and on the second level, words such as "species" and "part," which are said to be names of words occurring on the first level. A maximal proposition may only contain names belonging to the second level (a requirement that leads the author to reject or reformulate a number of Boethius' maxims). With regard to the topical differences, the author wavers between two different interpretations. Initially, the topical difference is described as the middle term of a valid syllogistic argument, which, occurring in both premises, is said to either join or disjoin the two terms of the conclusion. On this view, topical differences are words belonging to the first level of language; they are names of the things about which we argue. If one chooses this option, one will have to say that the topical differences differentiate the maximal propositions via their higher-level names actually occurring in the maximal propositions. Alternatively, one may take the topical differences to be these higher-level names themselves.

During the twelfth century, the purely linguistic interpretation appears to have been dropped, and the topical differences are now commonly construed as things (*res*). Famously, the century is one in which the problem of universals was a hotly debated issue, and whether one construed the topical differences as particulars or universals seems to some degree to have depended on what one was willing to include in one's ontology. Generally, however, commentators agree in

emphasizing the relative nature of the items, such as genus, species, part, whole, etc., around which Boethius' maximal propositions revolve, and in stressing that it is precisely by virtue of bearing some such relation (*habitus*) that things are capable of functioning as bases for arguments or loci.

In the thirteenth century, the discussion of the nature of the topical differences becomes tied up with the gradual elaboration of the doctrine of second intentions (*intentiones secundae*). The approach culminates with Radulphus Brito, whose commentary, written at the turn of the fourteenth century, is the latest of those extant. According to Brito, a topical difference is a concrete second intention, that is, a higher-order concept such as, say, generality (*generalitas*), taken not in its abstract but in its concrete form, i.e., genus (*genus*). In this manner, the locus is neither an intention nor a thing in itself but the intention taken as a way of conceiving the thing or the thing taken as falling under the intention.

Another difficult question posed by Boethius' text is how exactly the loci function. One aspect of this problem is whether or not they have a role to play with respect to formally valid arguments such as categorical syllogisms in the canonical figures and moods. In the late-eleventh-century commentary already mentioned, the topical difference is identified as the middle term of an argument, for example, "animal," or a higher level name of such a middle term, for example, "genus." The author exemplifies by means of a syllogism in the first mode of the first figure: All men are animals; all animals are substances; therefore, all men are substances. Here, then, the topical difference is "animal" or "genus" and the applicable maximal proposition will be: "What belongs to the genus, belongs to the species." The author is not too specific about the role played by the maxim here, but he appears to hold that it is not to make the conclusion follow from the premises but rather to make it more evident (*evidentior*).

The idea that maximal propositions have a role to play in even formally valid arguments such as categorical syllogisms was to be a matter of controversy in the twelfth century. Some

commentators draw a distinction between complexional (*complexionales*) and topical (*locales*) arguments. Complexional arguments are such as valid by virtue of the arrangement (*complexio*) of their terms, that is, formally valid arguments such as categorical syllogisms in the canonical figures and moods. Topical arguments are such as not valid by virtue of their form but where on the basis of a maximal proposition the conclusion can nonetheless be inferred from the premise(s). For example, the enthymeme “Socrates is a human being; therefore, Socrates is an animal” is not a formally valid argument, but on the basis of the maximal proposition “Of whatever the species is predicated, the genus is predicated,” the conclusion can nonetheless be inferred from the premise.

With the advent of Aristotle's *Topics*, the debate changed. Aristotle begins his treatise on topical argumentation by defining what he calls the dialectical syllogism, the characteristic feature of which it is to have plausible premises. As the medieval commentators understood him, Aristotle is here speaking of categorical syllogisms in the valid figures and moods, and so they had, after all, to account for how loci function in such arguments. This was never done by compromising the insight that such syllogisms are valid solely by virtue of their form, that is, the figures and moods. In the first half of the thirteenth century, some thinkers suggested that the dialectical syllogism has an additional form or force (*virtus*) consisting in the topical relation (*habitus localis*), but the more common strategy seems to have become to posit a connection between the plausibility of the premises of the dialectical syllogism and the status of the topical differences as second intentions.

Apart from the commentaries on *On Topical Differences*, there are a vast number of medieval handbooks on logic containing sections on topical argumentation based on Boethius' text. These handbooks sometimes display developments that have little or no basis in *On Topical Differences*. There are, for example, some handbooks from the first half of the twelfth century that operate with a very short list of loci, different from the lists found in *On Topical Differences* and containing only four or five items.

## Cross-References

- ▶ [Boethius](#)
- ▶ [Intention, Primary and Secondary](#)
- ▶ [Martin of Dacia](#)
- ▶ [Peter Abelard](#)
- ▶ [Radulphus Brito](#)
- ▶ [Syllogism, Theories of](#)
- ▶ [Universals](#)

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## Bonaventure

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### Abstract

Bonaventure O.F.M. (c. 1217–July 15, 1274) was a quintessential theologian of the thirteenth century and highly respected church leader, first serving as the Minister General of the Franciscan Order, then, he was named the Cardinal-bishop of Albano. In his ardent search for wisdom (*sapientia*), Bonaventure blended classical theologians (e.g., Augustine), ancient philosophers (e.g., Aristotle), and mysticism (e.g., Desert Fathers) within an indelible scholastic framework throughout his diverse range of writings that included theological treatises, many sermons, exegetical contributions, teachings on the mystical and spiritual life, numerous letters, and the authoritative biography on Francis of Assisi. Formed by classical Augustinianism, Bonaventure had privileged faith and theology over reason and philosophy albeit these two poles of enquiry coalesced within his impassioned pursuit of knowledge, beauty, and truth, wherever it was to be discovered. Bonaventure was at once a traditional and original thinker, steeped in theology (e.g., Augustinianism, Pseudo-Dionysian) and philosophy (e.g., Aristotle, Neoplatonism), both from the received teachings of Late Antiquity and the translated texts of the *res novae*,

thereby engendering a blended and textured approach of faith seeking understanding. Among his contributions, Bonaventure was the first theologian to critically reinterpret Anselm of Canterbury's (1033–1109) celebrated ontological argument. In one of his significant writings, *Disputed Questions on the Mystery of the Trinity*, Bonaventure provided a compelling argument for the existence of God whereby he concluded that there are three ways (or proofs) toward the existence of God, which were correlated with the soul, being, and truth or goodness. When the three ways have been explicated and understood, Bonaventure taught that the faithful seeker would arrive at the indubitable truth of God. In addition to many contributions in the fields of theology, philosophy, and mysticism, Bonaventure was heavily involved, both as leader of the Franciscans and as a cardinal in the Church, in the efforts at reconciliation during the divisive and contentious thirteenth century. Bonaventure was convinced that all truth, beauty, and wisdom was from God, which liberated him to place classical theology in conversation with emergent philosophical models of enquiry in order to encourage reflection upon the life of faith and reason that leads to the mystical ascent to God.

### The Life of Bonaventure

Bonaventure O.F.M. (c. 1217–July 15, 1274) was Minister General of the Franciscan Order and the Cardinal-bishop of Albano. As the Minister General, Bonaventure promoted intellectual rigor within the monastic order by encouraging the harmonization of faith with reason within the spiritual life. In the thirteenth century, Bonaventure emerged as one of the foremost Augustinian theologians who had integrated theology and philosophy into a compelling account of the sensible and spiritual realities. In his substantial literary corpus, Bonaventure addressed a diverse range of theological and ecclesiastical issues, from monasticism, biblical exegesis, the coalescence of faith and reason, and the spiritual life of the Christian.

A Spanish Franciscan named Zamorra wrote the first biography of Bonaventure in the

thirteenth century; unfortunately, it has not been preserved. In the fifteenth century, Mariano of Florence wrote the earliest extant biography on the life of Bonaventure. In addition to Mariano's account on the life of Bonaventure, the *Chronicle of the Twenty-four Generals* (c. 1369) contains details on Bonaventure's life. Mariano's biography and the *Chronicle of the Twenty-four Generals* provide sufficiently reliable information for providing a general timeline on the life of Bonaventure.

Bonaventure was born in Bagnoregio, Tuscany, either in 1217 or 1221, the latter option is generally considered the traditional date (Crowley 1974). Bonaventure assumed his father's name (Giovanni di Fidanza) at birth. Bonaventure's father likely practiced medicine and belonged to the noble family of Fidanza di Castello. Bonaventure suffered a serious childhood malady whereupon his mother Maria di Ritello invoked the intercessions of Saint Francis of Assisi who then brought healing to the young boy (*Legenda S. Francisci Prolog*). According to one fifteenth-century legend, Francis bestowed upon the young Giovanni the name *O buona ventura* during this holy encounter.

In the mid-1230s, Bonaventure entered the University of Paris where he studied under the feet of the eminent philosopher and theologian Alexander of Hales. Upon receiving a rigorous education in Paris, Bonaventure then entered the Orders of Friars Minor either in 1238 or 1243. Around a decade later, in 1254, Bonaventure received his teaching license then relocated back to the University of Paris where he would teach until the conflicts of 1256 between the Mendicant orders (Franciscans, Dominicans) and the secular professors, which culminated in the cessation of Franciscans as teachers at the university. In 1254, William of Saint-Amour, one of the secular masters at the University of Paris, composed a polemical treatise titled *Liber de antichristo* in order to condemn the mendicant's life of poverty. Two years later in 1256, William completed a second treatise that continued renouncing the mendicants, titled *The Perils of the Last Times* (*Tractatus de periculis novissimorum temporum*). Upon receiving the request of Louis IX, king of France,

Bonaventure answered William's invectives in his *Disputed Questions on Evangelical Perfection* (*Quaestiones disputatae de perfectione evangelica*) wherein he advocated for a moderate approach to the spiritual life. Having weighed the opinions of both parties by October of 1256, Pope Alexander IV decided in favor of Bonaventure and reinstated the mendicant orders and concomitantly condemned the derisive writings of William of Saint-Amour. Thereafter, in October of 1257, with regained papal support, Bonaventure entered the academic association for the masters of theology. Having been vindicated by the papacy and the monarchy, Bonaventure assumed the Franciscan chair in theology at the University of Paris in August of 1257. On 2 February 1257, Bonaventure was elected as the Minister General of the Friars Minor as a highly contentious moment when two factions, known as the Spirituales and the Relaxati (later to be called the Coventuals), had broken off relations from one another. The Spirituales held to a literal observance of the Franciscan rule and placed more emphasis on the vows of poverty. Contrarily to the more rigorous Spirituales, the Coventuals were open to moderate alterations within the rule such as allowing for the possibility of the papacy permitting the use of property by the Franciscans. In his vital role as Minister General, Bonaventure sought to reconcile these two factions of the Friars Minor. After assuming the role of the Minister General, Bonaventure attacked the Joachimite Spirituales at a convocation held in Città della Pieve. Additionally, Bonaventure composed an encyclical letter that addressed reforming measures of the Coventuals. Three years after the encyclical letter, Bonaventure sought to reinforce reforms at the General Chapter of Narbonne by promulgating a guide for the monastic life, known as *Constitutiones Narbonenses*, in keeping with the Franciscan rule, it consisted of 12 chapters.

Upon the request of the Church, in 1260, Bonaventure completed a *Life of Francis* (*Legenda major sancti Francisci*) that was declared the authoritative biography during the Chapter of Pisa of 1263. In 1264, under the prompting of Cardinal Cajetan, Bonaventure reinstated the Poor Clares only 1 year after their condemnation

during the Chapter of Pisa. The status of Bonaventure's *Life of Francis* was further established at the General Chapter of Paris of 1266 where it was decreed that all the *Lives* of Francis, other than Bonaventure's version, were to be eradicated in order to promote unity among the Friars Minor. The opponents against the censuring of the other biographies of Francis argued that the decree was a blatant attempt to silence the earlier sources of the Franciscan history.

Bonaventure founded one of the earliest confraternities, the Society of Gonfalone in Rome, sometime around 1264, the fraternal community emphasized honoring the Virgin Mary. Five years later in 1269, Bonaventure convened the Chapter of Assisi, his fourth council, wherein he instituted a Mass in honor of the Virgin Mary with instructions to the Franciscans to sing it every Saturday.

In 1272, Bonaventure convoked another Chapter at Pisa that promulgated additional decrees to define the role of the Poor Clares. On 23 May 1273, Pope Gregory X appointed Bonaventure to the seat of cardinal. Later that year in November, Bonaventure was elevated to the bishopric of Albano. In May of 1274, Bonaventure resigned from the leadership role of the Minister General in order to focus on ecclesiastical affairs. Pope Gregory instructed Bonaventure to organize the Fourteenth Oecumenical Council, which convened at Lyons, 7 May 1274. Pope Gregory presided over the Council of Lyons along with Bonaventure who had a decisive role throughout the conciliar deliberations. Most notably, Bonaventure, who was a skilled and respected ecclesiastical diplomat, mediated the reunion between the Latin West and Greek East on 6 July 1274.

Bonaventure died at Lyons on 15 July 1274 while the Council of Lyon was in session. The cause of Bonaventure's death remains unknown. However, Peregrinus of Bologna, who was Bonaventure's secretary, has provocatively maintained that he was poisoned. The day after his death, Bonaventure was buried in the church of the Friars Minor at Lyons. On 14 April 1432, Pope Sixtus IV canonized Bonaventure. On 14 March 1588, Pope Sixtus V named

Bonaventure as one of the Doctors of the Church with the honorary title of the "Seraphic Doctor." Bonaventure's feast day is celebrated on July 14.

## The Literary Works of Bonaventure

Beyond the aforementioned *Life of Francis* and the *Disputed Questions on Evangelical Perfection*, Bonaventure's many writings span a range of issues germane to thirteenth century Scholasticism. The majority of Bonaventure's writings are both philosophical and theological orientated falling under the literary genres of dogmatic, mystic, exegetical, and homiletic contributions. Four of Bonaventure's major contributions demonstrate the comprehensive nature of his synthesis of Augustinianism and Aristotelianism as faith seeking understanding in the scholastic context of the thirteenth century: *Commentary on the Sentences* (*Commentaria in quatuor libros sententiarum*), *Brief Commentary* (*Breviloquium*), *Journey of the Mind to God* (*Itinerarium Mentis in Deum*), and *On the Reduction of the Arts to Theology* (*De reductione Artium ad Theologiam*). In his longest and one of his most significant treatises, the *Commentary on the Sentences*, Bonaventure reflected upon a wide range of Scholastic teachings from the Trinity, to Creation, the Fall, the Sacraments, and the Last Judgment. In the *Breviloquium*, completed prior to 1257, Bonaventure provided an abbreviated and more concise summary on Scholastic theology within an Augustinian framework that emphasized the role of faith, illumination, and the interpretation of the scriptures. Bonaventure's *Journey of the Mind to God*, which was written on Mount la Verna in 1259, ascent to God is described within six progressive movements from that lift one up from the sensible world to greater contemplation and ultimately communion with God. In *De reductione Artium ad Theologiam*, Bonaventure evaluates the relationship between the arts, philosophy, and theology in relationship to what he describes as a natural center. In another one of his noteworthy theological contributions, the *Disputed Questions on the Mystery of the Trinity* (*Quaestiones disputate de*



*mysterio Trinitatis*), Bonaventure examines the possibility of knowing God's being in relation to Anselm's ontological argument. After establishing what he deemed to be the truth of God's being, Bonaventure considered how we apprehend the inner reality of God's being through natural reason and faith.

In addition to scholasticism, Bonaventure's mysticism, born out of the Victorine tradition, permeated and orientated his mystical, theological, and philosophical writings. In several treatises, Bonaventure examined the mystical and spiritual life of the prayerful Christian. In his *On the Threefold Way* (*De triplici via*), Bonaventure described the spiritual life in three stages of ascent, from the purgative, to the illuminative, and then the unitive. These three stages of the spiritual life belonged to the monastic tradition back to the Desert Fathers and throughout the Christian mystical tradition. Bonaventure's kindred affection toward the monastic tradition is evidenced in his spiritual commentary on sayings of the Church Fathers, known as the *Soliloquies* (*Soliloquium*). Among his writings on the mystical life, there is the 48 meditations on the life of Christ in his work the *Tree of Life* (*Lignum vitae*); *On the Six Wings of the Seraphim* (*De sex alis seraphim*) is a minor work on the virtues of superiors; *On the Perfection of the Life of the Sisters* (*De perfectione vitae ad sorores*) is a reflection on virtues germane to religious perfection; *On the Five Feasts of the Child, Jesus* (*De quinque festivitibus pueri Jesu*); *On the Rule of the Soul* (*De regimine animae*); and *Treatise on the Preparation for Mass* (*Tractatus de praeparatione ad missam*).

Another valuable source for evaluating Bonaventure's teachings is the extant lectures delivered in the university classroom. In 1273, Bonaventure had begun writing the unfinished *Collations on the Six Days* (*Collationes in Hexameron*) during his teaching duties in Paris. Other extant conferences are the *Collations on the Ten Commandments* (*Collationes de decem praeceptis*) and *Collations on the Seven Gifts* (*Collationes de septem donis*). In the *Collations on the Six Days*, Bonaventure examined chapter

one of the book of Genesis to make an argument against the Aristotelianism of the Averroists. He was in favor of a literalist interpretation of Genesis although he appreciated Augustine's figurative reading of the creation account. Bonaventure appreciated the mystical sense of scripture albeit his exegetical writings as a preacher were most concerned with a succinct exegesis of the Gospel. Bonaventure, who was a prolific preacher, has left behind 569 extant sermons. His sermons reflect the Scholastic method whereby the subject is divided and elaborated upon in accord with sensible and spiritual realities, then again, they also, often reached the heights of mysticism, love, and unity with God.

Bonaventure's exegetical works include four extant biblical commentaries on Ecclesiastes, Wisdom, the Gospel of Luke, and the Gospel of John. Furthermore, Bonaventure wrote on the religious life to encourage the monks of the Franciscan order. From his position as the spiritual master of the Friars Minor, Bonaventure indelibly shaped Western Christian spirituality and mystical theology. In one of his works on the explanation of the rule of the Friars Minor, Bonaventure strived to create a space for reconciliation, which was entirely in keeping with his approach during his 17-year generalship of the Franciscans. Bonaventure's *Life of St. Francis* may be read as another attempt at rapprochement among the divided brethren of the Friars Minor. Bonaventure's middle way (*via media*) approach to the monastic division proved unsuccessful largely due to intransigence of the two embattled factions. Following his explanation of the rule, Bonaventure wrote the *Constitutions of Narbonne*, wherein he instructed novices; also, he produced a minor treatise on the role of preaching and hearing confession within monastic community of the Friars Minor. Finally, Bonaventure composed many extant letters, both personal and then official and ecclesiastical in their nature, which have filled out the details of his life, his work, and objectives throughout his life as a professor in Paris, the Minister General of the Friars Minor, cardinal, bishop, and ecclesiastical statesman of the Church in the thirteenth century.

## The Bonaventurian Synthesis

Bonaventure's dynamic synthesis of Augustinianism and Aristotelianism in collaboration with many other theologians and philosophers belonged to and illustrates the unitive pursuit of knowledge in the thirteenth century scholastic context. Contemporary interpretations of Bonaventure point to the depth, complexity, and originality, which characterized his theological and philosophical approach to faith seeking understanding. This entry provides an overview of the salient features in Bonaventure's integrative rereading of the intellectual and spiritual tradition to advance a Christian philosophy for his contemporaries.

Bonaventure was an ardent disciple of Alexander of Hales who modeled an Augustinian approach to Aristotelianism emblematic of the thirteenth century scholastic world. Alexander copiously examined Aristotle's works in order to advance a theology and spirituality that remained faithful to tradition and attentive toward philosophical insights. Beyond the teachings of Augustine, Bonaventure drew upon Pseudo-Dionysius, Bernard of Clairvaux, Richard of St. Victor, Anselm of Canterbury (1033–1109), and Hugh of St. Victor (1096–1141) (Cullen 2006). Bonaventure's synthetic approach provided a way to engage contemporary philosophy from within the Christian tradition (Gilson 1965).

While Bonaventure's philosophical commitments were traditional, his thought was also marked with originality, exemplified in the reconfiguring of Augustinianism and Aristotelianism in his theological worldview. Unlike his counterpart Aquinas, Bonaventure never composed a commentary on Aristotle, although he quoted the Stagirite 1015 times (Bougerol 1974). Bonaventure occasionally favored the teachings of Plato over Aristotle, which more than anything, illustrates the malleability and diversity in his appropriation of philosophical sources. The hybridization of "Neoplatonizing Aristotelianism" also points to the historical context at the University of Paris where the blending of philosophical traditions was becoming more common among those who had developed a high level of erudition. Bonaventure's Augustinian framework

was decidedly colored by the blended reception of the ancient philosophies that emerged within the intellectual climate of the thirteenth century scholasticism (Van Steenberghe 1955). In the 1260s, Bonaventure convened conferences wherein he attacked the errors of Aristotelianism, which must be assessed in the context of the Averroists movement. Bonaventure extensively employed Aristotle's teachings but he was against the particular strict readings epitomized among the Averroists. Bonaventure primarily employed Avicenna and Averroes to support his more favored authors such as Boethius and Aristotle. On the one hand, Bonaventure argued that the Church Fathers were the primary source for working through Christian philosophy then on the other hand, he often employed Aristotle on his own terms and merits (Quinn 1973).

Bonaventure's assessment of philosophy as a self-contained and independent discipline was nuanced, multilayered, and less systematic than exploratory in its approach. On one level, for Bonaventure, the discipline of philosophy was autonomous even while subordinated to theology, the eminent queen of the sciences (De Wulf 1926). However, Bonaventure deemed philosophy a valid if albeit incomplete science on its own. Bonaventure delineated philosophy from theology both in terms of their respective principles and methodologies even as he coalesced these disciplines in the rubric of Christian wisdom (*sapientia*) (Robert 1951). In summation, the Bonaventurian synthesis epitomized the high watermark of the scholastic pursuit to comprehensively organize knowledge in order to explicate universal truths that drew one closer to God. Furthermore, rooted in the Augustinian tradition, Bonaventure turned to a range of philosophical and theological teachings, most notably including Pseudo-Dionysius and the Neoplatonic cosmological worldview that encouraged an affective element within the mystical ascent toward God (Davis 2017).

## The Ontological Argument

Among thirteenth-century intellectuals, Bonaventure was one of the first theologians or

philosophers to exhaustively examine and appropriate Anselm's ontological argument. Bonaventure believed that God and the human soul both belonged to the intelligible order of things (*I Sent.* 3, 1, 1, ad 2 m). On the basis of this shared intelligibility, Bonaventure then reasoned that humanity has been enabled to apprehend the truth and beauty of God. The human soul has been imprinted with and is nourished by knowledge of God. In the *Disputed Questions on the Mystery of the Trinity*, Bonaventure provided a sustained disputation concerning the existence of God in which he asserted three "ways" or "proofs" that stood as incontrovertible proofs of God's existence.

The first proof of God's existence is grounded in the innate nature of the soul or mind (*De myst. Trin.* I, 1). For Bonaventure, this innate knowledge is only related to God's existence, with no reference to God's essence. This is the case, according to Bonaventure, when humanity prescribes a false view of God, while simultaneously assuming God's existence (*I Sent.* 8, 1, 1, 2; *De myst. Trin.* 1, 1, ad 1 m). Bonaventure argues that innate knowledge of an immutable and eternal being is proved by the mind's desire for the true and the good. According to Bonaventure, the search for truth presupposes a perfect and absolute truth; consequently, every assertion of truth is simultaneously a positing of God's existence (*De myst. Trin.* 1, 1, 5–8). Furthermore, one presupposes the truth when denying the existence of truth; therefore, the denial of truth, or God, only affirms the reality of God and the truth (*De myst. Trin.* 1, 1, 26, t. v). More so, the soul's desire for the true and the good in their eternal and perfect forms resides within humanity as an innate predisposition. The intelligibility of God is recognized, even if in an imperfect state, within the intelligibility of the human soul (*De myst. Trin.* 1, 1, 10, t. V). Human knowledge of God is rooted in this relationship between the cause (God) and the image or likeness (soul) (*De myst. Trin.* 1, 1, Concl. t. V).

The second proof of God's existence is arrived at through an analysis of cause and effect revealed in the relationship between God and creation. Since God is the cause of creation, Bonaventure reasons one is able to gain knowledge of divinity

through these sensible effects. For Bonaventure, it is easier to approach God through the senses, rather than purely spiritual means. Consequently, Bonaventure asserts it is permissible to begin with creation in order to apprehend God (*I Sent.* 3, 1, 2, Contra 2 and Concl. t.1). Bonaventure appeals to arguments of cause and effect in order to demonstrate that there is necessarily an absolute being that all other beings derive their being (*I Sent.* 3, 1, 2, Concl. t. 1). Bonaventure was not concerned with a formal starting point or a strictly defined set of proofs derived from creation. Rather, Bonaventure believed God was attested throughout all creation to such a degree that God's existence is readily apparent. All creation witnesses to a Creator God (*De myst. Trin.* 1, 1, 10–20, t. V). The human intellect recognizes the mind's knowledge of the First Being when it compares the perfections of God with the insufficiency of humanity (*Iten.* III, 3). Creation enables one to discover the innate conception of God within the soul, which is the foundation for the existence of God. For Bonaventure, humanity is certain God exists because of the innate capacity of the soul, which makes it impossible to think God does not exist (*De myst. Trin.* 1, 1, 20, t. V).

Bonaventure's third proof asserts that God's existence is immediately and absolutely apparent. With this assertion, Bonaventure demonstrates his steadfast adherence to Anselm's thesis, which he held throughout his theological work. God, as the first principle, does not require further demonstration beyond the fact that the predicate is assumed in the subject. Bonaventure simplifies Anselm's dictum, "God as the being than which no greater can be conceived." Accordingly, Bonaventure translates Anselm's ontological definition into an immediate experience. Further, Bonaventure posits since that which cannot not-be is greater than that which can not-be. Consequently, according to Bonaventure, the being which none greater can be thought of necessarily exists (*I Sent.* 8, 1, 1, t. 1). More so, Bonaventure refines the above assertion by stating that if God is God, where the antecedent is readily evident, the conclusion is likewise plainly evident (*De myst. Trin.* 1, 1, 29, t. V). Bonaventure recognizes the infinite gap between humanity and God; however, the soul and the Creator, which are both intelligibles,

analogously share a nature even if only by largely different degrees. Bonaventure differentiates between the “order of being” and the “order of knowledge.” God and humanity may be infinitely separated in the order of being; however, there may be a level of communion within the order of knowledge. Divine grace makes God knowable proportionately to our apprehension as an interior object of recollection (*I Sent.* 1, 3, 1, ad 2 m, t. 1). Bonaventure advances Anselm’s ontological proof within his own synthesis through positing the interiority of the soul as the epistemological foundation for knowledge of God. In summation, according to Bonaventure, divine illumination makes it impossible to deny God’s existence (*In Hex.* IV, 1, t. v).

The above three arguments for God’s existence are closely interrelated as each of the proofs is grounded in the kindred relationship between God and the soul, which has the innate capacity to apprehend God (*I Sent.* 1, 3, 2, Concl. t. 1). Bonaventure has often been read in opposition to Aquinas where it is noted that the latter Dominican theologian contended that the intellect does not possess an innate idea of God (*Sum. theol.* 1, 2, 1, ad 1 m, 3 m). For Aquinas, contra Bonaventure, knowledge of God is derived from nature or outside objects rather than an innate capacity within the human mind (Quinn 1973). Recent comparisons between the scholastic method of Bonaventure and Aquinas have led to a greater appreciation of their similarities (i.e., both believed that philosophical enquiry into the created world could lead to apprehending the creator God) and that their variances were not inherently oppositional and do point to the plurality of scholastic approaches to integrating the Christian tradition with philosophical thought within the thirteenth century (Hughes 2013). Reflecting upon the canonical status of these two eminent scholastic theologians, Pope Sixtus V famously declared that Bonaventure and Aquinas were “the two olive trees and two candlesticks lighting the house of God, who both with the fat of charity and the light of science entirely illumine the whole Church (Apoc. 11:4).

## Cross-References

- ▶ [Alexander of Hales](#)
- ▶ [Anselm of Canterbury](#)
- ▶ [Aristotelianism in the Greek, Latin, Syriac, Arabic, and Hebrew Traditions](#)
- ▶ [Augustine](#)
- ▶ [Being](#)
- ▶ [Bernard of Clairvaux](#)
- ▶ [Ibn Rushd, Muḥammad ibn Aḥmad al-Ḥafīd \(Averroes\)](#)
- ▶ [Proofs of the Existence of God](#)
- ▶ [Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite](#)
- ▶ [Richard of St. Victor](#)
- ▶ [Thomas Aquinas](#)

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## Bursī, al-Ḥāfiẓ Rajab al-

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### Abstract

Raḍī al-Dīn Rajab b. Muḥammad al-Bursī (d. after 813/1410–11), known as al-Ḥāfiẓ Rajab al-Bursī, was a Twelver Shī'i thinker of the post-Mongol period in Eastern Islamic world, reputed to be a prominent representative of the rapprochement among Shī'ism, Sufism, and philosophy. Little is known about his life, except that he completed his studies in religious sciences in the center of Twelver Shī'i scholarship of Ḥilla, from where he had to flee around 780/1378 to escape from persecution by his fellow Shī'is because of his "extremist" beliefs. His opus magnum, the *Mashāriq al-anwār*, is a monograph devoted to the very center of gravity of Shī'ism, i.e., the first



Imām ‘Alī b. Abī Ṭālib (d. 40/661) and the notion of “divine Friendship” (*walāya*). Although his thought is less systematic than that of Sayyid Ḥaydar Āmulī and Ibn Abī Jumhūr, with whom he is commonly associated, it certainly played a role in the coalescence of philosophical and mystical ideas, inherited from Avicenna, Suhrawardī, and Ibn ‘Arabī, with the doctrine of Twelver Shī‘ism, thus paving the ground for the “philosophical Renaissance” of the eleventh/seventeenth-century Safavid Iran.

Raḍī al-Dīn Rajab b. Muḥammad b. Rajab al-Bursī (d. after 813/1410–11), known as al-Ḥāfiẓ Rajab al-Bursī, was a Twelver Shī‘i thinker of the second half of the eighth/fourteenth and the beginning of the ninth/fifteenth century. He is commonly associated with Sayyid Ḥaydar Āmulī (d. after 787/1385–86) and Ibn Abī Jumhūr al-Aḥsā‘ī (d. after 904/1499), as a prominent representative of the rapprochement between Twelver Shī‘ism, Sufism, and philosophy, during the somewhat chaotic post-Mongol period in Eastern Islamic world, before the proclamation of Twelver Shī‘ism as Iran’s religion state in 906/1501. He seems, however, to have been quite a marginal and isolated thinker, since he is not known to have had any master, disciple or companion. From the Safavid times to nowadays, Shī‘i scholars have adopted ambivalent positions towards him, wavering between respect for his traditional knowledge and denunciation of his heterodoxy. His influence upon the “philosophical Renaissance” in the tenth–eleventh/sixteenth/seventeenth centuries Iran remains a subject of investigation.

### His Life and Posterity

Little is known about the life of Rajab al-Bursī, whose name does not appear in any of the numerous biographical works produced in the Shī‘i milieu of Iraq throughout the ninth–tenth/fifteenth–sixteenth centuries. We owe our scanty information on him to late biographies of the

Safavid period, especially that of Mīrzā Afandī Jīrānī (d. 1130/1718), depending on some allusive and apologetic declarations disseminated in Bursī’s own works, namely, the *Mashāriq al-anwār* and his poetries. As indicated by his *nisba*, he is supposed to be born circa 743/1342 in a place called Burs, a hamlet set between Ḥilla and Kūfa in Iraq, an important area for Shī‘ism during this time (Al-Shaybī 2011, II, p. 225; Lawson 1999, p. 263). However, since the nickname (*kunya*) of Ḥāfiẓ (“the one who knows the Qur’an by heart,” or more than a hundred thousand Prophetic sayings), which he gave to himself, is not a typical designation for a Shī‘i scholar, there is a ground for suspecting that he was originally Sunni and then converted to Shī‘ism (Al-Shaybī 2011, II, pp. 226–227).

Bursī completed his studies in religious sciences in the center of Twelver Shī‘i scholarship of Ḥilla. He should have composed there in 778/1376–77 at least a first version of his *opus magnum*, the *Mashāriq anwār al-yaqīn fī ḥaqā‘iq asrār amīr al-mu‘minīn* (“The Dawning Places of the Lights of Certainty in the Divine Secrets Connected with the Commander of the Faithful [‘Alī b. Abī Ṭālib]”), so-abridged *Mashāriq al-anwār*, where he says that 518 years have passed since the occultation of the twelfth Imām in 260/874 (*MA*, p. 412; al-Shaybī 2011, II, p. 228). Probably circa 780/1378, he fled Ḥilla to escape from persecution by his fellow Shī‘is because of his beliefs about ‘Alī Ibn Abī Ṭālib (d. 40/661), the first Imām (*MA*, pp. 428–429). The *sharī‘a*-minded ulemas of Ḥilla condemned him by using the notion of *ghuluww*, “exaggeration” or “extremism,” which is the generic label for different kind of heterodoxies within Twelver Shī‘ism, starting with the divinization of the Imām.

After his migration from Iraq, Bursī found refuge in Khurāsān, north-east of Iran. At this time, this region was ruled by the short-lived Sufi/Shī‘i dynasty of the Sarbadārīds (738–783/1337–1381) (al-Shaybī 2011, II, pp. 225–226). Bursī established himself in Ṭūs (nowadays Mashhad), to be near the mausoleum of the eighth Imām ‘Alī al-Riḍā (d. 203/818). He seems to have



spent there the rest of his life, devoted to piety and writing. He probably achieved here the definitive version of his *Mashāriq al-anwār* in 813/1410–11 (Afandī 1981, II, p. 307; al-Shaybī 2011, II, p. 229), providing us a *terminus post quem* for his date of death (al-Ṭihirānī 1983, VIII, pp. 64–65). As for the location of his grave, some memoranda say that he was buried in Ṭūs (Ma‘šūm ‘Alī Shāh 1999, III, p. 711); others claim that his mausoleum is located in Ardastān, north of Isfahan (al-Khwānsārī 1971, III, p. 345).

Bursī’s reputation did not overpass the boundaries of the Eastern-Shī‘i Islamic world. Taqī al-Dīn al-Kaf‘amī (d. 905/1499–1500) is the first Shī‘i theologian to quote an esoteric speculation – implying the “science of letters and numbers” – from the *Mashāriq al-anwār* (al-Kaf‘amī 2003, p. 425; *MA*, Persian transl., introduction, p. 43). Surprisingly, Bursī is absent in the *Majālis al-mu‘minīn* of Nūrallāh Shūshtārī (d. 1019/1610), a comprehensive encyclopedia of all known or supposed Shī‘i figures. In Safavid Iran, however, his works have spread and gained the attention of several prominent theologians, philosophers, and historians. Muḥsin al-Fayḍ al-Kāshānī (d. 1090/1679), in his *Kalimāt makhnūna* (“The Hidden Words”), a synthesis of Shī‘i esotericism, Ibn ‘Arabī’s mysticism, and Mullā Ṣadrā’s “transcendental wisdom” (*ḥikma muta‘āliha*), considers Bursī to be authoritative and quotes from him the “theo-imamosophical sermons” ascribed to the Imām ‘Alī (al-Kāshānī 2011–12; pp. 197–199; see below). A Persian extensive paraphrase of the *Mashāriq al-anwār* was written in 1090/1680 under the command of Shāh Sulaymān (r. 1666–1694) by a certain al-Kirmānī or Sabziwārī (al-Khwānsārī 1971, III, p. 345; al-Ṭihirānī 1983, XXI, pp. 141–142; Amir-Moezzi 2017, p. 221). At the same period, al-Ḥurr al-‘Āmilī (d. 1104/1692) and Muḥammad Bāqir al-Majlisī (d. 1111/1699), two prominent Imāmi theologians, quoted many *ḥadīths* from Bursī while criticizing, at the same time, his tendency to “exaggeration” and his lack of reliability as a transmitter of traditions (al-Ḥurr, II, pp. 44, 117–118; al-Majlisī, I, p. 10; Afandī 1981, II, p. 307). In the Qajar period, al-Khwānsārī

(d. 1313/1895–96) mentioned him as a great knower of the Imāmi tradition (al-Khwānsārī 1971, III, pp. 340–344); and more recently, al-‘Allāma al-Amīnī (d. 1390/1970) tried to refute the accusation of extremism against him (al-Amīnī 1967, VII, pp. 50–52).

Around fifteen works are attributed to Bursī, half of them being reputed as lost or not yet edited, and all of them supposedly written in Arabic. The *Mashāriq al-anwār* is the only work ascribed to him with certitude. The number of its manuscripts and printings shows enough its popularity within Shī‘i Twelver milieu. The book also aroused interest among Western scholars, the first of them having been Henry Corbin, who devoted to it 2 years of teaching in the École Pratique des Hautes Études, Paris (Corbin 1993, pp. 104–107, 111–118). However, other works of interest are attributed to Bursī with high probability, among whose brilliant poetries and an esoteric commentary of a vast amount of Qur’anic verses.

## His Thought

Although the thought of Ḥāfiẓ Rajab Bursī, in its thematic and language, could be more adequately described as “Shī‘i gnosis” (*irfān shī‘ī*) than as “philosophy,” it certainly played a major role in the coalescence of philosophical and mystical ideas with the original doctrine of Twelver Shī‘ism. This, at turn, paved the ground for the “philosophical Renaissance” of the tenth–eleventh/sixteenth–seventeenth centuries Iran.

The *Mashāriq al-anwār* is a monograph devoted to the very center of gravity of all Imāmi beliefs and ideas, i.e., the person of ‘Alī b. Abī Ṭālib (d. 40/661) and the notion of *walāya*. This notion connotes the significations of the spiritual and temporal “direction” of the faithful, as well as the “sacred Friendship” of God and towards God; it is inseparable of that of prophecy (*nubuwwa*), which it encompasses. In this sense, the notions of *walāya*, “divine Friendship,” and *walī*, “friend of God,” are widely shared by Shī‘ism and Sufism. According to the original Imāmi doctrine, however, *walāya* is a synonym

for Imāmate, i.e., the secret of the Law revealed to the Prophet as preserved from alteration by his heirs; it is the third “pillar of Islam” after God’s unity (*tawḥīd*) and prophecy; and the essential attribute of Imām ‘Alī, just like *nubuwwa* is that of Muḥammad and unity that of God. After ‘Alī, *walāya* passed to his two sons, Ḥasan and Ḥusayn, then to nine descendants of the latter, until the twelfth Imām, in “major occultation” since 370/941.

In the *Mashāriq al-anwār*, Bursī introduces himself as a Shī‘i insider, “a believer whose heart has been tested by God for the faith,” according to a famous *ḥadīth* of the Imāms: “Our teaching is difficult, extremely arduous; it cannot be undertaken except by a messenger prophet, an angel of proximity, or a believing follower whose heart has been tested by God for the faith” (*MA*, pp. 33–34). He distinguishes four kinds of people: those who have some knowledge of both the esoteric (*bāṭin*) and the exoteric (*ẓāhir*) aspects of the Law, i.e., “those who are firmly rooted in knowledge (*al-rāsikhūn fī l-‘ilm*)” as mentioned in the Qur’anic verse 3:7; those who have no knowledge of the exoteric nor of the esoteric, i.e., the infidels (*kuffār*); those who have some knowledge of the exoteric without the esoteric and who accept prophecy without Imāmate, i.e., the Sunnis; and those who have some knowledge of the esoteric without the exoteric, whom he calls the “insane wise men” (*‘uqalā’ al-majānīn*) (*MA*, p. 71). Moreover, he dissociates himself from two symmetrically opposed groups, those who deny the secret of Muḥammad’s heirs, i.e., the Sunnis, and those who exaggerate in their veneration, i.e., the “extremist” Shī‘is (*ghulāt*), claiming to be on “the middle ground” (*al-namṭ al-awsaṭ*), that of the “Gnostics” or “true knowers” (*al-‘arīfūn*) (*MA*, p. 368). Himself accused of “exaggeration” (*ghuluww*) (*MA*, pp. 425–428), he criticizes his censors for their conformism (*taqlīd*) and attachment to the mere exoteric dimension of religion (*MA*, pp. 31–37).

The book is not arranged by subject matter but declines some fundamental topics throughout its numerous sections – between two hundred and three hundred according to the editions – with

numerous variations. Among the main topics are the secrets of letters and numbers; the Divine Names and “the Greatest Name” of God (*al-ism al-a‘ẓam*); the procession of all things from the “Muḥammadian reality”; the esoteric meaning of Qur’anic surahs, verses, and formulas; the allusions to ‘Alī and the Sacred Family (*ahl al-bayt*) in the Qur’an; the eternal, both unique and dual, Light of the Prophet Muḥammad and the Imām ‘Alī; the complementarity and consubstantiality of prophecy and imāmate; the love for ‘Alī as the way of salvation; the division of humanity between those who acknowledge and love ‘Alī and those who disregard and hate him; the Imām as a theophanic person; the Imām as the Perfect Human, omniscient and almighty; Imāmate as “universal commandment” (*riyāsa ‘amma*) and “cosmic sovereignty” (*walāya takwīniyya*); Imāmate as the fundamental pillar of Islam, comprising the testimony of God’s unity and the faith in prophecy.

However, several successive groups of chapters can be distinguished. The first is devoted to the science of letters and numbers (*MA*, French transl.). The second is centered on the esoteric virtues of the Sacred Family, namely, the Prophet Muḥammad, his daughter Fāṭima, and the Twelve Imāms. A third group of chapters deals particularly with the person of the Imām ‘Alī as a locus of manifestation (*mazhar*) of God. Finally, some brief chapters are concerned with the history of the division of Islam and the description of its sects (*firaq*), based on the famous prophetic saying: “My community will be divided in seventy-three sects, all but one of which are destined for Hell”; Bursī intends here to clearly distinguish the genuine Imāmism from the “exaggeration” of certain Shī‘i currents (Lory 2009, pp. 320–322).

With the *Mashāriq al-anwār*, Bursī appears as one of the foremost experts, in the early modern period, of the “science of [Arabic] letters” (*‘ilm al-ḥurūf*), the Islamic cousin of the Hebraic Kabbalah (Lory 2004), or one of the representatives of “lettrism” as metaphysics (Melvin-Koushki 2014). Belonging to the “occult sciences” (*‘ulūm gharība*) in Islam, it is highly valued in Shī‘ism where it first appeared in the teachings of the sixth

Imām Ja‘far al-Ṣādiq (d. 148/765). It was adopted in the esoteric Shī‘i milieu of the third/ninth century, as reflected in the corpus attributed to the alchemist Jābir Ibn Ḥayyān – supposed to have been Ja‘far’s disciple (Kraus 1986, 223–225; Lory 2003, pp. 139–142) – and in the epistles of the Ismā‘īlī “Brethren of Purity” (*Rasā’il Ikhwān al-Ṣafā*). It gained its philosophical respectability with a short epistle ascribed to Avicenna (d. 428/1037), *al-Risāla al-nayrūziyya* (Massignon 1958; Lory 2004, pp. 77–88). Ibn ‘Arabī (d. 638/1240) connected speculations on letters with the idea of theophany, God’s engendering of reality by means of His Names (Ibn ‘Arabī 1997, introd., pp. 412–436; Lory 2004, pp. 115–136). In Bursī’s time, this form of esotericism was not spread only by individual thinkers such as Ibn Turka of Isfahan (d. 835/1431–2) (Melvin-Koushki 2014), but also by the Ḥurūfiyya, a Shī‘i messianic and politicized group led by Faḍl Allāh Astarābādī (d. 804/1401–2) (Bashir 2005; Mir-Kasimov 2015). In the Safavid times, the “science of numbers and letters” (*‘ilm al-a‘dād wa l-ḥurūf*) would eventually be incorporated in “Shī‘i philosophy” by the great philosopher Mīr Dāmād (d. 1040/1631) (Terrier 2017).

Bursī’s speculations on letters go far below the theoretical sketch of Avicenna and do not seem to depend directly to the conceptions of Ibn ‘Arabī. It supports a conception of God’s creative activity as a self-disclosure (*tajallī*) by means of the Prophets and the Imāms, but also by means of their names, the letters composing their names, and the numbers corresponding to these letters. In this worldview, letters and names are constitutive of the hidden structure of the whole Creation. As a result, the “science of letters” is to be seen as the royal road to the knowledge of God through His Creation: “God’s secret is deposited in the treasury of the science of letters; and this is a treasured science (*‘ilm makhzūn*)” (MA, p. 42). Bursī also considers the knowledge of letters to be consubstantial to the immaterial faculties of human being as a *microcosmos*: “The significations of letters (*ma‘ānīhā*) lay in the intellect, their subtleties (*laṭā‘ifuhā*) in the spirit, their forms (*ṣuwaruhā*) in the soul, their inscription in the

heart, their potency of speaking in the tongue, their intricate secret in the ears” (MA, pp. 42–43).

As it appears in the previous quotation, the self-manifestation of reality is expressed by Bursī through the Neoplatonic scheme of emanation; however, he did not borrow the Plotinian hierarchy of the One, the Intellect, the Soul, and the Nature, but preferred that of God, the “luminous Intellect” (*al-‘aql al-nūrānī*), the Spirit, and the Soul. He associated the *alif*, the first letter of the Arabic alphabet, to the Intellect as the first being emanated from God, the True One (MA, p. 43). He symbolized the One, lying beyond all hypostasis, by the point as the origin and the end of all letters: “The speech ends in letters, the letters in the *alif*, and the *alif* in the point. [...] The point is the symbol of the descent of absolute and manifest existence with its inner dimension (*al-wujūd al-muṭlaq al-zāhir bi-l-bātin*), and of the beginning with the ending” (MA, p. 48). In this regard, he quoted a saying ascribed to ‘Alī: “I am the point under [the stroke of] the *bā*’ of *bi-smi-Llāh* [“in the name of God”, the opening words of the Qur’an],” suggesting that the first Imām is the first self-manifestation of God and the principle of all the existents (MA, p. 45).

As mentioned above, the “science of letters” in Islam has long been linked to the “science of numbers” (*‘ilm al-a‘dād*); unsurprisingly, the latter is also of great importance in Bursī’s thought. He upheld that “the secret of numbers in the souls is in correspondence with the forms of the existents” and that “the science of numbers is the first emanation (*fayḍ*) of Intellect upon the Soul; that is why it became firmly rooted in the potency of the soul” (MA, p. 58). Although he usually did not mention his sources, he was obviously inspired by Neopythagoreanism, a trend anciently linked with Neoplatonism. As a fervent Twelver Shī‘i thinker, he shows the number twelve at work throughout the structure of the cosmos and, following an alphanumeric calculation (Arabic *gematria*), in many ritual formulas of Islam (MA, pp. 194–196). It is noteworthy that his speculation on numbers, although drawing on the same traditional sources, clearly differs from that of his contemporary Ḥaydar Āmulī (see the relevant entry).

Bursī owes his reputation as an exaggerator, if not a heretic, to the fact that he was one of the main transmitters of certain controversial sermons (*khuṭab*) attributed to Imām ‘Alī. Contrary to the criticism addressed to him, he was not the first author to report these sermons, but borrowed them from an early Shī‘i work, Ibn Jumhūr al-‘Ammī’s (first half of third/ninth century) *al-Wāḥida*, a book mentioned by Ibn Nadīm in his *Fihrist* achieved in 377/997 (Ibn Nadīm 2002, p. 371; al-Ṭihārānī 1983, XV, pp. 7–8). In these texts, ‘Alī claims his complete and exclusive participation in the Names, Attributes, and Acts of God, by using for himself some expressions that the Qur’an uses for God – or according to the creed, that God uses for Himself. For instance, in the “sermon of the Clear Declaration” (*khuṭbat al-bayān*), ‘Alī says: “I am the First, I am the Last, I am the Manifest, I am the Hidden,” like what is said of God in the third person in the verse 57:3; M.A. Amir-Moezzi has proposed to describe these sermons as “theo-imamosophical” (Amir-Moezzi 2011b, pp. 103–131). As for Shī‘i scholars, they adopted very contrasting attitudes towards these texts. Rationalist jurists-theologians (*fuqahā’*) regarded them as spurious and their transmitters as “exaggerators” (*ghulāt*), while mystical or gnostic thinkers, such as Rajab al-Bursī, Ḥaydar Āmulī, and Ibn Abī Jumhūr (see their entries), regarded them not only as authentic, but also as reflecting the genuine doctrine of the Imāms. According to Amir-Moezzi, if “the apocryphal nature of these sermons, in their developed form, does indeed seem undeniable,” however, “on the one hand, similar speeches existed from an early period in Shī‘i-‘Alid milieu and, on the other hand, Twelver imāmological doctrine as it has been reported by early compilations of *ḥadīths* enables such a conception of the Imām” (Amir-Moezzi 2011b, p. 106). The reason why rationalist Shī‘i scholars aimed to censure these sermons is probably that such an imāmology jeopardized their project of conciliation with Sunni theology, as well as their claim to the “general representation of the Imām” during Occultation. Contrastingly, Bursī developed the original

Imāmī conception that the science owned by the “people of the Holy Prophetic Family” (*ahl al-bayt*) and particularly by Imām ‘Alī, is a super-rational omniscience beyond the reach of the ordinary human beings (Amir-Moezzi 1992, pp. 15–33; 2011b, pp. 193–229). This conception was rejected as “exaggeration” by the Shī‘i jurists-theologians claiming their legitimacy to exert, by mean of rational interpretation of Law (*ijtihād*), the religious and political prerogatives of the Imām during his absence.

Despite its controversial reputation, the *Mashāriq al-anwār* has to be seen as typical of the Shī‘i esoteric tradition, since it reflects the coexistence of both axial worldviews of Shī‘ism: a dual conception on the one hand, the dialectic of manifest (*ẓāhir*) and hidden (*bāṭin*), or of esoteric and exoteric, echoed in a series of complementary pairs such as prophecy and imāmate, Muḥammad and ‘Alī, revelation of the Letter (*tanzīl*) and spiritual exegesis (*ta’wīl*); and a dualist conception on the other hand, the antinomy of Good and Evil, or of Knowledge and Ignorance, dividing the whole humanity, since the beginning of History, between followers of the guides of Light and Justice and partisans of those of Darkness and Injustice (Amir-Moezzi and Jambet 2004, pp. 31–40). Yet, Bursī was informed of the doctrines of al-Ḥallāj (executed in 309/922), Avicenna, Suhrawardī (executed in 587/1191), and Ibn ‘Arabī; he integrated a number of philosophical and theosophical concepts taken from these sources, such as the Neoplatonic “primary emanation” (*al-fayḍ al-awwal*) (MA, p. 56), Avicenna’s “Active Intellect” (*al-‘aql al-fā‘āl*), “First Intellect” (*al-‘aql al-awwal*), and “Universal Intellect” (*‘aql al-kull*) (MA, pp. 56, 59, 62, and elsewhere), Suhrawardī’s “Light of lights” (*nūr al-anwār*) (MA, p. 59), Ibn ‘Arabī’s “Muḥammadian Presence” (*al-ḥaḍra al-muḥammadiyya*), and “Muḥammadian Reality” (*al-ḥaqīqa al-muḥammadiyya*) (MA, pp. 59, 62, 69–70 and elsewhere). However, except an allusion to Ibn ‘Arabī (MA, p. 45), no philosopher or Sufi master is directly quoted and discussed in his works. In this bold synthesis, the

*Mashāriq al-anwār* reveals the intellectual tension, characteristic of the Shī‘i gnosis, between an universalist approach on the one hand, expressed by concepts such as “Universal Intellect” and “Universal Soul,” and a nominalist one on the other hand, focusing on particular historic persons, namely the “people of the Holy Family” and their enemies. These alternative worldviews are connected through the figure of ‘Alī, both the historical leader of the Shī‘is and the archetype of the Perfect Human Being (*al-insān al-kāmil*), a concept shared by Sufism, philosophy, and Shī‘ism (Lory and Terrier 2017).

Another work of importance attributed to Bursī is *al-Durr al-thamīn*, a commentary of the Qur’an focusing on numerous verses – but not 500, as announced in the title – interpreted as referring to the supra-human, if not divine, virtues of the Imām ‘Alī and the “people of the Holy Family.” This work belongs to a certain tradition of Qur’anic commentaries, probably the oldest form of Shī‘i hermeneutics, described by Amir-Moezzi as “personalized commentaries.” Such exegesis aims to disclose specific historical personages, in particular ‘Alī, his two sons Ḥasan and Ḥusayn, as well as their enemies, beneath the veil of the Qur’anic ambiguous letter (Amir-Moezzi 2011a, p. 91). It should be recalled that the ancient Shī‘is maintained that the official Qur’an, whose elaboration was not achieved before the consolidation of the anti-‘Alid Umayyad dynasty, was a distorted version of the original Qur’an, which contained explicit mentions of both the “members of the Holy Family” and the “hypocrites” (*munāfiqūn*) among the Prophet’s companions. The identification of allusive expressions of the Qur’an with positive or negative characters of the early Islam would therefore be a way of filling the gaps left by censorship. Although the claim of the falsification (*tahrīf*) of the Qur’an was progressively denied by the Shī‘i scholars after the Occultation of the twelfth Imām, the genre of “personalized commentaries” remained. Following a foremost principle of Shī‘i imāmology stating that the Imām is the only authorized (by God) and authoritative (for the believers) hermeneutist

of the *Book of God* (Bar-Asher 1999), *al-Durr al-thamīn* is mainly composed from Imāmi *ḥadīths*. Bursī, however, does not limit himself to the role of transmitter but also assumes the role of hermeneutist by exercising his own effort of interpretation (*ijtihād*), combining reasoning and spiritual intuition. By doing so, he also shares decisive feature of the nascent “Shī‘i gnosis” with Ḥaydar Āmulī (see the relevant entry).

Under scrutinizing Bursī’s works, such as *Mashāriq al-anwār*, *al-Durr al-thamīn*, and his poetries, it appears that many of his assertions regarding the status of ‘Alī and his descendants, the issue of the Qur’an’s integrity, as well as the use of “occult sciences,” do indeed fit the qualification of Shī‘i “exaggeration” (*ghuluww*) as it was defined by the so-called “moderate” Shī‘i scholars. However, other features of the “extremist tradition,” such as the return of the “hidden Imām,” his rising (*qiyāma*) and his advent (*zuhūr*), are absent from his works. Bursī himself defined “extremism” by the challenge of God’s unicity, of the Prophet’s primacy, and of the validity of the Law (antinomianism) (*MA*, pp. 399–402). Be as it may, it worth reminding that the opposition between “moderate” and “extremist” Shī‘ism is mostly a late elaboration of reformist scholars aiming to find a *modus vivendi* with the Sunni majority (Amir-Moezzi 1992, index s.v. *ghâlī*, *ghulât*, *ghuluww*; 2011b, index s.v. *ghuluww*).

In sum, Bursī can be seen as a traditionalist Shī‘i thinker trying to restore the original esotericism against the increased power of law and jurists in the Shī‘i religion, a process undertaken by the rationalist scholars since the Occultation of the Imām. His thought is much less systematic and intellectualist than that of Sayyid Ḥaydar Āmulī and Ibn Abī Jumhūr, with whom he is commonly associated in scholarly literature; nor does he proceed, despite his mystical inclination, to an apology of Sufism. However, Bursī is rightly regarded, beside the two aforementioned thinkers, as a forerunner of the synthesis of Shī‘i theology, philosophy, and mysticism, elaborated in eleventh/seventeenth-century Iran by Mīr Dāmād



(d. 1040/1631), Mullā Ṣadrā Shīrāzī (d. 1050/1640) and their respective students.

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## Canon Law

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### Abstract

The history of canon law, the western church's legal system, reaches back almost to the origins of Christianity itself. Despite the aversion of Jesus and his earliest followers to legalism, their successors quickly discovered that good will and brotherly love were not by themselves sufficient to form a viable community. Rules concerning worship, property, and relationships within the community started to appear around CE 100 and multiplied rapidly thereafter. Canonical rules varied considerably from one region to another; however, until around 1140, when Gratian's *Decretum* finally provided a body of texts that all could accept as binding. Popes and councils during the following centuries promulgated a substantial volume of new canon law and by 1250, the church had a working system of courts, complete with professional canon lawyers. These courts and lawyers sought with mixed success to regulate the personal lives and religious practices of medieval Christians in great detail. While the sixteenth-century Reformation rejected much (but not all) of medieval canon law, the Catholic Counter-Reformation sought to reshape

the medieval law and to centralize authority firmly in the papacy, through the Roman Congregations that the Council of Trent established. In 1917, the Catholic church again reorganized its legal system, which had grown unwieldy over the centuries, in the form of a Code, which was further revised in 1983, which remains in force among Roman Catholics.

The earliest surviving set of canons (so called from the Greek *kanon*, meaning "a rule") is a brief collection known as the *Didache*, or *Doctrine of the Twelve Apostles*, written around CE 100. Further collections – the *Pastor* of Hermas, the *Traditio apostolica* of Hippolytus, and the *Didascalia apostolorum* – followed during the second and third centuries. These early collections, produced while Christians were a persecuted minority within the Roman Empire, dealt almost exclusively with internal concerns of the community of believers, such as the conduct of worship, fasting and penance, the authority and duties of bishops, priests, and deacons, and the conduct of Christians toward one another.

A revolution in Roman religious policy occurred when the emperor Constantine I proclaimed toleration for Christianity in 313 and then proceeded to embrace the religion himself. Imperial patronage made Christianity the most favored religion in the Roman world and under Constantine's successors, it was established

by the end of the fourth century as the Empire's official religion. Canon law quickly expanded in scope and force. Imperial authorities enforced decisions by popes, bishops, and church councils. Pronouncements by church fathers, such as Saints Jerome, Ambrose, and Augustine, were accorded the force of legal enactments. Church property and revenues became the subject of a complex body of law. The imperial government adopted many of the church's rules regulating marriage and family life. Bishops' courts enforced canonical rules about sexual morality, public entertainments, commercial and financial transactions, and even contract law.

As Roman government gradually faded away in the western part of the Empire following the barbarian invasions during the fifth and sixth centuries, bishops stepped in to fill much of the resulting power vacuum. They took over a host of functions previously performed by civil servants. We find them proving wills and supervising the administration of decedents' estates, provisioning garrisons, maintaining roads, bridges and aqueducts, operating schools, and overseeing tax collection. Church authorities, in brief, took over much of the day-to-day machinery of local government, in addition to their religious duties.

Canon law burgeoned during the early Middle Ages. New and increasingly voluminous collections of canons appeared in great numbers, as church law grew ever more complex. At the same time, however, the rulers of the new kingdoms that sprang up in western Europe began to appropriate church property and revenues. They likewise commenced to appoint bishops, abbots of monasteries, and the rectors of parishes, in contravention of canon law. As a reaction against these developments, a church reform movement materialized during the second half of the eleventh century. Its leaders saw canon law as one of the principal tools that they could use to reverse these developments. Once church reformers captured control of the papacy in the years following 1050, leading churchmen openly challenged the authority of kings, noblemen, and knights to control church property and institutions. The confrontation between Pope Gregory VII and the German Emperor Henry IV was only the most dramatic

episode in a struggle that continued into the middle of the thirteenth century and ended in at least partial victory for the papacy.

The reinvigoration of canon law that was a central goal of the church reform party led to what has been called a "papal revolution in law." Central to that revolution was the appearance around 1140 of the *Decretum* of Gratian. Gratian's book, which quickly became the basic textbook in the schools of canon law, attempted for the first time to rationalize canon law by applying dialectical analysis to resolve differences between conflicting canons.

The making of canon law intensified during the two centuries that followed Gratian's work, as teachers and students who studied his book became keenly aware of deficiencies in the earlier canon law. Popes and councils attempted to repair those deficiencies by creating new laws, which they codified in new collections that supplemented Gratian's text. In 1234, the pope promulgated a collection of new law in five books, the *Decretals of Gregory IX*. Pope Boniface VIII in 1298 published a further supplement, called sixth book (*Liber Sextus*), and this was followed in the fourteenth century by two more official collections.

Meanwhile, the volume of litigation in church courts grew dramatically. Lawyers trained in canon law fashioned a new and increasingly sophisticated procedural system that many secular courts adopted as well. By the end of the twelfth century, trained canon lawyers were beginning to dominate the College of Cardinals, and from the thirteenth century onward, the popes they elected were, not surprisingly, apt to be canon lawyers as well.

Church authorities increasingly undertook to supervise the public and private lives of the faithful, clerics and laymen alike, to assure that they conformed to the church's teachings. They monitored the lives of the clergy to force them to dismiss their wives and refrain from sexual activity. They permitted sexual relations among the laity only between men and women married to one another according to canonical rules. Popes and bishops issued regulations governing such things as commercial and financial transactions,

the times and conditions of labor, the prices of commodities, the administration of poor relief, and they attempted (with mixed success) to enforce them. Canonical courts punished adulterers, ruled on the legitimacy of marriages and the children they produced. They imposed penalties on usurers and on peasants who worked on Sundays and holidays. The church levied a variety of taxes from the faithful, which made it as a whole enormously wealthy, although that wealth was distributed very unevenly among different parts of the institution. Church authorities likewise attempted, with uneven success, to supervise peoples' religious beliefs and to penalize those who deviated publicly from the orthodox positions defined by popes, bishops, and councils. During the early Middle Ages, enforcement of theological uniformity lay primarily in the hands of local bishops and synods. From the latter part of the twelfth century onward, however, the papacy became increasingly involved in these matters and sought to centralize both the procedures for this purpose and their implementation through the newly created papal Inquisition. In short, canon law sought to regulate almost every aspect of the life of the population, although its success in doing so (like its wealth) varied from one region to another.

Although the leaders of the Protestant Reformation in the sixteenth century in principle rejected the canon law of the medieval church, in practice they retained many of its features. Stunned and shocked by the Reformation's success, Catholic leaders instituted a sweeping Counterreformation of their own at the Council of Trent (1545–1563), which radically transformed many features of the medieval canon law. Trent sought to centralize power within the church. It established specialized offices within the Roman curia, the so-called Roman Congregations, to supervise developments throughout the church in order to repress deviations from canonical norms swiftly, before they could lead to further departures from Catholicism. At the beginning of the twentieth century, Pope Pius X determined to reduce canon law, which had grown increasingly unwieldy over the centuries, to a codified form and in 1917 his successor, Pope Benedict XV,

promulgated the *Codex iuris canonici*, which sought to reduce nearly 2,000 years of canon law to a single modest-sized volume that every parish priest could keep at hand. Following the Second Vatican Council, Pope John Paul II revised that code in order to incorporate the council's decisions into canon law. He promulgated the new *Codex iuris canonici* in 1983 and it remains the official restatement of the law to this day.

## Cross-References

- ▶ [Heresy](#)
- ▶ [Inquisition](#)

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## Carolingian Renaissance

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### Abstract

The Carolingian Renaissance was a cultural revival inspired by Charlemagne who, during his long reign (768–814), extended the Frankish kingdom to include most of present-day France and Germany as well as parts of Spain and Italy. In this entry, it is taken to cover philosophy of the period c. 780–c. 900, except for the work of the best known philosopher of the time, John Scottus Eriugena, who is treated in separately. After a section discussing the cultural background (see “The Carolingian Renaissance and Carolingian Philosophy”), the two philosophers at Charlemagne’s court, Alcuin and Theodulf of Orleans, are considered (see “The Founders: Theodulf of Orleans and Alcuin”), and then Alcuin’s circle of pupils is examined (see “The Circle of Alcuin”). The next two sections look at two of the disputes (on predestination (see “Gottschalk and the Debate on Predestination”), and on the world-soul (see “Ratramnus of Corbie, the Soul, and Universals”) – but really on universals), which encouraged some of the liveliest ninth-century philosophizing. Central to philosophy in the early Middle Ages were the gloss traditions on important school texts: these are examined in “Ninth-Century Glosses to School Texts.” The “Concluding Remarks” emphasize that this whole area is in need of more research and that a synthesis such as that offered here is premature.

## The Carolingian Renaissance and Carolingian Philosophy

In its broadest meaning, “Carolingian Renaissance” refers to the centrally inspired cultured revival that accompanied Charlemagne’s achievement at the end of the eighth century in making himself ruler of a large empire, and took up the theme, which, in his politics, reached its apotheosis in his imperial coronation at Rome in 800. It was a movement, primarily, to reform the Church: clerical corruption was tackled, new standards of Latinity were imposed, and the text of the Bible and the Liturgy standardized. Among a small elite, there was a cultural and intellectual renaissance, also encouraged by Charlemagne. Intellectuals from Lombardy and Spain such as Paul the Deacon, Peter of Pisa, and Theodulf of Orleans were invited to the court, where they not only engaged in theological controversy but also wrote classicizing Latin verse. Later, the Anglo-Saxon from York, Alcuin, became the most influential of these figures. A library was built up at court which contained the texts of Latin authors such as Lucan, Terence, Horace, Juvenal, Martial, and Cicero, as well as Calcidius’ translation of Plato’s *Timaeus*; and after Charlemagne’s death, his biography was written by Einhard, in a form imitated from Suetonius. The intellectual renaissance survived the gradual disintegration of the Empire during the reign of his son Louis the Pious (814–40) and his grandson Charles the Bald (d. 877). Indeed, Charles the Bald seems to have been enthusiastically interested in poetry, theology, and philosophy, protecting the greatest thinker of the whole period, John Scottus Eriugena. Encouraged, perhaps, by the way in which his court looked to Byzantium as a model, this period was a time in which knowledge of Greek, rare in the Middle Ages, was cultivated, not just by Eriugena but also by his fellow Irishmen Sedulius Scottus and Martin of Laon (see in general the essays in McKitterick 1994).

The Carolingian Renaissance is clearly important, then, in the story of the transmission of classical civilization and for intellectual history. But what relevance does this period have to the history of philosophy? To gather from the bulk of

older and recent discussions, it is Eriugena, and Eriugena alone, who deserves to be considered as a philosopher. Moreover, Eriugena is usually considered to have cut himself off from his own background and century through his reading of Greek Neoplatonic Christian authors, and so to have been a virtual inhabitant of Constantinople rather than Laon or Soissons in the North of France. Other Carolingian scholars seem just to have been preservers and compilers: avatars of their epoch's renaissance perhaps, but hardly thinkers in their own right. This impression, however, is far from wholly accurate. The characteristic methods of Carolingian thinking – excerption, paraphrase, compilation, and glossing – give the misleading impression of servility. But, often, the thinkers are exercising a careful choice, and even by the way they selected and interwove others' material, they are indicating a clear set of their own ideas. And, arguably, these ideas and the more general approach and caste of mind from which they emerged cast medieval Latin philosophy in the mold which, from then on, it would continue to exhibit. I shall return to this point at the end of my discussion. The three areas in which Carolingian philosophy flourished were in logic, in the confrontation, as Christians, with pagan philosophical ideas, and in controversies over Christian doctrine. I have presented it under these headings elsewhere and tried to give an impression of the nature of philosophical thinking at the time through examples (Marenbon 1994, 1998; see also, for a logically oriented view Marenbon 2008). Here, rather, I shall try to set out the different phases of philosophy in period from c. 780–c. 900, with bibliography to help any new explorers of this neglected area – but perhaps they should read the two caveats in my conclusion before they read any further.

### The Founders: Theodulf of Orleans and Alcuin

The two men who revived philosophy for the first time in the medieval Latin West, at the court of Charlemagne, were Theodulf (d. 821), a Visigoth from Spain, and the Anglo-Saxon Alcuin (d. 804)

from York (see Bullough 2004; Jullien and Perelman 1999). Both were accomplished poets in the classical style, theologians, and among Charlemagne's most trusted administrators; Theodulf was rewarded with the bishopric of Orleans (798) and the abbacy of Fleury; Alcuin was made abbot of Tours (796). Their principal contribution was, in each case, in reviving logic and using it for theological purposes. Theodulf's most important theological work is the *Opus Caroli regis contra Synodum* or (as it is more commonly known) the *Libri carolini*, the response written in 792–793 in Charlemagne's name to the Greek position on image worship taken at the Council of Nicaea in 787 (Theodulf of Orleans 1998; cf. Freeman 2003). Despite the work's achievement in proposing a moderate attitude to the use of images, it was never actually issued, probably because the Papacy accepted the Greek view. The most remarkable section for historians of logic is IV, 23. In order to show that “to kiss” and “to adore” do not mean the same thing, Theodulf indulges in a display of his knowledge of logic – far beyond anything required for his point – borrowing from Boethius' first commentary on *On Interpretation* and from Apuleius' *Peri Hermeneias*. Although the fate of the *Opus Caroli* means that this logical passage cannot have had any direct influence, it is perhaps no accident that Fleury became one of the outstanding centers for logic in the early Middle Ages.

According to the new datings proposed by Donald Bullough (1991:37, 1997:581–582), Alcuin's *De dialectica*, the first logical textbook of the Middle Ages, was not written until after the *Opus Caroli*. But if – as seems probable (cf. Rädler-Bohn 2016) – the traditional dating of 786–790 is correct, then Alcuin retains the credit for reintroducing the study of logic into medieval Northern Europe. The *De dialectica* (Alcuin 1851:951–976) is, with one exception, almost entirely derived from the accounts in Isidore's *Etymologiae* and Cassiodore's *Institutiones* (itself based on Isidore). But it seems to have been Alcuin's own choice to have shifted the attention away from how logic is presented in these sources, as a tool for composing arguments, especially syllogistic ones, to the ten



categories. The one textbook he draws from, extensively and verbatim, is a paraphrase of Aristotle's *Categories* from the circle of Themistius (fourth century) which he believed was the work of Augustine. This attribution points to the special theological purpose he saw in the categories: without them, the "profound questions" about the Holy Trinity cannot be explained, he says (see Lehmann 1917; Marenbon 1997a).

Some of Alcuin's ideas outside logic are also philosophically interesting. For example, in his treatise *De rhetorica et de virtutibus* (Halm 1863:523–550) he goes beyond his main source, Cicero, to discuss how philosophers can be said to be virtuous, and although he uses Augustine, he comes to a different view, much less hostile to pagan thinkers. Alcuin also wrote a short treatise *De vera philosophia*, as an introduction to his textbooks on the Arts (Alcuin 1851:849–854; cf. Marenbon 1994: 172–173), in which he melds the biblical idea of wisdom with the philosophical wisdom to be attained through studying the seven liberal arts.

### The Circle of Alcuin

Two of Alcuin's pupils are known for their philosophical interests. The more celebrated of them, Fredegisus, wrote in 800 or later a letter *De substantia nihili et tenebrarum* (*On the Substance of Nothing and of Darkness*) (Fredegisus of Tours 1895, 1963). Fredegisus believes that God created names as well as the things named, and that he did not institute any names which lacked an object. He therefore believes that there must be something which corresponds to the names "nothing" and "darkness." This treatise is one of the few Carolingian works to have generated interest and debate among modern scholars over its interpretation (Mignucci 1979; Colish 1984; Haverkamp 2006). A controversy from later – the only record of it is a letter of Agobard of Lyons from about 830 – suggests that Fredegisus speculated about the origin of human souls and believed that they preexisted the body (cf. Marenbon 1981:64–66).

Alcuin's other philosophical pupil was Candidus, who was also very probably the

companion of Theodulf of Orleans when he went to Rome in 800–801 (Freeman and Meyvaert 2001:126). Candidus was probably the compiler of a set of philosophical passages (some original compositions, some extracts from ancient or patristic texts), that have been labeled the "Munich Passages," and he probably wrote one of them, labeled as "*Dicta Candidi*" (ed. and discussion in Marenbon 1981, to be corrected by Bullough 1991:178–181 and Dolbeau 1997:162–165; an excellent study of the composition, contents, and influence of this material has been made in Lebeche et al. 2009). Among the passages are some which show an interest, like Alcuin's, in the ten categories, and others which show a fascination for techniques of logical argument reminiscent of Theodulf. One passage consists of a dialogue-form argument for the existence of God, based on Augustine's *De libero arbitrio* but with some of its own, often simplistic argumentative moves. There is also an extract from Calcidius' Commentary to the *Timaeus*.

### Gottschalk and the Debate on Predestination

Gottschalk was a child oblate and unwilling monk, first of Fulda, then Reichenau, then Orbais, and then – as a prisoner – at Hautvilliers. The reason for his imprisonment was the condemnation at the Council of Quierzy in 849 for teaching the doctrine of double predestination: that the good are predestined to eternal bliss and the wicked to eternal damnation (edition – Gottschalk of Orbais 1945; cf. Jolivet 1958). Gottschalk claimed, with a great deal of justice, that this was Augustine's position. His opponents, who included his former teacher Hrabanus Maurus, Archbishop of Mainz, and Hincmar, Archbishop of Rheims, accepted as orthodox the doctrine that God predestines the good to salvation, but rejected the idea of predestination to damnation. In their view, it made God responsible for the evils performed by the wicked and so an unjust judge in punishing them; moreover, they regarded the teaching as socially destructive, since it removed the incentive for Christians to behave well.

Although the subject matter of this dispute was, then, strictly theological, and much energy on both sides was spent in finding patristic texts that supported one or the other view, it was also the occasion for medieval authors to begin to tackle the complex of philosophical problems surrounding the idea of free will (cf. Schrimpf 1980; Marenbon 1990).

The outstanding philosophical contribution to the controversy was John Scottus Eriugena's *De praedestinatione*, written in the early 850s at Hincmar's request and discussed in the entry on Eriugena. But Hincmar's own *Ad reclusos et simplices* (Gundlach 1889) and Hrabanus Maurus' letter to Noting (*Patrologia Latina* 112, 1530–53) setting out his position both show their authors struggling with some central ideas. Their difficulty results from the fact that, like Gottschalk, they accept that humans cannot act well without God's grace and that only some are predetermined to receive this grace. But then if God omits to give a certain person grace, and so that person cannot but be damned, is this not exactly the same as double predestination? Hrabanus and Hincmar are at least aware of this problem. Hrabanus tries to tackle it by suggesting that it may be the individual person who chooses to desert God, while Hincmar puts forward the suggestion (along lines which would be elaborated into a theory of Middle Knowledge by Molina in the sixteenth century) that God withholds grace from those who he has foreseen would misuse it if they received it. Further interesting contributions to the debate were made in the 850s in opposition to John Scottus' contribution by Florus of Lyons (*Patrologia Latina* 119, 101–250) and Prudentius of Troyes (*Patrologia Latina* 115, 1009–1366).

### Ratramnus of Corbie, the Soul, and Universals

A much less public dispute, but of great philosophical interest, took place in the early 860s, between Ratramnus, a monk of Corbie (d. c. 868), and an anonymous monk of Sainte-Germer de Fly, who seems to have been presenting the doctrines of his (otherwise unknown)

Irish master, Macarius. The only record of the controversy is in the *Liber de anima* that Ratramnus wrote for his former abbot, Odo, who had become Bishop of Beauvais – a work which itself survives only in a seventeenth-century copy (Ratramnus of Corbie 1952; cf. Delhaye 1950; Marenbon 1981:67–70). The discussion arises from a passage in Augustine's *De quantitate animae*, at the back of which stand the Neoplatonic doctrines of Soul as an hypostasis – the lowest level of reality – and of the World Soul. Augustine asks whether all souls are one, or are individuals' souls entirely separate, or are they both one and many. Macarius apparently took this third answer as Augustine's own view, but, at least as presented by Ratramnus, the issues discussed are not to do with the soul as such, but rather with the status of universals. Ratramnus believes (almost certainly wrongly, but he would not have known the Neoplatonic background) that, when Augustine talks of a single soul, he is merely referring to soul as a species. Basing himself on passages in Boethius that go against a realist view of universals, Ratramnus argues that species do not have any subsistence, but exist merely in the mind. Indeed, he insists (1952, 29:9–23, cited by Erismann 2010) that properly speaking the only things that are substances are those we can see and can point to with our finger. Macarius' position is, by contrast, a type of realism – and it has recently been very convincingly seen as an inchoate version of a view that is found in his fellow Irishman Eriugena and remains important, perhaps central, to thinking about universals until the time of William of Champeaux: immanent realism (Erismann 2010:334–343). Immanent realists hold that the same universal substance is present in each member of a species, and that the individual members are differentiated from one another only by accidents: in substance, therefore – just as Macarius seems to have claimed – all souls are one soul.

### Ninth-Century Glosses to School Texts

Outside the work of Eriugena, the most important philosophical work of the later ninth century is

found in what may seem to contemporary historians a strange place – the glosses written in the margins of manuscripts. These are not, in the case of some of the main school texts, simply readers’ notes. Although the glosses in one manuscript are rarely exactly the same as those in another, there are strong family resemblances, and one can speak of a “standard set of glosses” (or in some cases a variety of sets of standard glosses) which a considerable number of manuscripts share more or less, often adding some nonstandard material. Of central importance for early medieval philosophy are the glosses found in manuscripts of Martianus Capella’s *De nuptiis Philologiae et Mercurii*, the pseudo-Augustinian *Categoriae Decem*, Porphyry’s *Isagoge*, Boethius’ *Opuscula sacra*, and the gloss and commentary tradition on Boethius’ *De consolazione philosophiae*. (Another important school-text was the commentary by Macrobius on Cicero’s *Somnium Scipionis*, but little is known as yet about the extent of glossing and commentary as early as the Carolingian period.) An important figure in connection with these gloss traditions is Remigius of Auxerre (cf. Jeudy 1991). Remigius was born in c. 840, became a monk of Auxerre and, in 893, took charge of the cathedral school at Rheims. He wrote commentaries on a wide variety of works – classical grammarians and poets and, of the works listed above, the *De nuptiis* and *De consolazione* (and perhaps also Boethius’ *Opuscula sacra*). But Remigius did not strive to be original, and his commentaries seem – especially from the evidence of the one on *De nuptiis* – to be compiled by merging together material from various gloss traditions.

Martianus Capella’s *De nuptiis* is a fifth-century encyclopedia in prose with verse interludes, of the seven liberal arts (grammar, logic, rhetoric, arithmetic, geometry, astronomy, and music) preceded by two books which recounts the allegorical marriage between Mercury (divine reason) and Philology (the human soul). Despite (or because of?) its rebarbative style of Latin, *De nuptiis* became a very popular textbook in the ninth century. Philosophically, the most interesting gloss material is that attached to Book IV and some of that to Books I and II. The

relations between the different traditions of glosses have yet to be properly established. Eriugena is known to have taught *De nuptiis* at Charles the Bald’s palace school, and editions of two different versions of his commentary have been published (John Scottus Eriugena 1939; Jauneau 1978; the glosses to Book IV are better edited in Von Perger 2005). It is not certain that all this material is his (the basis for identifying the work as John’s are some comments in Remigius’ commentary, which attribute certain ideas to him), but most of it probably goes back to him, and his comments on logic show that – in what is very probably work from his earlier years – he is beginning to think along some of the lines which will be developed in his *Periphyseon* (cf. Von Perger 2005:264–301; Marenbon 2008:26–27). There are also glossed manuscripts that belong to an earlier tradition (Teeuwen et al. 2008), and another tradition, which has been associated with a writer called Dunchad, Martin of Laon, or Heiric of Auxerre (Pseudo-Dunchad 1944).

The *Categoriae Decem*, already Alcuin’s favorite, seems to have been the most intensely studied logical text in the ninth century. Of the two manuscripts which date from the last decades of this century, one (Milan Ambrosiana B 71 sup.) is not very fully annotated, but the glosses it contains are in many cases obviously linked to the teaching of Eriugena and have little to do with the logical content of the text. The other set of glosses in Sankt Gallen 274 is much fuller. It contains more material which would be standard in tenth- and eleventh-century glossed manuscripts. Unlike all the other glossators of the *Categoriae Decem*, however, the Sankt Gallen glossator knows Boethius’ commentary on Aristotle’s *Categories* and uses it to help him gloss the pseudo-Augustinian text (Marenbon 1981:116–138).

It also seems that the tradition of glosses to Boethius’ *Opuscula sacra* was begun in the ninth century. There have been attempts to link the glosses to a specific individual – Eriugena himself or, more recently, Remigius of Auxerre (Cappuyns 1931) – but such attributions are unreliable and the complexities of this gloss-tradition have yet to be unraveled. Boethius’ discussions in these little treatises provided early

medieval authors with a chance to think about some basic metaphysical issues, such as individuation, and how they related to doctrinal problems.

The glosses to Boethius' *De consolazione Philosophiae* have perhaps the richest tradition of all. Pierre Courcelle (1967) distinguished two strands of a commentary tradition, one linked to Sankt Gallen and one from Remigius of Auxerre (extracts, but he acknowledged that some manuscripts contained glosses that belonged to neither tradition.) The most recent research (Godden 2003; Jayatilaka 2006) suggests that the position is as complicated for this work as for the other textbooks. Each manuscript contains a different assortment of glosses, and the main groupings have not yet been properly established. Boethius' *De consolazione* faced the early medieval authors with a special challenge. Although Boethius was a Christian, he wrote *De consolazione* without including any explicit references to Christianity, and in some passages – most obviously Book III, metrum 9, an epitome of Plato's *Timaeus* – he proposes, through the mouthpiece of the personification Philosophia, ideas which seem to be at odds with Christian doctrine. Different Carolingian exegetes had different approaches to resolving the tension. The late ninth-century glosses to Book III, metrum 9 in one manuscript (Vatican lat 3663; edited in Troncarelli 1981) – which seem to be distinct from the Remigius or the Sankt Gallen set – give the impression, at first, of accepting without demur the pagan nature of the material, since they consider the stars and their properties and do not avoid astrology. But what may seem like a daringly pagan moment – the equation of the World Soul with the sun – turns out to be a quotation from the very soberly orthodox Bede. Both the Sankt Gallen commentator's and Remigius' attitude fit with a line of interpretation found in Alcuin, and it has been argued (Troncarelli 1981) in the way the *De consolazione* was presented even shortly after Boethius' death: the work is interpreted in an explicitly Christian way, with the figure of Philosophia transformed into the Biblical Sapientia, and any passages which, taken literally, seem to go against Christian doctrine, read allegorically with a Christian

meaning. There is, however, one short, continuous commentary, just of Book III, metrum 9, which takes a very different approach (edited in Huygens 1954). It was written by Bovo, a monk of Corvey. Bovo died in 916, and so this piece of writing comes from the closing years of what can be considered the Carolingian period, if not later. Bovo recognized both that Boethius was a Christian author but that, in this metrum especially, he said much that was “contrary to the Catholic Faith.” Using Macrobius' commentary on the *Somnium Scipionis*, he gives a remarkably penetrating interpretation of the Neoplatonic allusions in this poem, although he does so only – at least ostensibly – in order to condemn these pagan doctrines.

### Concluding Remarks

A survey, like this one, of Carolingian philosophy without Eriugena is very much a case of *Hamlet* without the Prince. But history follows different rules from fiction. The real story of *Hamlet* is just the story that Shakespeare told, in which, because he so designed it, Hamlet plays a role so central that none of the other elements in the play would make sense without his presence. Although, from the standard *Histories* of philosophy, it would seem as if Carolingian philosophy without Eriugena is not so much lacking in sense as absent altogether, what the paragraphs above suggest is a very different conclusion. Although Eriugena had a very definite influence on a circle of followers (Marenbon 1981:88–115), the greatest achievement of ninth-century philosophers may have been that, in general, they did not follow him. His bold theology and imaginative but sometimes less than fully worked-out Neoplatonic metaphysics were largely ignored, and instead, scholars worked carefully over the ancient textbooks, absorbing the rudiments of the Aristotelian tradition of logic. In doing so, they set the mold for eleventh- and twelfth-century philosophizing and that, in its turn, for how philosophy developed even after the assimilation of the whole Aristotelian corpus in the thirteenth century.

This judgment, however, must, like any judgment about philosophy in this period, be qualified by two notes of caution, which are, in fact, the most important points that are made in this article. First, there is no good reason to choose Carolingian philosophy or philosophy of the Carolingian Renaissance as constituting a distinct period in the history of philosophy. The gloss traditions, which are central to the story of early medieval philosophy, run on into the tenth and eleventh centuries. Second, outside the writings of Eriugena, philosophy in the late eighth and ninth centuries (and indeed in the tenth) remains a mostly unstudied field (cf. Marenbon 2009). Scholars are only now beginning to understand the complexity of the major gloss traditions, and they are still a long way from being in a position to start to assess the philosophical achievements of these years. An encyclopedic synthesis, such as this one, is therefore premature: there is nothing in the above paragraphs which more thorough study may well not show to be inaccurate, wide of the mark, or plain false.

## Cross-References

► [John Scottus Eriugena](#)

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## Categories

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### Abstract

The body of thought contained in Aristotle's *Categories* posed a host of questions for its medieval interpreters. This entry considers medieval approaches to five such questions:

1. What is the subject matter of the Categories, words or things?



2. Is Aristotle's list of ten categories complete and irreducible, and can its completeness be demonstrated?
3. What is the nature of the accidents in the last six categories (which are not covered extensively in the *Categories*)?
4. Are individual accidents individuated by the substances in which they inhere, can they be transferred from one substance to another, and what are the implications for the Christian doctrine of the Eucharist?
5. What is the ontological nature of relations and relatives, and what are the implications for the Christian doctrine of the Holy Trinity?

### Aristotle's *Categories*

Aristotle's *Categories* (Aristotle 1963, 1b25) states that incomplex expressions signify either Substance (e.g., Man) or Quantity (e.g., Two cubits long) or Quality (e.g., White) or Relative (e.g., Master) or Where (e.g., In the market place) or When (e.g., Yesterday) or Position (e.g., Lying) or State (e.g., Shod) or Action (e.g., To cut) or Affection (e.g., To be cut). These are the ten Aristotelian categories. The non-Substance categories are known as Accidents.

In at least some categories, a distinction can be made between denominatives (e.g., Brave) and that from which they are denominated (Bravery).

Among substances, Aristotle distinguishes primary substances (e.g., the individual man) as being neither said of a subject nor present in a subject (Aristotle 1963, 2b11). Two types of predication are thus distinguished (2a19). What is "said of" a subject (as Animal is said of Man) is predicated, both in name and definition, of the subject. What is "present in" a subject (as Grammatical knowledge is present in Man) may be predicated in name, but not in definition, of the subject; it is not part of the subject and cannot exist apart from it (1a20).

According to the *Categories*, there are individual accidents as well as individual substances. Everything other than primary substance is either said of or present in a primary substance. Thus, it

is sensible individuals, such as this man or this horse, which are substance in the truest and primary and most definite sense of the word – a claim that is diametrically opposed to Plato's Theory of Forms, which states that intelligible Forms are most truly substances.

The *Categories* mentions features peculiar to some of the categories, whereby they can be distinguished from other categories. It is common to all substances, and also to the differentiae whereby one species is distinguished from another, that they are not present in any subject (3a7). It is common to all substances and also peculiar to them that, while remaining numerically identical, they can receive contrary qualities through a process of change (4a10).

What is distinctive of quantity is that subjects can be equal or unequal to one another in respect of quantity (6a26). (But Equal and Unequal are relatives, not quantities.) What is distinctive of quality is that subjects can be similar or dissimilar to one another in respect of quality (11a15). (But Similar and Dissimilar are relatives.)

It is distinctive of relatives that every relative has a correlative, as Slave is correlative with Master. It seems to be a peculiarity of relatives that correlatives are simultaneous by nature: when one man becomes a master, another becomes a slave, and when one becomes a slave, another becomes a master (7b15).

The category of relatives includes items like Master and Slave, which are denominatives, and also includes the items from which these are denominated: Mastery and Slavery. The latter may be called relations.

### The Subject Matter of the *Categories*

The Neoplatonist Plotinus (d. 270) raised a number of detailed difficulties with Aristotle's account. The big problem, for him, was that if Aristotle's scheme of categories is supposed to be a classification of all beings, it seems unable to accommodate those intelligible entities that are the primary beings from which all others emanate (Plotinus 1988). Plotinus' disciple Porphyry (d. 305) wrote two commentaries on the *Categories*,

only one of which survives. He proposed an ingenious solution to Plotinus' interpretive problem. The *Categories* should not be read as a pretended classification of all beings but as a classification of the species and genera of sensible beings. By this means, Aristotle's book could be assimilated into Neoplatonic doctrine. Porphyry's most famous work is the *Eisagôgê* – an introduction to the *Categories* – which contains the structure later known as Porphyry's tree, a detailed account of the way in which the category of substances branches out into its genera and species.

The *Categories* talks sometimes about “things that are said” (1a16) and sometimes about “things that are” (1a20). Thus, there arose the interpretive question of whether the work is about words or things. Porphyry proposed that the book is about words insofar as they are used to signify things (Porphyry 1992). This compromise solution was to become influential in the Middle Ages.

The commentary on the *Categories* by Boethius (d. 524/525) takes over much of Porphyry's thinking. For example, he says that the substances of which the *Categories* speaks are compounds of matter and form, and not such things as God or the soul (Boethius 1891).

In the eleventh century, some interpreters rejected Porphyry's compromise concerning the subject matter of the *Categories*; they insisted either on reading the work as being about things [*in re*] or being about words [*in voce*].

### The Sufficiency of the Categories

Since the time of Simplicius in the sixth century, commentators have tried to prove that Aristotle was right in naming the ten categories, and just the ten, which he did name (Sorabji 2005). They used a variety of principles to divide all beings into Aristotle's ten categories (Simplicius 2003).

In the Arabic-speaking world, Avicenna (d. 1037) proposed a division of beings into Substance, Quantity, and Quality (which can be conceived without regard to anything other than their substance) and the remaining seven categories whose conception requires reference to something

other than their substance (Thom 2015). This two-plus-seven division of accidents was taken up in the West by Albert the Great (d. 1280).

Robert Kilwardby (d. 1279) proposed a three-plus-three-plus-three division, based on a distinction between what attached to a substance intrinsically or extrinsically or in a mixed mode and between what concerned the subject's matter or form or the composite of matter and form (Hansen 2017). Kilwardby's division was later reproduced by Walter Burley 1497 (d. 1344).

In 1266, William of Moerbeke translated Simplicius' *Categories* commentary into Latin. Thomas Aquinas, whose derivation of the ten categories was based on the different modes of predication, consulted this translation: a predicate either indicates what its subject is substantially, or else it is in the subject, or else it is outside the subject. A predicate that is in the subject is so either absolutely (following either from the subject's matter or from its form) or it is in the subject relatively. A predicate that is outside its subject is either wholly outside the subject (either not as a measure of the subject or as a measure – and then either as a measure of time, or of place in relation to the subject's parts, or of the whole subject) or outside of it in the way that Action and Affection are outside their subject.

John Duns Scotus thought the method of division could never demonstrate the sufficiency of the ten categories, though he believed they were only ten.

Like Scotus, William Ockham (d. 1347) rejected the opinion of those who sought to construct a deduction of the ten categories from first principles. He believed it was necessary only to have categories of Substance and Quality, the remaining categories being reducible to these. John Buridan (d. c. 1361) thought all the categories were reducible to Substance, Quantity, and Quality (Klima 2008).

### Problems About Accidents

Aristotle does not deal with the non-Substance categories in any detail. The *Categories* ends

with some loosely related chapters on contrariety and other types of opposition, on priority and simultaneity, on motion, and on having. In the Latin world, the *Book of the Six Principles*, formerly attributed to Gilbert of Poitiers (d. 1154), attempts to fill this gap in Aristotle's discussion.

In the Arabic world, Al-Farabi filled the gap by analyzing the remaining six categories in detail (Dunlop 1957–1959).

Regarding the individuation of accidents, Porphyry suggested that an individual accident such as the fragrance of an apple can be separated from its subject and thus can exist separately from what it was in, but only if it gets transferred to another subject. Porphyry's view of individual accidents as dependent on individual substance, albeit in a transferable way, was taken up and transmitted to the Latin Middle Ages by Boethius.

Peter Abelard took a different view of individual accidents. He understood Aristotle to say that what is in a subject cannot subsequently exist separated from that subject. He held that individual accidents are not transferable between subjects, but at the same time, he held that they do not attach with necessity to their actual subjects: an individual accident inhering in a given subject might have inhered in a different subject.

The question whether individual accidents are individuated by the substances in which they inhere takes on an added significance when considered in relation to the Christian doctrine of the Eucharist. The Church's teaching is that in the Eucharist the bread and wine become the body and blood of Christ. Berengar of Tours (d. 1088) argued that this doctrine entailed that if the bread changes substantially into the body of Christ while preserving the accidental features it had when it was bread (rather than merely preserving the appearance of those accidental features), then the same individual accidents must inhere first in one substance and then in another (Marenbon 2007). Thus, it seems that the Church's doctrine, when transposed into the language of the *Categories*, is not consistent with the theory that individual accidents are individuated by their substantial subjects and are not transferable from one substance to another.

## Problems About Relations

Aristotle had suggested that perhaps not all correlatives are simultaneous in nature because knowledge and the knowable are correlatives but the knowable exists prior to becoming known. Al-Farabi, following Porphyry, gives a solution, namely, that potential knowledge is simultaneous with the potentially knowable and actual knowledge with the actually known.

Avicenna (2005, 118) asks whether a relation is something existing between two things (as "most have thought") or whether "there is for each of the two related things . . . a special property." He adopts the second view, declaring that fatherhood is in the father and sonship in the son and "there is nothing here at all which is in both of them." Most of the medievals followed him in this judgment (Henninger 1989); but some, such as Nicholas of Paris (d. before 1263), held that "the specific relation that is paternity and filiation is in the father and son as in one subject and not in each of them taken separately" (Hansen 2014, 149).

In the Christian world, Augustine (1991) used the notions of substance and relation to illuminate the doctrine of three Persons in one God. He pointed out that when a relation inheres in a subject, the subject is something substantially besides being the relation's subject: the slave is substantially a man. What the subject substantially is was later called its ground [*fundamentum*]. Augustine held that God is a substance (not because God can receive contrary qualities through change, but because God is an essence not present in anything as a subject). The Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are said with reference to one another, in just the way that correlatives are; at the same time, each of them is substantially God. Augustine's elaboration of the doctrine of the Trinity became the source of a long tradition of theological thought.

Given that a relation inheres in its subject but stands toward its object, the question arises whether these two aspects are independent of each other and if they are mutually independent whether one or both are essential to relations. Robert Kilwardby (d. 1279) took these two aspects to be mutually independent and took the second aspect (standing toward an object) to be

the essential one. Given the independence of a relation's two aspects and given that its "towardness" is what is essential to it, there can be no contradiction in supposing a relation to stand toward an object while not inhering in any subject. If, then, the mark of a substance is taken to be not inhering in any subject, it follows that there is no contradiction in supposing a relation to be a substance (Kilwardby 1986).

This argument is rich in theological potential, because in Augustine's treatment of the Trinity, the three divine Persons are supposed to be both constituted by their relations and substantially identical with the Divine Essence. Clearly, if the Divine Essence is a substance and if it is not to be contradictory for the Father to be identical both with Paternity and with the Divine Essence, then it should not be contradictory for a relation to be a substance.

Aristotle had pointed out that a relation of similarity can come to characterize a subject without any change occurring in the subject (e.g., because there is a change in the relation's object). Some medieval thinkers concluded from this example that relations have no ontological content: a relation adds nothing to its subject beyond what is already contained in the relation's ground. Among the proponents of this view were Henry of Ghent (d. 1293) and Richard of Middleton (d. 1300).

Among the opponents of the view was Walter Burley, who posited five elements in a relational situation: the relation itself, its subject, its ground, its terminus a quo, and its terminus ad quem (Conti 2007b). Thus, he clearly distinguishes the ground of a relation from its subject and from its terminus a quo. For example, the relation of mastery is grounded in a power to coerce. Both the relation and its ground are distinguished from the man who happens to be a master (the subject) and from that master considered purely as a master (the terminus a quo). Mastery is a relation, the man who is a master is a substance, and the master as such is an aggregate of a substance and a relation. Both mastery and the man are per se beings, but the master as such is a per accidens being. Thus, what is a per se being (the man) is a relative only per accidens, whereas what is a per

se relative (the master) is merely a per accidens being.

Robert Alyngton (d. 1398) follows Burley on many points but posits four instead of five elements in a relational situation (Conti 2007a). These, it turns out, are the four per se beings that enter into any real relation: the relation itself, the subject (the man who happens to be a master), the ground (the power to coerce), and the per se being that happens to be the terminus ad quem (the man who happens to be a slave).

Alyngton's analysis, though original, does not depart from the standard medieval view of relations as inhering in a single subject (i.e., in modern language as monadic properties). A relation does require, besides its ground, two per se extremes. But it inheres in only one of these, namely, its subject. The relation does not inhere in its object; rather, the relation's correlative (e.g., servitude) inheres in the object.

## Cross-References

- ▶ [Albert the Great](#)
- ▶ [Augustine](#)
- ▶ [Boethius](#)
- ▶ [al-Fārābī, Abū Naṣr](#)
- ▶ [Gilbert of Poitiers](#)
- ▶ [Henry of Ghent](#)
- ▶ [Ibn Sīnā, Abū 'Alī \(Avicenna\)](#)
- ▶ [John Buridan](#)
- ▶ [John Duns Scotus](#)
- ▶ [Peter Abelard](#)
- ▶ [Richard of Middleton](#)
- ▶ [Robert Kilwardby](#)
- ▶ [Thomas Aquinas](#)
- ▶ [Trinitarian Logic](#)
- ▶ [Trinity](#)
- ▶ [Walter Burley](#)
- ▶ [William of Ockham](#)

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## Categories, Commentaries on Aristotle's

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### Abstract

Aristotle's *Categories* was a fundamental text in the medieval Latin philosophical tradition. Supplemented with an introduction by the late-ancient Neoplatonist philosopher Porphyry, it served, from the eleventh century onward, as the first book of the medieval philosophical curriculum. As a result of its theoretical and educational primacy, it became the object of an extraordinarily vast commentary tradition that includes commentaries by some of the most well-known medieval philosophers: Peter Abelard in the twelfth century; Robert Kilwardby, Albert the Great, and John Duns Scotus in the thirteenth; and William of Ockham, Walter Burley, and John Buridan in the fourteenth.

### The Commentary Tradition

The *Categories* was translated from the Greek around 500 CE by the Roman senator Manlius Boethius (ca. 480–ca. 525), who also wrote an influential commentary to it. Boethius' translation (which circulated in two different versions) came into use as the basis for studying Aristotle's theory of categories around 1000 CE and soon became the object of commentary.

It is not known exactly how many commentaries survive, but the number certainly runs into the hundreds. No complete survey or even catalogue of the material known to be preserved in the medieval manuscripts exists, and only a small portion of the material is at the present stage available in modern, critical editions. Relative to other texts, the commentary tradition on the *Categories* has received quite a significant amount of



scholarly attention in the last decades, but much remains to be explored.

The first extant commentary is from the early eleventh century (Anonymus, *Excerpta Isagogarum et Categoriarum*). It is little more than brief excerpts from Boethius' commentary reworked into a very simple question-and-answer form. A more sustained tradition of writing free-standing commentary appears in the sources from about 1100, although it probably began decades earlier. Boethius' commentary is still a significant source in these twelfth-century commentaries, most of which take the form of literal commentaries that combine word-by-word exposition of the letter of Aristotle's text with more freestanding discussion of exegetical or philosophical issues in, or arising from, it. A lot of the material is fragmentary, and almost all of it is anonymously transmitted, the exception being Peter Abelard's commentary in the *Logica ingredientibus*. Although they cannot be attributed to a specific thinker, several of the commentaries can, however, be seen to have originated in a specific part of the philosophical milieu of twelfth-century Paris, which was dominated by a number of fiercely competing schools. Thus, for example, one commentary can be identified as the product of a follower of Gilbert of Poitiers (Anonymous Porretanus) and another clearly belongs to the school of Abelard's fierce opponent Alberic of Paris (Anonymous Patavinus).

By the thirteenth century, the Parisian schools seem to have pretty much vanished, and a new institutional setting for teaching and doing philosophy had arisen: the university. There appears to be a dearth of material from the early decades of the century, but once we reach the 1230s, a number of commentaries by philosophers connected to the arts faculty of the University of Paris are preserved: John Pagus, Nicholas of Paris, and Robert Kilwardby. Like their twelfth-century precursors, these commentaries are literal commentaries, but they have a more rigid structure which seemingly reflects a more standardized teaching practice. Aristotle's text is now broken down into a series of lectures (*lectiones*), and each lecture consists of a division and an exposition of a piece of text as well as

series of questions pertaining to the interpretation of it. From the second half of the thirteenth century, even more material is preserved. Prominent commentators include Albert the Great, Martin of Dacia, Peter of Auvergne, Simon of Faversham, John Duns Scotus, and Radulphus Brito. Literal commentaries are still being written, but many commentaries now take the form of question commentaries; they presuppose a thorough knowledge of the letter of the text and consist solely in a series of more sustained, free-standing discussions of selected questions that arise from it or the doctrines it contains. A prominent feature of the commentaries in this century is that most of Aristotle's writings have now become available, and so commentators increasingly try to understand the *Categories* in the light of these other works, the *Posterior analytics*, the *Metaphysics*, and the *Physics* in particular. Another prominent feature is that the text is increasingly read against the background of the theory of first and second intentions that came to dominate logical studies during the course of the century.

The commentary tradition continues seamlessly into the fourteenth century and here includes commentaries by prominent thinkers such as Walter Burley, William of Ockham, and John Buridan. The formats in use are still the literal and the question commentary. A prominent feature here is the fierce debate between those who defend a staunchly realist reading of the *Categories* and those who propose a more deflationary, nominalist approach.

## Interpretive Issues

In spite of its diminutive size, the *Categories* is a theoretically rich and varied text. In it are discussed, in a suggestively brief manner, some of the most fundamental aspects of Aristotelian philosophy: kinds of predication, substance and accident, particular and universal, the list of categories, quantity, quality, relation, and modes of opposition, to name but the most central. The commentary tradition is similarly rich and diverse, and it will be expedient here to focus on



a few of the most basic interpretive issues that arise with regard to the text and the list of categories that lies at its heart: What is a category? What does Aristotle intend to categorize? And can a justification for the list of categories he advances be given?

### What Is a Category?

Aristotle nowhere in his text explains the notion of a category; indeed, he hardly even uses the term. Porphyry, in his *Introduction*, attempts to rectify the omission by giving a brief explanation, according to which categories are genus-species hierarchies, which extend from a most general genus at the top down through subordinate genera and species to a number of ultimate species under which fall only individuals.

On the basis of this understanding, medieval commentators distinguished two ways of speaking about categories, both of which are relevant in the context of Aristotle's text. In one sense of the term, a category is simply the highest genus of such a genus-species hierarchy. In another sense, a category is the entire hierarchy extending from a most general genus down to the individuals. When speaking of the category of substance, we may thus either mean the most general genus *substance* or this most general genus plus all of its subordinate genera and species all the way down to individual substances.

### What Does Aristotle Intend to Categorize?

One fundamental interpretive problem with regard to the *Categories* is what exactly it is meant to be about. Or, to put it slightly differently, what is it that Aristotle intends to classify with his list of categories? Is it linguistic expressions, mental concepts, or things in the world? Again, Aristotle doesn't say, and it had been a matter of lively debate in the late-ancient commentary tradition. In his commentary, Boethius gave an answer that he had taken from Porphyry: the subject matter of the treatise is "the

ten primary expressions signifying the ten primary genera of things insofar as they signify."

This understanding of the *Categories* became hugely influential, and it is the view, for example, adopted by Abelard in the twelfth century. But around the beginning of the thirteenth century, a new answer came to the fore, formulated in response to a new set of concerns with which commentators approached the text. Aristotle's *Posterior analytics* had now become available in Latin translation, and it made an important impact on the way commentators interpreted other authoritative texts. They now saw it as part of their task to show how each Aristotelian treatise could be construed as offering a scientific treatment of its subject matter. This implied certain constraints with regard to the subject matter. First of all, it had to be suitable to the relevant scientific branch. Second, it had to be unique to that branch, because the uniqueness of a science depends on the uniqueness of its subject matter. Third, the subject matter had to be unitary, since the unity of a science derives from the unity of its subject matter. But how will this work with the *Categories*? First, it is clear from the *Metaphysics*, which had now also become available, that Aristotle takes his categories to be categories of things in the world. But how can they be a *suitable* subject matter in logic, the branch to which the *Categories* was taken to belong? Second, if the study of the categories also belongs to metaphysics, how do they constitute a *unique* subject matter? And finally, if there are ten of them, as Aristotle claims, how do they constitute a *unitary* subject matter?

A version of the new standard reply appears already in the early thirteenth-century commentaries by John Pagus and Nicholas of Paris. As Nicholas puts it: "the subject matter of the book is the incomplex sayable capable of being ordered (*dicibile incomplexum ordinabile*)." A sayable (or predicable) is not a real object (*res naturae*), but rather a kind of mental construct (*res rationis*). The logician's consideration of the categories is thus meant to be distinguished from that of the metaphysician's, because whereas the latter considers beings insofar as they constitute the furniture of the world, the logician considers them

insofar as they ground, or are, certain (higher order) concepts, in this case the concept of an uncombined predicable that can be ordered in a generic hierarchy. In this way, they constitute not only a unique but also a suitable subject matter for logic, since logic, on the predominant view in the period, is precisely a science concerned with reason and reasoning (*scientia rationalis*). This subject matter is also unitary (if only in a qualified sense), because the categories are considered under this common notion. This answer to the problem of the subject matter of the *Categories* occurs in various variations in most commentaries of the thirteenth century, and as the century progresses comes to be increasingly cashed out in terms of the theory of first and second intentions. Much the same answer as Nicholas' is thus found toward the very end of the century in the commentary by Radulphus Brito, according to whom the subject matter of the *Categories* is "the incomplex sayable capable of being ordered in a genus according to the higher and lower."

There were, however, a few who reacted against this reading of the *Categories*. An anonymous commentator (Domus Petri 205), writing around the middle of the thirteenth century, flatly rejects it, and on the basis of a passage in the *Metaphysics* (IV.2.1004b19–22) where Aristotle says that logic and metaphysics are both concerned with being in its entirety, instead claims that: "being insofar as it is common to the ten categories is the subject matter of this book, and it is on the basis of the unity of this subject matter that this science is said to be unitary." Toward the end of the century, John Duns Scotus similarly criticizes the standard view and argues, less radically, that the primary subject matter here is simply the notion of a category (*praedicamentum*) or highest genus (*generalissimum*). This notion is something intentional, a mental construct (*causatum a ratione*), which is unqualifiedly common to the ten categories.

In the fourteenth century, the standard answer is still embraced by Burley who insists that it means that the *Categories* really is about things (insofar as they ground certain concepts); if expressions are discussed, this is merely incidental. Ockham, in contrast, returns to Boethius' proposal: The *Categories* is about expressions that

signify things. If things are discussed, it is because signification is tied up with things. And this, Ockham claims, is where many moderns have gone wrong, thinking that much of what Aristotle says is about things when he is really only talking about expressions and, correspondingly, concepts.

### How Many Categories Are There?

Another fundamental interpretive problem is with the list of ten items that Aristotle puts forth in Chap. 4: "Of things said without combination, each signifies either substance or quantity or quality or relation or where or when or being-in-a-position or having or doing or being-affected." Aristotle does not explain how he arrives at this list, nor does he give any sort of argument to justify it. And so, commentators have always been faced with the difficulty of explaining why one should think that there are these – and just these – ten categories.

One way in which medieval commentators tried to show the adequacy (*sufficiencia*) of the list was by constructing a division, based on more basic principles, that somehow yields Aristotle's ten items. One of the very earliest examples is again found in the commentary attributed to the early Parisian arts master Nicholas of Paris. Taking it that all beings are either substances or accidents, Nicholas attempts to account for the non-substantial categories on the basis of how accidents hold of substances. Accidents, he posits, hold either intrinsically or extrinsically. If an accident holds intrinsically of a substance, it does so either in virtue of its form, its matter, or the composite whole; this, Nicholas claims, gives you quality, quantity, and relation, respectively. If, on the other hand, an accident holds extrinsically of a substance, it does so in virtue of certain of its intrinsic accidents. Thus, doing and being-affected hold in virtue of certain types of quality, where and when hold in virtue of certain types of quantity and being-in-a-position and having hold in virtue of certain relations.

Such attempts at showing the adequacy of Aristotle's list of categories abound in commentaries from the early thirteenth century onward. Indeed, they are found not only in commentaries

on the *Categories* but also in commentaries on other texts where the theory of categories is relevant. Thus, some of the most well-known examples are the two divisions suggested by Thomas Aquinas, who left no commentary on the *Categories*, but dealt with the question in his commentaries on both the *Physics* and the *Metaphysics*. Compared with the relatively economical divisions found in Nicholas of Paris and Robert Kilwardby at the beginning of the century, these later divisions tend to become more complex and invoke an increasing number of principles to account for Aristotle's list.

Toward the end of the thirteenth century, this way of accounting for Aristotle's list of categories began to meet with severe criticism from a number of prominent thinkers. Writing in the early fourteenth century, for example, John Buridan dismisses all such attempts as futile, because they proceed as if the categories had a common genus, which they do not. Ockham, in his commentary on the *Categories*, says merely that it is difficult to prove that there are just ten categories and proposes to discuss the matter elsewhere. The strategy he does suggest in his *Summa logicae* is that the distinction between the categories can be derived from the things that can be asked about an individual substance. Thus, all uncombined expressions with which one aptly replies to the question "What is it? (*quid est*)," asked about an individual substance, belong to the category of substance; all those with which one aptly replies to the question "What is it like? (*quale est*)" belong to the category of quality; and so on. This approach to the problem, which has been revived again in contemporary Aristotelian scholarship, did not, in fact, originate with Ockham but can be found already in the twelfth century. It, too, was seen as having its problems. One problem, as pointed out later by Francisco Suarez in his *Metaphysical disputations*, was that as a way of accounting for the adequacy of Aristotle's list it doesn't really solve the problem, but merely pushes it back a step: Why should we think that there are just these ten kinds of questions? Buridan clearly saw the problem. Aristotle's list is a reasonable one, he argues, but if anyone can come up with a kind of question the apt reply to

which should turn out not to be reducible to one of the ten categories, then he would not be averse to positing an additional category.

Whether or not they thought a proof of it could be given, medieval commentators thus generally accepted Aristotle's list. An important thing to notice, however, is that this does not necessarily mean that they would also accept a ten-category ontology. This had been a matter of some debate already in the twelfth century, and it rose to the fore again in the fourteenth. Some, such as Burley, took a staunchly realist approach, but others, such as Ockham and Buridan, though happy to accept Aristotle's list of categories as a division of terms, fiercely denied that this implies that there are as many corresponding kinds of being. In fact, Buridan holds, the only things that exist are substances, qualities, and quantities; Ockham's ontology was even more sparse, comprising only substances and qualities.

The theory of categories was fundamental to the philosophy of the middle ages, and substantial discussions of it can also be found in commentaries on other texts such as Aristotle's *Metaphysics* and the *Sentences* of Peter the Lombard. Similarly, a substantial commentary tradition grew around the anonymous twelfth-century *Book of six principles*, which attempts to give a more in-depth discussion of the six final categories on Aristotle's list which get short shrift in the *Categories*. Finally, many medieval logical handbooks also include a chapter on categories.

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properly conceived. That tendency in turn corresponds to a critique of final causes in nature. The crucial change that occurred in the seventeenth century, however, was due less to a change in causal conceptions and more to implications of mechanical philosophy for commonsense inferences about nature and causal relations.

The history of Western accounts of causality can be divided into two long periods: premodern and modern. Premodern philosophers generally adopted a commonsense perspective that corresponds to ordinary experience. They concluded from observed regularities that some events are the causes of events that follow from them. In some of these cases, they further concluded that the regularity proceeded from intrinsic characteristics of things that, unless hindered, produce or generate always or for the most part the same effects. Premodern accounts of causality in human events (history, law, and ethics) depend on the purpose of the account. Accordingly, they may be very specific if the aim is to assign praise or blame or very general if the end is to understand human nature or the significance of a major event. In “sacred” histories, authors interpreted secular events as either divine actions or dependent somehow on divine intervention. Ancient Greek historians interpreted the causes of major events as general characteristics of a culture inferred from details about customs. This sort of view is sometimes portrayed as cyclical in the sense that humans in given cultures tend to behave in similar and predictable ways. Christian authors, following the lead of Sacred Scripture, superimposed directionality on history, a view that also depended on their belief in a providential order. This linear conception later contributes to modern ideas of progress (Funkenstein 1965).

In medieval European philosophy, we may also distinguish a major division between accounts prior to the thirteenth century and those after about 1250. The division arises from the introduction of Aristotle's treatises on nature in Western Europe around the middle of the thirteenth century.

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## Causality

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### Abstract

Modern philosophical accounts of causality deviate dramatically from medieval accounts, yet many of the views held in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries represent the end of an evolutionary process that began in the thirteenth century with the reintroduction of Aristotelian natural philosophy to medieval authors. The entry traces the evolution from premodern to modern views, explaining the transition that occurred from early medieval authors through late medieval scholastics. The crucial turning point is the tendency to distinguish explanatory principles from causes

Among Arabic philosophers there is also a division that appears in the ninth to tenth centuries between theological accounts that attribute everything and all events to a single cause (the Ash'arite doctrine sometimes referred to as "occasionalism") as opposed to those accounts that argued for the integrity and legitimacy of secondary causes. In Greek and Latin European thought of the early Middle Ages, there is also a major theological focus very much influenced by Neoplatonism, but unlike extreme Ash'arite thought, it preserves secondary causation (Fakhry 1958; Marmura 1965). The following focuses first on accounts of causality in the period prior to 1250 and then turns to developments after 1250 that advance a relatively more secular approach, leading, in the later Middle Ages, to critiques that influenced some early modern developments.

Late antique and early medieval Christian authors maintained that no new substance or change can be produced out of nothing. They believed that God created the world out of nothing, but Christian authors following the declarations of the early Fathers of the Church and of Neoplatonic philosophers conceived of divine creation in terms of overflowing of the divine essence or of emanation while maintaining a distinction between God and creation. Neoplatonic authors maintained that causes and effects resemble each other, and that an effect has a preexistence in a sense in the cause, and something of the cause continues to exist in a way in its effect (Bos and Meijer 1992).

Augustine of Hippo also believed that every effect must have a cause and adapted the Neoplatonic conception by positing the preexistence of created things as exemplars in the mind of God. Writing in polemical contexts, Augustine fashioned compromises influential on later Christian authors. How can one reconcile belief in an omnipotent and omniscient God with affirmation of free will and the contingency of natural and human events? The doctrine of original sin allowed for a distinction between prelapsarian and postlapsarian natural law, the latter justifying compromises in a world where nature and the human relationship with nature are corrupted by rebellion and sin. Thus is human history depicted

as a great drama subsumed by an eschatology in which the life of Christ acts as a pattern or model for the Christian life (Markus 1972; Matthews 1999). This is a comprehensive view of history and causation that we encounter in later authors such as Dante and Milton and in secular forms in Hegel, Marx, and Tolstoy.

What stands out among Christian adaptations of Neoplatonic ideas is the subordination of logical issues to ontology. Many of the major theses about causality held by medieval authors can be found in Proclus and the *Liber de causis*. All existing things are in each according to its proper nature, that is, to say, being is adapted to the level of the recipient. Every effect remains in its cause, proceeds from it, and returns to it. Representative authors maintain the dependence of lower creatures on the higher, adopting different views about the direct and immediate dependence of all things on God (Bos and Meijer 1992).

Perhaps the first Western medieval author to provide a systematic account is John Scottus Eriugena. In his *Periphyseon*, we find a kind of Neoplatonic summa written remarkably by an author with no direct knowledge of Plotinus, Porphyry, or Proclus. His study of nature elaborates the dialectical relation between creator and created. He describes four divisions of nature and works out the process of divine self-articulation and self-manifestation, creation as relating like to like with cause and effect expressed as mutually dependent relative terms. Eriugena exercised enormous influence on authors up to the thirteenth century when some of his formulations were condemned as giving occasion to misunderstanding and confusion. He nonetheless continued to influence the more Neoplatonic Aristotelians and the mystical thinkers of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries (Eriugena 1987; Moran 1989).

The medieval proofs for the existence of God are variations on causal proofs or on the dependence of beings for their existence and well-being on a being that is totally self-sufficient. Saint Anselm's "faith-seeking understanding" represents an effort to articulate the extent of God's self-sufficiency and the relation of the divine attributes to that than which no greater can be thought (McDowell and Williams 2003).



With Saint Bonaventure appears a representative Franciscan author of the Neoplatonic tradition who employed Aristotelian causal categories to flesh out the relations (vestiges and images) that lead us back to the original exemplar (Noone 1999).

The influence of Aristotelian physics and account of scientific demonstration transformed discussions about causality, leading to more analytical treatment of the principle of causality and the achievability of scientific knowledge. The transformation also reflects the relatively more depersonalized and relatively more secular accounts of nature and causal processes. Aristotle sought explanation of nature and change in causal principles. All things tend to intrinsically determined goals. Every change requires a cause, and nothing can change by itself. These assumptions adopted from his predecessors and taken as self-evident led Aristotle to propose material, formal, final, and efficient causes (not necessarily all four) to account for change (Aristotle 1941b, 1968–1970; Falcon 2005). The basic principles that influenced his medieval commentators attest to their acceptance generally of commonsense notions and of the principle of the uniformity of nature. Things acting always or for the most part in regular and predictable ways cannot, they thought, be due to chance. They contrasted natural motions with forced motions and attempted to account for forced motions in terms of natural motions. Accordingly, they rejected the possibility that regularly observed events could be the result exclusively of external forces acting on a body. Even authors like William of Ockham who was skeptical about strict demonstration of causal connections, nonetheless, affirmed the certainty of causal relations and even the knowability a priori of some causal relations (Adams 1987).

Critics tried to refine notions and settle disputes about details. Most adopted Aristotle's formal and final causes, the material subject of change that is receptive of form and capable of being formed, and the efficient or producing causes of change and motion. In some cases, entities transmit the form they possess to the entity that they produce or in which they produce a change. Among motions, locomotion has a privileged status.

Because all change is dependent on contact or proximity, every change depends on locomotion. In Aristotle's cosmological vision, lower motions depend on higher motions. In a chain of efficient causes, the first is the moving cause, leading Aristotle to propose the unmoved mover as the ultimate and first source of all change in the universe. By his account no change is neutral; all change is either according to nature or contrary to nature. In Aristotle's account of natural elemental motions, their natures account for tendencies and directionality, but their moving or efficient causes are the entity that generated the elemental nature in the first place and the agents that remove obstacles. The distinctions among the elements are rooted in qualitative contraries in the case of the contrary motions of sublunar elements and in the eternal circular motion of the celestial element, according to the Prime Mover's emulation of the unmoved mover (Aristotle 1939; Bodnár 1997).

After 1250, Latin philosophers applied this general picture to their understanding of theological doctrine and modified it by their efforts to reconcile it with the views of their Neoplatonic predecessors. A general overview cannot do justice to the details, distinctions, and differences among them. Issues that they discussed and refined included numerous questions. Can a cause have a plurality of effects? Can a cause have specifically or numerically different effects? Can the same or a similar effect be produced by two specifically different causes? Are causes prior to their effects, simultaneous with their effects, or, in some cases, later than their effects? What are necessary and/or sufficient conditions? What is the difference between an efficient cause and a sine qua non condition? Finally, Aristotle's conception of strict scientific demonstration imposed a challenge to produce demonstrations from cause to effect and to justify our knowledge of causes (Aristotle 1941a). By the end of the fourteenth century, philosophers held to a variety of opinions on the demonstrability, certainty, and knowability of causes. In general, some authors affirmed all three (with significant variations by Robert Grosseteste, Bonaventure, Albert the Great, Thomas Aquinas, Giles of Rome, Duns Scotus, and their followers). Some rejected

demonstrability while affirming certainty and knowability (e.g., Ockham and other like nominalist and somewhat more empiricist Aristotelians). Nicholas of Autrecourt rejected the principle of causality while accepting some causal inferences in a very restricted sense (Thijssen 1987).

Among specific examples, explanations of elemental motion and accounts of the highest form of demonstration serve to illustrate the above general comments.

What causes heavy bodies to always move downward toward the center of the Earth? In *Physics* VIII, 4, Aristotle argued that heavy bodies fall because of an intrinsic principle of motion, but he characterized the principle as passive, a capacity for being moved, not for moving itself. A heavy body is capable of a natural motion if acted upon, so the weight or the matter of the body is not its mover, and no heavy body stops its motion. Heaviness is nothing more than a downward tendency. The heavy body is moved, then, directly by the agent that generated it and made it heavy and, incidentally, by the agent that removes any obstacle to its motion. The argument constitutes a step in Aristotle's proof of the unmoved mover (Bodnár 1997). In *De caelo* III, 2, he turned specifically to a discussion of elemental motions. The natural motion of each body is simple. Heavy bodies rest naturally at the center of Earth, and so their natural motion is toward their place of rest. In this account Aristotle characterizes nature as a cause of movement in the thing itself. Here he suggests that sublunar bodies owe their impulse or tendency to weight or lightness. He explains the acceleration of falling bodies by means of the instrumentality of air. He suggests that the weight acting as an original force transmits the force by impressing its motion onto air, which, having an intermediate tendency upward or downward, causes the body to accelerate as it falls. Aristotle's account here can be reconciled with the version from *Physics* if we keep in mind Aristotle's principles about the direct cause as the first cause and the nature of the element as the tendency placed in it by its generator. The remainder of *De caelo* III and IV is an extensive discussion of the generation of the elements and the

nature of weight and lightness, confirming its consistency with the account given in *Physics*. In *De caelo* IV, 3–6, Aristotle repeats the assertion that the essential cause of natural downward motion is the agent that first made the body heavy and, incidentally, the remover of obstacles to motion, adding that acceleration is also a function of the shape of bodies in relation to the divisibility of the medium through which they move.

The account in *De caelo* III, 2, is nonetheless susceptible to a more mechanical interpretation. When Aristotle refers to nature as a cause, he suggests that weight acts as a force transmitting an impulse or motion to air that in turn functions as an instrumental cause of faster motion. Such texts occasionally stimulated medieval commentators, dependent on Latin translations and commentaries to treat the motions of elemental bodies in a more mechanical way (Aristotle 1957–1990; Goddu 1981, 1999).

Albert the Great came to grips with an apparent problem in Aristotle's account and Averroes' interpretation. Heavy bodies move naturally downward because their tendency downward is in them, yet the direct essential cause of that tendency is the agent that generated them and the incidental cause is the agent that removes the obstacle to motion. Therefore, the cause of downward motion is both natural and extrinsic. With respect to acceleration, force or impetus assists a natural motion. As he considered the instrumentality of air, Albert concluded that natural motions are partly violent and projectile motions are partly natural (Albert the Great 1890, 1971; Goddu 1981; Weisheipl 1980, 1985).

The theory of impetus implied that the motor of a projectile would be intrinsic to the body. Thomas Aquinas rejected the theory of impetus in part because a violent motion would then have an intrinsic principle of motion, a conclusion that is contrary to the very notion of a violent motion – it must have its force or mover extrinsic to it. Likewise, Thomas recognized that the principle of elemental motion must also be natural and intrinsic, albeit passive and not active (Aquinas 1963a, b; Goddu 1981, 1984).

William of Ockham gave two not entirely compatible accounts. In one, he regarded weight as the

efficient cause of a motion downward. Elsewhere he also adopted the instrumentality of air in the account of both elemental and projectile motions (William of Ockham 1985; Adams 1987; Goddu 1984, 1999). The point in referring to all of these discussions, however, is to emphasize the extent to which some medieval commentators (e.g., Albert the Great, Duns Scotus, and Ockham) interpreted intrinsic and extrinsic principles as movers, motors, and forces, in short, as efficient causes.

With respect to the highest form of demonstration, these authors' views are also instructive. Aristotle aimed at scientific understanding of known facts, why facts are so and what causes explain them (Aristotle 1941a). With a great deal of experience, we can, Aristotle believed, discover the first principles that explain why subjects have the attributes that we know them to have. The form of argument that Aristotle made preeminent is the syllogism. Typically, a syllogism consists of two premises and a conclusion, linking the subject of the major premise to the predicate of the conclusion by means of a middle term. In the highest form of demonstration, the middle term of a syllogism expresses the cause why the predicate of the conclusion belongs to its subject. The cause is distinguishable from the essence yet follows from it. Medieval authors agreed that the middle term is a real definition, although they differed about whether it is a real definition of the subject or of the attribute (Longeway 2007; see also the entry on Posterior Analytics, Commentaries on Aristotle's by Longeway in this volume).

Robert Grosseteste established a pattern for understanding Aristotle's doctrine while attempting to reconcile it with Augustine's Neoplatonic account of knowledge. Knowledge of a real definition of a substance does not provide knowledge of its causal powers, according to Grosseteste. Only experience (usually oft-repeated experience) can provide knowledge of causal powers, a view that influenced Ockham. Grosseteste linked his account, however, to an emanationist metaphysics that subsequent authors rejected. Albert the Great adopted the Aristotelian view that each subject has its own principles, and he also argued that the highest form of

demonstration has a definition of the attribute as the middle term, a causal definition of an attribute whose existence depends on other things, demonstrating that the attribute actually belongs to the subject (Longeway 2007).

Thomas Aquinas maintained that a thing's nature is necessarily an efficient cause of its primary attributes, capacities that depend on the right conditions for their actualization. Therefore, Thomas argued for the definition of the subject term as the middle term, the minor premise being true because of the efficient causal connection between the essence of the subject (the real definition) and its attributes (Longeway 2007).

William of Ockham agreed with Thomas that the middle term is the definition of the subject, but only in mathematics does a demonstration show that an attribute actually belongs to the subject (Albert's criterion). Ockham held that causal connections can be known with certainty, a few relating to human voluntary operations even a priori, but they cannot be demonstrated. Talk about capacities is oblique talk using modal terms about actual events. Every conclusion that relies on natural efficient causes is hypothetical, not categorical. Ockham rejected final causes as exercising any real productive power, so that identification of an efficient cause implies the material conditions on which the operation of the efficient cause depends and entails a final cause only when the efficient cause is a conscious agent with a purpose. Both Duns Scotus and Ockham retained Grosseteste's empiricist bent. Ockham thought that in some cases the causal power of a natural kind can be known from a single instance, confirming the extent to which he accepted the principle of the uniformity of nature. Our knowledge of the effects, however, is entirely dependent on experience or the observation of at least one instance and, in most cases, repeated experience critically evaluated (Longeway 2007; Adams 1987; Goddu 1984, 1999).

In relation to the "mixed sciences" (optics, harmonics, mechanics, and astronomy), the Aristotelian doctrines of causality and demonstration allowed for the application of mathematics in syllogistic arguments. In Averroistically influenced Aristotelianism, the distinction

between the mathematical and physical and the superiority of the physical over the mathematical supported a reading of Aristotelian doctrine that emphasized their separation. The Averroist critique of Ptolemaic astronomy even challenged the legitimacy of mathematical astronomy. Other interpretations of Aristotelian doctrine, however, adopted an interpretation that considered some mathematical demonstrations as paradigmatic and especially as relevant in mixed sciences. The key to such interpretations lies in constructing a major premise according to which a mathematical property belongs to some sort of mathematical thing, and a minor premise that asserts that a certain physical object is that sort of mathematical thing. In other words, the minor premise contains a warrant for viewing the natural phenomenon as mathematical (Lennox 1986). For example, if being equal to or less than  $180^\circ$  belongs to every arc of a semicircle, and if being the arc of a semicircle belongs to every rainbow, then being equal to or less than  $180^\circ$  belongs to every rainbow. According to this reading, Aristotle's philosophy of nature provides a defense of the explanatory role of geometry and arithmetic in investigations of the sort in which Galileo was involved. "Explanation" and "cause" are used here, however, in a special sense. In Galileo's *Two New Sciences*, we find that he characterized some mathematical premises as "causal" but in a sense which is formal, not efficient, nor material, nor effect producing in the physical sense (Palmieri 2008). In short, even among some mechanistic thinkers, Aristotelian notions about formal and material causes were either retained or reinterpreted in a way that was conducive to the advancement of mathematical-experimental philosophy. It follows that Galileo's critique of Aristotle focused not on the aim and presentation of science, but rather on the *facts* to be demonstrated, namely, that a body falling freely from rest has a uniformly accelerated motion and that a body compounded of a uniform horizontal motion with a naturally accelerated motion describes a semi-parabolic path. From his effort to demonstrate that Earth's motions cause tidal phenomena, it is also clear, however, that Galileo did not completely abandon causal explanation in the physical sense.

The upshot of such discussions can be formulated as a list of tendencies. The notion of "cause" was distinguished from explanatory principles and accordingly restricted more and more to efficient or producing cause. This restriction did not entail the rejection of material and formal causes, although it did tend to entail the rejection of final causes in nature. Scholastic philosophers, for the most part, continued to find matter and form, whether as principles or as existing constituents of things, useful in the explanation of substances and their attributes, essential and accidental (Goddu 1999). Even in the seventeenth century, there was less a denial of the four causes than a decision to focus on efficient causes as the proper aim of practical investigations of nature. Paralleling this trend (restriction to efficient causality) was a process of secularization, by means of which personal and teleological conceptions of causality give way to more reductive and empiricist views, or, in cases where the linear conception of history was "secularized," history was seen as having an inner logic.

Finally, however much seventeenth-century mechanical philosophy reduced efficient causality in nature to contact-action, the belief in invisible particles and forces as causes of motion, behavior, and secondary qualities of bodies in nature undermined the foundation in ordinary experience for observing causal connections. Because the supposed fundamental causes are invisible, some even occult, ordinary experience could no longer serve as a reliable guide to our understanding of nature or for our inferences about causal relations. This evolutionary process began with the reintroduction of Aristotelian natural philosophy in the thirteenth century, leading to the critique of natural final causality in the fourteenth, influencing the practical reduction to efficient causality in the seventeenth, culminating in Hume's empiricist reductionism to invariable sequence and habit in the eighteenth, and collapsing into the modern notion of concomitant variation. The adequacy of early modern views may be questioned by considering the regular sequence between day and night – regular, sequential, and plainly non-causal (Taylor 1963). Contemporary philosophers have reintroduced notions of agency, capacity, power, tendency, disposition, impediment, and

the like into their discussions, perhaps in part as the result of renewed interest in ancient and medieval accounts.

## Cross-References

- ▶ [Albert the Great](#)
- ▶ [Albertism](#)
- ▶ [Anselm of Canterbury](#)
- ▶ [Aristotelianism in the Greek, Latin, Syriac, Arabic, and Hebrew Traditions](#)
- ▶ [Augustine](#)
- ▶ [Bonaventure](#)
- ▶ [De caelo, Commentaries on Aristotle's](#)
- ▶ [Epistemology](#)
- ▶ [Form and Matter](#)
- ▶ [al-Ġazālī, Abū Ḥāmid Muḥammad](#)
- ▶ [Giles of Rome, Political Thought](#)
- ▶ [Ibn Rushd, Muḥammad ibn Aḥmad al-Ḥafīd \(Averroes\)](#)
- ▶ [Impetus](#)
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- ▶ [Thomas Aquinas](#)
- ▶ [Thomism](#)
- ▶ [Will](#)
- ▶ [William of Ockham](#)

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## Certainty

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### Abstract

The medieval reflections on certainty (*certitudo*) understood as an epistemic and psychological property of beliefs and of the

subject that possesses them are presented mainly in two fields, on one hand the examination of the status of knowledge facing skeptical criticism, and on the other hand, the demarcation of the role of faith in relation to knowledge and opinion. In general, we assume in the Middle Ages, that science is about truth, and science as a psychological state (act or habit) must be accompanied by guarantees that what is known, cannot be wrong. Knowledge must be certain in the sense that its truth must be unambiguous (excluding any possibility of doubt). To the extent that such immunity may be both objective and subjective, there are three types of certainty: first objective certainty, which rejoins the concept of evidentness (*evidentia*) and is linked to the idea of infallibility; second, a subjective certainty, as we do not hesitate to give our consent (the medieval philosophers use of the expression *sine formidine de opposito*, without fear that the opposite of what we assume is true); and finally a moral certainty, which refers to the reflection on the contingent action and designates enough certainty to an act. This latter kind of certainty comes closer to a form of probabilism. The main debate among philosophers and medieval theologians focuses on conditions of certainty and the objects of a certain judgment. In other words, one must determine what makes a proposition certain.

Thomas Aquinas exemplifies the primary position in the thirteenth century. The three forms of certainty distinguished above (epistemological, psychological, and moral) are clearly presented by him (In Sent. L. III, d. 23, q. 2, a. 1, q. 3, a. 1; ST I II, 14, 6, 112, 5, II-II, 4, 8). We must distinguish the certainty that refers to the strength of the adhesion (*firmitas adhaesionis*) from certainty assimilated from evidentness. This distinction in fact refers to a difference in the cause. Its object causes the evidentness whereas the firmness increases the disposition of the subject. Thus, the firmness will be considered as a state proper to every intellect, and will be only a relative judgment on the collection of beliefs and knowledge of



the intellect. A form of reflexivity, which is an additional guarantee, manifests this type of certainty that when I know by faith or science, I know that I know. However, the objective certitude called evidence is a certainty caused not by the dispositions of the subject but directly by the object. Thus, there is such a certainty when we judge from the principles of the object. To assess the certainty of assent, we must then identify its cause, but we must also determine how the mind apprehends the cause. In fact, in many ways (if not more) than the understanding of principles (*intellectus*) and science, faith should be entitled to this evidentness since its objects are immutable and eternal realities, the first infallible truth, simple and unchanging. But these objects are not fully apprehended by the intellect, since the will just supplements the work of the intellect as a cause of certainty. *De iure*, therefore, the highest certainty is one whereby the cause is the highest, that is to say wisdom as the science of divine things. Nevertheless, science, which is at the same time evident with regard to its object and firm, because of the mode of apprehension of the object by the subject, is more certain to us than faith. Thomas can then resume the hierarchy established by Hugh of St. Victor that places faith below science in terms of evidentness, but above opinion because of the strength that accompanies it. Thus, the perfection of a science is heightened by the more or less larger evidentness that accompanies it while that of faith will be in force (*vehementia*) of the adhesion. Besides this dual characterization of certainty in evidence and firmness, we must still distinguish absolute certainty, which covers objects immutable, from the certainty of the contingent which is related to a state of affairs, for example, the current status of the world when we make judgments. Therefore, Thomas concluded that one should not seek certainty in the same way as one would in all things. In human affairs, in particular, it is virtually impossible to achieve absolute certainty. One must therefore be content with a probable certainty (II-II, 70, 2). This certainty is one relating to objects that are true in most cases (*ut in pluribus*, I-II, 96, 1).

If we can say that, in general, the Thomistic distinctions are widely used throughout the Middle Ages, an important milestone is found in Duns Scotus' reflections on certainty, in his refutation of Henry of Ghent's "skepticism" (Ord. I, d. 3, §§ 224ss). Duns Scotus proposes a kind of architecture of reasoning whereby absolute certainty is a guarantee for all inferior forms of certainty specific to contingent knowledge. But alongside absolute certainty of the principles which warrant both experience (induction) and of sensation, Scotus adds absolute certainty of reflexive acts, following Augustine, in that we are certain about our own actions. Knowledge of self is an absolute knowledge in the same way as the principles. There is thus a dual foundation of certain knowledge, both necessary and contingent, so that self-knowledge, even if it is known in a secondary way, is a condition of experience and science. This epistemic revaluation of contingency is coupled with a reversal of Aristotelian epistemology, which is obviously dependent on the nature of the known object. Henceforth, the foundation of certainty is moved toward the subject of knowledge. The introduction of the infallible form of contingency cuts both ways in the medieval debates. On one hand, it highlights more clearly the fragility of our grasp of the contingent. This fragility will be highlighted in post-Scotus theology through the reflections on the intuition of a nonexistent object and divine deception. On the other hand, it provides the ultimate stopping point for skeptical doubt and a point of departure for a reconstruction of knowledge from the certainty of self, since we are dealing with a proposal absolutely indubitable and infallible, which brings subjective certainty on par with objective certainty or evidentness. This approach is generally taken in the treatment of divine deception. The inclusion of the *ego cogito* in the foundation of all certainty opposing divine deception appears explicitly for example in William Crathorn (In I Sent, q. 1, ccl. 14). This foundation is however strengthened by the argument that God cannot deceive, and it is the conjunction of these two theses that can save beliefs.

An alternative position, which allows support of contingency, without giving a special role to contingent knowledge like the cogito, appears in Buridan. This position, which can be described as reliabilism, will have some success in the epistemology of the late Middle Ages up until the circle of John Mair in the sixteenth century. In many ways, this is a restatement of the Thomistic position in a new context. In a sense, Buridan again clearly separates certainty and evidentness. Certainty refers to the firmness of the assent to truth, while evidentness indicates a causal relationship between an object and my mind (*Summulae*, tract. 8, from *Demonstrationibus*, *In Met* II, Q. 1). Thus, evidence implies certainty, but not vice versa as shown in the case of faith (in which the content may be obscure). From this starting point, Buridan distinguishes absolute evidentness, unfalsifiable by any power whatsoever (i.e., the evidentness of analytical principles), and relative evidentness (*ex suppositione*) that refers to any proposition always true under the laws of nature, but which can be falsified in supernatural circumstances. This natural evidentness ensures the certainty of experimental science and our sensations. In fact, the basis of this evidentness is the natural inclination of the human mind to truth. The inclination of the intellect to the truth is nothing other than the affirmation that there is no reason to think that an event that has always occurred, an observation that has always been confirmed, will be invalidated at once. When certain precautions are taken (repeated observations in different circumstances, the absence of counterexamples, similarities between cases), it is neither reasonable nor scientifically fruitful to doubt our cognitive processes. Indeed, the Picard Master argues that our inclination to truth is comparable to the inclination of wheat growing. Indeed, wheat cannot grow in exceptional climatic conditions, but it will under normal conditions. We must therefore understand that there is, similarly, in us humans a biological structure that enables us to sufficiently make a reliable capture of the outside world, under normal functioning of our cognition. Natural evidentness excludes error (the opposite cannot occur) in normal operating conditions.

That is to say, assuming that God does not intervene. Buridan requires only that such divine intervention does not need to be taken into account in practice in a theory of knowledge. The relative evidentness makes clear on the impossibility in some cases to control all parameters of knowledge. The inclination of the intellect to realize the truth reflects this general reliability. Justifying our knowledge is neither to exclude any objections that are logically possible, nor to reject a priori all sources of error, but only to exclude some relevant alternatives in a particular context. Thus, the error, exemplified by divine intervention, is a theoretical possibility, which reflects the ignorance of some possible parameters of knowledge in a given context, but does not call into question the criteria of the infallibility of truth and knowledge of the contingent.

## Cross-References

- ▶ [Divine Power](#)
- ▶ [Epistemology](#)
- ▶ [Henry of Ghent](#)
- ▶ [Intuitive and Abstractive Cognition](#)
- ▶ [John Buridan](#)
- ▶ [John Duns Scotus](#)
- ▶ [Skepticism](#)
- ▶ [Thomas Aquinas](#)
- ▶ [Truth, Theories of](#)
- ▶ [William Crathorn](#)

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## Church Fathers

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### Abstract

The Church Fathers are the early Christian authors who were considered the authentic witnesses of Christian life and belief. The first of these writers were the Apostolic Fathers, those closest to the time of the Apostles, and thus the earliest noncanonical witnesses to the Church's understanding of the Christian Scriptures. As the Church grew in numbers and became more noticed, it also became the target of criticism and needed to be defended against charges that were opposed to it. This work was done by the next generation of Church Fathers, the Christian Apologists. When the Church grew and spread even more, it gathered into its flock people of different cultural levels. This demanded that the Church develop schools and also sound teachers. These teachers, both in the East and the West, manifested the strength of Christian truth and the power of Christian life in their writings that marked this period as the Golden Age of the Fathers. The end of the Patristic era is generally marked in the West with the death of St. Isidore of Seville (d. c. 636) and in the East with the death of St. John of Damascus (d. c. 750). The writings of the Fathers have been given great respect both in their role of establishing the Christian tradition of beliefs and patterns of living and also as works that provide a deeper grasp of the meaning of Christian truths or provoke questions that lead Christians to a deeper understanding of their beliefs.

The Church Fathers, whose lives and writings were exemplary in building Christian community life and decisive in matters of doctrine, were the early Christian writers who were considered by the Church to be models of Christian living and

authentic witnesses of the Christian faith. Their sermons, letters, and treatises fostered understanding of Christian truths, fought against detractors and heretics, and encouraged strong moral habits and trust in God's grace and providential guidance.

### Meaning of the Expression "Church Father"

St. Clement of Alexandria (d. c. 213), in the opening chapter of his *Stromata* (*Tapestry* or *Miscellanies*) (PG 8, 687–690), explains the meaning of the expression by acknowledging the importance of spiritual fathers: "It is a good thing, I reckon, to leave to posterity good children. This is the case with children of our bodies. But words are the progeny of the soul. Whence we call those who have instructed us, fathers." According to Clement, the Fathers of the Church replaced the fathers of the pagan world, Homer, and the other "theologians of vice" (*Logos protreptikos* (*Exhortation to the Heathen*), 4; PG 8, 133–164). St. Basil (d. 379), speaking for those attending the Council of Nicea (325), wrote: "What we teach is not the result of our personal reflections, but that which we learned from the holy Fathers" (*Ep. 140*, 2; PG 32, 588). These early Christian Greek writers sensed themselves as simply following the advice given in the *Book of Deuteronomy* (32, 7) that admonished the covenant people to "ask your fathers, and they will inform you; your elders, and they will tell you." Yet, even more, they viewed the Church Fathers as imitating the example of Saint Paul, who in his *First Letter to the Corinthians* (4, 14–15) said: "I am not writing this to make you ashamed, but to admonish you as my beloved children. For though you might have ten thousand guardians in Christ, you do not have many fathers. Indeed, in Christ Jesus I became your father through the gospel." In the West, St. Augustine (d. 430), in his late battle with the Pelagian, Julian of Eclanum, refuted the latter's charge that he was an innovator in his teaching about marriage by appealing to Sts. Irenaeus (d. c. 202), Cyprian (d. 368), Hilary (d. 397), Ambrose (d. 397), John Chrysostom (d. 407),

and Jerome (d. 420) (*Contra Julianum Pelegianum* 1, 7, 30–34: PL) as those supporting his position. While not employing the word "Fathers," Augustine was invoking as his justification a tradition followed earlier in the East by Sts. Clement of Alexandria and Basil.

### The Community of the Fathers

Many writers in the later Christian tradition might speak broadly of their spiritual fathers, namely, their more immediate teachers. St. Bonaventure (d. 1274), for example, refers to Alexander of Hales (d. 1245), his teacher at the University of Paris, as his spiritual father. Dominicans and Franciscans invoked the founders of their religious communities, Sts. Dominic (d. 1121) and Francis (d. 1226), as their guiding fathers in imitating and preaching Christ. The traditional Fathers of the Church, however, had a longer and wider claim to respect. In the view of some scholars, they extended from the time of the Apostolic Fathers, like St. Clement of Rome (d. c. 100), to the last of the Western Fathers, St. Isidore of Seville (d. c. 636), and the last of the Eastern Fathers, St. John of Damascus (d. c. 750). Other modern scholars cut the era off with St. Gregory the Great (d. 604), while still others extend it to 850.

This community of respected Church writers also contained a special group of more renowned authors, the Doctors of the Church. At first, there were equally four doctors from the East (Sts. John Chrysostom, Basil the Great, Athanasius (d. 374), and Gregory of Nazianzus (d. 390)) and four from the West (Sts. Ambrose, Augustine, Jerome, and Gregory the Great). In modern times, a number of other traditional Fathers have been added to the list of Doctors: Sts. Cyril of Jerusalem (d. c. 386), Cyril of Alexandria (d. c. 444), Hilary of Poitiers, and John of Damascus. The criteria of qualifications for doctors include renowned sanctity as well as faithful learning. An outstanding learned man who had great influence in developing the understanding of Christian beliefs, such as Origen, is excluded from the list of Doctors of the

Church because he is not officially canonized and held some faulty doctrinal positions. Some, nonetheless, still consider him a Church Father, since he made strong contributions to the orthodox teachings of the Church both by opposing errors and by bringing greater understanding to the faith.

Those enshrined in the ranks of the Fathers form a much larger group than the Doctors of the Church. The general criteria for their admission to this community are antiquity, orthodoxy, moral goodness, and church approval. Disagreements over meeting these criteria are frequent. Antiquity is measured somewhat ambiguously by the undefined border between Antiquity and the Middle Ages. While full orthodoxy is desired, often, as in the cases of Tertullian and Origen, brilliance and vigor in presenting and defending the faith overshadow for many the errors or inexactness that are attached to some of their dubious teachings. Moral goodness is not the same as canonized sanctity, so this criterion in the eyes of some demands that the way of life of a Father of the Church only be such that it does not interfere with a firm grasp of divine revelation. Approbation certainly, at times, is a formal declaration of a pope or church leader or council, but it may also be attained in a virtual way through a general Christian consensus.

While these criteria for the most part function within a confessional context, often the study of the Church Fathers, called Patristic studies, extends to authors who are not considered Church Fathers, such as pagan authors like Celsus, Porphyry, and Julian the Apostate, who provide the context for apologetic works by Christians attempting to refute their attacks on Christian life and belief. Even of more importance for understanding many of the works of the Fathers are philosophers, like Plato, Proclus, Plotinus, Seneca, and Cicero, as well as Jewish authors, like Philo Judaeus, who influenced early Christian writers. Since a major role of the Church Fathers was to defend the Christian faith, it also is necessary to know its enemies and its heretical interpreters, such as Simon Magus, Arius, Nestorius, and Pelagius, who provide the context for many Patristic writings.

## The Apostolic Fathers

The first of the authors considered to be Church Fathers are called the Apostolic Fathers. While also dealing with doctrinal issues, these authors are more generally seen as guiding the way of life of those who walk in the footsteps of Christ and his apostles. Clement of Rome, whose *Letter to the Corinthians* was written c. 96, was a successor to the apostle Peter as the bishop of Rome. His strong appeal to the Church at Corinth to cease its conflicts and disagreements is made with a sense of authority and duty. This letter was well received and respected, reestablished unity within the Church of Corinth, and has been judged by some as confirming the primacy of the bishop of Rome. Ignatius of Antioch, who suffered martyrdom under the emperor Trajan around 110, is renowned for seven letters he wrote to different Christian communities. He bears witness to a hierarchical structure of bishops, priests, and deacons in the early church. His strongest attacks against heresy were aimed at the Docetists, as he affirms the divinity and true humanity of Christ. The *Didache*, perhaps written in the 80s and 90s, may be the earliest Patristic document. It sets out in clear terms the difference between the demands of a Christian life and the evils of paganism. It is also considered the first code of canon law directing the lives of those in primitive Christian communities. Polycarp, the author of a *Letter to the Philippians* and a bishop of Smyrna, was a disciple of John the Evangelist. He also wrote a strong recommendation for the letters of Clement, many of which do not survive, and taught St. Irenaeus before suffering martyrdom c. 155 CE. In his surviving letter, written to the Philippians, he fought against the errors of Docetism and the demands of the Judaizers, who required converts to become Jews in order to become Christians. He urged a way of life that stressed charity, almsgiving, and prayer, including prayer for civil authorities. Another disciple of John and a friend of Polycarp was Papias. Only fragments of his work exist, but the surviving material is important, since it is the earliest witness to the authorship of the Gospels. Another work that is generally listed among the writings belonging to

the era of those who may have had contact with the Apostles is *The Shepherd of Hermas*. This treatise was respected for its many moral exhortations and was even considered canonical by some in the early Christian era. Its theme of the two cities is noted as a possible source for St. Augustine's portrait of the two cities in *The City of God*.

## The Apologists

In the next era, as the Church grew, Christians became more noticed and their teachings and way of life criticized. The main pagan view of religion was connected with the gods of the city and with the emperors or rulers who were given divine honors. Refusal by Christians to consider the rulers divine marked them as atheists. Also, because their lasting city was the heavenly Jerusalem, Christians were considered to be disloyal to earthly kingdoms and unwilling to participate in political affairs or the defense of their homeland. Their love for one another and the closeness of their communities led to accusations that they shared their wives. Athenagoras (d. c. 190) addressed his *Apology for the Christians* to the emperor Marcus Aurelius and refuted philosophically the charges of atheism and appealed for a just dealing with Christians. The unknown Christian author of *The Letter to Diognetus* likewise attempted to defend Christians against the same charges. He therefore portrayed the followers of Christ in these words: "They play their full role as citizens but labor under all the disabilities of aliens . . . They share their meals, but not their wives." Justin (d. c. 165) is the greatest of the Greek Apologists. In his search for truth, he studied all the current philosophies before arriving at the true philosophy of the Gospel. His *Apologies* aimed at a Greek philosophical audience and argued that their philosophies needed revelation. Christianity did not need to become Greek, he contended; rather Greek philosophy, in order to become fully true, needed to be absorbed and transformed by Christianity. His *Dialogue with Trypho* is directed to Jews, showing the positive Christian view of the Old Testament, that worship of Christ is not opposed to monotheism and that the Church

is the New Israel. He attempted to show how the Jews and the Greeks each possessed some germ of the *Logos* (*logoi spermatikoi*), but that only Christians, joined to the divine *Logos* (or *Word*) which is found in Christ in its fullness, have the total and unadulterated truth. Not only did the Apologists attempt to answer the charges against Christianity mentioned above, they also tried to meet the challenge coming from those who twisted the Gospel teachings with their heretical interpretations. St. Irenaeus of Lyon (d. c. 202) left two large works: his *Adversus haereses* (*Against Heresies* or *The Overthrow of the Pretended but False Gnosis*) and his *Epideixis* (*Demonstration of the Apostolic Teaching*). Both works were written in Greek by the well-travelled Irenaeus, but *Adversus haereses* survives only in its Latin translation. In his effort to refute Gnosticism as a secularized imitation of Christianity, which reduced faith to a form of human wisdom, Irenaeus presented the varying teachings of different Gnostic teachers. He followed this catalogue with a contrast between the various forms of Gnosticism and true Christian teaching, using reason, tradition, and the teachings of Christ, the Prophets and the Apostles. Irenaeus' *Epideixis* is a much simpler work that presents the essential truths of Christian faith: the triune God, Creation, the Fall, the Incarnation and Redemption. He follows this exposition with a defense of Christian truth and completes the work with an effective appeal to Christian living. *Adversus haereses* strongly appeals to tradition in contrast to claims on the part of certain Gnostics to new supplemental revelations. Irenaeus searches for a tradition that goes back to the Apostles whom Christ instructed. Apostolic tradition under his influence becomes established as one of the main criteria for determining true Christian teaching and for judging the reliability of the teachings of the Church Fathers in their various works.

## The Birth of Christian Schools

As those joining the Church gradually came from all levels of society, including lawyers, rhetoricians, and philosophers, a need for more



sophisticated presentations of Christian belief and life became necessary. This led to the development of Christian schools. At first, they were developed on already prepared locations. Alexandria for a long time had pagan and Jewish schools. Philo was representative of the Jewish tradition there and attempted to make the Old Testament meaningful for Alexandrian Jews, promoting allegorical interpretations of Biblical stories. Abraham, for him, was not just the literal Abraham from Ur in Chaldea who was told by God to search for the land of promise; he was every Jewish searcher for covenant fulfillment. Origen (d. 253) learned his allegorical principles from Philo and developed in the same local a Christian allegorical reading of the Old and New Testaments. The chief members of this school were Ammonius, Athanasius, and Clement of Alexandria. In 232, Origen was forced to move his school to Caesarea, a community that later counted among its members the Cappadocians: Basil the Great, Gregory of Nazianzus, and Gregory of Nyssa. In reaction to Origen's allegorical method, a Christian school was begun at Antioch by Lucian of Samosota at the end of the third century. It concentrated on grammatical exposition and the literal and historical interpretation of the Scriptures. It counted among its alumni John Chrysostom and Theodore of Mopsuestia. Antioch also established another school, in Edessa, that flourished under Ephraem the Syrian (d. c. 370) and Nemesius of Emesa (fl. 350–400). Although many controversies arose in these schools, it was also in them that the formulation of many Christological truths was established.

### The First Latin Fathers

The Latin language with its concrete practical character was, unlike Greek, incapable of expressing philosophical truths in early Christian times. Neither did it have the capacity to present Christian truths with precision. This ability had to be developed, and it was gradually formed in the third century by Tertullian (d. c. 220), Cyprian (d. 258), Arnobius (d. c. 317) and Lactantius (d. 317). One of Tertullian's chief doctrinal

works was *On the Prescription against Heretics*, with its famous caution against the dangers of philosophy as the source of heresies. Asking "What has Athens to do with Jerusalem?" he pointed out how Christians have often been led astray in their beliefs by the teachings of various philosophers. Tertullian's *Against Marcion* defends the compatibility of the Old and New Testaments and challenges Marcion's rejection of the Gospels of Matthew, Luke, and John. His *Against the Valentinians* and *On the Flesh of Christ* both show his own philosophical acumen, however, as he fights against the different Gnostic positions. His *Against Praxeas* is one of the best expositions on the Trinity before the Council of Nicea. However, he speaks especially of how the divine plurality was manifested in creation and redemption and seems to contend that the Father became the Father only after the generation of the Word as the model of creation. He presents no awareness of an eternal generation. Many of his later works also were disrespected, since they were produced after he became a Montanist and embraced its rigorism. Cyprian, another Latin writer, is most praised for his treatise *On the Unity of the Church*, a twofold attack on the Roman schism of Novatian and the African schism of Felicissimus. Arnobius and his student Lactantius are known as competent rhetoricians, and certainly the latter is considered a master of Latin expression. However, neither is highly respected for theological originality in their works.

### Clement of Alexandria and Origen

The outstanding third century Greek writers were Clement of Alexandria and Origen. The former was a convert who became president of the School of Alexandria around 200 and dedicated his life to writing and teaching, the first Christian to attempt a synthesis of pagan learning and Christian revelation. Clement's three main works that survive are the *Protrepticus* (*Exhortation to the Greeks*), the *Pedagogue*, and the *Stromata* (*Tapestry* or *Miscellanies*). Clement makes a strong case against the Gnostic contention that

faith and reason are irreconcilable. He does not claim that reason establishes faith, but rather argues that reason brings understanding to the truths of the faith. This, for him, is the true Christian *gnosis*. When Clement had to flee the School of Alexandria due to the persecution of Septimus Severus, he was succeeded as president by Origen. Origen is the greatest scholar of ancient Christian times. Some of his teachings, or the misinterpretations of his teachings by his followers, were condemned at the Second Council of Constantinople in 553. They were related to the divine processions, angels, the soul and the last things. In regard to the divine processions Origen described the Father as “self-existent God” (*autotheos*) and the Son as a secondary deity, distinct from the Father by an essential inferiority. He is considered the source of the heretical teachings that were initiated by the heretic Arius. Origen’s much admired exegetical work, the *Hexapla*, presented various forms of the Old Testament in six columns with cross references so that a reader could compare the different versions with the original. He also left scholia or explanations of difficult passages, as well as commentaries and homilies *On Matthew*, *On the Gospel of John*, *On the Epistle to the Romans*, and *On the Canticle of Canticles*. His main dogmatic work is his *Peri archon* or *De principiis* (*On First Principles*). It is a treatise on the Trinity: the creation and fall of angels; the creation, fall, and redemption of man; and the basic principles of the moral life and the sources of revelation. His *Contra Celsum* (*Against Celsus*) refutes Celsus’ portrait of Christ as a deceiver and contests his attempt to provide a naturalistic account of the extraordinary spread of Christianity. His *On Prayer* is an introduction to prayer in general, followed by an explanation of the *Lord’s Prayer*.

### The Golden Age of the Fathers

In 313, the Edict of Toleration ushered in a new era for Christians. Apologetical writings were less necessary. Writers could aim their works at the Christianization of the world and the presentation and explanation of the Church’s teachings. The Greek

world of the East had talented Christians who were well-tutored in Greek culture; the Latin authors of the West were nourished on many of the same sources of Greek learning in translation. The works of both the Greek and Latin Christian writers took on diverse forms: exegetical, doctrinal, polemical, moral, and ascetical. Many of the doctrinal and polemical works were attempts to bring understanding to the basic truths of the Christian faith. Others were to correct heretical presentations of Christian truths or to clarify distorted representations of Christian life and beliefs.

The first ecumenical or general Council of the Church was held at Nicea in 325. One of its charges was to present the teaching of the Church in regard to the triune character of the one God. In a sense, the council was asked to rescue Christians from the ambiguity bequeathed by Origen. Origen had, in effect, used the correct Greek term *homoousios* (of the same substance) to indicate that the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit were of the same substance. Still, as mentioned above, he portrayed the Father as self-existent and the Son as in some way subordinate. The Word and the Spirit, for Origen and many of his followers, are in some way distinct from the Father by an essential inferiority. The Council of Nicea had to confront this puzzling Origenist portrait of the Trinity that had festered for more than a century and that was most forcefully represented just prior to Nicea by the subordinationist theology of Arius. The Council of Nicea understood *homoousios* (of the same substance) to mean that the Son possessed the entire Godhead or divine essence as the Father. Still, the declaration of the council did not settle matters for everyone: some of the strongest opponents of the Arians opposed the non-Biblical term *homoousios*, despite its use to defend an undeniable Biblical truth. Athanasius came to the council’s defense in his well-known three *Orationes contra Arianos* (*Against the Arians*), written between 335 and 356. He defended Nicea’s teaching on the unity of substance of the Son with the Father and his eternal generation. His *Epistola de decretis Nicaenae synodis* (*Letter on the Decrees of the Council of Nicea*), written in 351, explains and defends more broadly the Trinitarian terminology of Nicea. Though his doctrinal

contributions are his most notable, Athanasius supplied spiritual riches of another sort with his *Life of Anthony*, translated into Latin by Evagrius of Antioch (d. c. 392). It is considered one of the most able ascetical treatises of the Patristic era.

Athanasius was one of the principal writers preparing the way for the First Council of Constantinople (381), which extended the *homousios* doctrine of Nicea to the Holy Spirit. This second ecumenical council established what would stand thereafter as the Trinitarian dogma: the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are consubstantial, sharing one substance, but in three hypostases or persons. That this is the case was established by the two councils (Nicea and Constantinople). Three of the great Greek Church Fathers, Sts. Basil, his brother, Gregory of Nyssa, and their friend Gregory of Nazianzus, jointly called the Cappadocians, in many of their writings tried to go beyond the declarations of these truths and attempted to bring further understanding of them by attempting to explain how the three persons, who shared a common nature, were distinct. Basil, in his *Contra Eunomium* (*Against Eunomius*), taught that the distinctive element connected with each person was not that which made him to be God, but rather was the property that made the Father to be the Father and the Son to be the Son and the Holy Spirit to be the Holy Spirit. These properties, according to Gregory of Nyssa, were matters of generation or procession. In his four treatises on the Trinity, *Ad Eustathium de Trinitate* (*To Eustathius Concerning the Trinity*), *Ad Abladium* (*To Abladius*), *Ad Simplicianum* (*To Simplicianus*), and his *Adversus paganos* (*Against the Pagans*), Gregory explains that what made the Father to be the Father was his ungenerated character (not, however, in the sense of Origen's "self-existence"), and what made the Son to be the Son was his generated character. The latter property explained the unique way in which the undiminished or unsubordinated divine substance was communicated from the Father to the Son. Gregory went on to explain that the Holy Spirit likewise proceeded from the Father through the Son, and this particular explanation stayed with the Eastern Church. (In the West, the procession of the Holy Spirit was rather portrayed with

the Holy Spirit proceeding from the Father and the Son. This varying explanation formed what is called the *Filioque* debate.) Although less interested in dogmatic matters, Gregory of Nazianzus, has left a solid defense of the Nicea-Constantinople teachings on the Trinity, especially in his *Orations* (#27–31). His *De vita sua* (*On His Life*), a long poem, is heralded as a worthy competitor to Augustine's *Confessions*. Among the many other Greek Fathers of this period, certainly the most noteworthy is John Chrysostom, the "golden-mouthed" orator. His strong efforts in Constantinople to correct clerical abuses, reform monastic life, and uproot the vices of the rich met strong resistance and banishment, though the emperor, Theodosius II, later asked publicly for God's forgiveness for the ill-treatment suffered by Chrysostom. John Chrysostom, however, is best known for his literary output. He was a superb exegete, well-trained in the Antiochian method of clear exposition and practical application. He has left homilies on *Genesis*, the *Psalms*, and *Isaiah*, but his best work was saved for the exegesis of the New Testament, especially the *Epistles of St. Paul*. His most popular treatises are his *De sacerdotio* (*On the Priesthood*) and his defenses of the monastic life, which are found in three works: *On the Enemies of Monasticism*, *On Compunction*, and *Exhortation to the Fallen Theodore* (which inspired Theodore of Mopsuestia to re-embrace monastic life).

Among the many Latin writers of the West, in the Golden Age of the Fathers, the ones who stand out most prominently are Sts. Hilary of Poitiers, Ambrose, Jerome, and Augustine. Hilary of Poitiers must be ranked with Athanasius as one of the great defenders of the Nicene teaching on the Trinity. He opposed Arianism and effectively silenced it in the West. In fact, his *De Trinitate* (*On the Trinity*) was originally called *De fide contra Arianos* (*On the Faith against the Arians*). Ambrose of Milan is most noteworthy as the bishop who converted Augustine. He was well-trained in the works of the Greek Fathers. Like Hilary, he also opposed Arianism, which had a firm supporter in Empress Justina. His writings against them included his *De fide ad Gratianum* (*On the Faith to <Emperor> Gratian*) and his *De*

*Spiritu Sancto (On the Holy Spirit)*. He wrote a number of treatises on the sacraments and also three guidebooks for catechumens. In his exegetical writings he followed the Alexandrian exegetes, Philo and Origen, with some help from St. Basil, especially on his exegesis of the *Hexameron*. His moral treatises show the influence of Cicero, especially in his *De officiis (On Duties)*, which takes its title from Cicero's work of the same name. Ambrose is also known as "the Father of Ecclesiastical Chant." Jerome mastered both Greek and Hebrew and was commissioned by Pope Damasus to rework the Latin Bible; the result was the Vulgate. He was without doubt the greatest Scripture scholar of his era, vastly improving on the *Vetus Latina (Old Latin)* text. He revised the *Psalter* on the basis of the Septuagint text and then reworked the whole Old Testament in view of the Septuagint of Origen's Hexapla and the original Hebrew text. His exegesis of so many Scriptural works, found in his "Prefaces" and homilies on various books of the Bible, demonstrates his concern with both the literal and allegorical understandings of the Biblical texts.

Augustine of Hippo is the most talented and respected Western Father of the Church. His *Confessions* treats many events of his life but places them in a larger Christian context that makes this work more an odyssey of a soul searching for God and meaning within a divine framework than the biography of an individual's self-reflective experiences. He shows true gratitude to Cicero for his *Hortensius* and its invitation to search for truth and praises the Platonists for their high spirituality. Still, in many of his works, especially *The City of God*, he criticizes the philosophers and shows their tendencies to place themselves at the top of the hierarchy of reality. Peace, man's goal in life is the tranquility of the soul that the Stoics sought, but it is a tranquility brought about by the pursuit of the right order of things, with God at the top. Augustine fought powerfully and untiringly against the Pelagians and Manicheans. Many of his doctrinal treatises, both philosophical and theological, are considered classics and his *De Trinitate (On the Trinity)* is not only his greatest dogmatic work, but at least for the Latins the most

important treatise on the Trinity written in the Patristic era. His *Retractationes (Re-Treatments)* provides an impressive picture of his later reflections on the aims and main ideas of the 93 works he had previously written. His *De doctrina Christiana (On Christian Teaching)* provides the model followed by later Christian writers for theological education. His sermons and letters are often simple in style, exemplifying the truth of his perception, that it is not necessary to use a gold key to open doors that can more readily be opened by a wooden key (*De doctrina Christiana* IV, 9, 11: PL 34, 100). His philosophical insights and theological vision markedly set the framework of Christian understanding in the Middle Ages, and even in the modern world.

### The Last of the Fathers

Among the last of the Western Church Fathers, the most important were Boethius (d. 524), Gregory the Great (d. 604), and Isidore of Seville (d. 636). Boethius set for himself the task of translating the great philosophers Aristotle and Plato. He translated most of the logical works that make up Aristotle's *Organon*, though not all of these translations survived. He wrote commentaries on some of them: one on the *Categories* and two on the *Perihermeneias*. One of the *Perihermeneias* commentaries also provides much information about all the ancient Greek commentaries on that work. While a careful scholar, Boethius was also a deep, talented, creative artist and theologian. His *Consolation of Philosophy* is a masterpiece of philosophy and poetry, and his five theological tractates are dense works of technical linguistic precision aimed at those alone who could wrestle with the complications involved in attempting to attain some understanding of the mysteries of the Trinity and the Incarnation. Gregory the Great was a major force in reestablishing Rome and the Church after the barbarian invasions. His writings were extensive and influential. His *Moralia on Job* explained that text according to the numerous models of exegesis that descended from the schools of Alexandria and Antioch: providing literal, allegorical, anagogical, and tropological

interpretations that became universal patterns for reading all the works of Scripture. The tropological or moral interpretation of the Biblical texts revealed their rich teachings concerning the way Christians should live in the present life. His *Moralia* thus became for centuries a guidebook for Christian moral and ascetical practices. His *Liber regulae pastoralis* (*Book of Pastoral Care*), written when he became pope, provided specific directions for the spiritual life of pastors and prudent advice for developing the faith and moral character of their flocks. He also played a major role in revising the celebration of the liturgies and bringing reform to Church music. Isidore of Seville is considered by many to be “the last of the Fathers of the West.” He is recognized mainly as a compiler, but a compiler who preserves many of the riches of the Fathers and famous pagan authors. His most often cited work is his *Etymologies*, which, like many of his other treatises, provides interesting, but at times uncritical derivations and information. His books on grammar, rhetoric, dialectic, and the four mathematical sciences show his support for the educational basics of the seven liberal arts that many Church Fathers viewed as important for the development of Christian learning.

Before turning to John of Damascus, generally considered the last of the Eastern Fathers, special mention has to be made of Dionysius the Areopagite. This author was at first judged to be the first-century Dionysius converted by the preaching of St. Paul (*Acts* 17, 34). His chief works were: *De divinis nominibus* (*On the Divine Names*), *De mystica theologia* (*On Mystical Theology*), *De caelesti hierarchia* (*On the Celestial Hierarchy*), and *De ecclesiastica hierarchia* (*On the Ecclesiastical Hierarchy*). In the thirteenth century students of his works found that they showed signs of strong influence from the neo-Platonic philosopher Proclus, and thus had to be produced toward the end of the fifth century. In earlier times, some passages in his works were challenged, but when Maximus the Confessor (d. 662), aided by the sixth-century commentaries of John of Scythopolis, defended his orthodoxy in a work called the *Ambigua* (*On Ambiguous Points*), Dionysius’ reputation was restored. The intellectual

power of his books was so strong that they were recognized in the Latin West as worthy of translation. Hilduin, the abbot of St-Denis, first translated them in 827, but it was the translations of John Scotus Eriugena, about 25 years later, that were employed by mystical and theological writers throughout the Middle Ages. John of Damascus or John Damascene (d. 749), the last of the Eastern Fathers, is most respected for his *Fountain of Wisdom*. This three-part work begins with a treatise that serves as an introduction to the study of theology, the *Dialectica* (*On Dialectic*). The second part provides a history of heresies. The most famous section of the work was the third part, *De fide orthodoxa* (*On Orthodox Faith*), a compendium of the Christian doctrines of God, creation, providence, Christology, the sacraments (Baptism and Eucharist), veneration of the saints and their images, the books of Scripture, evil, and the last things. He also wrote many treatises on Christian morality and asceticism, exegetical works on Paul’s epistles, and produced a small collection of sermons and liturgical hymns. All of his works show a strong familiarity with the councils and the Patristic writings of the East. He underscored the strong respect for tradition that is exemplified by the Church Fathers and carried by their writings.

## Influence of the Church Fathers

The later Church Fathers vouch for the moral, ascetical, doctrinal, and liturgical contributions of their spiritual fathers in the faith. John of Damascus, the last of the Eastern Fathers, shows his dependence on Dionysius the Areopagite, Gregory of Nazianzus, Maximus the Confessor, and Nemesius of Emesa in his *De fide orthodoxa*. His commentaries on the *Epistles of St. Paul* borrow frequently from John Chrysostom and Cyril of Alexandria. The Second Council of Constantinople (553) in its acts states:

We further declare that we hold fast to the decrees of the four Councils, and in every way follow the holy Fathers, Athanasius, Hilary, Basil, Gregory the Theologian, Gregory of Nyssa, Ambrose, Theophilus, John Chrysostom, Cyril, Augustine,

Proclus, Leo and their writings on the true faith (*Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*: 14, 303).

St. Augustine, as already mentioned, not only cited Sts. Irenaeus, Cyprian, Hilary, Ambrose, John Chrysostom, and Jerome as he battled with the Pelagian Julian of Eclanum; he cited them authoritatively as proof that his own teaching was in accord with the traditions of the Church. Still, this respect for Patristic authorities was not routine or slavish. Augustine, at the beginning of *Epistle 82* (PL 33, 277), says:

Only those books of Scripture which are called canonical have I learned to hold in such honor as to believe their authors have not erred in any way in writing them. But other authors I so read as not to deem anything in their works to be true, merely because of their having so thought and written, whatever may have been their holiness and learning.

Perhaps even more forcefully, in his *Letter to Fortunatianus* (*Epistle 148*; PL 33, 628–629) he argued: “Still, we are not obliged to regard the arguments of any writers, however Catholic and estimable they may be, as we do the canonical Scriptures, so that we may – with all due respect to the deference owed them as men – refute or reject anything we happen to find in their writings wherein their opinions differ from the established truth, or from what has been thought out by others or by us, with divine help. I wish other thinkers to hold the same attitude toward my writings as I hold toward theirs.” Vincent of Lerins, in his *Commonitorium* (*A Commonitory or Letter of Instructions*), I, 2, 6 (*Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*: 11, 132), written 3 years after the Council of Ephesus (431), indicates that both the Scriptures and the Church Fathers can be manipulated by heretics. He instructs his audience to be careful about the misuse of Scripture and the writings of the Fathers and he sets up a demanding standard before accepting any teaching found in Scripture or the works of the Fathers as a declaration of Christian faith: “Moreover, in the Catholic Church itself, all possible care must be taken, that we hold that faith which has been believed everywhere, always, by all.” Despite these cautions regarding the writings of the Fathers, whether due to the Fathers’ fault or misinterpretations of their statements, they still commanded

great respect as authors who were searching for a more profound penetration of Scriptural revelation. In the medieval period, theologians frequently went to their texts, even conflicting texts, to force themselves to pursue a deeper understanding of the faith or a richer appreciation of their examples of Christian moral, ascetical, or liturgical practices. Later, those who found the teachings of medieval theologians dissatisfying returned to the Church Fathers as more dependable guides of Christian faith and life.

## Cross-References

- ▶ [Alexander of Hales](#)
- ▶ [Aristotelianism in the Greek, Latin, Syriac, Arabic, and Hebrew Traditions](#)
- ▶ [Augustine](#)
- ▶ [Boethius](#)
- ▶ [Bonaventure](#)
- ▶ [Cicero in Political Philosophy](#)
- ▶ [Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite](#)

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## Cicero in Political Philosophy

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### Abstract

The Roman philosopher and statesman Cicero was the most eminent pagan whose work on political ideas was available and known to the Latin Middle Ages. His ideas about the natural foundations of society and politics, natural law, and the best regime were widely debated and interpreted. Among the authors who read and interpreted his thought were John of Salisbury, Brunetto Latini, Thomas Aquinas, John of Paris, Ptolemy of Lucca, and Marsiglio of Padua. Even after the reception of Aristotle's political philosophy in the middle of the thirteenth century, Cicero continued to be an influential figure.

Marcus Tullius Cicero (106–43 BCE) was the only important political thinker of pagan antiquity whose ideas continued to be widely accessible without a break to the Christian West following the collapse of the Roman Empire. Cicero's two major political treatises, *De res publica* and *De legibus*, were not directly circulated during the Middle Ages. But the doctrines contained in these works were familiar through intermediary patristic sources such as St. Augustine and Lactantius. Moreover, Ciceronian tracts on moral matters (*De officiis*) and rhetorical technique (*De inventione*) contained many passages that were extremely germane to political speculation. Cicero's ideas on the subjects of politics and society were broadly disseminated because *De officiis* and *De inventione* were among the most widely read and revered texts in the medieval West. Significantly, both *De officiis* and *De inventione* present accounts of society and government also expressed in *De res publica* and other of Cicero's political works. Thus, by way of a variety of

sources, Cicero's political philosophy stood out as a separate and coherent theory to its medieval inheritors.

Central to the Ciceronian conception of human society is the claim that men join together because of their natural powers of reason and speech. Reason induces in human beings the desire to live in civil unity, while speech offers the method by which association may be achieved and maintained. Thus, for Cicero, social, political, and legal order was based on laws of nature that were knowable by and applicable to all human beings equally and without differentiation, on which grounds he has properly been credited with introducing a larger measure of universalism and egalitarianism into political philosophy than had been present among his Greek predecessors. On the other hand, Cicero recognized that some people enjoyed superior abilities to exercise their rational and linguistic facilities – and thus a better claim on leadership roles as statesmen and legislators. Indeed, he suggests that human societies could not have formed in the first place without the guidance of wise and eloquent men who awoke in scattered individuals the reason and speech latent in them. Magistrates and orators in mature political communities recapitulate the same function, appealing through persuasion to the rational powers and basic moral sense of citizens in achieving public decisions. These basic principles are retained throughout Cicero's *corpus*, whether in his rhetorical or his philosophical texts.

In turn, one finds these quintessential Ciceronian doctrines upheld throughout the Middle Ages. Beginning already in the eleventh century, glosses on *De inventione* underscored the idea that human association has its basis in the natural faculties of speech and reason. Likewise, medieval moralists were demonstrably imbued with the naturalistic description of social organization contained in *De officiis*. Perhaps the earliest medieval thinker to embrace a self-consciously Ciceronian perspective on political matters was John of Salisbury (1115/20–1180), a highly educated churchman. As a leading exponent of twelfth-century Latin humanism, John was intimately familiar with the extant portions of the Ciceronian

corpus and expressly identified himself as a devotee of Cicero. There is some evidence that John's famed organic metaphor for the commonwealth, sketched in his major work of political and moral thought, the *Policraticus*, was partially rooted in Cicero's ideas. Like Cicero, John holds that art imitates nature and hence that the precepts of justice could be discovered through reason and realized in political and legal institutions. His definition of justice itself, as a twofold duty to refrain from committing evil acts and to aid those who are threatened with injury, is derived directly from *De officiis*. John clearly upheld conclusions about one's responsibility to sacrifice for the good of the community that resonate with Cicero, not least his agreement with his Roman predecessor that violent action against an incorrigible tyrant is sometimes justified and necessary. Furthermore, in his treatise on speculative philosophy and education, the *Metalogicon*, John adopted an essentially Ciceronian approach to the natural origins of society. In that work, he regards the foundations of civil and social life to result from the human capacities of reason and language, so that political institutions and relations must rest on a proper theory of education.

John of Salisbury wrote prior to the reception into Europe of Aristotle's major writings on moral and political philosophy, the *Nicomachean Ethics* and *Politics*, which were not translated into Latin until the mid-thirteenth century. Although some scholars have attributed a fundamental change in medieval political thought to the appearance of these Aristotelian texts, Cicero's doctrines continued to be cited and utilized alongside, and sometimes in preference to, Aristotle's teachings. An early illustration of the continuation of Ciceronian thought is afforded by Brunetto Latini's *Li livres dou tresor*, a philosophical encyclopedia compiled between 1260 and 1266. Latini, a Florentine who was trained as a professional rhetorician, was not a scholastic in a narrow sense, but his education and career afforded him knowledge of the current Aristotelian learning. *Li livres dou tresor* relies heavily, for instance, upon Robert Grosseteste's recently completed Latin version of the *Nicomachean Ethics*, although it shows no direct awareness of Aristotle's *Politics*. The work

is divided into three sections, the last of which surveys both rhetoric and politics. Latini's rationale for associating rhetoric and politics in this fashion is expressly Ciceronian. With *De inventione* apparently in mind, he follows "Tully" in upholding the precept that the greatest skill a governor can possess is rhetoric, since without eloquent expression, neither cities nor justice nor bare social bounds would have come into existence and been sustained. Among the primary requirements elucidated by Latini for appointment to public office is that he must speak well as concerning matters of truth. These attributes indicate that a necessary precondition for competence as a governor is attainment of qualifications as a rhetor.

In order to bolster this position, Latini adopts the Ciceronian view that society itself would be impossible in the absence of an orator. He cites and embellishes on the doctrine of *De inventione* that human beings joined together in communal life only as the result of the stimulus provided by a wise and eloquent person who counseled his fellows to associate under the terms of justice. Latini indeed likens the contribution of the primitive orator to the creative power of God. Wise speech is placed by *Li livres dou tresor* at the center of the communal affairs of the city: public words are the fount of civic life. Moreover, Latini maintained that this oratorical role forms a continuing feature of the community, imbedded in the idea of "counsel" which runs throughout the third part of *Li livres dou tresor*. "Counsel" seems to connote wise speech for the purpose of achieving public welfare or rectitude. This impression is reinforced by Latini when he turns directly to the governance of the city: one of the primary duties of rulers is to assemble the chief and wise men of the city in order to request and consider their "counsel" regarding important matters, such as the conduct of diplomatic affairs. The magistrate, in turn, may be taken to speak on behalf of the interests of the community because his eloquence is coupled with the wisdom to recognize the public good.

The retention of Ciceronian doctrines after the full recovery of Aristotelian writings permeated more traditional scholasticism as well, even among authors who are normally counted

as devoted students of Aristotle, such as St. Thomas Aquinas (c.1225–1274). In turn, one of Aquinas's students, John of Paris (c.1240–1306), adopted an overtly Ciceronian stance in expressing his views about human nature and politics in his *De potestate regia et papali*. Although John cites Aristotle concerning the natural suitability of mankind for political life, he almost immediately supplements this source with a recapitulation of Cicero's views. Why does he bother making reference to Cicero? The answer to this question turns on John's deep-seated conviction that there exists an unbridgeable chasm between individual advantage and common welfare. Men who are oriented toward their own advantage cannot at the same time rule themselves and others according to a principle of public benefit. For this reason, it is necessary to distinguish sharply between that person whose duty it is to supervise the common utility and the great mass of individuals for whom self-regard constitutes the primary goal. Hence, human beings would not seem to be "political" in the sense Aristotle envisioned. Rather, John appeals to the Ciceronian position that however much men are naturally suited by physical need, linguistic facility, and gregarious instinct for communal life, their actual assembly is not a foregone conclusion. John postulates that primordial men live solitary lives, saved only from assimilation to the lesser animals by the fact that they are able to employ reason instead of relying merely on "natural instinct." Human beings require active prompting in order to be transformed according to the associative inclinations endemic to their nature. Thus, in John's view, nature does not impart its own inherent principle of motion. Rather, men only enter into communities when a wise man persuades them on rational grounds to do so, a claim for which Cicero is expressly cited as the authority. The activation of this capacity to accept communal order, law, and rulership depends upon the cogent presentation of the rationale for and benefits of allegiance to the principle of public utility. In no way, then, may the institution of government be regarded as the imposition of coercion over an unwilling populace. Rule is only legitimate (viz., in accordance with nature) when established by a consensual

process in which men agree on the basis of rational persuasion to be governed within the confines of the precept of the common good.

Ptolemy of Lucca (c.1226–1327), another associate of Aquinas, also found himself attracted to Cicero's conception of the foundations of human community. In *De regimine principum*, which was a continuation of the tract *De regno* that is usually ascribed to Aquinas, Ptolemy sets out to defend the proposition that the republican system of rule, and especially the Roman Republic, formed the best or ideal form of government. In part, he defends the view that God specifically ordained the Roman Republic as the vehicle for His lordship. But he supplements this claim with reference to a form of social and political naturalism indebted to Cicero. The Roman Republic was for him distinctively suited to redressing the failings of the human condition in its natural state, namely, that human beings are a frail and always endangered race, lacking the natural resources to survive enjoyed by other creatures, so that they must struggle to gain and retain earthly security and welfare. Ptolemy articulates the foundation of all systems of government to be the discovery of natural laws that preserve human society and direct men to the common good of all. This is a Ciceronian doctrine (perhaps most famously stated in *De officiis*, which Ptolemy knew); indeed, in the following paragraph, Cicero is cited directly in connection with the "art" of politics necessary to provide for human necessity. The primary "natural" duty of government is to assure that those whose preservation is threatened are served and hence that the bonds of human society are maintained and strengthened.

How does Ptolemy's characterization of the naturalness of human community relate to his defense of the special divine "calling" of the Roman Republic? In his view, the virtues embraced by the Republic naturally and in the absence of Revelation were identical to the end for which "the rule of Christ" was initiated: to promote sacrifice for the good of all and love of one's fellows rather than personal self-glorification or pursuit of private advantage. The virtues of patriotism, civil benevolence, and justice, while prefiguring the rule of Christ, were important

precisely because humanity's natural circumstances are so precarious and difficult. Although he cites the Aristotelian contention that human beings are naturally social and political animals, Ptolemy understands "nature" in a decidedly unAristotelian fashion. Cicero's definition of the republic as a common social bond woven from agreement about matters of right or justice, derived from his *De res publica* as reported by St. Augustine, is invoked and endorsed in support of Ptolemy's teaching. People join together in community – and political community more specifically – in order to protect and improve their physical as well as their moral well-being. The political virtue of governors in thus understood by him as comprising the qualities conducive to the defense of the bonds of nature, understood in terms of the provision to the community of the activities requisite for survival and peace.

A further scholastic figure who proves to have a strong affinity for Ciceronian political theory is Marsiglio (or Marsilius) of Padua (1275/80–1342/43), whose treatise, the *Defensor pacis*, is among the best known (if somewhat infamous) political writings of the fourteenth century. The *Defensor* is widely acclaimed for its emphatic insistence that only those rulers who govern strictly in accordance with the consent of their citizen-subjects are legitimate and deserving of obedience. It is precisely in order to bolster this position that the *Defensor* invokes the Ciceronian version of the generation of the human community. According to Marsiglio, men joined together not because they were coerced to do so, but because they responded to the exhortation of prudent men who were specially endowed by nature with extraordinary reason and eloquence. Human beings may be inclined to associate in communities and to submit to law and government, but they cannot be compelled to do so. The provenance of this doctrine is obviously Ciceronian. Thus, Marsiglio realizes that the inclination to associate differs from the Aristotelian notion of internally regulated motion towards an end, for which reason, perhaps, he, in contrast to John of Paris and other scholastic theorists, declines to state in the *Defensor* that man is a political animal. The natural inclination to enter into community is

instead constituted as an implicit feature of human nature, requiring reasoned persuasion in order to stimulate and direct it towards realization.

The Ciceronian aspect of Marsiglio's argument consequently precludes submission to any application of power which has not acquired the prior approval of the citizen body over which it is wielded. It is in these terms that we may best understand the *Defensor's* unwavering commitment to the consent of the populace as the prerequisite for duly constituted rulers, laws, and all other manner of government activity. Marsiglio's consent theory is complex, but its philosophical substance is rooted firmly in Cicero's idea of man's transformation into a civilized creature. Marsiglio recognizes that human beings often find it difficult to live peacefully with their fellows, yet earthly happiness and comfort make it imperative that people enter into a civil community. Therefore, political authority needs to be adequate to coerce those citizens who are incapable of controlling their temptation to behave iniquitously; yet government must still not interfere with the free choice to associate (in accordance with natural inclination), which forms the basis of all communal institutions, by enforcing obedience unilaterally. Marsiglio presumes, along Ciceronian lines, that the inclinations which nature imparts to man are only the beginning of social and political development. For Marsiglio, as for Cicero, the only valid path to a properly fashioned community is man's collaboration with nature in the fulfillment of those gregarious propensities inherent within him.

Cicero's political philosophy thus has clearly left an indelible mark on the thought of the Middle Ages. The sources scrutinized in this article are merely illustrative of the uses to which medieval authors put his ideas. Cicero's standing among the so-called Renaissance humanists only solidified his standing as a preeminent source for the articulation of European political philosophy. This suggests, in turn, the presence of greater continuity between medieval and early modern approaches than is sometimes recognized. Simply stated, the construction of too high a wall between the Middle Ages and the Renaissance, or between scholastic and humanist outlooks, is challenged

by the persistence of Ciceronian political ideas. Such an absolute historiographical division becomes an obstacle to the appreciation of the extent to which medieval philosophy more generally must not be shut off from successive intellectual traditions. Cicero's political philosophy exercised just as substantial an impact on medieval thinkers as on their humanist successors in the quattrocento.

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## Civil (Roman) Law

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### Abstract

The Roman law was fundamental to medieval civilization – it was the greatest legacy of the Roman Empire. It was known through Justinian's codification, the *Corpus iuris civilis*. The systematic study of Roman law began at the University of Bologna toward the end of the eleventh century. The first school of Roman law jurists was that of the Glossators, followed by that of the Commentators. A combined *ius commune* jurisprudence including both civil and canon law developed. The Commentators sought to accommodate Roman law to their own society. Most of the *Corpus iuris* was concerned with private law but medieval jurists made major contributions to the language of government and politics. Both monarchical and republican elements existed in Roman law. The divine source of the emperor's power was stressed, as was also its popular origin. The jurists considered the problem of how the Roman Republic had been legitimately succeeded by the Empire. The notion persisted that the emperor's power was limited because it derived from the law. Custom preserved the notion of popular consent. Medieval jurists faced the problem of universal and territorial sovereignty, producing theories of the sovereignty of both kings and city-republics. Medieval jurists treated natural law and the law of peoples (*ius gentium*) as higher norms based on reason. There was a wide range of treatments of the relationship between temporal and spiritual power. The medieval scholastic treatment of Roman law was not supplanted by the sixteenth-century humanist approach but coexisted with it. In jurisprudence, as in other areas, scholasticism and humanism were both characteristic of Renaissance intellectual life.

Roman law played a fundamental role in medieval civilization. It was the greatest legacy from the ancient Roman Empire to medieval Europe. In the West, it was known through Justinian's codification (completed in 529), known as the *Corpus iuris* in the Middle Ages and as the *Corpus iuris civilis* from the sixteenth century. The *Corpus iuris* was divided into four parts: the *Institutes*, which consisted of a short introduction to the law; the *Digest*, composed of legal opinions of 39 classical jurists from the second to the fourth centuries; the *Codex*, comprising laws of emperors; and the *Novels*, containing further laws of Justinian, issued up to his death (565). In the early Middle Ages in the West, some knowledge of Roman law was transmitted through the barbarian codes, the *Lex Romana Visigothorum* and the *Lex Romana Burgundionum*, but a systematic study of the *Corpus iuris* was only reestablished through the revival of legal studies at the University of Bologna toward the end of the eleventh century. Thereafter, Roman law was central to the development of jurisprudence, especially in Italy, France, and the Iberian Peninsula. But most importantly, canon law and its scholarship grew in tandem with civil, thereby spreading the influence of Roman law all over western Christendom. In the Byzantine Empire, the simplified Greek version of the *Corpus iuris*, issued by Leo VI (886–912) and known as the *Basilica*, became normative.

In the West, the scholarship of Roman law began with the school of the Glossators. This culminated in Accursius' *Glossa ordinaria* on the whole text of the *Corpus iuris* (completed in the 1230s). From the late thirteenth century, the school of the Commentators became dominant. The method of these jurists was scholastic in that they applied Aristotelian methods of argument to an authoritative body of knowledge, in their case the *Corpus iuris*. The school began in France; the Italian jurist, Cynus de Pistoia (1270–1336/1337), brought the new approach to Italy. He taught Bartolus of Sassoferrato (1313/1314–1357), who in turn taught Baldus de Ubaldis (1327–1400), the most famous jurist of his day. The study of Roman law was initially distinct from that of canon, but the two forms of scholarship increasingly influenced each other. Indeed from the

mid-thirteenth century onward, some jurists were awarded a doctorate in both laws (*Doctor iuris utriusque*). Modern scholars have tended to see civilians and canonists as operating within an overall common law (*ius commune*). This legal system was seen by its practitioners as a complete worldview. It certainly provided a universe of discourse in terms of juristic language. Following the words of the famous classical jurist Ulpian (d. 223), the law was seen as “a true not pretended philosophy,” of which jurists were the priests (*Digest*, 1.1.1,1) – the law provided an explanation of the world in moral terms as the “art of the good and the equitable.”

The approach of the Commentators was not antiquarian. They sought to accommodate the text of the Roman law to the realities of their world. They were not concerned to resurrect the meaning of the law in its original historical context – nor were they philologically equipped to do so. For them, Roman law was no relic from antiquity but a living law, normative and applicable in their own day. The task of the Glossators had been to establish the meaning of the text as it stood, but with a developing tendency to apply their findings to their own society. The method of the Commentators was in stark contrast to that of the legal humanists of the sixteenth century who sought to recover the meaning of the Roman law in its original historical context. A Commentator, such as Baldus, was well aware of the historical distance between the fourteenth century and the first century BCE, but drew a different lesson: that it was more important to apply the law to the here-and-now – it served no useful purpose to try and resurrect a time long past.

The *Corpus iuris* enshrined the distinction between public and private law with its content being almost entirely concerned with private law. But the treatments of public law that it contained had a crucial and determining influence on the development of the language of government and politics in the Middle Ages. Modern scholars have been particularly concerned with this area.

The *Corpus iuris* was overwhelmingly the emperor's law. In his decree of promulgation, Justinian had given all parts of it equal status as imperial law. But the codification had been made



in a hurry and there were contradictions within it. Not least, there coexisted both monarchical and republican elements. The history of law under the Roman Republic was given in outline, and there were other traces of republican law. This meant that medieval jurists were able to use the Roman law as a treasure-house of passages to apply to the wide variety of political institutions they were confronted with: the Empire, kingdoms, city-states, and lordships of various kinds.

The divine source of the emperor's power was stressed and, indeed, he was described as "lord of the world" (*dominus mundi*) (*Digest*, 14.2.9). His laws were sacred and everlasting: Justinian had decreed that his codification would last "forever" (*in omne aevum*) (*Digest, Constitutio, "Omnem,"* 11). The emperor was the "living law" (*lex animata*) (*Novel*, 105,2,4) – an echo of Hellenistic notions of kingship. There was a clear statement of his sovereign will: "what has pleased the emperor has the force of law" (*quod principi placuit legis habet vigorem*) (*Digest*, 1.4.1). Indeed, he was described as being "freed from the laws" (*legibus solutus*) (*Digest*, 1.3.31). This formulation was the distant ancestor of early modern notions of absolute monarchy but its meaning was restricted: the emperor was freed from the observance of the *leges*, in the sense of positive law.

But a problem remained. Rome had once been a republic in which power was ultimately derived from the people. How had it legally become an empire? How had a series of emperors been set up with legitimate authority? The answer given by the *Corpus iuris* was the so-called "royal law" (*lex regia*), whereby the Roman people had transferred all its power and authority to the emperor. The *Corpus iuris* only referred to this law and modern scholars have disputed whether it ever actually existed or whether it was a legal construction to explain the transition from republic to empire. Some have identified it with the *leges de imperio* by which the popular assembly gave power to an emperor on his accession. The problem with this interpretation is that only one such law survives (that concerning Vespasian) and only in a truncated form not conforming to the description of

the *lex regia* – it is a grant of specific powers and exemptions rather than a general transfer of power. Whatever the truth of the matter, reference to the *lex regia* kept alive the idea that the people was the source of the emperor's authority. Medieval jurists, in discussing it, broached fundamental political issues: was it revocable or irrevocable? In other words was sovereignty alienable? Furthermore, the notion of the *lex regia* was relevant to another issue. Did the emperor have a completely free hand? If he did, this would go against the spirit of the Roman law because the self-image of the governmental and legal system of Rome was that it was one which exemplified the rule of law. So, there was a passage that stressed that it was fitting for the emperor to obey the laws, precisely because his power was derived from the law (*lex Digna vox*) (*Code*, 1.14.4). But of course he could not be compelled to acquiesce.

The notion of popular consent persisted in another area within the *Corpus iuris*, that of custom. The treatment was sketchy and contradictory. *Digest*, 1.3.32, ascribed to the second-century jurist, Julian, stated that the people could express its will in abrogating a law by its tacit consent through disuse. This passage came to be used by late medieval jurists as a building block in developing ideas of consent. A contradictory constitution of Constantine (*Code*, 8.52.2) stated that a custom could not abrogate a *lex*. This view was determinative in the *Corpus iuris* and was reinforced by Justinian's statement that the emperor, whose will was the sole source of law, was its only interpreter (*Code*, 1.14.12). Interpretation was, of course, precisely what the late medieval jurists undertook in accommodating the Roman law to their contemporary social and political reality.

One of the most well-known maxims from Roman law, "what touches all should be approved by all" (*quod omnes tangit ab omnibus comprobetur*) (*Code*, 5.59.5,2), was used by medieval jurists to justify popular consent in matters of law and government. But they took it out of context: in the *Corpus iuris*, it belonged to private law – when a ward had more than one guardian,

all had to agree to certain acts involving the interests of all guardians.

The universal nature of imperial authority in the *Corpus iuris* posed a problem for medieval jurists faced with kings who did not accept subordination to the emperor and, in Italy, city-republics which from the twelfth century increasingly exerted their autonomy. *Code*, 1.1.1, according to the medieval Vulgate version (*littera Bononiensis*), referred to “all peoples whom the sovereign authority of our clemency rules” (*cunctos populos quos clementie nostre regit imperium*). Did this mean that all peoples were under the emperor’s rule or was it restricted only to those that actually obeyed him? A solution was approached first in terms of kingship. Two formulae which were distinct in origin became combined. The first was the notion that the king in his kingdom was the emperor of his kingdom (*rex in regno suo est imperator regni sui*). The source of this was to be found in canonist writings of the last decade of the twelfth century and in a *quaestio* written by the civilian Azo shortly after 1200. The second was that of the king who did not recognize a superior (*rex qui superiorem non recognoscit*). This was derived from a passage in Pope Innocent III’s decretal, *Per venerabilem* (1202): “Since the king himself [of the French] does not recognise a superior in temporal matters” (*quum rex ipse [Francorum] superiorem in temporalibus minime recognoscat*). The application of this thinking to independent city-states in Italy came in the fourteenth century with Bartolus who, basing his argument on the power of popular consent, produced the concept of the city, which was its own emperor (*civitas sibi princeps*) and which did not recognize a superior. Baldus developed further the implications of the sovereignty of such republics, giving particular attention to corporation theory and to citizenship as both a political and a legal concept. When faced with the apparent contradictions between the universal claims of the emperor and the territorial sovereignty of kings and then cities, jurists had from the thirteenth century used the *de iure-de facto* distinction. Canonists discussed whether the king of France did not recognize a superior *de*

*iure* or *de facto*. In the thirteenth century, civilians (with the possible exception of Johannes de Blanosco) accorded *de iure* sovereignty solely to the emperor. Bartolus took the step of accepting that cities through the exercise of *de facto* power gained fully legitimate sovereignty; Baldus applied the same argument to kings. This approach meant that the facts of political life were fully recognized. The magnitude of Bartolus’ and Baldus’ achievements in justifying the sovereignty of Italian city-republics is shown if one reflects that, in the *Corpus iuris*, cities enjoyed the status of mere *municipia*, licit corporations subject to imperial confirmation of their legal rights. The *lex regia* applied solely to the Roman people and not to cities in general and was, therefore, not used by either jurist in their arguments supporting the sovereignty of city-republics.

The *Corpus iuris* had given cursory attention to the jurisprudential concepts of natural law (*ius naturale*) and the law of peoples (*ius gentium*). The treatment of natural law was contradictory. Ulpian considered it to be that which human beings shared with animals, whereas the second-century lawyer, Gaius, connected both laws, considering the *ius gentium* to be the product of natural reason. Gaius’ view predominated amongst Roman jurists. Given the prominence of the concept of natural law in scholastic discourse, medieval jurists, both civilians and canonists, treated natural law and the *ius gentium* as higher norms. In contrast there was no suggestion in the *Corpus iuris* that a provision of the *ius civile*, which went against natural law was in any way invalid. Medieval jurists treated the *ius gentium* as a legal expression of human beings’ natural reason. They found the *ius gentium* a particularly useful category for dealing with government and politics, because in the *Corpus iuris* it was described as the source of rulership and property. The Neapolitan school for instance, in support of the king of Sicily’s claims to independence from the Roman emperor, denied the latter’s *de iure* universal sovereignty, maintaining that there was a plurality of sovereign monarchs on the basis of the *ius gentium*. The inhabitants of the kingdom of

Sicily, like those of Spain, had conquered their territory by the effusion of their own blood. This argument bypassed the mainstream *de iure-de facto* one which only applied within the context of Roman law and rested on the premise of the *de iure* claims of the emperor. For the Neapolitans, the *ius civile* of the Romans was only one amongst many. Within the school of the Commentators, Baldus held that the *ius gentium* justified self-government by peoples and the election of kings by the inhabitants of a kingdom.

In the Middle Ages, the relationship between the church and secular rulers was of central importance and at times highly contentious. In the *Corpus iuris*, religion was considered to be part of public law. A distinction was, indeed, made between the emperorship (*imperium*) and the priesthood (*sacerdotium*), both of which were understood to derive from God. But the emperor, as God's vicegerent on earth, was the head of the church understood as the Christian Roman Empire, and legislated on ecclesiastical matters. The first 13 titles of the *Code* were concerned with the clergy and religious questions, as were many of the *Novels*. From the time of the papal reform movement in the later eleventh and early twelfth centuries, the church's rejection of this imperial role became insistent. Freedom of the church (*libertas ecclesiae*) from lay control became enshrined in the rapidly developing canon law. Civilian jurists had to consider church matters in the light of papal claims and the arguments of canonists. As regards the relationship between secular rulership (*regnum*) and the priesthood, juristic opinion within the *ius commune* ranged from a dualist approach, seeing both as derived directly from God and existing in parallel, to a hierocratic one, seeing the pope as mediating governmental power from God to the secular ruler. As a sign that canon law could not be ignored by civilians, the greatest of the Glossators, Accursius, had to consider the Donation of Constantine. According to this, the emperor had granted the imperial authority in the West to Pope Sylvester and his successors. This purported document was not mentioned in the *Corpus iuris* but a version of the supposed text was included in

canon law, notably Gratian's *Decretum*. The authenticity of this donation (which was not extant) was attacked by Nicholas of Cusa on grounds of historical evidence in his *Concordantia catholica* (1433) and proved to be inauthentic for philological reasons by Lorenzo Valla in 1440. But such arguments were not known in Accursius' day. The issue for him and other jurists was whether the donation was valid or not. He proved on Roman law grounds that it could not be relying above all on the emperor's duty to conserve the empire by virtue of his office. The Donation served as a title to the Papal States, but one which medieval popes were careful to have reconfirmed by subsequent emperors; indeed popes came to insist on such reaffirmation before they would conduct an imperial coronation. The division of Italy into lands of the empire (*terrae imperii*) and lands of the church (*terrae ecclesiae*) became embedded in juristic discourse. The range of opinion over the relationship between temporal and spiritual powers was wide: pope and emperor were seen as twin pillars of Christendom but the extent of their power as regards each other was disputed.

The scholastic treatment of Roman law outlasted the Middle Ages. From the early sixteenth century, it was indeed challenged by the emergence of humanist jurisprudence based on a sophisticated knowledge of Latin philology but it was not supplanted. Both methods, known colloquially as the old style "Italian manner" (*mos italicus*) and the new style "French manner" (*mos gallicus*), coexisted. Indeed, in those places in Europe where Roman law was applied, the traditional scholastic approach still remained dominant in the practice of lawyers and the law courts. Thus in jurisprudence, as in other areas, scholasticism and humanism were both characteristic of Renaissance intellectual life.

## Cross-References

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## Conciliarism

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### Abstract

Conciliarism was rooted in church tradition, which valued the great councils of Antiquity as defenders of true doctrine. It became a movement in reaction to the Great Western Schism (1378–1417). Theologians like Peter of Ailly and John Gerson, as well as canonists like Francesco Zabarella, argued for a general council to resolve the schism. Eventually, the Council of Constance (1414–1418) declared a council supreme in reuniting the church, defending orthodoxy and reforming the ecclesiastical institution. Some conciliarists argued that the church as a whole was the ultimate ecclesiastical authority, and that it was represented by a council. Calling a council, however, was the prerogative of the papacy under canon law. An appeal to equity was used to circumvent the law. If necessity required a council, other authorities could gather one. Nicholas of Cusa argued for a church, which balanced hierarchy with consent of the church as a whole. The Council of Basel (1431–1449) tried to impose reforms on pope and curia. This produced a papalist reaction led by Pope Eugenius IV (1431–1447) and the Dominican theologian John Torquemada.

Although shaped by the Great Western Schism (1378–1417), which divided the papacy between two and then three claimants, and the desire for reform of the church, conciliarism was rooted in

traditional texts. The history of the church highlighted the great church councils of the fourth and fifth centuries, which had defined key doctrines, and medieval popes had legislated through general and local councils convoked on their initiative. By the end of the thirteenth century, canon lawyers had examined the remedies available if a pope fell into error, some thinking he lost his office upon espousing heresy, while others thought a church council had to depose the pontiff formally. Canon law, however, restricted the power of summoning a general council to the Roman pontiff – preventing a pope’s enemies from using such an assembly against him. Canonists also discussed the church as a corporation, an entity able to defend its own interests. Canonists and theologians also were aware of Augustine’s idea that Peter had received the keys as the representative of the whole church (*in figura ecclesiae*), not just in his own right. Theologians, moreover, discussed the church as the mystical body of Christ. There was room for arguments that a council could represent Christ even in the absence of a legitimate pope.

A general council to decide between the rival popes was recommended soon after the outbreak of the schism. Henry of Langenstein, a theologian, and Conrad of Gelnhausen, a canonist, were among the first to propose this solution, arguing that a general council could assemble in the absence of an undoubted Roman pontiff. Equity (*epieikeia*, an Aristotelian concept) permitted the church to waive the letter of the law under such circumstances. Other measures were tried without success. These included a compromise between the claimants, the abdication of one in the other’s favor, and election of the surviving claimant when his rival died, but none of these came to fruition. At last, Benedict XIII (Avignon) and Gregory XII (Rome) agreed, under pressure, to meet to find a solution to the schism. This failed to happen, provoking both colleges of cardinals to abandon their popes and come together. The cardinals agreed to hold a council of union in Pisa in 1409.

For this council, theologians, like John Gerson and Peter of Ailly, and canonists, like Francesco Zabarella, prepared tracts arguing for

the ability of a council to meet and end the schism. The power of the whole church over a pope was emphasized. The Pisan synod declared both popes deposed, electing Alexander V in their place. Alexander having died soon after his election, Baldassare Cosa was elected his successor as John XXIII. John proved unable to unite the church, and so Sigismund of Luxemburg, king of the Romans, urged on by Gerson and others, pressured John to call a council. John, driven from Rome by the king of Naples, called a council to meet in Constance. If John hoped to be confirmed in office, he found his future in doubt. So he fled, but the Council of Constance, after some hesitation, declared that it met with the authority of the Holy Spirit and had power from God, as the representative of Christ and the church, to resolve the schism. The council also claimed, in the decree *Haec sancta*, authority to defend the faith and reform the church “in head and members.” John XXIII was deposed, and Gregory XII resigned shortly thereafter. (Some later papalists claimed his pro forma authorization of the council had legitimized it.) Benedict XIII refused to yield, but most of his followers, even in his native Spain, deserted him. The Council of Constance, once it had representation of all the former parties in the schism, was able to elect an undoubted pope, Martin V, a Roman noble of the Colonna clan. Constance also enacted the decree *Frequens*, which called for a regular succession of councils to regulate the conduct of church government, especially that of the Roman curia. Some reforms also were enacted at Constance, but the reformers were not satisfied. The next council, assembled at Pavia and then moved to Siena, failed to enact further reforms.

When the next council assembled in Basel in 1431, a new pope, Eugenius IV, a nephew of Gregory XII, had just been elected. He tried to dissolve the council or at least transfer it to Italy to meet representatives of the Greek church in an effort to restore ecclesiastical unity in the face of the advancing Ottoman Turks. The Basel fathers, deep in negotiations with the Hussite rebels in Bohemia for a debate over the issues dividing them from orthodoxy, refused to adjourn or

move. They threatened the pope with suspension from office if he did not yield.

Treatises favoring councils written at the time included Nicholas of Cusa's *On Catholic Concord*, which argued for a church governed by councils representing the whole body, including the pope, that would maintain order and enact reforms. This system of councils balanced the order of hierarchy with the need to obtain widespread consent. Cusanus' treatise shows the influence not just of canon law, but also the theology of Ramon Llull, who thought that harmony could be brought out of discordant elements. Nicholas also thought the church would benefit from reform of the Holy Roman Empire, which would be a strong element in the defense of Christendom against internal and external foes. (The failure of Basel to achieve concord eventually would drive Nicholas to become an agent of the papacy in defeating the council.) Also among the subtler thinkers at Basel, Heymeric of Camp, a professor from Cologne, argued for an idea of the council as the agent of the whole, including the pope, more fully representative of God than was the Roman pontiff on his own. This he argued from the works of Llull and even from Latin discussions of the Qur'ān. Some other conciliarists, however, thought in less subtle terms, arguing that the council represented the whole in very legalistic ways. The whole being greater than any part, even the most important part, the pope himself, a general council was supreme, holding plenitude of power. (The canonist Panormitanus would claim this before an imperial diet in 1442.) Consequently, a council could impose reforms on the curia. Basel also organized its own curia and assumed the power to issue indulgences, otherwise a papal prerogative.

Faced with this resistance and routed from Rome by local foes, Eugenius recognized the council, but he refused to be bound by its reform decrees. Eugenius dispatched a committee of presidents to Basel, but they were faced with an oath of incorporation into the council intended to make them compliant with the will of the majority. The Council of Basel began to divide internally, especially over the site of a council with the Greeks. The majority favored Basel or Avignon,

neither acceptable to the pope nor the Greeks. By 1437, Eugenius was able to decree transfer of the assembly to Ferrara. Some of the fathers left – seeing discord as a sign that the Spirit had departed – but the remainder resisted. They turned the decree of Constance on conciliar authority, *Haec sancta*, into a pronouncement of dogma. Then they deposed Eugenius IV, electing the semiretired duke of Savoy, Amadeus VIII, to reign as Pope Felix V.

This election set off a fierce diplomatic struggle, particularly in the Holy Roman Empire. Basel's apologists traveled to imperial diets to proclaim that general councils represented the church with fullness of ecclesiastical power. Even a legitimate pope had to obey, embracing reforms, or face deposition. Eugenius' envoys argued that the pope was supreme, the one who received the power of jurisdiction from Christ and distributed it to bishops and priests. This hierarchic view was supported by John Torquemada and others with allusions to ideas of celestial hierarchy, derived from Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite, and an idea of the natural order as monarchic. Bees – obeying a king! – and migrating birds following a leader were invoked, using a text from canon law, as proof that a plurality of rulers was against nature.

Eventually, Eugenius and his supporters prevailed through propaganda describing the Basel assembly as a mob of rebellious subjects and by making concessions to the princes, especially those in the Germanic lands. A temporary reunion with the Greeks, decreed at Florence in 1439, also buoyed the embattled pope. The Basel assembly yielded at last, after Eugenius' death, and "elected" his successor, Nicholas V, as pope. Felix V had already abdicated, retiring to Savoy.

Conciliar sentiment remained alive, especially in Paris, well after this defeat, and both rulers and prelates at odds with Rome appealed to a future general council. Even Pius II's prohibition of appeals from pope to council failed to destroy this conciliar tradition. It remained alive until the French Revolution destroyed Gallicanism in France. Ultramontane views of papal supremacy held sway unquestioned for more than a century. These dismissed conciliarism as



inspired by heretical critics of the papacy. The conciliarist example, however, has been invoked since the Second Vatican Council was announced in 1959. The possibility that a more consultative order might prevail in the church was tied to an argument that the decree *Haec sancta* of the Council of Constance defined a dogma that could not be overturned on behalf of pope and curia.

## Cross-References

- ▶ [Canon Law](#)
- ▶ [Corporation Theory](#)
- ▶ [Jacques Almain](#)
- ▶ [John Gerson](#)
- ▶ [John Torquemada](#)
- ▶ [Nicholas of Cusa](#)
- ▶ [Peter of Ailly](#)
- ▶ [Political Philosophy](#)

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## Conscience

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### Abstract

Medieval thinkers inherited from Jerome (d. 420) a perhaps unintended distinction between conscience and *synderesis*, or the “spark of conscience”. Once accepted, the distinction required an explication of how conscience and *synderesis* relate to each other. Philip the Chancellor posited that *synderesis* straddles the distinction between a potentiality (*potentia*) and a disposition (*habitus*). As a dispositional potentiality, *synderesis* could either supply truths to conscience (as in intellectualistic accounts) or motivate the will to do good (as in voluntaristic accounts). Both types of account held that conscience binds us to follow it, but also allowed that conscience could be mistaken and yet still binding. While Bonaventure had recognized that conscience can learn from experience, Thomas Aquinas took the step of connecting conscience with prudence. This latter move anticipated later medieval accounts, where conscience would be treated in relation to the moral virtues rather than *synderesis*.

The medieval period proved to be especially fruitful for philosophical analysis of conscience, even if it was stimulated by what may have been a textual error. The error concerns the Greek term for conscience, *suneidêsis*, which was translated into Latin as *conscientia*. Both terms comprise a range of meanings, ranging from simply

“knowledge” to knowledge that is shared with someone else. But *suneidêsis* became bifurcated into two terms as a result of a confusing passage in Jerome’s *Commentary on Ezekiel*. There Jerome used the term *sunteresin* instead of the more standard term to name a fourth part of the soul (in addition to the rational, irascible, and concupiscible parts), which he referred to as the “spark of conscience” (*scintilla conscientiae*). This led medievals to believe there was a distinction between conscience proper and the “spark of conscience.” By the twelfth century, the term *synderesis* (or the variant *synteresis*) was being used to refer to the “spark of conscience” distinct from and in some sense higher than conscience (*conscientia*) itself.

Jerome further reinforced this duplication in conscience by his inconsistent answer to the question of whether conscience can be lost. On the one hand, he says that the spark of conscience was not erased even in Cain; but on the other he concludes that some people become so sinful that they cease to have a conscience. The medievals would seek to resolve this inconsistency by distinguishing a conscience that cannot be lost (*synderesis*) from a conscience that can be lost (*conscientia*) in the case of the very wicked. Cain shows no remorse for killing his brother Abel, yet he complains about his punishment (Gen. 4:13). This vestige of regret might be regarded as evidence that the “spark of conscience” is still operative in him, even though it hardly indicates a *moral* conscience.

Medieval theologians sought other ways to distinguish *synderesis* from *conscientia*, including where each is located in the soul, what the function of each is, whether each is subject to error or immune to it, and whether each is innate or acquired. By the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, treatments of conscience became a regular feature in commentaries on Peter Lombard’s *Sentences*, as well as in disputed questions and summas. The majority of medieval accounts on conscience began from *Sentences* 2.39, which considers how the will alone among natural goods can be bad. There Lombard invokes Jerome’s *Commentary on Ezekiel* to mention the “higher spark of reason” (*superior scintilla rationis*) that inspires us to desire good and hate

evil, even though we can obviously be overcome by evil desires and fall into sin.

While Lombard set the stage for subsequent discussions of conscience, Philip the Chancellor (d. 1236) produced the first medieval treatise on conscience (“De synderesi”) in his *Summa de bono* (ca. 1225–28). There he expounds the distinction between *synderesis* and conscience and revisits the question of whether conscience can be lost. Jerome had held that *synderesis* was a potentiality associated with reason, but Philip breaks new ground by considering it a “dispositional potentiality” (*potentia habitualis*). It resembles a potentiality in being innate, yet is like a disposition in embodying a tendency to do what is good. This duality in *synderesis* influenced later treatments of conscience, which are sometimes characterized as intellectualistic or voluntaristic, depending on whether they understand *synderesis* as a dispositional potentiality that supplies truths to conscience or as a desire for the good.

In question 3, Philip argues that conscience emerges from the conjunction of *synderesis* with free choice. Consequently, conscience can be mistaken, while *synderesis* cannot since it involves no deliberative judgment. In the following question, Philip considers whether *synderesis* can be lost through the example of heretics who died for their faith. While he regards them as mistaken in their religious beliefs, he finds that *synderesis* is still operative in them insofar as they resisted what they found to be evil. *Synderesis* is thus the counterpart to the impulse to sin evident in our fallen nature, but Philip rejects Lombard’s idea that *synderesis* is a special grace to compensate for the impulse to sin.

Once Lombard had set the context for discussing conscience and Philip had outlined two distinct ways of viewing conscience, the stage was set for two highly original expositions offered by Bonaventure (d. 1274) and Thomas Aquinas (d. 1274).

## Bonaventure

Bonaventure’s treatment of conscience is highly distinctive and is generally interpreted as a

voluntaristic view of the difference between conscience and *synderesis*. Bonaventure distinguishes *synderesis* and conscience by locating them in different parts of the soul: conscience in the rational part and *synderesis* in the affective part. Conscience thus has a cognitive role, while *synderesis* provides motivation to the will. This has the effect of making conscience a disposition of practical reason that directs our judgment about what can be done and *synderesis* a potentiality of desire that stimulates us to do good.

While others ask whether *synderesis* is innate, Bonaventure raises this question with respect to conscience. Inasmuch as conscience is a disposition relating to basic dictates of nature, it is innate. Yet to grasp such a dictate as “one’s parents are to be honored” requires that we have acquired an understanding of *parent*. So conscience is in another sense an acquired disposition relating to what we learn by education and experience. Bonaventure thus recognizes that conscience can be “dynamic” in the sense of developing new practical principles based on experience. These principles then become new means to the good that we desire to attain.

Conscience performs two distinct but related functions: first, it enables us to discover the most general practical principles (e.g., “obey God,” “honor your parents”). As in other accounts where this function is attributed to *synderesis*, conscience is innate, unerring, and inextinguishable even in most morally corrupt person. Second, conscience applies these principles to specific situations: here conscience can err since a misapplication of the principles can occur through ignorance or incorrect reasoning. From this liability to error it follows that a mistaken conscience can become involved in doing evil actions.

One is obliged to follow one’s conscience both when it is conformed to God’s law and when it is in addition to God’s law. But a dilemma arises when conscience dictates an action *against* God’s law and so places one in a “double bind.” Whether one acts or does not act on such a conscience, one will sin mortally. Bonaventure counsels not acting at all when conscience dictates acting against a divine law or known church authority. Instead, one must educate oneself so as to correct one’s

erroneous conscience and thereby resolve the conflict with authority.

Turning to *synderesis*, Bonaventure sees in the “spark of conscience” the role of driving conscience to act. *Synderesis* cannot be extinguished by sin, but its exercise can be hindered temporarily, as when one is so thoroughly in the grip of the impulse to pleasure that reason has no sway over him or her. In cases where we fail to adhere to what conscience has determined to be good, feelings of guilt or remorse result, because our natural desire for the good has been frustrated.

With conscience and *synderesis* separated into two distinct powers, it may seem as if they are isolated from each other. But Bonaventure is careful to emphasize that they do interact, as *synderesis* drives conscience and conscience can direct *synderesis*. Their interaction mitigates the tendency to make these functions into faculties. Further, the recognition that conscience does not simply apply principles to situations, but learns and develops from experience makes Bonaventure’s account more akin to Aristotle’s conception of practical wisdom. But Bonaventure stops short of exploring the connections between conscience, *synderesis*, and the moral virtues, as Aquinas and others will do.

## Thomas Aquinas

By comparison with Bonaventure, Aquinas offers an intellectualistic approach to distinguishing between conscience and *synderesis*. While both have cognitive and motivational roles for Aquinas, he regards *synderesis* as a disposition (*habitus*) within reason for apprehending general moral principles, while conscience is an act, applying these principles to activity in a particular situation. Conscience works both prospectively (prodding, urging, binding) and retrospectively (accusing or causing remorse), when it asks, before acting, “What ought I to do?” and, after acting, “Did I do the right thing?”

Aquinas holds that *synderesis* cannot be mistaken about basic moral principles for the simple reason that if it could be, none of our knowledge would be certain. Nor can *synderesis* be

extinguished except with respect to its actualization. The errors we make about what is to be done lie with conscience, either because it has misapplied a basic moral principle or has falsely derived a new principle from those known by *synderesis*.

Like Bonaventure, Aquinas recognizes that in order to act, conscience needs principles with more content than the most general dictates, such as “Do good and avoid evil.” These more explicit (or “secondary”) principles have to be derived from experience and instruction. Further, the agent will need the virtue of prudence, which enables one who has it to correctly apprehend particular circumstances. Aquinas advances the medieval discussion by linking conscience with prudence and other virtues in order to account for weakness of will.

Both Philip and Albert the Great (d. 1280) had found a role for *synderesis* and conscience in the Aristotelian practical syllogism. On Albert’s account *synderesis* provides the first premise, which expresses universal reasons relating to the good; reason provides the second premise by applying the particular to the universal; conscience draws the conclusion, which has the force of a command. In an example Aquinas develops from Aristotle’s *Nicomachean Ethics*, weakness of will takes on this form: an incontinent man knows the general principle forbidding fornication, but also holds the principle that pleasure should be enjoyed. If he pursues fornication, he still knows habitually that fornication is to be avoided, but in this instance his actual knowledge – that this fornication will bring pleasure – overcomes his habitual knowledge. This is not a failure of *synderesis*, but of the incontinent agent, who lacks the virtues needed to assess the situation correctly and deliberate appropriately about what is to be done.

Aquinas does not seem to have addressed the misapplication of moral principles to particular circumstances. But he does offer an explanation of how conscience can be mistaken. Conscience errs when it makes an invalid inference and when it introduces a false premise. Aquinas accepts that one can have a mistaken conscience in good faith, and one may be excused if the mistake is factual in

nature or concerns social norms. But if the mistake is about law, then he is not excused because he should have known the law. When heretics mistakenly think that swearing an oath is forbidden by God, they have made an error in their higher reason that is passed on to conscience.

The problem of mistaken conscience becomes acute in light of the fact that conscience binds us to act according to its dictate. Acting against conscience is always wrong, but Aquinas reasons that it is because one also acts against *synderesis* (which is infallible) that acting against conscience is always wrong. Conscience binds in much the same way as the commands of a ruler (including God) do: as soon as they are known, they bind with a conditional necessity. If one obeys, a reward may be expected; but if one disobeys, punishment will follow.

Aquinas modifies Bonaventure’s account of mistaken conscience. Bonaventure held that erroneous conscience cannot bind us to act, but instead binds us to correct it. Aquinas, however, accepts that an erroneous conscience binds as long as it remains and, moreover, puts one in a double bind. Suppose someone’s conscience tells him that a command of God is actually bad. If he follows his (mistaken) conscience, he will sin by rejecting God’s command; if he follows God’s command, he will sin by rejecting his own conscience. Yet Aquinas also reasons that while a correct conscience binds absolutely and in every circumstance, a mistaken conscience binds only relatively. Hence, a mistaken conscience can be set aside without committing sin, but a correct conscience cannot be set aside without sinning. The binding force of a mistaken conscience consists in its being taken to be correct; if and when its error is corrected, it ceases to have binding authority.

Aquinas modified the state of the medieval discussion of conscience in a number of ways. Where earlier accounts had treated conscience and *synderesis* in isolation from other elements in human action, Aquinas enriched the discussion of conscience by appealing to prudence to explain how we develop secondary principles. Prudence also plays a crucial role in correctly applying these principles to a given situation and in carrying out

the dictates of conscience. This innovative move of relating conscience to moral virtue anticipated how later medieval thinkers would address conscience.

### Duns Scotus and William of Ockham

The linking of conscience with the moral virtues that we find in Aquinas continued to the point where *synderesis* and conscience ceased to be treated as topics in their own rights. Duns Scotus (d. 1308) offers very little explicit treatment of conscience or *synderesis*. His views on conscience must be gleaned from his treatment of the development of moral virtues. Scotus locates *synderesis* and conscience in the intellect, as Aquinas did, though he characterizes conscience as a habit (rather than an act) of reaching proper conclusions about what to do. But the function Bonaventure saw in *synderesis* – of driving us toward the good – Scotus finds in the will's affection for benefit ( *affectio commodi*), which drives human beings to seek their highest happiness in God. Scotus also gives conscience a dynamic role in developing the human agent well beyond its function in applying general principles to situations. In particular, conscience provides one of the necessary conditions for acquiring a moral virtue: that one act in accordance with a correct dictate.

William of Ockham (d. 1349) continues the trend of discussing conscience in the context of the virtues. While Ockham omits any treatment of *synderesis*, he makes a place for conscience in developing virtues when he argues that we can act morally not only from knowledge acquired from experience but also from knowledge that is taught to us (which Scotus had denied). He accuses Scotus of conflating conscience with the prudence associated with each individual virtue ("proper prudence") and argues instead that conscience can direct actions based on dictates that are learned from others. Both, however, agree that conscience plays a critical role in directing action that can lead to the development of prudence and then the remaining moral virtues. In this mature phase of medieval thought about conscience, Bonaventure's conception of conscience as learning from

experience and Aquinas's connecting conscience to the acquisition of moral virtues reach their fullest medieval expression.

The high medieval period stands out for the sustained attention devoted to conscience as a key component in moral psychology. Yet along with the insights that were gradually arrived at from the twelfth to the fourteenth centuries, there are also aspects of conscience that medieval thinkers overlooked. While they considered whether a person could cease to have a conscience, they did not consider whether someone might fail to develop a conscience in the first place. In their focus on the innateness associated with *synderesis*, they did not consider that conscience might be largely shaped by social and cultural influences. They did not enumerate fully the stock of general moral principles that everyone should have by virtue of *synderesis*. If they had, it might have helped them grapple with the prospect that some people may be misguided in their moral formation and so miss supposedly innate moral principles. Finally, in their focus on conflicts between conscience and our bodily appetites, they neglected to consider that we also wrestle with conflicts between conscience and our psychological desires for goods such as prestige, honor, and power.

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## Consciousness

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### Abstract

Medieval discussions recognize many of the issues that are nowadays associated with the philosophical term “consciousness,” but the conceptual schemes used in these discussions are very different from the modern ones. Thus, the modern interest in consciousness and self-consciousness relates to medieval interest

in perception, conceptual representation, attention, and self-knowledge. The phenomenality of conscious thought was not directly addressed. The medieval theories of self-cognition distinguish between knowledge of the essence of the soul and the acts of the soul. For the former, opinions varied so that the Platonic thinkers often affirmed that the essence of the soul can be directly perceived while the Aristotelians claimed that such perception is indirect. Knowledge of the existence of one's own soul was often given as an example of a certainty. Medieval authors generally agreed that acts of one's own soul can be self-consciously perceived, but opinions differed in respect to how such self-conscious thought is structured and whether all mental acts are actually perceived, or whether all thought is self-conscious.

## Conceptual Changes

As a technical philosophical term, “consciousness” and its cognates in other languages became important only in modern philosophy. It has been claimed that the concept was unknown in Ancient Greek philosophy. For medieval philosophy, such a straightforward claim would be obviously misleading. The phenomena related to the concept in modern philosophy were intensively studied during the Middle Ages, though with somewhat different conceptual schemes. Medieval authors discussed issues that nowadays are associated to consciousness in distinct contexts and in settings very different from the modern ones.

Contrary to what has sometimes been claimed, the Latin term *conscientia* was used in Classical Latin in a meaning close to modern English “consciousness.” Augustine, for example, claims (*De trin.* 13.1.3) that he has most certain knowledge of the faith he has in his heart through *conscientia*. Such usage of the word continued to the Middle Ages, but the word did not gain any central position in philosophical discussions before the modern era. More relevant medieval terms include, for example, *cognitio reflexiva*, *notitia sui*, *cognitio intuitiva*, *intentio*, and *representatio*.



Historically, medieval discussions of philosophical topics related to consciousness can be traced back to the Neoplatonic–Stoic tradition, to which Aristotelian elements were incorporated. This tradition was taken over by Arabic thinkers like Ibn Sīnā (Avicenna) and Ibn Rushd (Averroes). Both had major influence on medieval Latin discussions. Also certain Ancient Roman thinkers like Augustine were important for the developments among Latin authors.

### Phenomenality and Intentionality

Phenomenality as such, or the qualitative aspect of conscious experience, does not seem to play any significant role in medieval discussions of conscious experiences. It seems that medieval thinkers typically did not think that there would be any special private dimension in conscious experience. Rather, their view was that we normally experience the world as it is, and thus share phenomenally the same experience when perceiving the same object. Thus, in perceiving a white object, the species of whiteness informs the mind of any perceiver in the same qualitative way, and exact description of how the form informs the mind raised much interest. The viewpoint was not, however, subjective in the modern sense, and it did not become a topic of philosophical dispute whether there is a special “what is it like for a person to be perceiving whiteness.”

There were, however, elaborate discussions concerning how we experience our mental acts as our own. Do the phenomenal characteristics of mental acts include experiencing the acts as personally one’s own? Do we have consciousness of the unity of the mind? Can the so-called Averroist view that we all share the same intellect be refuted simply through reference to experiential consciousness? These questions did not receive unanimous answers. Generally, medieval authors thought that intellectual understanding is experienced as individually one’s own, although that experience may not reveal an incorporeal soul. Also, although most Latin authors thought that the sensory soul and the intellectual soul are distinct, even metaphysically distinct, it was

mostly thought that the subject of sensory perception was experienced to be the same as that of intellectual cognition. The discussion seems to be connected to Avicenna’s insight that the subject of visual perception and the subject of the resulting emotion are experienced to be the same.

Consciousness is about some object. Such intentionality of consciousness has been one of the main obstacles in twentieth-century projects of naturalizing consciousness. Medieval discussions recognized the intentionality, and aimed at explicating what exactly is it that serves as the object of consciousness, and what the presence of the object to the mind in consciousness amounts to. Representational theories gained little following, while the main thrust was toward direct realism, where the object of consciousness is typically an external real thing that somehow gains presence in thought.

### Knowledge of the Essence of the Soul

It was a commonplace in medieval philosophy that no one can be in doubt about the existence of one’s own soul. For example, Matthew of Aquasparta refers to Augustine’s *The City of God* (XI, 26) as having given the final refutation of the radical skeptical position by pointing out the certain knowledge of one’s own existence. There was, however, a widespread opinion about exactly how such self-knowledge is grounded and what it contains. Can one have direct self-consciousness in the sense of experiencing oneself as a mental subject, or is such knowledge mediated through experiences of mental acts so that the subject of the acts is not as such a possible object of consciousness? If the soul itself can be experienced, does this experience yield knowledge of the incorporeality of the soul or its separability from the body?

Before Aristotelian thought gained importance in the thirteenth-century universities, Latin authors followed the Neoplatonic tradition and affirmed that it is possible to turn intellectually inward to one’s mental self. According to an Augustinian argument that was often quoted in the Latin Middle Ages, the soul’s incorporeality

can be directly grasped in the immediate awareness of oneself that is unlike any awareness of anything corporeal. Also, Avicenna's "floating man" thought experiment was well known among the Latin thinkers. In this thought experiment, one is to imagine oneself as being created as if floating in air without any sensory experiences. As Avicenna claims, the thought experiment shows how one can know one's own existence without any knowledge of the body, and that therefore one should conceive of oneself as an incorporeal soul. Franciscan thinkers developed the epistemological aspects of this Augustinian–Avicennian understanding of the structure of self-consciousness.

Aristotelian thinkers like Thomas Aquinas claimed that the essence of the soul cannot be directly experienced, and even knowledge of the existence of one's own soul comes through experiencing the acts of the soul. Knowledge of the incorporeality of the soul comes through scientific study rather than direct experience. Some other thinkers followed Averroes' interpretation of the Aristotelian position, which implied an even stronger denial of direct self-consciousness.

### Knowledge of the Acts of the Soul

It was generally agreed in the Middle Ages that we perceive the acts of our own soul. When seeing a stone, say, we normally perceive the seeing and not only the stone. There were, however, disagreements concerning how this second-order perception ought to be understood and whether it is separable from the first-order seeing. Already Augustine recognized the implicit infinite regress resulting from perceiving the act by which one perceives one's own perceptual act, and welcomed it as showing even to the skeptics that we know not just something but an infinity of things, but the medieval authors did not take the infinite regress as a refutation of a theory involving second-order mental acts. William Ockham, for example, remarks that infinity is beyond human capacities. One perhaps can have a third-order perception of the perception that one sees, but

further levels of perception may be beyond the reach of the human mind.

Medieval authors often took up as a separate question whether habits or dispositions of the soul can be directly perceived. Normally, the answer is that they are perceived through acts of the soul.

As a part of his theory of intuitive cognition, John Duns Scotus took the view that we have indubitable knowledge of our own mental acts, because we perceive them directly and immediately. In his own theory, William Ockham made it clear that we perceive our own mental acts by second-order acts – that there are no literally reflexive acts which would not be directed at objects. These second-order acts are reflexive in the looser sense that they have first-order acts as their objects, thus yielding intuitive, certain knowledge of one's own mental acts.

Walter Chatton criticized Ockham's theory and claimed that all perceptual acts are experienced already through their presence in the soul. No second-order act would thus be needed for the first-order act to be experienced. Ockham, and his disciple Adam Wodeham, answered by making it clear that nothing can be experienced without a mental act taking it as an object, and interestingly pointed out that not all mental acts are conscious. Thus, if one sees a stone on a narrow path (and does not stumble on it), one notices and knows that one sees the stone only if one has a second-order act directed at the first-order perception of the stone. Thus, one must recognize the class of mental acts that remain nonconscious. Wodeham even presents the interesting case of a person thinking that he does not think. Otherwise, the examples found in the discussion are parallel to examples used in twentieth-century philosophy like stopping at red lights without noticing that one has seen any traffic lights.

### Cross-References

- ▶ [Adam Wodeham](#)
- ▶ [Augustine](#)
- ▶ [Ibn Rushd, Muḥammad ibn Aḥmad al-Ḥafīd \(Averroes\)](#)

- ▶ [Ibn Sīnā, Abū ‘Alī \(Avicenna\)](#)
- ▶ [Intentionality](#)
- ▶ [John Duns Scotus](#)
- ▶ [Matthew of Aquasparta](#)
- ▶ [Peter John Olivi](#)
- ▶ [Thomas Aquinas](#)
- ▶ [Walter Chatton](#)
- ▶ [William of Ockham](#)

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## Consequences, Theory of

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### Abstract

The theory of consequence is a branch of logic that studies dependence relations between propositions as a separate subject. Thus it is, in a way, more general than syllogistics. It rests on old foundations but, as a distinct field, it was born around 1300. Its most creative phase was 1320–1340 (Burley 1955, Ockham 1974, Buridan 1976), but it was elaborated afterward and possessed an established place in the logic books. A “consequence” from antecedent(s) to a consequent is probably best regarded as a

valid inference. According to its standard definition, a consequence holds when the antecedent is incompatible with the opposite of the consequent. Logicians sought general rules for such relations. Some rules were “proof-theoretical,” that is, one consequence follows from others; some rules concerned the validity of a single inference type. A lot of theorems of propositional logic were proved in this connection, and modal qualifications were soon added. A large part of the discussion was about various distinctions of consequences. They could be *ut nunc* (under present conditions) or, simply, without temporal qualifications. Simple consequences were either formal or material. Roughly, the earlier writers (Burley, Ockham) declare that formal consequences are valid because of the meanings of terms, but Buridan defines formal validity in the manner of modern logic, as the validity of all instances of the same logical form. This initiative was criticized, but finally many logicians utilized both definitions, one amounting to analyticity, the other to logical validity.

## History

The theory of consequence (*consequentia*) was a field of logic investigating how something follows (*sequor*) from something. “Consequence” was a broad notion that could be applied even to mean just inclusion between terms, but in logical theory it usually denoted the relation of entailment between propositions. This is obviously a crucial issue for logic, and both the Aristotelian syllogistics and the Stoic propositional logic provided backgrounds for the medieval development. The Latin term *consequentia* comes from Boethius, who was aware of both of these traditions and studied propositional inferences among “hypothetical syllogisms.”

A consequence consists of component propositions, the *antecedent* and the *consequent*, and some element marks them as so conjoined that the latter follows from the former. A modern reader will immediately ask what kind of relation is meant with this “following”: is the consequence

a conditional sentence, or an entailment, or an inference? But this question has proved extremely complicated, and perhaps no full answer is available, since the medieval classifications were not the same as ours and the authors differed in their opinions. Scholars have often emphasized the nature of medieval consequences as conditionals (if  $p$ , then  $q$ ); indeed, this is how medieval logicians often express their *consequentiae*, and hence they have been read as complex propositions. More recently a different interpretation has gained ground: at least in the best era of consequence theory, consequences seem to function like inferences ( $p$ ; thus  $q$ ). Note, for example, that an acceptable consequence is most often called, not true, but “good” (*bona*), or such a consequence “holds” (*tenet, valet*). And the study of consequences appears in its own place in treatises, separate from hypothetical propositions. Its nature was inferential, though even the close logical connection between conditionals and inferences was well known at least in the fourteenth century. However, consequential inferences could be expressed as conditionals if the conditional was to be read as “metalinguistic”: “if  $p$  is asserted, it is correct to assert  $q$ .” (Buridan’s preferred view seems to be like this.)

For simplicity, let us first give a rough outline of the external historical development and only then go to substantial matters.

After Boethius, the word *consequentia* was frequently used as a common name, though without further theoretical import. Closer inquiry began in the early twelfth century, when the *Dialectica* of Garlandus classified consequences according to the truth values of their propositions; he also stated explicitly the leading principle that no consequence with a true antecedent and a false consequent can be true. (He discussed these questions in the context of hypothetical propositions.) Abelard then made relations of consequence and inference a central subject in his *Dialectica*. There the theory had already achieved considerable philosophical sophistication. Abelard’s findings were radical, since he was clearly aware of the special logical character of necessary consequence and excluded all relations that were less binding.

Consequences did not figure as a distinct subject in the foremost textbooks of the thirteenth century, though they were applied and commented upon in some chapters; apparently the theme was well known. The definite genre of consequence theory was born after that. Its source is somewhat enigmatic; it has often been assumed that it originates from topics, but there is hardly any concrete evidence concerning possible links to the thirteenth-century topical literature. Anyway, the investigation of consequences by themselves began around 1300, and a few short treatises *De consequentiis* from that time have survived. The purpose of the emerging theory was to discuss especially consequence relations and to express their features in as general form as possible. The initiative clearly gained immediate response, since consequences were soon an established branch of logical inquiry. Its most creative period was perhaps 1320–1340, when three leading philosophers wrote, arguably, the most important contributions to it: Walter Burley’s *De puritate artis logicae* (two treatises); William Ockham’s *Summa logicae*, Part III-3; and John Buridan’s *Tractatus de consequentiis*.

After the central issues had thus been declared, the development of the theory caused some interesting philosophical debates. Broadly speaking, the English interpretation differed from that of Buridan’s continental followers (the “Parisian school”). The later fourteenth century achieved also considerable technical elaboration in the study of consequences, and the results of this process found their place in textbooks (e.g., in the influential books of Ralph Strode and Paul of Venice). The commenting and qualifying discussion continued during the whole fifteenth century, mainly in Italy. The last contributions were after 1500; then the authors were mainly interested in counterexamples and special cases.

## Rules

It is hardly possible to find any clear and universal definition of consequence. In fact, the medieval authors seem to presuppose the notion of “following” as fundamental, as it well may be. But all of

them seem to assume that there is some modal element: if the antecedent of a valid consequence is true, the consequent cannot be false. Among other things, this means that consequence is quite different from our material implication. It must not be simply identified with the modern strict implication either. (Notice, moreover, that only correct inferences were usually called consequences, though it was admitted that the term could also have a wider sense.)

During the heyday of consequence theory, a special problem arose concerning the existence of the components of a consequence. Since the medieval practice was to regard propositions as concrete linguistic acts, truth and falsehood could only belong to actual propositions, and a consequence could hold only if its two components were simultaneously present. This trouble was avoided with a counterfactual assumption: if the two components were formed simultaneously, then the required relationships would occur. Yet, there are problems: in Buridan's example "No proposition is negative, therefore no donkey is running," the antecedent would obviously be false when asserted, and the consequence would become correct, though it is surely incorrect. The strategy recommended by Buridan is to say that, in a correct consequence, things cannot be as the antecedent signifies, without being as the consequent signifies: a semantical interpretation by means of a step from propositions to states of affairs. But especially conjoined with self-reference, the condition of the existence of propositions was a source of numerous problems.

It is remarkable that consequence theory can consider even relations between unanalyzed propositions, without entering the structure of subjects and predicates. In this respect it resembles propositional logic and is simpler than the Aristotelian syllogistics. Burley states, indeed, that propositional consequence rules must be utilized in all logic, and he places consequence theory before syllogistics, because syllogisms are just a species of consequences. Most writers do not say this equally explicitly, though they often proceed in the same order. And even in Burley's case, it would be quite mistaken to claim that he builds predicate logic upon propositional logic in the

modern sense. (Note, however, that from the case of syllogisms it is easy to see that the antecedent can include several propositions.)

The theory of consequences aimed at finding some universal rules about consequence relations. What were, then, these laws? Let us designate the relation with  $\rightarrow$ . Interestingly, a number of rules were about relations between different consequences, about proper steps from one consequence to another. (This is one context where it is best to regard the consequences as inferences and to think that the rules are about the universal validity of some inference forms.) These rules have therefore been occasionally called "proof-theoretical." In other words, such rules concerned the conduct of inference. One such universal rule was if  $P \rightarrow Q$  and  $Q \rightarrow R$ , then  $P \rightarrow R$ . (This can be generalized to what is now known as the "cut rule.") Another central rule was that of contraposition: if  $P \rightarrow Q$ , then  $\neg Q \rightarrow \neg P$ . These two recur constantly in the texts. Burley, Ockham, and Buridan did not mention the fundamental modus ponens and modus tollens among consequence rules, but later, for instance, Strode began his exposition by stating these two with perfect elegance.

A different type of rules simply declared that a certain single inference form was universally valid. For instance, the consequence from "All S are P" to the particular "Some S is P" was valid, because the universal proposition had existential import, according to the medieval conception. Likewise, many consequences were considered valid because of the connection between "superior" and "inferior." For example, the consequence from "Every animal is running" to "Every man is running" is valid, since the subject term in the antecedent is superior to the subject term of the consequent. The study of such relations is connected to the semantical doctrine of suppositions of terms. No authors attempted to list an exhaustive array of present-day propositional tautologies as consequential rules, but a few basic principles occurred in this function. Thus, Burley already proved De Morgan's laws as consequence rules. He presents them as immediate corollaries of his rule: "The formal element that is affirmed in one contradictory must be denied in the other."

Therefore, if  $\neg(P \ \& \ Q)$  and  $P$ , then  $\neg Q$ , that is, if  $\neg(P \ \& \ Q)$  then  $\neg P \ \vee \ \neg Q$ . Such absolutely elementary tautologies of propositional logic as  $P \ \& \ Q \ \rightarrow \ P$ ,  $P \ \rightarrow \ P \ \vee \ Q$  do not appear among consequence rules; instead, there are rules about inference from conjunctive to simple terms and from simple to disjunctive terms.

Authors who wrote comprehensively about consequences had obviously systematic purposes, which they expressed by first laying down primary rules and then proving derived rules, which were occasionally even called theorems. The proofs could be long and detailed. However, the process did not amount to a calculus in any modern sense, since the principles of derivation were not spelled out beforehand. They were chosen case by case. Consequence treatises also listed examples of erroneous consequence rules: rules that resembled correct rules but produced fallacies.

During the fourteenth century, consequence theory was enriched with modal considerations. An increasing space was given to consequences with necessary or possible antecedents. To take the most elementary example, when the antecedent is necessary, the consequent is necessary too. At the same time the correct formulation of modal syllogisms was debated, and modal consequences reflect similar issues. The final addition was that of epistemic operators. Strode already gave a set of rules for consequences concerning knowledge, doubt, and understanding, and fifteenth-century authors then added more attitude operators, like belief. The various modal qualifications multiplied the number of given rules.

The first theorists said that the consequence holds because the negation (or “opposite”) of the consequent is repugnant to the antecedent. The “repugnance” was then explained with a modal condition about the necessary relation. The nature of this necessity disturbed logicians somewhat, and they referred to current modal theories. After the birth of possible-worlds semantics, Buridan offered one particularly interesting principle: if one proposition can have more causes of truth, that is, verifying states of affairs, than another, but not conversely, the former follows from the latter.

## Philosophical Interpretation

The most interesting part of consequence theory for present-day readers is perhaps the discussion about various kinds of consequence. Logicians always gave much attention to such distinctions of types. Usually the first distinction was drawn between consequences *ut nunc* (“as-of-now”) and simpliciter. It stems from Boethius, but its precise meaning caused confusion.

A consequence  $P \ \rightarrow \ Q$  held simply if it was valid always without temporal qualifications and as-of-now if  $P$  and the opposite of  $Q$  were incompatible only now, or alternatively, for a certain period. The consequence is thus valid *ut nunc* if the antecedent cannot now be true without the consequent, under the present conditions. Simple consequences were studied more, and they are more important than the temporally determined ones, but modern scholars have shown great interest in consequence *ut nunc*. The reason is that, as formulated for instance by Ockham, it reminds of the modern truth-functional material implication. Yet it is probable that even consequence *ut nunc* is essentially modal. Mere truth of the consequent does not suffice to make the consequence valid, but something more is required, since some propositions that are now true could, under present conditions, be false. Examples of this depend on modal theories, but at least propositions about future contingents as consequents can lead to such situations – the temporal import of “now” must be taken seriously. Keeping strictly to one single moment, the outcome can amount to material implication. During the fifteenth century, the role of *ut nunc* declined.

On the other hand, another issue kept its full importance, that is, the question about formality and materiality. This is founded on the conviction that even valid consequences can be valid for different reasons, some for more remarkable reasons than others. Let us consider the basic definition that the antecedent and the opposite of the consequent are repugnant or incompatible. What can be the explanation of such repugnance? Obviously, it often results from the contents of the propositions in question: the natures or essences of the mentioned things are such that the



antecedent and the opposite of the consequent are in conflict. This was noted by the thirteenth-century logicians who said, like Kilwardby, that this consequence was “natural.” But there existed even other cases where the repugnance was undeniable but had nothing to do with the contents of the propositions, with the natures of things, and here they spoke about accidental consequence.

We see the meaning of this distinction when we look at the doctrine of Burley which preserves basically the same scheme. For him, a consequence holds naturally when the antecedent “includes” the consequent, whereas the consequence “a man is a donkey, thus you are sitting” is only accidental because it involves no internal connection between the propositions. Attempting to get further, he introduced the notions of formal and material consequence, which were to become generally used. According to him, consequences are formal, when they depend either on logical theorems or on formal relations of inclusion between terms; otherwise they are material. This implies that “a man is a donkey, thus you are sitting” would be only material, but so would the consequence “Socrates is sitting, thus Socrates is not running” be as well. The incompatibility of man and donkey, sitting and running, are no formal conceptual features. Burley is possibly utilizing the Scotistic doctrine of formalities, but his presentation is rather vague.

Later, authors used and explicated the distinction between formal and material in very different ways. Ockham’s characteristic idea is to claim that consequences are valid because of “mediums,” which are either “external” general logical rules or some “intrinsic” principles which are more like additional premises and true because of the meanings of the terms in the propositions. Both cases can produce formal consequences: “Socrates is sitting, thus Socrates is not running” is formal for him, and so are syllogisms as well. On the other hand, at least “a man is a donkey, thus there is no God” is a material consequence. The reason is that the external rule guaranteeing its validity becomes applicable only because of the repugnant particular terms “man” and “donkey.” Ockham hints toward the notion of logical form, but his text is here very brief.

The idea of logical form was then fully developed in Buridan’s logic. According to him, the form of a proposition consists of its structure of syncategorematic elements plus the distribution of categorematic elements. And as he defines it, “a consequence is formal if any proposition with similar form would, when stated, be valid.” This means that formally valid consequences hold merely because of the logical forms of the propositions and do not depend on what the categorematic elements are. A consequence is formally valid if all its substitution instances are valid. The same definition is encountered in modern logic. Formal consequences are sheer instances of strict logical theorems, whereas material consequences are valid because they could be completed to formal ones by adding necessary propositions as supplementary premises. (Hence, Buridan called them enthymematic, and his pupils called them imperfect.) “A man runs, thus an animal runs” is not formal, since the substitution instance “A horse walks, thus a wood walks” is not valid, but it is materially valid since the addition of “Every man is an animal” leads to a formal consequence.

Buridan’s conception is a remarkable achievement in the history of formal logic. Some followers embraced it, such as Pseudo-Scotus in his famous logic commentary, Marsilius of Inghen, and Albert of Saxony. But it did not win general acceptance; on the contrary, critics argued that it did not capture the point of logical consequence, which was in entailment by conceptual inclusion. Actually, it became customary to see the formality of consequences as a matter of inclusion relations (analyticity). It has been argued that such an interpretation of consequence is psychologistic, but this is not necessary. Apparently the important writers were not mainly interested in psychology but in the contents of conceptual forms; that is why they called the corresponding consequences formal. Expressly psychologistic positions developed only toward the end of the fifteenth century.

Gradually, a number of logicians understood that the two criteria concerned different things, two senses of formality. For example, Paul of Venice explains that a consequence is formal if the contradictory of the consequent is formally

incompatible with the antecedent (but his account of this formal incompatibility is not quite clear). On the other hand, a consequence is valid *de forma* if every consequence of the same logical form is valid. This distinction led to somewhat awkward labels like “formally formal,” that is, formal in both senses. The double characterization was elaborated during the fifteenth century by several logicians, such as Paul of Pergula.

One final point must be mentioned. The basic definition of consequence immediately implies that anything follows from an impossible antecedent (*ex impossibili quodlibet*), and equivalently, the necessary follows from everything. These are the “paradoxes of implication.” Abelard pointed them out and regarded them as so intolerable that he rejected the standard definition of consequence. But in the ensuing debate, the opinion of the “Parvipontani” who supported them came to prevail. In later literature these rules were normally accepted and sometimes even definitely defended. For most authors, they were basic examples of material consequences. This conviction faltered only in the psychologistic wave near 1500.

## Cross-References

- ▶ [Boethius](#)
- ▶ [John Buridan](#)
- ▶ [Paul of Venice](#)
- ▶ [Peter Abelard](#)
- ▶ [Ralph Strode](#)
- ▶ [Syncategoremata](#)
- ▶ [Walter Burley](#)
- ▶ [William of Ockham](#)

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## Contemplative Happiness and Civic Virtue

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### Abstract

According to medieval anthropology, man can reach his perfection through both moral virtue and contemplative life. This conception is developed in medieval commentaries on Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics*, in theological texts concerning the after-life and the beatific vision, and in texts concerning the secular-mendicant controversy.

Human perfection is a central concept in medieval anthropology. Like any other being, animate or inanimate, man is what he is thanks to a form. This form expresses the essence of the human being and realizes its fundamental characteristics. According to a tradition that goes back to late Antiquity, man is conceived as a two-sided

creature: he is a creature both material and spiritual, since he is composed of a body and a soul. As a spiritual creature, man is the less noble of all spiritual beings, inferior to God and the angels; as a material creature, man is the noblest of all material beings, superior to the inanimate things and to the irrational animals. As a corporeal creature, man has to dominate the passionate and irrational part of his mind; to achieve this, he needs to master moral and political virtues. As a spiritual creature, man has to try to improve the intellectual part of his mind through contemplation and philosophy. This conception stems from elements borrowed from Plato, Neoplatonism, and Augustine, and achieves its fullest development in commentaries on Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics* (first complete Latin translation a few years before 1250).

According to Aristotle, one can consider human life from two points of view. In so far as man is a social animal, he leads a political or active life, which requires him to exercise such moral virtues as justice, temperance, courage, liberality, etc. Nevertheless, absolutely speaking, the noblest activity of man is contemplation, realized through the use of intellectual virtues: leading the philosophical life improves the best part of the human being, the intellect, and brings him the purest and most complete form of happiness.

In their ethical writings, medieval thinkers examine the problematical question of the relation between active life and contemplative life, or in other words between the moral virtues and philosophical speculation.

The usual position taken on this problem, which accords with the views of Albert the Great and Thomas Aquinas, asserts that the active life is inferior to the contemplative, but that an active life prepares and eases the way to achieve the contemplative life. This position is frequently referred to with a saying quoted from Aristotle, *Phys.* VII: *in quiescendo namque et sedendo anima sciens fit et prudens*. The proper activity of the rational part of the soul, that is, contemplation and philosophy, is difficult if the passions of the irrational part of the soul (such as anger, desire, etc.) are not submissive to the rational part, and are not led by the right

rule (*orthos logos – recta ratio*) of the moral virtues.

But since the means is always inferior to the end, a contemplative life is always superior to an active life: for contemplation is an end that is self-defined.

Such is the view expressed for instance by Albert the Great (*Super Ethica* X, lect. 10–19; *Ethica* X, tract. II) and by Thomas of Aquinas (*Sent. lib. Eth. X*, 9–16; *Summa theologiae*, IIa IIae, qu. 179–182); it is also defended by the masters of arts, for instance in the *Nicomachen Ethics* commentaries of Giles of Rome (preserved in manuscript BnF lat. 16089) and Radulphus Brito.

During the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, an effort was made to assimilate this Aristotelian conception to Christian morals and anthropology. This resulted in several problems, which emerged in particular in the years preceding and following the Parisian condemnations of 1270 and 1277. Christian doctrine and anthropology consider that the purpose of our terrestrial life is merely to lead to the after-life; only in this after-life can mankind achieve its own perfection. According to this Christian conception, our life on earth is an imperfect one, in which the body and sin hold back the human being from perfection and happiness. In contrast with this conception, the Aristotelian conception does not postulate that the soul survives the body and hence does not take into account any form of after-life: according to this conception, man can attain perfection only in this life. The condemnation issued in 1277 is in part a reaction against this Aristotelian conception of human perfection: see especially proposition 157 (*Quod homo ordinatus quantum ad intellectum et affectum, sicut potest sufficienter esse per uirtutes intellectuales et alias morales de quibus loquitur philosophus in ethicis, est sufficienter dispositus ad felicitatem eternam*) and 176 (*Quod felicitas habetur in ista vita et non in alia*).

Although this problem is still being discussed, it can be stated that these propositions, expressed in such a plain manner, are nowhere to be found in the texts of the period that are known today. Still, they may be related to the ideas defended by

Boethius of Dacia in his famous *De summo bono* (a brief work in which the author praises the contemplative life and philosophy); they also may have been maintained in one or several commentaries on the *Nicomachean Ethics* that have since been lost. But the only extant commentary on the *Ethics*, which could possibly precede the condemnations (namely the *questiones* contained in MS Paris BnF lat. 14689, tentatively attributed to the Parisian master James of Douai) is far from defending such radical views; furthermore, the date of this commentary is very uncertain.

In the theological texts, the contemplative life is held superior to the active life on the basis of evangelical authority, Luke, 10, 41–42: *Martha Martha sollicita es et turbaris erga plurima, porro unum est necessarium; Maria optimam partem elegit quae non auferetur ab ea*. The canonical interpretation of this passage identifies Martha with the active life, and Mary with the contemplative. The *Glossa ordinaria* explains that the “best part,” chosen by Mary, shall not be taken back from her, since the contemplative life starts in this life but proceeds in the after-life; on the other hand, the active life, represented by Martha, ends with the death of the body. Mary is therefore praised by the Lord in so far as she has privileged the contemplative life.

During the second part of the thirteenth century, the confrontation between the active and contemplative lives became the object of numerous discussions in the context of the dispute between seculars (*praelati*) and mendicants (*religiosi*): seculars typically led an active life, while mendicants typically led a contemplative life.

In this debate, Henry of Ghent defended the idea that contemplation in its perfect state, that is the metaphysical contemplation of the blessed, is superior to action but that in this earthly life the good works of an active life are superior to contemplation (which at this point is necessarily imperfect), since meritorious acts contribute to the salvation of the soul and, thus, they produce the contemplation of the after-life.

Opposing Henry, Godfrey of Fontaines maintained that the debate over the type of life must be separated from the dispute between

seculars and mendicants: according to Godfrey, the *praelatus* must devote himself to contemplation as much as he can, and devote himself to the works of the active life only when the community he is in charge of needs it (*Quodl.* V, qu. 16; *Quodl.* XI, qu. 6; *Quodl.* XII, qu. 19–20).

## Cross-References

- ▶ [Albert the Great](#)
- ▶ [Boethius of Dacia](#)
- ▶ [Ethics](#)
- ▶ [Giles of Rome, Political Thought](#)
- ▶ [Godfrey of Fontaines](#)
- ▶ [Henry of Ghent](#)
- ▶ [Nicomachean Ethics, Commentaries on Aristotle's](#)
- ▶ [Parisian Condemnation of 1277](#)
- ▶ [Radulphus Brito](#)
- ▶ [Thomas Aquinas](#)

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## Corporation Theory

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### Abstract

Detailed medieval discussion of corporations began in the late twelfth century among the glossators of canon and Roman law. Although the concept of the corporation was later adopted, modified, challenged, and developed both by theologians and specialists in Aristotelian philosophy in the faculties of arts, it remained quintessentially a legal idea of fundamental importance in later medieval political debate. Canonists in particular were

confronted by practical difficulties arising from collegiate churches. Corporation theory designed to make sense of such institutions, and the law governing them was then applied by advocates of conciliar government to the relationship between the pope and the universal church and was integral to the juristic analysis of other communities such as kingdoms and cities.

Roman law provided the technical starting point in the shape of the *universitas*, traditionally translated as “corporation.” The classical lawyers’ principal interest had been the procedural status of collectivities such as municipalities, particularly how such a collectivity could initiate or react to a legal challenge. In the course of their discussions, the classical jurists raised or implied a number of further questions, which would play a vital role in medieval jurisprudence and political theory. Undoubtedly, their most important legacy was contained under the rubric of *Digest* 3.4: (*Actions in the Name of Any Corporate Body*, or *Quod cuiusque universitatis nomine vel contra eam agatur*, in the *Littera Boloniensis* or vulgate version of the *Corpus iuris civilis* in use at the medieval schools). Corporations were not willingly recognized by Roman law (D. 3.4.1pr). Tax farmers, exploiters of mines and salt marshes, and providers of public services such as Roman bakers or Tiber sailors were all organizations that were “permitted to have a *corpus*.” However, the *Digest* also contained passages where things in public ownership were said to belong to a corporation (D. 1.8.1pr) and where the corporation was closely associated with the *res publica* in the sense of a city or municipality (D. 1.8.6.1; D. 3.4.1.1; D. 3.4.2). This capacity of the *universitas* to express a collectivity of public significance was greatly exploited and extended by medieval jurists in their glosses and commentaries on Roman law. The most dramatic example of this was the attribution of corporate powers to the entire Roman people by Johannes Bassianus, who taught at Bologna and Mantua in the late twelfth century. The immediate context was an exegete’s problem: Roman law seemed to ascribe sole legislative

powers to the emperor (*Code*, 1.14.12) at the same time as maintaining that the Senate could also make law (D. 1.3.9). Bassianus’ solution, which became famous thanks to its adoption by his pupil Azo (d. 1220/1229), was that the emperor was the only person who could legislate on his own and was in that sense superior to his subjects as long as the latter were understood as discrete individuals (*singuli*); however, taken collectively as members of a corporation (*universi*), the Romans still had the power to legislate. Since Roman law located the origins of imperial authority in a concession of governmental powers by the Roman people known to the compilers of the *Corpus iuris* as the *Lex regia*, then perhaps by corporate action that original act could also be revoked. The canonist Laurentius Hispanus (d. 1248) assumed this in pointing out that the emperor could be deposed because he received his jurisdiction from the people, whereas the pope could not be deposed by the college of cardinals because he held his authority by the word of the Lord. The contrast between the corporate and the single or private on which Bassianus’ distinction turns was reflected in the way the glossators of the Roman law handled a closely related question. They argued that the consent of private individuals could not establish someone as a judge; jurisdiction in the sense of forensic authority could only be created by a corporate act of consent (C. 3.13.3). The first statement was derived directly from the law itself, but the second was purely glossatorial and testifies to the willingness of the medieval jurists to deploy corporate notions. Accursius (d. 1263), the author of the standard gloss to the Roman law, went on to stress that such a judge received jurisdiction purely through his election by the corporation, although it remained true that if he wished to use that jurisdiction, he would still require the approval of a superior officer. For the jurists who followed Accursius, especially in the early fourteenth century, much would depend on the consequences if approval by a superior were not forthcoming. The contemporary political background against which many of these ideas were first ventilated was after all that of northern and central Italy, where autonomous cities routinely



defied, ignored, or usurped imperial authority both to legislate on their own and to pass coercive judgment over their own citizens.

In entering his proviso about the actual exercise rather than the mere possession of jurisdiction mentioned above, Accursius cited two further passages in Roman law (Novel 15pr and § 1), but it is hard to believe he was not at the same time thinking of another set of authorities and problems entirely. For although the technically juristic vocabulary of corporation theory was ultimately derived from the Roman law, it was not in fact the glossators of Roman law who made the most of it, at least in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, but the canonists. The archetypal structure within the institutional church was the collegiate church, which by the later twelfth century was almost everywhere composed of the bishop and his chapter. In an earlier tradition, represented in Gratian's *Decretum*, the bishop was not merely the spouse of his church but also its representative, such that the bishop was said to be in his church and the church in its bishop (C. 7 q. 1 c. 9). But the nuances and complexities identified by Gratian himself, together with the burgeoning commentary both on this foundational text and subsequent papal letters or "decretals," rendered such a summary wholly inadequate. As a result of intensive legal scholarship, papal legislation, and yet more legal reflection on this new papal law, the bishop emerged by the early to mid-thirteenth century as the recipient of a legally articulated and tightly regulated delegation by his chapter. In his commentary on the Decretals of Gregory IX, the future Pope Innocent IV (*reg.* 1243–1254) argued that rectors chosen by corporations held jurisdiction, not the corporations themselves. Innocent's attribution of jurisdiction to the head rather than to the members of a corporation was primarily an intervention in the vexed question of bishop and chapter. Bishops were supposed to be elected by their chapters, but they were not supposed to take up the full active governance of their diocese until confirmation, consecration, and installation by their ecclesiastical superior, who in most cases would be a metropolitan or the pope himself. In the meantime, the chapter disposed of some powers of governance.

Thirteenth-century canonists were compelled by the exigencies of daily life to resolve the problem of where different authorities lay in an ecclesiastical corporation composed of head and members, bishop, and chapter. This question arose in its sharpest form during an episcopal vacancy but had continued relevance in a variety of other situations besides. Could a bishop bind his church without obtaining the consent of the canons, for example, and if so, on what business? Innocent IV's answer that the jurisdiction of an ecclesiastical corporation was concentrated in its head implied extensive powers for the bishop, but his was only a minority opinion. Moreover, it did not sit easily with other comments by the same jurist to the effect that jurisdiction was transferred to the chapter at the bishop's death and that voluntary alienations of ecclesiastical property were invalid without the consent of the chapter. Commentators on Gratian's *Decretum* ("decretists") had recognized from the mid-twelfth century that the goods of a church were not owned by its bishop, but by the church itself, understood either as the clergy of the diocese or even the congregation of believers subject to that church. This basic truth could not be ignored when, say, alienation of ecclesiastical goods was discussed, and explains why even Innocent IV was unable to present an entirely consistent picture of relations between bishop and chapter.

Innocent's pupil Henricus de Segusio (d. 1271), known by his later cardinal's title as Hostiensis, adopted a distinction originally put forward by the author of the standard gloss to the Decretals of Gregory IX, Bernardus Parmensis (d. 1266). Bernardus had differentiated between rights belonging solely to the chapter, those belonging solely to the bishop, and those held by bishop and chapter together. The results in Hostiensis' more thorough treatment of the problem were complicated by the different capacities in which a bishop interacted with his chapter. When the matter at issue concerned only the rights of the chapter, he voted simply as a canon; when the business affected everyone, he sat as prelate over the canons; when it pertained to him alone he not merely sat as prelate but could even act against the advice and wishes of the canons. The principle

was clearly established that where the matter touched everyone, the bishop had to consult his chapter. Hostiensis characterized the role of the bishop as that of a general proctor (*procurator generalis*) of his chapter, able to conduct administrative and judicial business simply on the strength of the ordinary jurisdiction bestowed on him at election, with no need for further mandate or commission on a case-by-case basis. When Hostiensis declared that the corporation made the ordinary judge (*iudex ordinarius*) by electing him, he was not just reflecting comparable ideas among the Roman lawyers, even though election by a corporation played a prominent role in their analysis of ordinary jurisdiction. Rather, he confirmed and stabilized a tradition of canonist scholarship, which went back at least a generation to the works of Tancred (d. 1236) and Laurentius, both of whom had specified that a collectivity conferred ordinary jurisdiction by electing its own lord or prelate. By combining the various comments of his predecessors into a systematic whole, Hostiensis provided the first fully articulated explanation of the ecclesiastical corporation. From then on, the majority opinion among canonists was that a bishop's jurisdiction came from the corporation that elected him, not from the subsequent ceremony in which he was raised to the higher sacramental rank of bishop. Otto von Guericke's famous criticism that canonist corporation theory opened the way to authoritarianism failed to take account of this by focusing on the metaphysical principle of unity of a corporation – never a canonist interest – rather than the legal source of jurisdiction within a corporation.

The distinction between the powers the prelates enjoyed by ordination, and the powers conferred on them by the corporate act of election, familiar to canonists since the twelfth century, assumed amplified importance in the first years of the fourteenth century when it was applied to the pope by the Dominican friar John of Paris (d. 1306) in his treatise *On Royal and Papal Power* (*De potestate regia ac papali*). This analysis owed most of its key elements to the canonists' meditations on the relationship between bishop and chapter and provided the main outlines of a conciliar theory, over a century

before the Council of Constance met to end the Great Schism. As we have seen, canonists since the twelfth century had been in no doubt that prelates were not the owners of the property of their churches. In conformity with this tradition, John characterized the prelate as an administrator or steward of ecclesiastical property; he took the tradition an important step further by asserting this of the pope, who thus became the general administrator rather than the owner of the universal church's property. Thirteenth-century canonists had also left important indications and hints about the relationship between pope and cardinals. Hostiensis had tried to provide a more structured, synthetic explanation, according to which the papal plenitude of power devolved on the cardinals during a papal vacancy. Under normal circumstances, Hostiensis argued the cardinals shared in the pope's fullness of power as parts of his body; the image was owed to Roman law, which presented the senators as parts of the emperor's body (C. 9.8.5pr), but the substance of the idea was more an extrapolation from the relationship between bishop and chapter at the diocesan level as Hostiensis and his canonist predecessors had construed it. Hostiensis went even further by hypothesizing that should the college of cardinals be wiped out during a papal vacancy, then their authority would devolve to the Roman clergy and people, who ought then to summon a general council of the church to elect a new pope. John of Paris' precise innovation lay in his claim that the cardinals held their authority even under normal circumstances as representatives of the universal church. Christ had certainly established the office of papacy on Peter, alone among the apostles as whose successors bishops in the modern church were routinely regarded. But the choice of incumbent pertained, John argued, to the church at large. Roman lawyers had long argued that the Roman Empire had been willed by God but actually created by the Roman people by means of the *Lex regia*. Something similar was now happening to the church under John of Paris' merciless combination of canon law with the Aristotelian conviction that governmental power – jurisdiction – was a natural quantity inherent in every self-sufficient perfect

community. What was of jurisdiction was not, he argued in a brilliant passage, beyond the normal course of human affairs but reached the ruler – in this case, the pope – in a certain sense naturally. What was bestowed by human agency could, in John’s view, be withdrawn by the same means. This was all the more significant in that from their earliest commentaries on Gratian’s *Decretum* onward, canonists had upheld the theoretical possibility that a pope could be judged and if necessary deposed for heresy, a category of misdemeanor which jurisprudence had enlarged to include persistent scandalous behavior to the obvious detriment of the church and the faith. John’s solution was not entirely satisfactory because it is hard to accept the creation of the papal office by Christ in person as just another example of nature’s most important process as outlined in Aristotle’s *Politics*. But John’s thesis combined most of the elements which, under pressure of the Great Schism, would issue in the conciliar theory, most of which were, to repeat, the fruit of canonist scholarship. The new ingredient was Aristotelian naturalism, allowing John to imply, in his comment about jurisdiction not being beyond the normal course of human affairs, what became a commonplace by the mid-fourteenth century and a cliché by the fifteenth: the “political” community was a corporation, which contained by its very nature jurisdiction within itself; the universal church was no exception. This contention rapidly became a load-bearing element in political polemic beyond the legal discourse, as the works of William of Ockham, Marsilius of Padua, Nicholas Oresme, and John Gerson demonstrate. It could be challenged, but not ignored. But the key argument had only been enhanced, not inspired, by the Aristotelian corpus. This was the recognition, given focus in the magisterial systematization of canonist conciliar doctrine by Franciscus Zabarella (d. 1417), that the jurisdiction, which constituted the pope’s plenitude of power and hence his preeminence over other prelates, subsisted in the church as its foundation and was detained by the pope only in a ministerial capacity. With that realization, the distinction noted in the early thirteenth century by Laurentius

Hispanus between the emperor and the pope ceased to apply.

The resolution and legal articulation of the relationship between bishop and chapter was one of the most urgent and arduous tasks facing canonists from the later twelfth century onward. For them, the corporate nature of collegiate foundations was a given, whereas the precise structure of such corporations and its implications for the daily governance of the church were unfortunately anything but. Scholarship and supplementary papal legislation had to fill out the picture. For Romanists, by contrast, the *universitas* and the questions it raised might more properly be said to have constituted an opportunity.

In a famous gloss to *Digest* 3.4.7, Accursius had identified a corporation with its members (gl. *non debetur*). His conclusion was strange because it seemed to undermine one of the main purposes of the corporation. From the way the gloss is structured, moreover, it is not certain that this was Accursius’ own opinion rather than just an argument put forward by other people, which he included for pedagogic reasons. Either way, other glossators disagreed. Roffredus Beneventanus (d. after 1243) related how as an advocate in the Tuscan city of Arezzo he had persuaded the court to put an entire subject town under ban and to compensate the plaintiff from that community’s common property, even though the town was now divided between factions, the consuls who had contracted on behalf of the town no longer existed, and the offices they had filled were defunct. Roffredus argued that the *universitas* nevertheless remained liable although the town was functionally no longer a town. The example shows how robust the *universitas* could be as a bearer of legal capacity entirely distinct from that of its members. About a century later, Bartolus of Sassoferrato (d. 1357) carefully explained that by fiction of law, a *universitas* represented a single person distinct from the persons of its members. Philosophers and canonists denied this, he continued, and admitted that in a certain sense they were right: the whole did not differ in reality from its parts. Innocent IV had indeed described such a person as *persona ficta* and consequently denied it any legal capacity not

possessed by its members. Fictiveness was by contrast no obstacle for Bartolus and the other Romanists, but the precise advantage of the corporate person. As he went on to explain, by fiction of law the person represented by a *universitas* outlived its members. Bartolus referred in support of his claim to *Digest* 46.1.22, which only says that a municipality, a court of decurions, and a *societas* all function *vice personae* or “in the place of a person.” (Cities are also taken as private persons in *Digest* 50.16.16 and 46.1.22.) A major advantage of ascribing personality to a corporation was that it rendered more accessible the type of solution to otherwise intractable problems that Roffredus had advocated. It was also capable of some surprising extensions. Bartolus’ pupil Baldus de Ubaldis (d. 1400) applied the *universitas* so conceived to kingdoms: the *res publica* of the kingdom was distinct from the people of the kingdom and constituted a royal dignity that resided in the king for as long as he lived. If “the person of the king is the organ and instrument of that intellectual and public person,” and if “that intellectual and public person is that which is the principal source of action,” then it ought to be possible to ascribe sempiternity to some acts of the ruler, which lawyers had for years attempted to uphold against the strong counterargument that no ruler could be bound by his predecessor. Such acts might include contracts and enfeoffments, because a case could now be made for the principle of noncontradiction based on the identity of the contracting or enfeoffing *universitas* (*dignitas, res publica*) despite the change of ruler.

Medieval corporation theory was adopted and exploited wholesale by Calvinist polemicists in the 1570s and by their counter-reformation opponents. Via such works as Theodore Beza’s *On the Right of Magistrates* (*Du droit des magistrats, De iure magistratum*, 1574), the anonymous *Defences Against Tyrants* (*Vindiciae contra tyrannos*, 1579), François Hotman’s *Francogallia* (three versions: 1573, 1576, 1586) and William Barclay’s *On the Kingdom and Royal Power* (*De regno et regali potestate*, 1600) the notion of the corporate people as the source and residual repository of jurisdiction also survived to inspire and

revolt English and Scottish thinkers of the seventeenth century.

## Cross-References

- ▶ [Canon Law](#)
- ▶ [Civil \(Roman\) Law](#)
- ▶ [Conciliarism](#)
- ▶ [John of Paris](#)

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## Abstract

Cristoforo Landino (1424–1498) was a leading humanist in Medici Florence; he was known as an accomplished Latin poet and an enthusiastic proponent of the Italian vernacular. He lectured on Latin and Italian literature at the Florentine *Studio* from 1458 to 1497, numbering among his students Marsilio Ficino, the most important Renaissance translator, commentator, and promoter of Plato. Though not himself a professional philosopher, Landino took a keen interest in philosophy, especially – though not exclusively – Platonism. He produced three philosophical dialogues: *De anima*, *Disputationes Camaldulenses*, and *De vera nobilitate*. Largely derivative, not only of classical authors but also of medieval and Renaissance thinkers, these three works, written in elegant Ciceronian Latin, dealt with philosophical themes such as the immortality of the soul,

the superiority of contemplation to action, the supreme good, and the primacy of virtue in determining nobility. In addition, he drew on various Platonic notions, mostly to do with ethics, in his allegorical interpretation of Virgil's *Aeneid* and his commentary on Dante's *Divine Comedy*, both of which were highly influential; and in this way he contributed to the Renaissance revival of Platonism.

Cristoforo Landino was born in Florence in 1424; his family, originally from Pratovecchio in the Casentino, was of modest means. In his early youth, he pursued legal studies in Volterra, earning a doctorate at the age of 15; however, he disliked the law and returned in 1439 to Florence, where he attended lectures in the *studia humanitatis* given by Carlo Marsuppini (1398–1453) and also came under the influence of other prominent humanists such as Leonardo Bruni (1369–1444). After Marsuppini's death, he sought to take over his chair in the Florentine *Studio*, but he had several rivals for the post, each supported by different factions within the city. In the end, the various disciplines covered by Marsuppini were divided between three scholars: the Byzantine John Argyropoulos (c. 1415–1487) taught philosophy; Francesco da Castiglione (c. 1420–1484) lectured on Greek; and Landino, who was a specialist neither in philosophy nor in Greek, gained the chair of rhetoric and poetry in 1458, with the powerful support of Piero de' Medici (1416–1469). In his long and successful career at the *Studio*, which lasted until 1497, the year before his death, Landino lectured mainly on the Roman poets (Virgil, Horace, Juvenal, Persius), and also on Cicero's *Tusculan Disputations* and *Familiar Letters*, and on the *Divine Comedy* of Dante and the *Canzoniere* of Petrarch. His lectures formed the basis of the line-by-line commentaries, which he published in Latin on Horace (1482) and Virgil (1488), and in Italian on Dante (1481); all three were frequently reprinted and influenced the later critical tradition of these authors. Landino took the view that the great poets – above all Virgil and Dante, and also Juvenal – included

philosophical truths in their writings; however, they hid these under the veil of metaphors and allegories, which he thought was the task of learned commentators like him to uncover. These truths, which were usually closely connected to Platonism, centered on ethics, with the poet seen as deploying his art in order to inspire readers to seek virtue and shun vice.

In his own Latin poetry, he imitated the Roman poets Catullus, Horace, and Propertius, and also the Italian verse of Petrarch – Landino's main major collection was entitled *Xandra*, after the woman who played the role of Laura in his poetry. The first book, begun around 1443, was originally dedicated to the humanist and architect Leon Battista Alberti (1404–1472), who later became a relative by marriage when, in 1459, Landino wed Lucrezia di Alberto di Adovardo Alberti. The final version of the collection, in three books, was rededicated to Piero de' Medici and completed around 1459 or 1460. Apart from amatory verses to *Xandra*, it includes poems in praise of the Medici and of Landino's circle of humanist friends: Carlo Marsuppini, Leonardo Bruni, Poggio Bracciolini (1380–1459), and Bartolomeo Scala (1430–1497).

Like Alberti, Landino was a champion of the vernacular. He published two Italian translations from Latin: Pliny's *Natural History* in 1476 and the *Sforziad* of Giovanni Simonetta (1420–1490) in 1490. He also composed a *Formulario di lettere e di orazioni in volgare*, which was first printed in 1485.

Following a well-established tradition among Florentine humanists, Landino attempted, in 1456, to enter the Chancery, the highest echelon of the Republic's civil service. He did not succeed, but in 1467 he attained the lower post of chancellor of the Parte Guelfa, and in 1483 he became a secretary to the *Signoria*, the ruling body of Florence. Landino's involvement in civic duties, which he carried in parallel to his career as a university professor, confirms his commitment to the view, put forward in his philosophical works, that the best life combines both action and



contemplation and that humanist intellectuals had a responsibility to act as advisors to those who governed.

Among Landino's students was Marsilio Ficino (1433–1499), who later became a close friend. In 1456, Ficino dedicated his treatise *Institutiones ad Platonicam disciplinam*, now lost, to Landino, who impressed on the budding Platonist the need to study Greek in order to gain access to the original sources, thus setting Ficino on the course that would lead to his publication of the first complete translation of Plato into Latin (1484) and his emergence as the key figure in Renaissance Platonism. In his commentary on the *Symposium*, completed in 1469 and written in the form of a dialogue, Ficino cast Landino as one of the interlocutors, given the task of interpreting the famous speech of Aristophanes.

Landino himself composed three philosophical dialogues. The earliest, *De anima*, written around 1471–1472, features three interlocutors – himself, Marsuppini and the mathematician Paolo Toscanelli (1397–1482) – who discuss a variety of issues concerning the soul over the three days of Easter. Landino broadly structures the treatise on Aristotle's *De anima*: Book I deals with the nature of the soul and its origin; Book II with the faculties of the soul that interact with the body; and Book III with the mind, the intellectual virtues, and the immortality of the soul. As one would expect of a humanist, he draws on a range of classical, Christian, and Renaissance sources; more surprisingly, he makes extensive use of works by medieval scholastics, especially the commentary on *De anima* by Albert the Great (McNair 1993). Interestingly, Landino's account of the Platonic doctrine of the soul relies more on Macrobius, Albert the Great, and the treatise *In calumniatorem Platonis*, published a few years earlier in 1469, of Cardinal Bessarion (1403/1408–1472), than on the translations of Plato by Ficino, which may not yet have been in circulation (McNair 1992).

By the time Landino wrote his second philosophical dialogue, *Disputationes Camaldulenses*, now dated to around 1474 (Fubini 1996), he had

gained access to Ficino's translations of Plato and also to his *Theologia Platonica*, completed in 1474. The dialogue, which was first printed in 1480, is set in the summer of 1468 at the monastery of Camaldoli. Landino again includes himself among the interlocutors, along with Ficino and other Florentine intellectuals; but the main speakers in the first half are Alberti and Lorenzo de' Medici (1449–1492), who discuss the relative merits of action and contemplation, in Book I, and the ultimate good, in Book II. Although in the debate, Alberti, the spokesman for contemplation, triumphs over Lorenzo, the advocate of action, both sides accept that, in reality, the best life will be a combination of the two, as represented by the dialogue's dedicatee, Federico da Montefeltro (1422–1482), Duke of Urbino, a successful military commander, whose leisure moments were devoted to study. A discussion of the competing theories of the ultimate good leads to the conclusion that it lies in the soul's cognition of God in the afterlife, a position that is supported by arguments liberally borrowed from Book III of Thomas Aquinas' *Summa contra gentiles*. These themes are picked up in the second half of the dialogue, in which Alberti delivers an extended Neoplatonic interpretation of Books I–VI of the *Aeneid* as an allegory of the soul's arduous ascent from pleasure (Troy), through political activity (Carthage), avoiding moral hazards such as greed (Harpies) and ambition (Polyphemus), so that it can reach its final destination of true wisdom (Italy).

The last of Landino's philosophical dialogues, *De vera nobilitate*, is set in 1469 but could not have been written before 1487, since it refers to Ficino as a canon of the Florentine cathedral, an office he obtained in that year. Unlike his other two dialogues, the interlocutors are not friends and associates of Landino, but instead are given fictional Greek names: Aretophilus ("lover of virtue"), who is poor but learned, and his wealthy patron, Philotimus ("lover of honor"). In line with earlier humanist treatments of true nobility, the argument is overwhelming weighted in favor of virtue, in particular, the virtues of the mind and soul.

## Cross-References

- ▶ Albert the Great
- ▶ Aristotelianism in the Greek, Latin, Syriac, Arabic, and Hebrew Traditions
- ▶ Dante Alighieri
- ▶ Petrarch
- ▶ Platonism, Renaissance
- ▶ Thomas Aquinas
- ▶ Virtue and Vice

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# D

## Dante Alighieri

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### Abstract

Dante Alighieri (1265–1321) was a poet whose work was influenced both by his political experiences and by his study of philosophy. Born in Florence, he was educated in grammar and rhetoric and reports in his *Convivio* that he studied philosophy at the “schools of the religious,” probably the *studia* at Florence’s Franciscan and Dominican houses. Until his exile, he was an active participant in civic life, as a guild member, communal councilor, and prior. He was exiled in early 1302 after his faction, the Whites, was replaced by the Blacks (with the not-so-covert support of Boniface VIII). He never returned to Florence, dying in Ravenna in 1321.

Except for the early collection of lyric poems, the *Vita nuova*, most of his works were composed during his exile. *Convivio* is an unfinished encyclopedic work on human knowledge. *Monarchia* argues for a single universal ruler, who should be the Roman emperor and not the pope. The *Divine Comedy* brings together many of these philosophical and political themes, transformed into a masterpiece of imaginative literature.

Dante Alighieri (1265–1321) was a poet whose work was influenced both by his political experiences and by his study of philosophy. He was born in 1265 in Florence to Alighiero Alighieri, possibly a moneylender, and Bella degli Abati. He was educated in grammar and rhetoric and began his literary career by composing lyric poems in the *dolce stil nuovo* (“sweet new style”), many of them inspired by his beloved Beatrice, thought to be Beatrice Portinari, although he contracted marriage to Gemma Donati in 1277, with whom he had four children. After Beatrice’s death in 1290, Dante compiled 31 of his lyric poems into the collection *La vita nuova*, interspersing them with a prose commentary that narrates the transformation of his relationship with Beatrice from conventional courtly love of the earthly Beatrice to a purely intellectual love of her blessed spirit. Also in the 1290s, Dante tells us in the unfinished *Convivio* (*Banquet*) of 1304–1307, he turned for consolation to the study of philosophy *ne le scuole de li religiosi e a le disputazioni de li filosofanti* (“in the schools of the religious and the disputations of the philosophers”; *Conv.* 2.12.7.). These “schools of the religious” would have been the *studia* attached to the mendicant orders in Florence. His teacher at the Franciscan house, Santa Croce, was probably Peter Olivi, who exposed him to the Spiritual Franciscans’ criticism of church property, while the Dominican teacher at Santa Maria Novella, Remigio dei Girolami, familiarized him with Aristotelian ideas.

In addition to his early poetic efforts and philosophical explorations, Dante also participated in Florentine civic life. He fought in the battle of Campaldino against Arezzo in 1289 and joined the guild of *Medici e speziali* (doctors and pharmacists) in 1295, making him eligible to hold political office under the recently passed (1293) Ordinances of Justice. Dante sat on communal advisory bodies, including the *Consiglio dei Trentasei del Capitano del Popolo* (Council of the Thirty-six of the Captain of the People) from November 1295 to April 1296, and the *Consiglio del Cento* (Council of the Hundred) twice, in 1296 and 1301. He served a 2-month term as one of the seven priors, the executive body in the Florentine commune, from June 15 to August 15, 1300. In a failed attempt to defuse factional tensions in Florence, Dante and his fellow priors exiled the leaders of both the Black and White parties. The subsequent priorate recalled the Whites, and the still-exiled Blacks turned for help to Pope Boniface VIII, who arranged with Charles of Valois, brother of King Philip IV of France, to intervene in Florentine politics as “Peacemaker” between the warring factions. In October 1301, Dante was one of three ambassadors sent by the commune to Rome to negotiate with Boniface to keep Charles out. Their efforts were unsuccessful, and Charles of Valois entered Florence on November 1, 1301. A few days later, the supposed peacemaker opened the gates to the Black exiles, who took over the government and condemned their enemies to punishments ranging from fines to exile to death. Dante, still in Rome on his embassy, was sentenced first to exile on January 27, 1302, and then to death, should he return to Florence, on March 10, 1302. He spent the rest of his life in exile, dying in Ravenna on September 13, 1321.

Most of Dante’s works, both literary and philosophical, were composed during his exile and in many cases were informed by that experience. The *Convivio*, for example, is modeled on Boethius’ *Consolation of Philosophy*, both in form – a mixture of prose and poetry – and in content – how the study of philosophy offers comfort to one in difficult circumstances (prison for Boethius, exile for Dante). Originally projected to have 14 books, the *Convivio*, which Dante worked on

from 1304 to 1307, was left unfinished and never made public during his lifetime. Each of the four completed books opens with one of Dante’s *canzone*, followed by a prose commentary. It opens with a statement drawn from Aristotle’s *Metaphysics*, *tutti li uomini naturalmente desiderano di sapere* (“all men naturally desire to know”). Knowledge is therefore necessary for humans to realize their souls’ potential and thereby achieve earthly happiness. The *Convivio* was meant to present that knowledge in the vernacular for the benefit of those without Latin. The completed books discuss cosmology and the moral virtues whose cultivation results in true nobility.

While the *Convivio* was conceived as encyclopedic in scope, the *Monarchia* (*On Monarchy*) focuses on a single topic – the necessity for a single universal ruler. The dating of the treatise is disputed; it may have been composed as early as 1309–1313, the period of the emperor Henry VII’s ultimately unsuccessful expedition to Italy to establish imperial rule, or, if the reference to *Paradiso* in *Monarchia* 1.12 is taken as part of Dante’s original text, as late as 1317. The three books of *Monarchia* each demonstrate a proposition: Book 1 asserts the need for a universal ruler; Book 2 explains why such a ruler must be a Roman emperor; and Book 3 argues that the authority of the Roman emperor derives directly from God and is not subordinate to the papacy.

Dante’s most famous work, the *Divine Comedy*, brings together many of the philosophical themes from these other works. The dating of the composition of the *Divine Comedy* is also imprecise, but Dante probably worked on *Inferno* from 1306 to 1309 and on *Purgatorio* from 1308 to 1312, publishing them in 1314 and 1315, respectively; he had completed cantos one through seventeen of *Paradiso* by 1316 and finished it in 1321. Setting the action at Easter time 1300 allows Dante to have several of the figures he meets on his journey through hell, purgatory, and paradise prophesy his coming exile. Other figures are the mouthpieces for his criticisms of papal policy and conduct and his exaltation of the Roman Empire. Beatrice returns as his spiritual and intellectual guide, explaining cosmological

concepts as she leads him through the heavenly spheres of paradise.

## Cross-References

- ▶ [Boethius](#)
- ▶ [Peter John Olivi](#)
- ▶ [Political Philosophy](#)
- ▶ [Poverty](#)
- ▶ [Remigio dei Girolami](#)
- ▶ [Roman Empire](#)

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## al-Dawānī, Jalāl al-Dīn

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Jalāl al-Dīn al-Dawānī (830–908/1427–1502), known as al-Muḥaqqiq al-Dawānī, is one of the main representatives of the philosophical school of Shiraz, which flourished at the eve of the Safavid period in the tenth-eleventh/sixteenth-seventeenth centuries Iran. He was closely associated with contemporary courts, and the Turkmen rulers of Shiraz especially showed him great respect. Partly because of the political upheaval associated with the rise of the Safavids, he travelled throughout various cities in Arabia, Iraq, and Iran. His religious affiliation has been the subject of many debates, but it can finally be assumed that he was a Sunni Ash'arite and moved to Twelver Shī'ism in the last part of his life, coincidentally with the advent of the Safavid realm (in 906/1501) and the conversion of the state of Iran to Shī'ism. Some 70 of his works, in both Arabic and Persian, have survived, on theology (*kalām*), metaphysics, and ethics. Al-Dawānī remains as an influential thinker in both Sunni and Shī'i worlds, followed by students in the Ottoman world and in Iran, as well as in Muslim India.

## His Life

Jalāl al-Dīn Muḥammad b. As‘ad al-Dawānī was born in 830/1427 in the town of Dawān, near the city of Kāzarūn, in the Iranian province of Fars. He first studied with his father Sa‘d al-Dīn As‘ad and Muḥzir al-Dīn Muḥammad al-Kāzarūnī, who had been both students of Mīr Sayyid Sharīf ‘Alī b. Muḥammad Jurjānī (d. 816/1413), a Sunni Ash‘arite theologian. Both introduced him to religious sciences (*ḥadīth*, *fiqh*, *tafsīr*) as well as to rational sciences. He then moved to Shiraz where he studied theology, *ḥadīth*, principles of Islamic jurisprudence (*uṣūl al-fiqh*), logic and philosophy under scholars such as Ṣafī al-Dīn Ījī (d. 864/1460), Muḥyi al-Dīn b. Muḥammad Kūshkinārī Anṣārī and Muḥammad Kāzarūnī. The two latter had been also taught by Sharīf ‘Alī Jurjānī.

Jalāl al-Dīn al-Dawānī was closely associated with contemporary courts, beginning with the Turkmen rulers of Shiraz, the Qarā Qūyūnlū followed by the Āq Qūyūnlū. While still young, he was appointed *ṣadr* (religious supervisor) by the Qarā Qūyūnlū Yūsuf (d. 872/1468); he soon resigned the post but was promptly affected as professor at the Begum *madrasa* (*dār al-aytām*). Under the Āq Qūyūnlū Sultan Ūzūn Ḥasan (r. 857–882/1453–1478) and Sultan Ya‘qūb (r. 883–896/1478–1490), he was appointed as a chief judge (*qāḍī al-quḍāt*) of Fārs and even reached the rank of minister. He wrote his *Akhlāq-i jalālī* (“Jalālian Ethics”), also known as *Lawāmi‘ al-ishrāq fī makārim al-akhlāq* (“Flashes of Illumination on Praiseworthy Ethics”; Newman 1994), in Persian for the Sultan Ūzūn Ḥasan, and his *‘Arḍ-nāma* for the latter’s son Khalīl during his brief reign (882–883/1478). When staying in India, he dedicated to the Bahmani king in the Deccan, Sultan Maḥmūd I of Gujārat (r. 862–917/1458–1511), his commentary on Suhrawardī’s (d. 578/1191) *Hayākil al-nūr* (“Temples of Light”), entitled *Shawākil al-ḥūr fī sharḥ Hayākil al-nūr* (“Forms of the Houris of Paradise. On the Commentary of the Temples of Light”), authored in 872/1468, as well as his *Unmūdhaj al-‘ulūm* (“Epitome of Sciences”), and his *Risāla dar bayān-i māhīyat-i ‘adālat wa aḥkām-i ān* (“On the Quiddity of

Justice and its Decrees”). His treatise entitled *Risāla Ithbāt al-wājib al-qadīma* (“The Old Epistle Demonstrating the Necessary Being”), written before 870/1465–6, was offered to the Ottoman Sultan Mehmed II (d. 886/1481), the conqueror of Constantinople (al-Ṭihirānī 1983, vol. 1, pp. 106–107). The Shī‘i historian and theologian Qāḍī Nūrullāh Shūshtarī (d. 1019/1610), while praising his excellence in the fields of knowledge and religion, points to his apparent inclination for wealth, luxury, glory, and power, quoting a Persian verse of him: “Experience made clear to me at the end that man is worth as much as his science and his science as his wealth” (Shūshtarī, vol. 4, p. 543).

Dawānī experienced a chaotic period due to the dismantling of the Āq Qūyūnlū’s empire and the war between this dynasty and the young Shāh Ismā‘īl, head of the militarized messianic Sufi-Shī‘i order of the Ṣafawīyya and future first ruler of the Safavid dynasty in Iran (r. 906–930/1501–1524). Dawānī therefore composed his work in a situation of instability and insecurity, as testified in both conclusions of his *Risālat Ithbāt al-wājib al-qadīma* (*Sab‘a rasā’il*, p. 113) and his *Shawākil al-ḥūr* (*Thalātha rasā’il*, p. 255), and was frequently moving from city to city in Iran (Kāshān, Shīrāz, the island of Hormuz) and the Arabic ‘Iraq.

Regarding his religious affiliation, Dawānī is considered to have been a Sunni Ash‘arite theologian, according to most of his works and his political relationships. His writings were highly respected during his lifetime at the Ottoman court in Istanbul. In his *Sharḥ baytay az Ḥāfiẓ* (“Commentary of Two Verses of Ḥāfiẓ al-Shīrāzī”) and his *Sharḥ al-‘Aqā‘id al-‘aḍadiyya*, a commentary on ‘Aḍud al-Dīn al-Ījī’s (d. 756/1356) *al-‘Aqā‘id* (“Creed”), the latter composed in 905/1499, he identifies the “saved sect” (*al-firqa al-nājiyya*) of Islam with that of the Ash‘arites, while rejecting both Imāmi Shī‘is and Mu‘tazilites (Dīnānī 2011, pp. 5–8). However, a couple of his late works and some of his poetries have a strong Shī‘i flavor. In the *Nūr al-hidāya* (“The Light of Guidance”), a treatise whose authenticity remains doubtful, the author claims his veneration for the 12 Imāms (*al-Rasā’il al-mukhtāra*, pp. 118–127). His



*Risālat al-Zawrā* (“the Treatise of Baghdad”), certainly authentic, was written, according to Dawānī himself, following a vision of Imām ‘Alī which inspired him the subject of the book (*Sab‘a rasā’il*, p. 202). However, considering the pro-‘Alid tendency of Persian mysticism in pre-Safavid Iran, this testimony shall not be taken as a decisive evidence of his Shī‘i affiliation. Reciprocally, one may assume, like Nūrallāh Shūshtarī, that Dawānī’s first open claims of the superiority of the Sunni Ash‘arite theology were made by concealment (*taqiyya*) of his Shī‘i convictions, as well as by venality, in a chaotic period (Shūshtarī, vol. 4, p. 547). Shūshtarī also gives various testimonies of Dawānī’s secret Shī‘i practices and quotes some of his poetries claiming his veneration for Imām ‘Alī and the *ahl al-bayt* (Shūshtarī, vol. 4, pp. 545–546, 549–550). It is related that, when questioned on the identity of “the Imām of the age,” he replied ambiguously that the Shī‘is believed it was Muḥammad b. Ḥasan, the 12th Imām, and the Sunnis Sultan Ya‘qūb (Shūshtarī, vol. IV, p. 546; Newman 1994, p. 132). Although his late Shī‘i convictions may be suspected of opportunism (Newman 2006, pp. 37–38 and 160–161, n. 56), he was revindicated as a Shī‘i thinker by historians of the Safavid period, such as Shūshtarī and Quṭb al-Dīn Ashkiwarī (d. between 1088/1677 and 1095/1684) (Ashkiwarī, pp. 463–467).

Jalāl al-Dīn al-Dawānī counts as a main representative of the philosophical school of Shiraz with Ṣadr al-Dīn Muḥammad Dashtakī (d. 903/1498), his son Ghiyāth al-Dīn Maṣṣūr al-Dashtakī (d. 948/1541) and Shams al-Dīn al-Khafīrī (d. between 942/1535 and 946/1539) (Nasr and Aminrazavi 2015, pp. 27–116). However, when talking about the school of Shiraz, one should keep in mind that like in the case of the “school of Isfahan” (11th/17th century) the term “school” does not mean here a community of thought but merely a main philosophical dynamic, with shared problematics and divergent positions, among thinkers of the same city. The heated disputes between Jalāl al-Dīn al-Dawānī and Ṣadr al-Dīn Dashtakī remain famous in the history of philosophy in Iran. They generally took the form of public disputations which the young Ghiyāth

al-Dīn Maṣṣūr al-Dashtakī assisted to and related in later works. This controversy animates a number of both these philosophers’ writings. Dawānī and Dashtakī exchanged six commentaries or series of glosses on ‘Alā al-Dīn ‘Alī b. Muḥammad al-Qūshjī’s (d. 879/1474) commentary on Naṣīr al-Dīn Ṭūsī’s (d. 672/1274) *Tajrīd al-i’tiqād*, a Twelver Shī‘i creed previously commented by al-‘Allāma al-Ḥillī (d. 726/1326) in his *Kashf al-murād*, and by Ash‘arite theologians such as Shams al-Dīn al-Iṣfahānī (d. 749/1348) and Sharīf ‘Alī Jurjānī. Al-Qūshjī was also an Ash‘arite scholar and primarily an astronomer. He wrote his commentary on *Tajrīd al-i’tiqād* after 853/1449. Dawānī and Dashtakī may have become acquainted with him in person while staying in Tabriz. Dashtakī wrote a first gloss on Qūshjī’s commentary, known later as his “Old Gloss” (*al-ḥāshiyā al-qadīma*). Dawānī criticized it implicitly in a subsequent commentary, also known as his “Old Gloss,” completed in 882/1477. Five years later, in 887/1482, Dashtakī wrote his “New Gloss” (*al-ḥāshiyā al-jadīda*) on Qūshjī’s commentary on the *Tajrīd*, with the assistance of his son Ghiyāth al-Dīn, including a refutation of Dawānī’s gloss. At his turn, Dawānī completed his “New gloss” in 897/1491-2, no copy of which has remained available. Following the composition of this gloss, Dashtakī revised and expanded his New Gloss to respond to Dawānī’s positions. These commentaries, whose focus is mainly metaphysical, also contain a discussion about the famous logical “liar paradox,” which was a popular subject of discussion among Islamic philosophers and theologians, especially from the seventh/thirteenth century onward (Alwishah and Sanson 2009; Qaramaleki 2014). Finally, Dawānī wrote his third gloss on Qūshjī’s commentary on the *Tajrīd*, known as “Newest Gloss” (*al-ḥāshiyā al-ajadd*), in which he responds to the “sophistries and criticisms containing contentions and arguments” presented by his adversaries Dashtakī father and son. Ṣadr al-Dīn Dashtakī died without having the time to respond to the latter work, but Ghiyāth al-Dīn Dashtakī continued the polemics (Pourjavady 2017, pp. 418–437). He first authored harsh refutations of Dawānī’s works, but after the death of

the latter, continued to discuss his positions while showing marks of respects towards him. Apart from their dramaturgy, these exchanges addressed some major philosophical issues, such as the principiality of quiddity or existence (*aṣālat al-māhiyya* or *aṣālat al-wujūd*), existence in mind (*wujūd dhihnī*), the immateriality of the imaginative faculty, the unicity and the gradation of being (*waḥdat al-wujūd*, *tashkīk al-wujūd*), which would eventually be assumed by the eleventh/seventeenth century philosophers Mīr Dāmād (d. 1040/1631) and Ṣadr al-Dīn al-Shīrāzī known as Mullā Ṣadrā (d. 1045/1636) (Kākā'ī 2008, p. 43).

As a professor, Dawānī taught, among other philosophical works, Naṣīr al-Dīn al-Ṭūsī's commentary on Avicenna's *al-Ishārāt wa l-tanbīhāt*, Shihāb al-Dīn Suhrawardī's *Ḥikmat al-ishrāq*, his own commentary of the latter's *Hayākil al-nūr* (see below), al-Qūshjī's commentary on al-Ṭūsī's *Tajrīd al-i'tiqād* (see below), and al-Ṭūsī's commentary on Euclid's *Elements*, *Taḥrīr kitāb Uqlīdis* (Pourjavady 2017, pp. 417–418). Among his students, Shams al-Dīn al-Khafri, who also studied under Ṣadr al-Dīn Dashtakī, has to be mentioned (on him, see the relevant chapter). Jalāl al-Dīn al-Dawānī died and was buried in his birthplace of Dawān in 908/1502, 1 year after the Safavids captured Tabriz and established Shī'ism as the state religion of Iran, but 2 years before the capture of Shiraz in 909/1504.

## His Thought

Dawānī's works seem at first sight to be divided into two fields, theology and philosophy, as if his thought went through two periods: a first one dominated by the frame of the Ash'arite school of theology (*kalām*); a second one under the influence of Suhrawardī's philosophy of Illumination (*ḥikmat al-ishrāq*). However, a brief overview of the works ascribed to him with certainty can show enough that Dawānī always held the same theological and philosophical ideas together.

Dawānī authored two epistles on the demonstration of God's existence, the necessary Being

(*wājib al-wujūd*), respectively known as “the old one” (*Risāla fī ithbāt al-wājib al-qadīma*) and “the new one” (*Risāla fī ithbāt al-wājib al-jadīda*). The first one was authored before 870/1465-6 (*Sab'a rasā'il*, introduction, p. 42); many commentaries were written on it (Ibid., pp. 45–46), notably by Nūrullāh Shūshtarī (al-Ṭihirānī 1983, vol. 13, p. 60) and Ghiyāth al-Dīn al-Dashtakī (al-Ṭihirānī 1983, vol. 6, p. 11). The second epistle was written at least 10 years after the previous one. From one to another, Dawānī affirmed himself as an Ishrāqī philosopher while remaining within the context of the Ash'arite theology. In his “Old Epistle,” he criticizes the insufficiency of the proof of the existence of God by the impossibility of an infinite regression from the possible existent (*mumkin al-wujūd*), an argument commonly used by the Peripatetics (*Sab'a rasā'il*, p. 76). In his “New Epistle,” he supports an ontological proof: God's existence is not added to Him but is his own essence (Ibid., p. 124). God, i.e., the necessary Being, is the pure existence (*al-wujūd al-baḥt*) remaining by itself, and the pure Essence (*al-dhāt al-baḥt*) without determination (Ibid., p. 125). The necessary Being is indivisible by essence (Ibid., p. 127).

In his *Risālat ithbāt al-wājib al-jadīda*, Dawānī borrows from al-Fārābī (d. 339/950) and Ibn Sīnā (d. 428/1037) the distinction between the intrinsically necessary Being (*wājib al-wujūd bi-dhātihī*), i.e., God the existence-giver, and the possible beings (*mawjūdāt*), whose existence is extrinsically necessitated. He stresses that the existence predicated of God, the necessary Being, and the existence predicated of possible existents, are not one and the same. “The existence (*wujūd*), which is the principle of derivation of [the concept of] existent, is a single entity in itself, and it is an external reality. The [concept of] existent is more general than this self-subsistent existence and that [existent] which is in some particular way related to it” (*Sab'a rasā'il*, p. 131). Consequently, the necessary Being is the only one who deserves to be referred to as “existence,” the only one whose existence is a reality outside the mind; and existence cannot be truly ascribed to possible beings. Symmetrically, the necessary Being

can be only metaphorically called “existent” (*mawjūd*), because it is not something of which existence is predicated, but is identical to existence (Ibid., pp. 131–132). The same idea is developed in Dawānī’s and Dashtakī’s glosses on Qūshjī’s commentary on *Tajrīd al-kalām* (see Pourjavady 2017, p. 422). In his *Shawākil al-hūr*, he ascribes to al-Fārābī and Ibn Sīnā this statement: “When saying that the necessary Being is existent, this world [‘existent’] has a metaphoric sense” (*Thalātha rasā’il*, p. 168).

Regarding the traditional issue of divine attributes, Dawānī argues that all the essential attributes of God (*ṣifāt al-dhāt*) are included in the attribute of Science (*al-Jadīda*, in *Sab’a rasā’il*, p. 141), which seems to be a departure from Ash‘arite theology and a step closer to the views of philosophers. Nevertheless, he joins the Ash‘arites, with an argument inspired by Suhrawardī, when he refutes the thesis of the philosophers, primarily Ibn Sīnā, that God does not know individuals as such (*Sharḥ Khuṭbat al-Zawrā’*, in *Sab’a rasā’il*, p. 211). According to his argument, since the necessary Being is at the highest level of immateriality, he knows himself by essence and is therefore Intellect, intelligent and intelligible; his essence being the requiring cause of all possibilities, and the knowledge of the cause implying that of the caused, God is knower of all existents (*al-Jadīda*, in *Sab’a rasā’il*, p. 144). Dawānī still fits into the Ash‘arite doctrinal framework when he denies that man is the true agent (*mu’aththir*) of his actions. According to his argument, the possible existents are quiddities; quiddities are, by essence, in potentiality, and what is in potentiality cannot be at the origin of what is in actuality. Only the existence without quiddity, which is that of the necessary Being, is at the origin of the acts of the existents. The necessary Being is the one and only agent in the world of existence. This, according to him, was what philosophers, Sufis and theologians, with the exception of the Mu‘tazilites, agree on (Ibid., p. 140). On the question of final retribution and divine justice, he also supports the Ash‘arite theory of *kasb* (“acquisition”) against the theory of free will defended by the Mu‘tazilites (Ibid., pp. 156–157; *Khalq al-a’māl*, in *al-Rasā’il*

*al-mukhtāra*, p. 71). According to the doctrine of *kasb*, the man who acts is in reality acted upon, but receives and acquires the imputation of his acts at the time of his action; he is therefore responsible for them, although he is not really their agent. In his *Jalālian Ethics*, he also supports the Ash‘arite position that both good and evil are standards determined by the law (*sharī‘a*), i.e., good is what the Lawgiver commands and evil is what He prohibits, and rational-objective ethical standards do not apply to God as the Mu‘tazilites and some Shī‘i theologians like al-‘Allāma al-Hillī were thinking (Dīnānī 2011, p. 388; on al-‘Allāma al-Hillī, see the relevant chapter).

Dawānī defends the same Ash‘arite doctrines in his *Risālah-i Tahlīliyya*, a commentary in Persian of the first part of the Muslim credo, *lā ilāha illā allāh*, “there is no god but God,” as well as in his *Risāla fī Khalq al-a’māl* (“On the Creation of Acts”). He develops there three points of view on divine oneness (*tawḥīd*): the oneness of acts, meaning that all the causality of acts is ascribed to God; the oneness of attributes, meaning that all the reality of the attributes of science, power, life, etc., is ascribed to Him; and the oneness of the Essence, meaning that all perfection and existence are ascribed to Him (*Risālat-i tahlīliyya*, pp. 23–24; *al-Rasā’il al-mukhtāra*, pp. 75–76; Dīnānī 2011, pp. 443–444). According to this last point of view, creatures are mere loci of manifestation (*maẓāhir*) of the divine Essence. Similarly, in his *Shawākil al-hūr*, the Suhrawardian metaphysics of the Light of lights (*nūr al-anwār*) and intermediate lights, intelligences, and “lords of species” (*arbāb al-anwā’*) – corresponding to the Platonic Ideas – allows him to reinforce his theory that all influence derives from the First Cause, without real effectiveness of intermediate causes, a theory in accordance with the Ash‘arite dogma (*Thalātha rasā’il*, pp. 190–191; Dīnānī 2011, pp. 358–360).

In his *Treatise of Baghdad* (*Risālat al-Zawrā’*) and his auto-commentaries on it (*Sharḥ Khuṭbat al-Zawrā’*, *Sharḥ Risālat al-Zawrā’*), Dawānī presents a doctrine of the Provenance and Destination (*al-mabdā’ wa l-ma’ād*) strongly influenced by Avicennism, Suhrawardī’s Illuminative philosophy, and Ibn ‘Arabī’s (d. 637/1240)

theosophy as well, both the latter being referred to in the introduction of his commentary (*Sab'a rasā'il*, pp. 203 and 205). In the *Treatise of Baghdad*, Dawānī addresses the question of the relationship between God and the existents through the relationship between the cause and the effect. He first asserts that quiddities (*māhiyyāt*) are non-generated (*ghayr maj'ūla*) but are, in their essences, the effect of the efficient cause (*athar li-l-fā'il*) (Ibid., p. 174; Engl. transl. in Nasr and Aminrazavi 2015, p. 39). He then argues that “the effect is nothing but a purely mentally posited entity,” which is real only when considered from the point of view of its relation to the cause, but inexistent and impossible when considered as an independent entity (Ibid., p. 174; Engl. transl., p. 40). According to a quote probably from Ibn 'Arabī, “the immutable entities (*a'yān thābita*) have not smelled the perfume of being, and verily they have never and shall never be manifested, but rather what is manifested is only a trace of them.” Dawānī thus denies any independent reality or existence to the possible existents (*mawjūdāt*), going to say that “[God] is the real essence and everything else is His aspects, modalities, facets and so forth (. . .). Thus, there are not multiple essences in [the realm of] existence, nay rather, there is only one single essence that possesses multiple attributes” (Ibid., p. 175; Eng. transl. p. 40).

Of one Dawānī's main assertions in his *Treatise of Baghdad* is that “the relation between the first and the second”, i.e., between God, the First Cause or the Necessary being, and the possible existents which are his effects, “is the mother of all relations” (*Sab'a rasā'il*, p. 176; Eng. transl. p. 41). This expression is borrowed from Suhrawardī's *Hayākil al-nūr*, in which we can read – with Dawānī's commentary between square brackets – that “the first fixed relationship in existence is the relationship of the existent subsisting substance, [that is, the first effect,] to the first eternally subsistent, [which is existent by its essence and gives existence to others]. It [that is, this relationship] is the source (lit. ‘mother’) of all relationships [because it contains them all]” (Nasr and Aminrazavi 2012, p. 116). The cessation of the effect in reality is the

appearance of the cause in another mode. Temporal extension, which is the origin of change and alteration and the seat of the temporally originated entities, is all one reality when considered as one of the aspects (*shu'ūn*) of the First Cause. With respect to the levels that are beyond the boundaries of that extension, there is no succession: “There is no dawn or dusk for your Lord” (*Sab'a rasā'il*, pp. 176–177; Eng. transl. pp. 41–42). Thus, the world of existence is nothing but the sum of God's manifestations or theophanies, which is one of Ibn 'Arabī's fundamental views: “all existing is the proof of its Artisan as it is a place of manifestation”, confirmed by a quotation of Qur'an 7:44: “There is not a thing but celebrates His praise” (*Sab'a rasā'il*, p. 189). In a note from a manuscript (quoted by Dīnānī 2011, p. 180), Dawānī adds: “The divine Real (*al-ḥaqq*) is the reality of realities, the essence of essences. Worlds are only manifestations, modes and ways of acting of the essence of Reality. The world refers to all the points of view taken on the relationship to the essence of its Oneness. . .”

In the view of Dawānī, the procession of Reality or the divine Essence is nothing but the movement of the soul. All worlds are forms of the unique Reality, differing according to the degree of elevation or lowering of the soul (*Sab'a rasā'il*, p. 219). One single reality like the human-kind appears with forms of multiplicity to senses and imagination and becomes unified when appearing to the Intellect. The intelligible form itself becomes varied in accepting multiplicity (Ibid., p. 178; Eng. transl. in Nasr and Aminrazavi 2015, p. 43). However, according to Dawānī, one should keep in mind that “the reality is other than the form. For [the reality] on the level of its essence and in its pure simplicity is devoid of all the forms in which it is manifest” (Ibid., pp. 179–180; Eng. transl., p. 44). The soul, when descending to the level of sense perception, reaches the furthest limit of multiplicity, and when ascending to the level of Intellect, i.e., pure immateriality, becomes one. Dawānī therefore asserts that “the nature of knowledge is multiplying the one and unifying the many,” according to the degrees of elevation and lowering

of the soul (Ibid., p. 181; Eng. transl., p. 45). This conception allows him to bring together Aristotle's psychology, the Neoplatonic system, and Ibn 'Arabī's theosophy, by writing that "the soul is the matter for all forms and the ground for all realities (. . .); and by and in [the soul] the Breath of the All-Merciful (*al-naḥās al-raḥmānī*), which is in its essence, becomes multiple" (Ibid., pp. 181–182; Eng. transl., p. 46).

In his auto-commentary on the *Epistle of Baghdad*, Dawānī addresses the classical issue of the principality of quiddity or existence. Following Suhrawardī, he supports the principality of quiddity (*aṣāliyyat al-māhiyya*) and the merely mental nature of existence (*i'tibāriyyat al-wujūd*). More precisely, he supports the principality of existence in terms of God alone, the intrinsically necessary Being, and the purely mental character of the existence of the possible. As for quiddities, existence is nothing but a mental point of view on them, since they are not established with existence (*Sab'a rasā'il*, p. 207). Existence in itself is not an attribute subsisting by other means, but a real essence; any other becomes existing when it is realized by existence, or when existence manifests itself in it (Ibid., p. 208). No existing object remains identical in itself despite the illusion produced by the senses: the forms that follow one another in the matter of the world are like the colors alternating in the qualitative change of any body (Ibid., p. 210). On all this again, Dawānī brings Suhrawardī's metaphysics in line with the dogmas of Ash'arite theology.

In his auto-commentary on the introduction of the *Treatise of Baghdad*, Dawānī, on the other hand, moves away from the Ash'arite framework, thanks to Ibn 'Arabī's inspiration. According to him, if every possible existent rationally proves the existence of its Maker (*ṣāni'*), being a locus of manifestation (*mazhar*) for Him (*Sab'a rasā'il*, p. 189), the human being is the locus of manifestation of all the divine names and attributes, since he embraces in his essence all realities, whether material or immaterial, dense or subtle. Human being is an "epitome of all the worlds" (*unmūdhaj jamī' al-'awālim*). This is the reason why he is called "microcosm" (*al-'ālam al-ṣaghīr*) but would better be called

"macrocosm" (*al-'ālam al-kabīr*) because he exceeds the world by comprehending also the mental being (Ibid., pp. 190–191). Dawānī here quotes a famous saying attributed to the Sufi master Abū Yazīd al-Baṣṭāmī (d. 234/848 or 261/874): "Shall the [divine] Throne and everything that surrounds it occupy one of the corners of the Gnostic's heart (*qalb al-'ārif*) for thousand times, it would even not fulfil it" (Ibid., p. 190). In response to the objection that the macrocosm, in the common sense of the term, also includes intellective beings which are the rational souls of spheres according to the philosophers, he writes: "The celestial intelligences have absolutely no sensation; neither do the souls of the spheres have any sensation through external senses, according to those who profess their immutability and immateriality, that is, the philosophers. Men of spiritual experience, on the other hand, think that the immaterial beings know the Most High only through His attributes of incomparability (. . .). On the contrary, the Perfect Man, as the gathering of all worlds, knows the Most High in all the dimensions He gives him." Even more, the Perfect Man (*al-insān al-kāmil*) is the highest degree of reality, the most perfect locus of manifestation of all God's attributes of perfection, which the rank of the Muḥammadian Sealing Reality (*al-martaba al-khatmiyya al-muḥammadiyya*) (Ibid., pp. 192–193).

In conclusion to his *Treatise of Baghdad*, Dawānī gives his reader a twofold precept: to preserve the wisdom of those who are not worthy of it, to provide it to those who are worthy of it. In support of this idea, he quotes a word attributed to Plato: "Do not let your knowledge about yourself be damaged by the ignorance of others about you" (*Sab'a rasā'il*, p. 183; Eng. transl. in Nasr and Aminrazavi 2015, p. 47). Interestingly, this ethical position is congruent with Shī'ī esotericism and will be widely shared by Shī'ī philosophers of the Safavid period.

Dawānī's *Shawākil al-hūr fī sharḥ Hayākil al-nūr*, a commentary on Suhrawardī's brief epitome of his doctrine, highly contributed to the spread of Ishrāqī philosophy in India. In this work, Dawānī aims to harmonize Suhrawardī's



metaphysics of Light, its Avicennian philosophical roots, Ash'arite theology, and Sufism. He also stresses the link between Suhrawardī's fundamental doctrine and his own worldview as expressed in his previous *Treatise of Baghdād*: "The whole world is a shadow of the Light of lights. On the verification of the relationship between the forms and the essential realities, we have a discourse in the *Treatise of Baghdād* and its commentary" (*Thalātha rasā'il*, p. 244). Besides the conception of the relationship between cause and effect, reality and forms, Dawānī embraces Suhrawardī's key principles of psychology and cosmology. On the first issue, he supports that the rational human soul knows itself by essence (*ya'qulu dhātahu bi-dhātihī*) (Ibid., pp. 129–130). He also supports the immateriality of the soul as well as the complementarity of the receiving (*qābil*) soul and the donating (*hādī*) Intellect: "The soul is called soul only as long as its perfections remain in potentiality. When they reach their actuality, the name of the soul is taken away from it and the name that belongs to it is that of the Intellect." This is what animals, even with immaterial souls according to the Ishrāqī philosophers, are incapable of, unlike man (Ibid., p. 116; *al-Jadīda*, in *Sab'a rasā'il*, p. 144).

On the field of cosmology, Dawānī agrees with Suhrawardī's that the circular motion of the sphere is the cause of the events of our world and that this motion is voluntary (*Thalātha rasā'il*, pp. 198–200; Eng. transl. in Nasr and Aminrazavi 2012, pp. 93–94). The heavens are perpetually in motion, not compounded of the elements, therefore they are not susceptible of generation and corruption; they are all spherical because of their circular motions, according to Ptolemy's *Almagest*; they are living, because their motion is voluntary; they are rational, because they comprehend universals (Ibid., pp. 221–222; Eng. transl., pp. 112–113). Like Suhrawardī, Dawānī sees cosmology as an inspiration for mystical psychology. The motion of the heavens, since it belongs to "the attainment of a holy and delightful thing, which is the dawning of lights from their sources above," is the model of "the motions issuing from the soul stripped of the connections of nature, on account of the holy gleams and intimate dawns, as

the masters of ecstasy and witnessing [i.e., the masters of Sufism] attest" (Ibid., p. 203; Eng. transl., p. 97). On the basis of this conception, Dawānī justifies the Sufi ritual of listening to music (*samā'*), a practice commonly condemned by lawyers, be they Sunni or Shī'i: "This is the secret of listening to music and, for the divine [sages], its principle leading to its establishment, so that one of the leaders of this group [the Sufi master Rūzbihān Baqlī] said, 'The wayfarer in the assembly of listening to music is opened up to things that are not found in forty-day retreats'. It is related by Plato that whenever he wanted to pray, he moved the power of his soul by listening to appropriate voices, when he wanted to be moved by the power of wrath or love." (Ibid., p. 204; Eng. transl., p. 97; see Corbin, *L'archange empourpré*, pp. 71–72) He then defines the "divine lovers" as "those stripped of material connections to the extent possible for them, as is said from the divine solitaries seeking perfection, or the lovers of the divine lights, which are the intellects that resemble them" (Ibid., p. 206; Eng. transl., p. 99). Dawānī pays special attention to Suhrawardī's assent that the spiritual observations made by the "pillars of wisdom and prophecy" should be considered more authoritative than the physical observations made by the astronomers such as Ptolemy and Hipparchus, commenting on it by saying that Suhrawardī's intention "was not to say that we should simply imitate (*taqlīd*) these pillars, but (. . .) to arouse the desire in the student so that he concentrates on the path that allows him to acquire, as far as possible, the separation (*tajrīd*) and subtlety of the intimate consciousness (*talīf al-sirr*)" (Ibid., p. 188).

In his commentary on Suhrawardī's treatise, Dawānī also supports various philosophical ideas out of the framework of Ash'arite theology. He notably supports the Avicennian theodicy as resumed by Suhrawardī, arguing that "the good is existence and the perfections that follow from it" (Ibid., p. 211; transl., p. 103) and that "divine Providence (*ināya*) is connected with governance of the universal insofar as it is universal primarily and in essence, and with governance of the particular secondarily and by accident" (Ibid., p. 216; Eng. transl., p. 108). Consequently, "since it is



known that anything more perfect than the actual order is impossible, then this order is the best of possible orders” (*Ibid.*, p. 216; Engl. transl., p. 109). He also defends the hypothesis that perfect or pure human souls, after their separation from the body caused by natural death, are translated to internal imaginal bodies, in which they enjoy the witnessing of that other world’s forms. “If they are stripped of the connection with nature, which strongly attracts them to their origin, then they become linked with the heavenly spirits and intelligences, and are ranked differently according to their different degrees in separation” (*Ibid.*, p. 218; Eng. transl., p. 110). This idea, that appeared among Suhrawardī’s disciples and commentators, would eventually be linked with the concept of the “imaginal world” (*‘ālam al-mithāl*) by Shī‘i philosophers of the Safavid period such as Fayḍ Kāshānī (d. 1090/1679) and Quṭb al-Dīn Ashkiwarī. Finally, following Suhrawardī’s commentators like Shams al-Dīn Shahrazūrī (d. between 687/1288 and 704/1305), as well as Ibn Sīnā’s *Treatise of love* (*Risāla fī l-‘ishq*), Dawānī emphasizes the cosmological and ontological role of love (*‘ishq*), arguing that love is diffused in all beings as the inclination towards unification with their cause and reaching perfection. According to his view, “this demonstrates that all existent beings have a certain consciousness (*shu‘ūr*) differing in level according to the difference in the levels of love” (*Ibid.*, p. 210; Eng. transl., p. 103). Consequently, love is the reason of the motions of the heavens, whose purpose is “the illuminations that unfold to them from their origins, that they may resemble them by these illuminations, as indicated by [Suhrawardī’s] phrase ‘They love the radiance of holiness’, that is, the lights which are their origins” (*Ibid.*, p. 223; Eng. transl., p. 114). He also expressed this idea in a poetic verse in Persian: “Wherever beauty appears, love arises/As being is an unceasing beauty, love is perpetual” (*Sharḥ Rubā ‘iyyāt*, p. 72, quoted in Dīnānī 2011, p. 433).

In the fourth part of his *Epitome of Sciences* (*Unmūdḥaj al-‘ulūm*), dealing with the principles of religion (*uṣūl al-dīn*) or fundamental theology, Dawānī takes up the classical issue of eternity (*qidam*) or createdness (*ḥudūth*) of the world. He

starts from the observation that there has always been a conflict on this issue between philosophers and followers of the three religions, the latter supporting unanimously the createdness of the world when the former opt for its eternity. With reference to an ancient, anonymous, and untitled philosophical work, Dawānī reports Aristotle’s statement according to which no philosopher had ever supported the createdness of the world except one, presumably Plato. He points out that this is about the world’s temporal createdness (*ḥudūth zamānī*), since all philosophers equally support its essential createdness (*ḥudūth dhātī*) (*Thalātha rasā’il*, p. 284). The reasoning of philosophers who are committed to the eternity of the world is that God, the causer and agent of all things, being eternal, his effect is necessarily eternal (*Ibid.*, p. 286). Dawānī criticizes the arguments of the philosophers and supports the createdness of the world in all its aspects through a purely theological argument: “among the manifest aspects of [divine] wisdom in not having given existence to the world in past eternity, there is the fact of having reserved temporal eternity for Him alone as He reserved essential eternity for Him alone, to better manifest His uniqueness in eternal subsistence without partner” (*Ibid.*, p. 318).

Interestingly, in the *Light of guidance* (*Nūr al-hidāya*) attributed to Dawānī, the author addresses the same issue and defends the idea of a meta-temporal creation (*ḥudūth dahrī*) of the world – defined as the actuality of quiddity after a real and unquantifiable nonbeing – a concept which he believes is apt to reconcile theologians and philosophers (*al-Rasā’il al-mukhtāra*, pp. 114–116). This position would eventually become central to the metaphysics of Mīr Dāmād, the first great master of philosophy of the second century of the Safavid rule in Iran.

Finally, some attention has to be paid to Dawānī’s treatise on ethics, his *Akhlāq-e jalālī* (*Jalālīan Ethics*), also entitled *Lawāmi ‘al-ishraq fī makārim al-akhlāq* (*Flashes of Illumination on Praiseworthy Ethics*), based on the content of Naṣīr al-Dīn Ṭūsī’s *Akhlāq-i Naṣīrī*, intermingled with Ishrāqī elements and quotations of Sufi masters (Rosenthal 1958, pp. 210–223;

Lambton; Woods 1976, pp. 37, 101, 115–118). In this work, Dawānī aims to identify the moral ideal of human perfection, as borrowed from the Aristotelian Ethics, and the Qur’anic account of the nature and the function of man, stating that man’s goal is to become truly “the viceregent of God on earth” (*khalīfat allāh fī l-ard*). He starts from a definition of practical wisdom (*ḥikmat-i ‘amalī*) as “the science of the states of man’s rational soul as praiseworthy and blameworthy actions can proceed from it by will. The purpose of this science is for the soul to become free of vices and qualified for virtues in order to achieve the perfection that is its end” (quoted in Dīnānī 2011, p. 386). It is through wisdom that man achieves his perfection and shows himself worthy of the divine deposit (*al-amāna*) that he was the only creature to accept from God according to Qur’anic verse 33:72. He also defines wisdom as “gaining similarity to the Divine (*al-tashabbuh bi-l-ilāh*, equivalent to Ὁμοίωσις θεῷ) as far as possible,” echoing a famous passage of Plato’s *Theaetetus* (quoted by Dīnānī 2011, p. 391). He integrates Sufism into this definition of wisdom by considering after Suhrawardī (*Talwīḥāt*, pp. 73–74) the great Sufi masters such as Junayd al-Baghdādī (d. 298/911), Abū Yazīd al-Bastāmī, and ‘Abdallāh Tūstārī (d. 283/896), as true sages or philosophers. Moreover, while adopting the Aristotelian system of the four cardinal virtues, he defends the idea that theoretical wisdom is the condition and the end of the other virtues. It is therefore the science that completes all human virtue and perfection: “According to the unanimous opinion of the followers of reason and tradition (*ahl-i ‘aql wa naql*), no virtue achieves its perfection without science,” which he confirms with a prophetic hadith: “men are either teachers or students; the rest [of men] counts for nothing” (quoted in Dīnānī, p. 400). This is in line with the theological idea, as mentioned above, according to which all the essential attributes of God (*ṣifāt al-dhāt*) are included in that of Science. Thus, although wisdom can also be defined as a happy medium between two extremes, namely, cunning and foolishness, theoretical wisdom, the acquisition of which is the goal of philosophy, has neither excess nor end (quoted in Dīnānī, pp. 402–403). By assuming

this philosophical ideal, Dawānī clearly emancipates himself from Ash‘arite theology without remaining within the framework of Aristotelianism either. Rather, he assumes the Neoplatonist heritage as the Shī‘ī philosophers of the Safavid era would eventually do. In the same work, he also developed the view of ideal kingship, following the Platonist and Fārābian tradition, through a series of advices addressed to kings (Nasr and Aminrazavi 2012, pp. 119–133). *Akhḫāq-i Jalālī* has been translated into English by W. T. Thompson and published in London in 1839 under the title of *Practical Philosophy of the Muhammadian People*, a translation harshly criticized by G. M. Wickens (1984).

In conclusion, Jalāl al-Dīn al-Dawānī was an original and influential thinker of the pre-Safavid period, while participating in the encounter of the theological, philosophical, and mystical ideas that somehow prepared the philosophical renaissance in the eleventh/seventeenth century Iran. Alongside his influence in the Ottoman Empire and India, and despite his Ash‘arite orientation, his works had a definite echo in those of the famous Shī‘ī philosophers Mīr Dāmād and Mullā Ṣadrā.

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## Dāwūd al-Qayṣarī

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Dāwūd al-Qayṣarī (d. 1350) was the pioneer of the school of Ibn al-‘Arabī in the fourteenth century. Having authored many of his works as commentaries on the classics of theoretical mysticism, such as *Fuṣūṣ al-Ḥikam (The Bezels of Wisdom)* by Ibn al-‘Arabī (d. 1240), *Tafṣīr al-Basmala (The Commentary on the Basmala)* by al-Kāshānī (d. 1335), and *al-Qaṣīda al-Tā’iyya* (a mystical poem) by Ibn Fārīd (d. 1234), al-Qayṣarī can be regarded as one of the main theorists and interpreters of Islamic mysticism after the Mongol Invasion. His intellectual activities were mainly focused in Central Anatolia, Egypt, and Western Iran, and in these places, he sought to deepen his knowledge on classical Islamic sciences (Islamic theology and jurisprudence) as well as philosophical mysticism. Al-Qayṣarī is

also regarded as one of the scholars who prepared the intellectual background at the beginnings of the Ottoman Empire, a fact which was evinced by his appointment as a professor in Iznik Madrasa (the first madrasa in Ottoman times) by the Sultan Orhan Gazi (r. 1323–1362). Al-Qayṣarī’s writings had gained wide circulation in the Shiite intellectual communities and the Irfani (gnostic) schools in Iran, an impact which has continued till recent times, as is seen in the writings of the Iranian revolutionist, Ayatollah Khomeini (d. 1989).

## Life

Dāwūd al-Qayṣarī’s time and place of birth is uncertain, although it has been conjectured that he was born around year 1260. The sources indicate that he was originally from Sāwa, a city in central Iran. His family migrated from there to Kayseri in central Anatolia, because of the turmoil caused by Mongol invasions in western Asia and Khorasan. Al-Qayṣarī received his early education in Kayseri, Konya, and Tokat; these cities were among the main centers in which scientific and intellectual activities during the Anatolian Seljuks had accumulated. A special reference must be made to his teacher Ibn Sartak, under the guidance of whom al-Qayṣarī studied the teachings of the Maragha school of astronomy and mathematics (Fazlıoğlu, “Osmanlı Coğrafyasında”, p. 25). After establishing many scholarly contacts throughout Anatolian cities, al-Qayṣarī went to Egypt, which was an important center for basic Islamic sciences (theology and jurisprudence) under the governance of the Mamluks at the time, in order to pursue further scholarly goals. A couple of years in Egypt gave him the opportunity to strengthen his ties with the Akbarī circles, namely, the followers of the ideas of Ibn al-‘Arabī. Al-Qayṣarī’s engagement with this dominant mystical school reached its peak when he met in Tabriz his master ‘Abd al-Razzāq al-Kāshānī (d. 1335), one of the influential commentators of the writings of Ibn al-‘Arabī, and spent a long time with him. When he eventually turned back to Anatolia, the new rising Ottoman state was ready to appoint him to the Iznik Madrasa (in the ancient city of Nicaea), the

first official college founded in Ottoman Empire, as professor of Islamic sciences. Dāwūd al-Qayṣarī died there in 1350.

## Works and Ideas

Dāwūd al-Qayṣarī's monumental and most known work is *Matla' Ḥuṣūṣ al-Kalim (The Explanation of the Special Words)*. This work is a commentary on Ibn al-'Arabī's *Fuṣūṣ al-Ḥikam (The Bezels of Wisdom)*. It comes with an essential introduction, in which al-Qayṣarī lays out the foundations of the philosophical mysticism according to the Akbarian school. This introductory section, which is titled *al-Muqaddima (The Introduction)*, provides a full-fledged structure of the philosophical mysticism in 12 chapters: existence of God, names and attributes of God, unchangeable/fixed entities (*al-a'yān al-thābita*), substances and accidents, universal worlds and the five divine presences (*al-ḥaḍarāt al-khams*), the universe of ideas/images, the ranks of spiritual revelation (*kashf*), the world as the form of the human reality, the succession of Muhammad and *aqtāb* (so-called the human pillars of the world), the great soul (*rūḥ*) in human world, ascension of soul to God, prophecy, and sainthood. Within these chapters, al-Qayṣarī intended to develop a mystical theory of metaphysics, which was clearly seen as an alternative to that of Islamic philosophy and theology. This attitude of al-Qayṣarī is first and foremost apparent in his understanding of existence. Existence per se, when it is taken "as it is" in the absolute sense, corresponds to the Ultimate Deity itself. Existence per se is devoid of any contrary qualities, such as the distinctions real-mental, universal-particular, substantial-accidental. These qualities can only be predicated of existence or being as a result of the emergence of certain ranks and states that are related to beings other than God. Al-Qayṣarī even describes the ultimate existence as the pure goodness, the eternal, and last but not least the necessary being, all descriptions which are attested for God in classical Islamic thought (pp. 13–17). With this perspective, in which God is equalized with existence, every being in the scale of existence

becomes an appearance of an attribute or name of God. In fact, man is also an appearance (*maẓhar*) of God's most unique name, Allah (p. 48). Human beings can only grasp the true knowledge of things, if they are illuminated by the light of God. In short, God evinces universe, and universe evinces God. Thus, it is not surprising to see that al-Qayṣarī adheres to the Neoplatonic theory that advocates the immaterial concept of soul, rather than its materialist counterpart in classical Islamic theology. Al-Qayṣarī sees no harm in accepting the notions of intellects and souls as ontological entities. In his classification of beings, he places intellects and souls under the category of "spiritual substances," which in turn come under the category of "contingent entities."

In his treatise *Nihāyat al-Bayān fī Dirāyat al-Zamān (On Understanding the Nature of Time)*, al-Qayṣarī delves into the discussions on time as a philosophical concept. He initially groups the overall views of philosophers and theologians in two parts: there are those who think that time is an immaterial substance and is necessarily existent like God. There are also those who think that time is an accident, and it is the measure of heavenly movements (Aristotle), or the measure of existence (Abū l-Barakāt al-Baghdādī). Basing himself on previous authorities, such as Avicenna, Naṣīr al-Dīn al-Tūṣī and Shams al-Dīn al-Samarkandī (d. 1322), he rejects all these views and states that the only solution to the question of time is to define it as "the measure of existence's endurance (*baqā*)," rather than "the measure of existence itself." The addition of the term "endurance" here is needed because it is not possible to ascribe to "existence per se" the material quality of measure. In the words of al-Qayṣarī, time is in fact a corollary of the divine entity; it emanates from the divine entity in order for the durations of all existent beings created by God to be measured (*al-Rasā'il*, pp. 165–170). This interpretation of al-Qayṣarī shows us again how he emphasizes the concept of existence per se in his philosophical mysticism and relies on it.

One of the works that is recently attributed to al-Qayṣarī (Fazlıoğlu 2017) is titled *al-Ithāf al-Sulaymānī fī l-'Ahd al-Ūrkhānī (The*



*Dedication of Sulaymān in the Time of Orkhan*). As stated in the introductory chapter, the work is dedicated to the Sultan Orhan Gazi (r. 1323–1362), who had invited him to teach in the Iznik Madrasa. Al-Qayṣarī wrote this treatise to raise and discuss certain questions in several religious and nonreligious sciences. The work belongs to the *anmūzaj* literature (*anmūzaj* means “modal examples”), a scholarly literature in classical Islamic thought which is dedicated to discussions of the selected examples in a given science. The aim of this kind of writing is to demonstrate the authority and erudition of the author and his capacity to deal with manifold areas of sciences and disciplines. Accordingly in *al-Ithāf*, al-Qayṣarī tackles the problems in religious disciplines (interpretation of the Quran, sayings of the Prophet, Islamic law, methodology of Islamic law, Islamic theology, and disputation theory) and non-religious ones (geometry, arithmetic, astronomy, optics, logic, metaphysics, physics, medicine, and ethics). In addition to these subjects, al-Qayṣarī also delves into the problems of Arabic linguistics. As regards religious sciences, he addresses such problems as the distinction between the definitions of belief (*īmān*) and submission (*islām*), superiority of prophets over angels, the legal issue of intention in ablution according to the Hanafite and Shafiite schools, the distinction between the inner and outer speech (*kalām*) as an attribute of God. As regards rational sciences, he discusses such issues as the problem of horn angle in Euclid's *Elements* (geometry), the problem of the roots of irrational numbers (arithmetic), the mutual positions of sun and moon (astronomy), the nature of light, colors, and darkness (optics), major and minor premise in conditional syllogism (logic), the problem of whether form is the cause of matter (metaphysics, the issue is discussed in the context of Avicenna's *al-Ishārāt*), the category of quantity (physics), the concept of mixture (*mizāj*, medicine), and lastly the relationship between medicine and ethics (ethics). With all these knotty problems, al-Qayṣarī appears to establish himself as the master of all disciplines, just as was expected of him when he was appointed to the first madrasa in the Ottoman Empire.

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## De caelo, Commentaries on Aristotle's

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### Abstract

Aristotle's *De caelo* was his major contribution to cosmology, embracing the celestial and terrestrial regions into which he divided the cosmos. By translations, it passed from Greek to Arabic, and was finally translated from Arabic, and then from Greek into Latin in the twelfth



century. Numerous commentaries and treatises known as *Questions* were written on the *De caelo* from the thirteenth to the seventeenth century. One of the most problematic questions deriving from *De caelo* was whether the world is eternal, as Aristotle argued, or whether it was created as Christians insisted. This difficult question, and others, produced a theological reaction in the form of a Church condemnation of 219 articles in 1277. The central issue that emerged was about God's absolute power. Scholastic natural philosophers assumed that God could do anything short of a logical contradiction. By His supernatural powers, it was therefore assumed that God could do anything that Aristotle had regarded as naturally impossible. This gave rise to numerous hypothetical discussions about what things would be like if God created other worlds and what form that might take, or if He moved our world with a rectilinear motion, or if He made matter disappear and created a vacuum, and so on. In commentaries and *Questions on De caelo* in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries – following the momentous contributions by Copernicus, Tycho Brahe, and Galileo that had completely subverted Aristotle's physical cosmos – scholastics sought, as best they could, to adjust to the new cosmology.

In his basic works on natural philosophy, Aristotle devoted *De caelo* (*On the Heavens*) to cosmology. Of the four books comprising the treatise, Aristotle devotes the first two to the celestial region, which includes all the stars and planets. Because celestial bodies are incapable of self-motion, they are carried around the heavens by spheres that are concentric with the earth's center. The celestial region extends downward from the outermost sphere of the celestial region – the sphere of the fixed stars – to the innermost sphere of the moon. Aristotle regarded the celestial region as eternal and therefore assumed it to be composed of an ether that was eternal and incorruptible. The third and fourth books treat of the terrestrial region that ranges from just below the moon to the geometric center of the earth. Here we find four terrestrial

elements in descending concentric circles of fire, air, water, and earth, the last mentioned constituting a sphere that lies at the center of our spherical universe.

The first significant commentaries on *De caelo* were written in Byzantium. In the fourth century CE, Themistius (fl. late 340s–c. 385), a Peripatetic philosopher, wrote a commentary on *De caelo*, as did Simplicius (fl. first half of sixth century CE), a Neoplatonic philosopher. Aristotle's natural philosophical works were virtually unknown in the Latin West until the twelfth century. But they were known east of Byzantium, in Syria and Persia, brought there by Nestorian and Monophysite Christians who had been driven from the Byzantine Empire as heretics. Nestorian Christians translated Aristotle's treatises on natural philosophy into Syriac and from the latter they were often translated into Arabic.

Aristotle's works played a significant role in Islamic science and natural philosophy. By far the most important Islamic natural philosopher to comment on Aristotle's works was Averroes (1126–1198), in the twelfth century, who usually made three different types of commentaries on most of Aristotle's natural philosophical works, including *De caelo*. There was the short commentary, which was really a paraphrase or summary, of Aristotle's text. The second, or middle commentary, was also not a direct translation, but gave the meaning of a brief segment of Aristotle's text intermingled with comments by Averroes. The third and last type of commentary was the Long Commentary, which included all of Aristotle's text presented sequentially section by section, with each section followed by Averroes' commentary on that section. In the short and middle commentaries, it was often difficult to distinguish Aristotle's text from Averroes' comments.

During the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, Aristotle's *De caelo* finally reached the West in Latin translation. Gerard of Cremona (c. 1114–1187), the greatest medieval translator of Aristotelian texts from Arabic to Latin, translated *De caelo*, while in the thirteenth century William of Moerbeke (c. 1215–c. 1286) translated some 49 works from Greek into Latin, including *De caelo* and virtually all works attributed to

Aristotle (Grant 1974). Two important commentaries on Aristotle's *De caelo* were also available to medieval authors, namely Michael Scot's (d. c. 1235) translation from Arabic to Latin of Averroes' (Ibn Rushd) Long Commentary on *De caelo*, which was popular between the thirteenth and sixteenth centuries (as evidenced by 30–40 extant manuscripts), and William of Moerbeke's translation from Greek to Latin of Simplicius' Commentary on *De caelo*.

In the thirteenth century, Albert the Great (c. 1200–1280) and Thomas Aquinas (c. 1224/1225–1274) followed Averroes in their commentaries on *De caelo*. Albert wrote a paraphrase and Thomas an *Exposition*, although instead of including the whole relevant text, he substituted a few words – known as cue-words – from the beginning of the passage that would presumably enable the reader to identify the proper text in Aristotle's *De caelo*.

In the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, the most popular form of commentary on *De caelo*, and other of Aristotle's texts, was the *Questiones*. The questions format was developed at the medieval universities from a type of classroom disputation known as the "ordinary disputation." In such a disputation, the teaching master proposed a question and then selected one student to defend the affirmative side and another to defend the negative side. After both sides had presented their arguments, the master proposed a solution, thus resolving or "determining" the question. This formed the basis for the written questions on Aristotle's books on natural philosophy. They all bore the title *Questions on [title of Aristotle's treatise]*.

In the fourteenth century, Nicholas Oresme (c. 1320–1382) performed an extraordinary feat that was never duplicated. He produced two strikingly different interpretations of *De caelo*. In his earlier career, as a master of arts at the University of Paris, he wrote a questions treatise on *De caelo* between 1346 and 1356. Around 1370, King Charles V of France requested Oresme to translate four of Aristotle's treatises from Latin into French. The fourth treatise was *De caelo*, which Oresme translated around 1376 with the title *Le Livre du ciel et du monde*. Oresme not only translated

Aristotle's text into French, though usually by paraphrasing the text, but added a section-by-section French commentary. Each commentary was preceded by the entire relevant Aristotelian passage. It was Oresme's final treatise and was undoubtedly the most brilliant *Commentary on De caelo* in the whole of the Middle Ages. As recognition for his four French translations, King Charles made Oresme the Bishop of Lisieux in 1377.

To arrive at some idea of the number of extant commentaries on *De caelo* between the years 1200 and 1650, one should consult the indispensable catalogs compiled by Charles Lohr (1967–1974, 1988). A count reveals 278 authors who commented on *De caelo* treatises. Of these, 40 are known only from manuscript catalogs or were mentioned by other authors, which leaves 238 authors represented by a manuscript or a printed edition, or both; 139 are only in manuscript form; 76 are only in printed editions; 21 exist in both manuscript form and printed editions. If we add 76 and 21, we obtain 97 printed editions of *De caelo* (Grant 1994: 29–30). Of the 278 authors who commented on *De caelo*, a total of 71 wrote between the thirteenth and fifteenth centuries (18 in the thirteenth, 21 in the fourteenth, and 32 in the fifteenth centuries), while a total of 207 composed their commentaries during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries (108 in the sixteenth and 99 in the seventeenth century). It is obvious that *De caelo* was still frequently commented upon well into the seventeenth century. Its popularity may have derived from the impact of Nicholas Copernicus' (1473–1543) heliocentric theory published in 1543 (*On the Revolutions of the Heavenly Bodies*).

Commentaries and *Questions on De caelo* ranged over numerous cosmological issues. Of great significance was Aristotle's argument that the world is eternal, having neither beginning nor end. Here Aristotle was in direct conflict with the Christian faith, which assumed that God had created the world from nothing and would eventually destroy it. In the Condemnation of 1277, of the 219 articles condemned, some 27 denounced the eternity of the world in many contexts. In their *Questions on De caelo*, natural philosophers such

as John of Jandun (1285/1289–1328), John Buridan (d. 1361), and Nicholas Oresme argued that the world could not have been brought into being by natural means, because no natural means could be identified. Hence, they argued that in terms of natural causation, the world should indeed be eternal, as Aristotle had argued. Nevertheless, almost all commentators on *De caelo* believed on faith that the world is not eternal, but was created by God (Grant 1994: 76).

A number of comments on *De caelo* were influenced by the Condemnation of 1277. In his *De caelo*, and in many of his treatises, Aristotle had argued that certain phenomena were naturally impossible, as, for example: an infinite world, the existence of other worlds, the existence of anything beyond our world, and so on. Christian theologians viewed Aristotle's claims as effectively denying God the power to perform any of these acts, even if He chose to do so. Thus, they viewed Aristotle's arguments as a denial of God's absolute power to do anything short of a logical contradiction. Thereafter, scholastics allowed that God could do all the things Aristotle had said were impossible. They showed this by hypothetically assuming that these naturally impossible conditions were real and arguing accordingly. Many *De caelo* commentaries included a number of hypothetical questions and many arguments were thereafter formulated "according to the imagination" (*secundum imaginationem*). Although God could do naturally impossible things, none believed that He had actually done any of them, or would do them. But since they were possible by God's absolute power, scholastics envisioned worlds that were radically different from Aristotle's, even though they agreed with him that these hypothetical phenomena were indeed naturally impossible. The alternative was to abandon Aristotle's cosmos, a possibility that was never seriously entertained during the Middle Ages.

*De caelo* commentators often asked whether a body moved circularly could be infinite, and similarly for a body moved rectilinearly. If an infinite body moved circularly and completed one circulation in a finite time, it would follow that an infinite body traversed an infinite space in a finite

time, which is absurd (Grant 1994: 109). It was also usual to inquire whether an infinite body could move rectilinearly. Buridan denied that it could, because many infinite places would have to exist as the body moved into and out of them successively. Moreover, all bodies moving rectilinearly must be in a place. But an infinite body cannot be in a place, because no body could contain it (Grant 1994:109–110). These were Aristotle's arguments. But Buridan concedes that, according to article 49 of those condemned in 1277, it is an error to say that God could not move the whole world with a rectilinear motion. Thus, God could move the entire world rectilinearly even though the world is not in a place, because nothing lies outside of it to serve as a place.

In a question asking whether an infinite body is possible, Buridan denies that it is naturally possible, and also denies that God could create an infinite body, because then He could not create a body greater than that infinite body, since there is nothing greater than an infinite body. Thus would God's absolute power be limited (Grant 1994: 111) A number of scholastic theologians – for example, William of Ockham (c. 1285–1347), Gregory of Rimini (c. 1300–1358), Robert Holkot (c. 1290–1349), Henry of Harclay (c. 1270–1317), and others – argued the opposite: God could indeed create an actual infinite, although none believed he had done so. Those who adopted this interpretation were called "Infinetists."

Article 34 of the 219 articles condemned in 1277 declared, "That the first cause could not make several worlds" (Grant 1974: 48). This was Aristotle's opinion and was condemned because it denied to God the absolute power to create as many worlds as He wished. In the fourteenth century, *Questions on De caelo* always included a question as to whether God could create other worlds. Although medieval scholastics did not really believe that God had created other worlds, or would ever do so, they routinely argued that God could indeed create other worlds. Many assumed hypothetically that God did indeed create other worlds and then raised questions about the characteristics of those worlds. In refuting the existence of other worlds, Aristotle had assumed

they were all alike and were somehow distant from one another. But medieval natural philosophers posed questions that probably never occurred to Aristotle. If other worlds existed, did they exist simultaneously? Or did they exist successively, one world at a time? If simultaneously, were they all distinct and independent of one another? Or were they concentric, with one spherical world inside another?

Aristotle had claimed that if other worlds existed simultaneously, the earth of one world would move toward the earth of another world. This implied that an earth would have to rise up against its natural inclinations and somehow get through space and enter another world where it would seek to join the earth at the center of that world. To avoid this absurd consequence, Buridan and Albert of Saxony (c. 1316–1390) insisted, as did others, that each earth would remain at the center of its own world and have no inclination to join the earth of another world. In their view, each world is independent of every other world.

In his French commentary on *De caelo*, Nicholas Oresme used a plurality of worlds to introduce the subject of void space lying beyond our world. On the assumption of a plurality of spherical worlds, Oresme insisted that a void space would exist between any two of them. Thus did Oresme reject Aristotle's arguments that it was impossible that anything – place, plenum, void, or time – exist beyond our world. It was supernaturally possible. Indeed, Oresme argued that the void space beyond our finite world is infinite and is God's infinite immensity, although God is not an extended being (Oresme 1968: 177). Oresme's identification of God with infinite void space would be repeated in the seventeenth century by such figures as Nicolas Malebranche (1638–1715), John Locke (1632–1704) (Grant 1981: 239), Henry More (1614–1687) – although More viewed God as extended in His infinite space – and Samuel Clarke (1675–1729) (Grant 1981: 248).

Article 49 of the Condemnation of 1277 denied that God could move the entire spherical world with a rectilinear motion because a vacuum would be left in the place vacated by the world. This was a common question in *De caelo* commentaries.

Buridan and Oresme insisted that by his supernatural power, God could indeed move the world with a rectilinear motion even though the world is not in a place and would be moved through a vacuum, leaving a vacuum behind in its former location. Because there is nothing outside of our world, Oresme regarded the rectilinear motion of the world as an absolute motion, a concept that made no sense in Aristotle's world. Indeed such a motion would deny Aristotle's concept of place and motion.

Long before Copernicus, medieval natural philosophers were discussing whether or not the earth lies immobile in the geometric center of the world, as Aristotle argued. Indeed, it was one of the most popular questions in medieval cosmology. One form of the question inquired whether the earth rotates daily on its axis. Although numerous scholastic commentators posed this question, none accepted the earth's daily axial rotation as physically true. In his French commentary on *De caelo*, after extensive arguments in favor of the earth's rotation, Oresme rejected it, insisting, however, that it was nonetheless a viable hypothesis, because neither reason nor experience could resolve the issue.

Another aspect concerning the earth's motion was whether it might move slightly in the position it occupied at the center of the world. On this issue, John Buridan departed radically from Aristotle. Buridan agreed that if the earth were homogeneous and spherical, its center of magnitude and its center of gravity would coincide with the geometric center of the world. But the earth is obviously not homogeneous and therefore its center of magnitude does not coincide with the center of the world. However, the earth's center of gravity coincides with the true center of the world. But it does so in a very strange manner. Continual geological processes throughout the earth cause its center of gravity to change incessantly as it seeks to coincide with the geometric center of the world. Buridan concluded that the earth continually moves with small rectilinear motions that never cease because the earth incessantly undergoes geologic changes. Albert of Saxony and John Major (1467/1468–1550) adopted this position in the fourteenth and sixteenth centuries

respectively. After the Copernican theory was condemned in 1616, very few commentators on *De caelo* adopted Buridan's idea of a slightly moving earth.

When commenting on *De caelo* medieval scholars overwhelmingly emphasized the first two cosmological books, paying much less attention to the third and fourth books that were devoted to the heaviness and lightness of bodies and their motions. Some, like John Buridan, formulated a question in the third book that was concerned with whether the motive force that projects a stone, or continues the motion of an arrow, are moved by an external force or by an internal force that was usually called *impetus*.

Commentaries on *De caelo* continued to the end of the seventeenth century. The Catholic Church's condemnation of the Copernican theory in 1616, and of Galileo in 1633, made the heliocentric system unacceptable to Catholic commentators. But the geoheliocentric theory proposed by Tycho Brahe (1546–1601) in the sixteenth century was adopted by some scholastics. Brahe denied the daily rotation of the earth and retained its position in the center of the world. However, he assumed that all the planets – except the earth – moved with circular motions around the sun as their geometric center. The Jesuit natural philosopher, Melchior Cornaeus (1598–1665), adopted Brahe's geoheliocentric system in his *De caelo* commentary and thus made a dramatic departure from the traditional Aristotelian medieval system.

Tycho Brahe caused another major change in *De caelo* commentaries. By his observation of the comet of 1577, Brahe concluded that the comet moved in the celestial region and that the heavenly region was composed of a fluid substance, not hard celestial orbs, as had been generally assumed since the Middle Ages. If the orbs were hard, the comet would have smashed through them in ways that would have been detectable, which, of course, did not happen. As a consequence of Brahe's rejection of hard orbs, at least ten scholastic authors in the seventeenth century added a question to their *De caelo* commentaries that had never been discussed in the Middle Ages: "Whether the heavens are fluid or solid" (Grant 1994: 705). Those who opted for a fluid heaven also abandoned Aristotle's

fundamental concept that the celestial ether was incorruptible and unchangeable.

The new questions that were incorporated into early modern scholastic *Questions on De caelo* as a result of the cosmological changes proposed by Copernicus and Brahe were quite dramatic. Many scholastics, especially among the Jesuits, adopted Tycho's system in which the earth remained stationary in the center of the world, while the other planets moved around the Sun as their center of motion. Thus, *Questions on De caelo* underwent significant changes. But this should not obscure the fact that the great majority of questions first presented during the late Middle Ages, continued to be discussed to the end of the seventeenth century. We may conclude, therefore, that although traditional questions continued to dominate among *De caelo* authors, there was a genuine attempt to take cognizance of the revolutionary cosmological changes of the early modern era.

## Cross-References

- ▶ [Albert of Saxony](#)
- ▶ [Albert the Great](#)
- ▶ [Ibn Rushd \(Averroes\), Latin Translations of](#)
- ▶ [Impetus](#)
- ▶ [John Buridan](#)
- ▶ [John of Jandun](#)
- ▶ [Nicholas Oresme](#)
- ▶ [Parisian Condemnation of 1277](#)
- ▶ [Thomas Aquinas](#)

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*et corruptione* follow *De caelo* and antecede *Metereologica*. The three kinds of changes in addition to motion (dealt with in *Physica* and *De caelo*) are the main topics of *De generatione* as well as the attribution either to the four elements (material cause) or to the motion of the sun in the ecliptic (efficient cause) of the origin of such changes. They are: (a) generation and corruption when only the primary matter persists, while substantial form changes; (b) alteration, when substance persists and only qualitative properties change; (c) growth and diminution when change is limited to quantitative properties. Other very important physical notions such as action and passion, mixture and the role of simple bodies in mixed ones are as well discussed. This work reached the Latin middle age through the two main channels through which Aristotle's work spread in the Latin West, the Greek, and the Arabic. From the latter the medieval commentators borrowed a very useful instrument to get a better acquaintance with the topics discussed in Aristotle's work: Averroes' middle commentary, which contains also some hints to Greek commentators. In thirteenth-century Latin commentaries, the need to get to the heart of the text prevails, while in the fourteenth century the discussions of the more urgent philosophical topics overcome the literal explanation.

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## De generatione et corruptione, Commentaries on Aristotle's

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### Abstract

According to Andronicus of Rhodi's edition of Aristotle's works in the second half of the first century BCE, the two books of *De generatione*

In the Greek tradition of *De generatione et corruptione* only Philoponus' commentary has been preserved; it was translated in Latin by Gerolamo Bagolino in the sixteenth century and published by his son in 1540. Philoponus' commentary (in which Alexander of Aphrodisias is often quoted) can be considered the model of the following commentaries: it provides precise informations about the Aristotelian context of the topics discussed in *De generatione et corruptione* (referring to *De caelo*, *Physica*, *Metereologica*, and *Metaphysica*) and goes deep into some of the most relevant problems dealt with, paying particular attention to the arguments against atomism.



Part of the Latin (the translation of Gerard of Cremona) and the Hebrew (the translation of Zerayah ben Yshaq, end of the thirteenth century) tradition of Aristotle's *De generatione et corruptione* comes from the Arabian translation from the Syriac (by Ḥunayn b. Ishāq, Baghdad, ninth century). In addition to Ḥunayn's son Ishāq ben Ḥunayn's translation, more Arabic translations are recorded of the lost Greek commentaries by Alexander of Aphrodisias, Themistius, Olimpiodorus, and John Philoponus. In the Islamic world, Avicenna dealt with topics discussed in *De generatione et corruptione* in the third part of his *Shifā'*, known in Latin as *Sufficiencia*. The *Liber tertius naturalium De generatione* was translated only in 1280 in Toledo and it was not very diffused among the Latin scholars. It cannot be properly considered a commentary to Aristotle's work, even though it deals with topics discussed in *De generatione et corruptione*. The persistence of the elements in the mixed bodies is one of the main interests in Avicenna's text: he is convinced that they outlast without any change in mixed bodies, the changes interesting only the accidental forms. This was a problem largely debated in the Latin medieval tradition of *De generatione et corruptione* and was associated with topics such as the intension and remission and plurality of forms. Avicenna's solution was known through Averroes' censures in his *De caelo* commentary, where he attributes to substantial forms of the elements a weaker ontology (they are an intermediate stage between substantial and accidental forms). The mixed body, therefore, has a special substantial form with qualitative properties resulting from the mixture of the elementary qualities.

Averroes' (known in the Middle Ages also as "Commentator") middle commentary on the *De generatione et corruptione*, translated probably by Michael Scot around 1230, is by far more important for the western Latin tradition of Aristotle's work. Not only in the commentaries of the more prominent medieval thinkers, but also in the anonymous glosses the Commentator's interpretation of Aristotle's text is very often quoted as a sure authority. The difficult and often too concise Latin translations (both from the

Arabic and Greek) find in Averroes' explanatory notes a clear settlement, which consents a wider understanding of Aristotle's arguments; also the information about the ancient philosophical systems (Plato, Democritus, Leucippus, Anaxagoras, and Empedocles) is widely used by the medieval masters for a more adequate acquaintance with Aristotle's criticism.

*De generatione et corruptione* was available to the Latin world in two translations: from the Arabic by Gerard of Cremona (*translatio nova*) and from the Greek original by Burgundio of Pisa (*translatio vetus*). The latter was more widely diffused than the former and was used by Albert the Great, Thomas Aquinas, and Aegidius Romanus. Aegidius used both the old and the new translations, the former being according to him more respectful of Aristotle's intention.

The content of *De generatione et corruptione*, as well as of other works by Aristotle, Seneca, and Boethius, circulated since the thirteenth century in a very abridged form, namely as a list of sentences, in which the philosophical topics discussed in the two books were synthetically recorded (*Auctoritates Aristotelis*, ed. Hamesse 1974: 167–171). This kind of summary of Aristotle's philosophy was widely used by medieval commentators; very often quotations from *De generatione et corruptione* as well as from other works follow the text of *Auctoritates* rather than the original. Its favorable reception is confirmed, moreover, by the medieval tradition of comment on *De generatione et corruptione*: very often, in fact, the titles of the questions are drawn literally from *Auctoritates*; to mention only the more common: the persistence of matter in generation and corruption, the permanence of similar qualities in generated and corrupted things, the eternity of generation and corruption, reaction following action, the end of motion when properties are acquired by the generated thing, the permanence of primary qualities in the mixed, the elemental qualities, the easier transmutation between bodies with similar properties.

The *Auctoritates* records some sentences, in addition to those from Aristotle's text, from the commentaries on *De generatione et corruptione*

by Averroes and Albert the Great which are the two most important contributions to the full appreciation of the topics therein discussed in the Latin world. After the first early diffusion in some of the medical works from the School of Salerno, the fortunes of *De generatione et corruptione* depend exclusively on its use in the newly established university training.

Together with Averroes' commentary, the paraphrasis of Aristotle's *De generatione et corruptione* by Albert the Great can be considered the most influential contribution to the understanding of Aristotle's work in the Latin medieval culture. It is exactly this form of commentary which consents a more precise acquaintance with the not always perspicuous Latin translation. Albert's project, in order to make intelligible Aristotle's text, is to maintain part of the Latin words and expressions in a wider context of explanation; he reserves, moreover, a deeper analysis to particular topics in his digressions to the textual exegesis. Albert's choice of the topics to be more carefully considered, has a relevant role in the medieval commentary tradition, since part of the questions raised by the Aristotelian text have their origin in such digressions. According to Albert, *De generatione et corruptione* is the third and last part of the natural philosophy, having as its object motion concerning either substantial (coming and passing away) or accidental (alteration, augmentation, and diminution) forms of natural bodies. The special object of this part of natural philosophy, as well as its place in the wider domain of physics, is after Albert's commentary the first problem discussed in commenting on *De generatione et corruptione*. In several digressions Albert gives a more extensive presentation of Democritus, Leucippus, and Plato's solutions about the composition and the action of natural bodies, extending Aristotle's sketchy critical outlines. Albert deals also with the most relevant topics such as the role of potency and matter in generation, the different functions either of substantial forms and qualities in generation and mixture, or of the soul in human growth (where medical notions like the *humidum radicale* integrate Aristotle's solution), the permanence of the elements in the mixed bodies, the efficient

causality of celestial bodies, in particular the motion of the sun in the ecliptic.

Thomas Aquinas' commentary on *De generatione et corruptione* was prepared in Naples and it was, according to William of Tocco's biography, Thomas' last work on philosophy. Like other commentaries on Aristotle, it was not finished by Thomas; the lacking part of Book I (from ch. 5) and Book II was provided by Thomas of Sutton. Following his teacher Albert's lead, Thomas commented on Aristotle's text, but his explanatory strategy was very different from the paraphrasis of Albert the Great. The philosophical exegesis is introduced by a very careful presentation of Aristotle's text (*divisio textus*); the topics discussed by Aristotle are reconsidered and presented in a clear logical form, which permits a deeper acquaintance with philosophical problems (often labeled as questions). Albert's and Thomas' commentaries opened the way to the style of widely diffused commentary in the fourteenth-century Latin medieval tradition: the questions on Aristotelian works. In his commentary Thomas is particularly determined on arguing against the materialistic views of the atomists and of Plato, whose geometrical foundations of natural change ignore the importance of the formal structure of natural bodies. Generation and corruption include both matter's potentiality and substantial form's actuality. Thomas defends his conviction of the unicity of the substantial form arguing against Avicenna, who maintains in his *Fons vitae* that a plurality of hierarchically ordered forms is required for every being.

His two commentaries, in the form of explanation and questions respectively, bear witness to Aegidius Romanus' high interest toward *De generatione et corruptione*. The questions are limited to part of the first book, while the explanations are for the complete text. This latter commentary is different from both those of Albert the Great and Thomas; Aegidius limits himself programmatically to present Aristotle's intention and to clarify his way of arguing, reserving for the commentary through questions the discussion of the more important topics raised in the text (only at the beginning we find some topics widely discussed in a similar fashion to the questions

commentary). In commenting on Book II Aegidius introduces the wider analysis of philosophical topics as particularly relevant problems (*dubia*), after having explained Aristotle's text; these *dubia* are evidently what would have been reserved for the questions commentary, which Aegidius did not write. This change in the commenting strategy is very important: in the fourteenth century there is an evident distinction between the two kinds of commentary: the explanation is normally limited to an illustration of Aristotle's text, division of the text, and presentation of the main arguments, while the most relevant topics are discussed through the questions. Aegidius, like Albert and Thomas, is particularly eager in denouncing the limits of Democritus' and Plato's convictions about the primary components of natural bodies. In order to grant the infinite divisibility of matter as well as the natural bodies' possibility of action and passion Aegidius distinguishes between two different sorts of act: *actus in fieri* and *actus in facto esse*; the infinite divisibility is not consented in the latter. Discussing on matter Aegidius upholds his theory of the presence in matter of a certain formal element, labeled corporeity, which gives it an indefinite quantitative feature (*dimensiones interminatae*). In his questions commentary on Book I Aegidius deals with the problems raised by the atomists, with the essential features of generation, alteration, and augmentation, but also with the intension and remission of forms as well as with the limits of continuous motions like alteration.

Both Siger of Brabant and Boethius of Dacia, the two Masters of Arts who in Paris adhered to the new physical and moral doctrines drawn from Aristotle, commented on *De generatione et corruptione*. Siger limited himself to a concise explanation, while Boethius dedicated a certain number of short questions to the main problems discussed in Book I, privileging in the second the action of celestial bodies on the elemental sphere. In the prologue of his commentary Boethius states that man's highest perfection is in knowing the truth and in behaving rightly. In arguing against Plato's convictions about the origins of the world, Boethius points out that according to Aristotle cosmos has no beginning, contrary to what is

maintained by Christian faith; the same topic is discussed in the last question on Book II as well as in his *De aeternitate mundi*.

In the fourteenth century, Aristotle's *De generatione et corruptione* was often commented on at the University of Paris, where John Buridan, Nicholas Oresme, Albert of Saxony, and Marsilius of Inghen did their best to discuss in the wider context of Aristotelian philosophy the topics raised in the two books. Only John Buridan wrote two commentaries, an explanation commentary (*sententia*) and a questions commentary, while Nicholas Oresme, Albert and Marsilius limited themselves to the questions commentary; having been published in the early sixteenth century, Albert's and Marsilius' commentaries were largely diffused in Renaissance and Early Modern Aristotelian scholastic philosophy. Among others, the English philosopher Walter Burley wrote an explanation commentary, which had a much more limited circulation than his *Physics* commentary, edited in 1505.

In the fourteenth century, explanation commentaries had a minor role in comparison with those of the thirteenth century; their function was often reduced to the division of the text. The questions commentaries, on the contrary, assumed a complex and articulated structure so much so that a question or a group of questions could be sometimes considered a real treatise (for example, question 11 on Book I of Oresme's commentary on *De generatione et corruptione*, dedicated to reaction). In the central section of the questions, commentators usually provide a useful analysis of philosophical terms as well as different possible solutions to the problem(s) discussed; the opening arguments introduce a solution(s) different from that (those) introduced in the central section and the final arguments provide a critical view on this (these) same solution(s). Commentaries on *De generatione et corruptione* supply in this way a complete abstract of the more debated topics on natural philosophy, including logical and metaphysical aspects.

The French tradition from John Buridan to Marsilius of Inghen will be considered here as a whole. The opening questions of these commentaries enquire the possibility of a science

concerning generation and corruption. Together with the traditional distinctions between the different kinds of evidence in mathematics and in physics, a particular interest is devoted to the linguistic analysis, which permits to discriminate generation (interesting absolute, substantial terms) from alteration and augmentation (limited to connotative, accidental terms).

In canvassing the different features of generation and alteration new physical notions are introduced: changes which prelude and prepare generation and corruption (*alteratio praevia*) are continuous motions, while generation is an instantaneous transformation. These different kinds of changes occasion some very important analyses concerning natural, artificial, and violent transformations and consequently modal notions such as necessary, possible, and impossible. Determinism is ruled out by distinguishing between temporal and eternal necessity, the latter reserved only to the never-changing God's perfection, while even natural events like lunar eclipses can be frustrated, notwithstanding their apparent necessity.

According to Aristotle, generation is always coupled by corruption: this connection raises problems about the role of matter and above all about the relationship between the forms in both generated and corrupted bodies. All the Parisian commentators we are here considering adhere to the unicity of substantial form theory (with the exception of Oresme, who defends double substantial principle in human beings, which according to Marsilius of Inghen is an open adhesion to the plurality theory).

The problem concerning the identity of natural bodies interested in physical changes is raised in debating growth and diminution. Man's identity is assured by his soul, which is the same through different changes and ages, while in natural elemental bodies it is very hard to point out such a principle, precisely because of the continuous partial or total variations. Identity is a notion that can be properly used only for permanent things, while for successive ones (like those submitted to physical transformations) it can be used only in a larger sense.

The problem of action and passion in natural bodies heralds the last topic of Book I of *De*

*generatione et corruptione*, namely mixture. In addition to the traditional problems concerning the contact between agent and patient, in these commentaries the model of the diffusion of light (*multiplicatio specierum*) is assumed as a possible way of accounting for natural action. The atomist theory of change gives the occasion to John Buridan to deal with the possibility of the infinite division. The other commentators, beginning with Nicholas Oresme, introduce new philosophical notions such as intension and extension, referring respectively to the degree of intensity (*intensio qualitatis*) and to the spreading (*quantitas qualitatis*) of the quality in the natural body. These are the basilar notions of the *De configurationibus qualitatum* doctrine to which Nicholas Oresme dedicated a special treatise, which can be considered as one of the most innovative tools in natural philosophy, relying also on geometry and mathematics in order to explain physical changes. The latitude of forms is used in the questions of Book II to research into the ways of interacting of the elemental qualities.

Mixture raises very important problems concerning its natural or violent nature: all the elements, in fact, must be involved in order for a mixed body to be produced. The permanence of the elemental forms in the mixed body, moreover, revive the old contraposition between Avicenna and Averroes, the former against any possibility of change inside substantial forms, the latter more favorable to such a possibility for the elemental forms, exactly to let them survive inside the mixed bodies. In addition to the traditional topics either of intension and remission of forms or of the unicity/plurality of forms, new notions such as the temporal limits of alteration and generation of a mixed body (*primum/ultimum instans; maximum/minimum quod sic/quod non*) and reaction (the action of the patient on the agent) are introduced in these questions, together with the new mathematical tools to study motion (*de proportionibus*). In the last question(s) on Book II of *De generatione et corruptione* of the fourteenth-century Parisian commentaries we are considering here, a very significant change is to be recorded: the problem of the duration of natural bodies is analyzed relying on these new tools

(temporal limits) rather than on astrological notions, as in the case of Albert the Great's commentary.

With Lefèvre d'Étaples' *Paraphrases*, published in Paris in 1501 the tradition of Aristotle's *De generatione et corruptione* enters in a new age, in which the need of a more correct acquaintance with the text is more urgent than that with the philosophical topics (also the *Commentarii collegii Conimbricensis* on *De generatione*, where the late medieval discussions are very often recorded, have a similar approach).

## Cross-References

- ▶ [Albert the Great](#)
- ▶ [Aristotelianism in the Greek, Latin, Syriac, Arabic, and Hebrew Traditions](#)
- ▶ [Boethius of Dacia](#)
- ▶ [Ibn Rushd, Muḥammad ibn Aḥmad al-Ḥafīd \(Averroes\)](#)
- ▶ [Ibn Sīnā, Abū 'Alī \(Avicenna\)](#)
- ▶ [John Buridan](#)
- ▶ [John Philoponus](#)
- ▶ [Marsilius of Inghen](#)
- ▶ [Natural Philosophy](#)
- ▶ [Nicholas Oresme](#)
- ▶ [Siger of Brabant](#)
- ▶ [Thomas Aquinas](#)

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## Demetrios Kydones

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### Abstract

Demetrios Kydones (c. 1324 Thessaloniki to c. 1398 Crete), also spelled Demetrius Cydones, is a key figure in the intellectual and political life of Byzantium in the fourteenth century. Demetrios' greatest contribution is perhaps the intellectual challenge he poses to Byzantine conceit, as regards the cultural and spiritual achievements of the West. His translations of Latin theological texts as well as literary works indicate that the West was well aware of the Greek heritage, which the Byzantines considered as their prized national possession. The depth and clarity of

thought, pertaining to Western theology, put to test the dogmas, deeply engrained in Byzantium. Thus, Demetrios turns out to be one of those who stimulated an intense theological controversy, in the course of which Byzantine thought had to contend its identity against western Scholasticism. In his philosophical views, he is far from original. Just like his brother Prochoros Kydones, he supports Thomism, juxtaposing Christian Aristotelianism to the Neoplatonic aspects in the teaching of Gregory Palamas.

### Life

Demetrios Kydones was born in Thessaloniki into a noble Byzantine family. He was instructed in the liberal arts by the distinguished scholar and theologian Neilos Kabasilas and was given spiritual guidance by the future ecumenical patriarch Isidore Boucheiras, who also taught him classical Greek language and literature. It is disputable whether he was in touch with Barlaam of Calabria during his stay in Thessaloniki (1335–1341). Following his father's death in 1341, Demetrios had to take over the responsibility of his family. He was in close connection with John Kantakouzenos and had to leave the town during the Civil War (early summer of 1345). When in February 1347 Kantakouzenos' army entered Constantinople, Demetrios was appointed Master of Requests at court. He soon became renowned as an expert in classical literature. Initially, his interest in Latin was dictated by a pragmatic impulse, but his making himself acquainted with Thomas Aquinas' work helped him discover his vocation, namely to introduce the ideas of Latin theology in Byzantium.

In December 1354, he finished his translation of *Summa contra gentiles*. Encouraged by his success and with his brother's help, he translated *Summa theologiae* (Parts I and II) and *De rationibus fidei ad cantorem Antiochenum*. In Byzantium, Demetrios introduced various other Latin patristic and scholastic texts: excerpts from Augustine's *Letters* (ep. 28, 82, 143), *Sermons on the Gospel of St. John*, complete translations of



Anselm of Canterbury's *De processione Spiritus Sancti* and *De asymo et fermentato*, and Ricoldo of Monte Croce's *Refutation of the Qur'ān*. The original literary work of Demetrios was highly influenced by his Latin sources. He wrote the moral philosophical essay *De contemnenda morte*, three apologies explaining his conversion to Latin Catholicism, and a still unpublished *Defense of Thomas Aquinas Against Neilos Kabasilas*. The voluminous collection of 447 letters and his *Exhortations* are a valuable source for the history of Byzantium and its relations with the West and with the Turks.

His detailed knowledge of Latin theology enhanced his dissatisfaction with the Palamite doctrine and with Byzantine theology in general. By 1365, Demetrios had made a profession of faith in the Latin Church. In this time of political maneuvers, this did not affect his career at court, and he was appointed prime minister from 1369 to 1383 and later from 1391 to 1396. In 1390–1391, Kydones opened an academy of Greek culture in Venice, introducing the study of the Greek language and thought to the Italian Renaissance. In 1396, hostility toward his Latin Catholicism grew, and he had to retire to the island of Crete, where he died.

## Thought

Demetrios Kydones' primary reason for translating Latin theological works was to deal with the theological controversies of his age. From a Thomistic stance, Demetrios challenged the Neoplatonic aspects of Hesychasm. He supported the notion of God's simplicity, turning a cold shoulder to the distinction between essence and energies, which implies a distinction between essence and existence. On the contrary, according to Palamas there is a pre-eternal emanation of the energies of God's essence, constituting the divine wisdom or intellect, which is divine but not God and on the other hand is also not created. The philosophical sense of this debate lies in the juxtaposition of Aristotelian metaphysics, modified according to the scholastic teaching of transcendentals, to the Christian Neoplatonism of Palamas. From these

teachings, unlike Barlaam and Ankyndinos, Demetrios inferred that it is possible to apply apodictic syllogisms in theology. He tried to retain his adherence to this stance from a Thomistic point of view. In Thomas' doctrine, he saw a means of solving the problems of Hesychasm.

According to Demetrios, Thomas offered the best method of reaching the truth. Reasoning and the use of syllogisms lay in the very essence of man. The Creator attributed an intermediary place to the human soul between the intelligible and the sensible nature. This determines a midway mode of knowledge between the immediate intuitive knowledge and the experience of the senses. That is why knowledge cannot be carried out without change. Demetrios embraced the Thomistic conception of two modes of discourse. The first takes the sense data as a starting point, proceeds to the proximate truths, and is elevated to the prime and direct principles. The other type of discourse follows the opposite flow of thought, coming from the absolutely simple being to the composite things. Thus, knowledge enables the connection of the absolute and the contingent being. This is the essence of syllogism. Therefore, the use of syllogisms is a feature of human nature. Being the best of our faculties, reason exerts the best act and contributes to our final natural end. Paradoxically, Demetrios resembles Palamas, allowing for the application of apodictic syllogism in theology, but from a Thomistic point of view.

The literary work of Demetrios had as its consequence the most radical differentiation of conceptual patterns of Eastern and Western theology.

## Cross-References

- ▶ [Gregory Palamas](#)
- ▶ [Prochoros Kydones](#)
- ▶ [Thomism, Byzantine](#)

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## Denys the Carthusian

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### Abstract

After having studied philosophy at the University of Cologne “in the way of Thomas” (*in via Thomae*), Denys de Leeuwis (b. 1402; d. 1471) entered the Charterhouse

at Roermond, where he spent, almost uninterrupted, the rest of his life. To him we owe a massive literary output, which he organized according to a three-tiered hierarchical scheme of wisdom: philosophy is the lowest level of a hierarchy which, through scholastic theology, culminates in mystical theology. The three orders of wisdom are analogical and isomorphic; that is, philosophy prepares for and somehow foreshadows the superior modes of supernatural knowledge. This explains Denys' keen interest in philosophical matters. Unlike the majority of fifteenth-century Carthusians, Denys conceived of mystical theology not as an affective act only, but as a cognitive act complemented by love. Influenced by Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite, Albert the Great, Henry of Ghent, and fifteenth-century Albertists, Denys came to challenge, during his life, some major doctrines of his early "patronus" Thomas Aquinas.

Denys de Leeuwis (b. 1402; d. 1471) was renowned during his life and after death for his extraordinarily extensive and versatile literary production. Born in Rijkel in the Belgian province of Limburg, he was given his first education in the Abbey school of Sint-Truiden; then (1415) he attended the famous school at Zwolle in the Netherlands, where he had his first contacts with Modern Devotion. Having been denied access to the Carthusian monastery at Roermond (Dutch Limburg) because he was too young, he went on the advice of the Roermond prior to the University of Cologne. There he matriculated (1421) in the Thomistic *Bursa*, later called *Bursa Montana*. Even though he studied "in the way of Thomas," at Cologne he might have come into contact with the rival "Albertist" group led by Heymerich van de Velde. After receiving his Master of Arts degree (1424), he returned to the Charterhouse at Roermond, and this time he was admitted (1424 or 1425). He spent the rest of his life in the monastery, save for a short period before his death (1465–1469), when he was entrusted with the foundation and direction of the Charterhouse in Vught near's Hertogenbosch.

It has long been assumed that Denys accompanied Cardinal Nicholas of Cusa on a papal legation through the Low Countries and the Rhineland around 1451–1452, but recent research has put into question this piece of information (Meuthen 1993). However, there were real contacts between the two because some of Denys' writings are either dedicated to or associated with Cusanus (Emery 1991).

Even though Denys spent most of his life in the solitude of a Carthusian monastery, he was not isolated from the cultural life of his time. Not only did he have contacts with Cusanus and study at Cologne in his youth – his writings show him taking part in the doctrinal disputes animating that academic milieu – but his person and his writings encompassed "all of the spiritual currents of the Late Middle Ages," namely, "monastic theology, Scholasticism, speculative mysticism, and the Modern Devotion" (Emery 1996). Moreover, he was often consulted by secular and ecclesiastical authorities, as well as private people, concerning various issues, and was involved in the affairs of the world, as his pastoral, reforming, and anti-Mohammedan writings reveal.

The astonishing list of his works – more than 150 titles are still extant – makes him one of the most productive writers of the Middle Ages (Emery 2000). His corpus is impressive for the variety of the genres practiced and the wealth of the topics discussed. He composed commentaries on all the books of Sacred Scripture; treatises on various issues related to monastic life and to the traditions of meditation and writings based on famous monastic works (i.e., a commentary on John Climacus' *Scala Paradisi* and a "translation" *ad stilum facillimum* of John Cassian's *Collationes*); numerous ascetical, devotional, pastoral, juridical, reforming, and apologetic writings; several hundreds of sermons; and a *Summa de vitiis et virtutibus*.

Even more noteworthy, however, is the fact that a large section of his literary output consists of works of scholastic philosophy and theology: his enormous commentaries on Peter Lombard's *Sentences* (written over a lifetime and completed around 1464) constitute a unique document of medieval theological learning, wherein Denys,

on each topic, reported and contrasted the views of the foremost thirteenth- and early-fourteenth-century theologians – except the *nominales*, whom he judged to be concerned with words and unable to grasp reality – and added his personal comments. Furthermore, he commented upon the whole of the writings of Pseudo-Dionysius and upon Boethius' *De consolazione philosophiae* and wrote works closely based on Aquinas' writings. Remarkable are also his independent philosophical and theological treatises, wherein he expounded his personal views by collecting the remarks scattered throughout his major commentaries.

The first book of the *De lumine christianae theoriae* (around 1452) was his first and most extensive philosophical work: while describing the procession of all creatures from God and their return to Him, Denys treated all the crucial issues of the philosophical tradition, displaying a complete mastery of the doctrines of all the major ancient, Arabic, and Jewish philosophers.

Denys' last word on all the philosophical questions, however, is to be found in his *Elementatio philosophica*, which, like its theological counterpart – the *Elementatio theologica* – was written by him late in his career after the completion of the *Sentences* commentary (1464–1465); he organized both works in propositions followed by comments, imitating the structure of Proclus' *Elementatio theologica* (Emery 1996).

Such a huge corpus included an equally vast selection of sources, which ranged from Sacred Scriptures to the Fathers, from Christian mystics to canonists, from scholastic theologians to ancient and pagan philosophers, read either first-hand in Latin translation – for example, Plato's *Meno* and *Phaedo* in Aristippus' translation and Proclus' *Elementatio theologica* – or via the writings of scholastic doctors, especially those of Albert the Great. To Denys' mind, the most authoritative source after Scripture is Pseudo-Dionysius, whose writings constitute a sort of rule of thought according to which the teachings of other sources have to be evaluated in the theological as well as in the philosophical domain.

Among scholastic theologians, Thomas Aquinas has the preeminence not so much for intrinsic merits of his thought or because of Denys' schooling in the *via Thomae*, as for Thomas' sanctity. Over the course of his life, however, Denys, influenced by other authors, came to question Thomas' authority on several crucial issues (see below).

Central to Denys' thought is his conception of the hierarchical order of wisdom. Philosophic wisdom is the lowest level of a hierarchy which, through scholastic theology, culminates in the union of mystical theology. Therefore, philosophy prepares the human intellect for the superior modes of supernatural knowledge, and the highest form of philosophy, namely, metaphysical contemplation, the objects of which are the First Cause and separate substances, adumbrates those modes at the natural level (Emery 1996, 2003).

In contrast with the majority of his Carthusian brethren, Denys contested a merely affective interpretation of mystical union and stressed its cognitive nature. According to his interpretation of Pseudo-Dionysius' teaching – which he saw confirmed in the writings of Jan van Ruusbroec ("alter Dionysius") – in the contemplation of mystical theology, the mind unites with God by penetrating, beyond all negations and affirmations, the inaccessible light of his essence, known *quia est*. Simultaneously the soul unites affectively with God because love in the will accompanies this act of cognitive union.

As one may conjecture from the *Protestatio ad superiorem suum* (1440s), a work which Denys seems to have written in order to gain permission to resume his writing activity, the very breadth of his intellectual enterprise, as well as his intellectualist conception of mystical theology, caused him some problems, as in the 1440s, he was forbidden to write for some years and at the 1446 Carthusian General Chapter was severely criticized for unspecified reasons, probably connected with his literary activity (Emery 1996).

A crucial focus of Denys' thought is constituted by the nature and acts of the rational soul. Influenced by Pseudo-Dionysius and Boethius, as well as Albert the Great and Ulrich of

Strasbourg, Denys developed noetic doctrines, which implied harsh criticisms of Thomas Aquinas' teachings. Denys held that the human mind can know without recourse to phantasms and that it can know the quiddity of separate substances and, through their mediation, can contemplate God *quia est* and thereby attain a natural happiness in this life. Given the reciprocity between the order of being and that of knowing, Denys read Thomas' denial of the human soul's ability to know without recourse to the body as an argument against the soul's immortality. Moreover, since knowledge without phantasms was one of the key points of disagreement between Thomists and Albertists at the University of Cologne, Denys adopted in fact a position identical to that of the Albertist school (Palazzo 2006).

The distinction between being and essence is another doctrinal point where Thomas' teaching was fiercely criticized by Denys. Denys' view on this question changed radically, however, over the years, moving from an early adherence to the Thomistic doctrine of a real distinction between *esse* and *essentia* to the adoption of the position, attributed to Albert, Ulrich, and Henry of Ghent, that the distinction was only intentional. Also in this case, Denys was in fact an ally of the Albertist school. Even more, it was the reading of the *Tractatus de esse et essentia* of Johannes de Nova Domo, founder of that school, that led Denys to interpret Albert's and Ulrich's position in terms of Henry of Ghent's doctrine of intentional distinction.

Denys' biography has been recently reappraised in light of new evidence or through the reinterpretation of documents already at our disposal. It is now believed that the reason why at a certain time in the 1440s Denys was prohibited of commenting on the Scriptures is that he was not a formally recognized theologian, unlike the then prior of the Charterhouse of Roermond, Bartholomew of Maastricht. A detailed account has been given of the controversy about the supremacy within the Church opposing the Pope Eugene IV and the Council of Basel (1431–1449) and the role played

by Denys, who adopted a middle way between the two factions. Denys criticized Bartholomew of Maastricht's views on this matter and, due to these criticisms, was censured by the General Chapter of the Carthusians in 1446. Long-standing misconceptions concerning the relationship between Denys and Cusanus have definitely been abandoned (e.g., the conviction that Denys accompanied the Cardinal on the papal legation through Germany and the Low countries). By contrast, it has become clearer that an important tie between them was the common defense of the pontifical prerogative in the dispute against the Council. Finally, we know today that around 1455, Denys took a radical position in the dispute over simony, arguing that it is never licit to accept money or goods from someone asking to enter a convent or a monastery. In so doing, he came into conflict with his former professor in Cologne, Bernardus de Reyda (Emery 2014a).

At a doctrinal level, a thorough analysis has been carried out on providence. This topic, as has been observed, is at the heart of Denys' thought, since divine providence coincides with divine wisdom. Quoting both the Fathers and the scholastic doctors, Denys addressed this crucial subject several times throughout his corpus from both a philosophical and a theological point of view. It turns out that divine providence cannot be reduced to the order of all created things and their governance by the First Cause, for it involves other related issues such as God's foreknowledge and its compatibility with free choice and contingency; predestination of the elect and foreknowledge of the reprobate; and fate and its relationship with providence (Emery 2014c).

New studies have enhanced our knowledge of Denys' attitude toward philosophical and theological sources, providing at same time a valuable insight into his views on more specific topics. Recently attention has been paid to Averroes, who is among the philosophers most cited in Denys' works. Denys oscillated between a respect for Averroes as an authoritative figure of philosophic wisdom and a disapproval of the perfidious Averroes who denies the basic Christian truths (Palazzo 2012).

Denys regarded Thomas Aquinas, who was canonized as a saint, as the most important among the scholastic authors. Nonetheless, Thomas does not escape Denys' criticisms on several key doctrinal issues (e.g., the distinction *esse-essentia*; the necessary recourse to phantasms in every act of cognition; the soul's impossibility to know the separate substances) (Emery 2020). Overall negative was Denys' attitude toward Duns Scotus and Durandus of Saint-Pourçain, whom he considered extraneous to the main tendencies of the thirteenth-century theological discourse, rebuking them on many major issues (Emery 2011a, b).

According to Denys, Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite, who is the model of the highest form of wisdom, also provides a criterion according to which it is possible to evaluate the lower degrees of cognition concerning divine attributes and essence. Further research has shed fresh light on Denys' commentaries on Pseudo-Dionysius' epistles and *De mystica theologia* with specific regard to his intellectual interpretation of mystical theology and his interpretation of the distinctions among symbolic, intelligible, and mystical theology (Emery 2014b).

## Cross-References

- ▶ [Albert the Great](#)
- ▶ [Boethius](#)
- ▶ [Essence and Existence](#)
- ▶ [Henry of Ghent](#)
- ▶ [Peter Lombard](#)
- ▶ [Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite](#)
- ▶ [Thomas Aquinas](#)

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## Dietrich of Freiberg

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### Abstract

Dietrich of Freiberg (c. 1240/1250–1318/1320) was an important representative of the Dominican order in the Middle Ages. He focused on central philosophical problems taken up toward finding solutions applicable for philosophy as well as theology and the natural sciences. Methodologically, rational argumentation was key for Dietrich, even as he aimed, in line with Augustine's recommendation, at a concordance between authority (*auctoritas*) and reason (*ratio*). Characteristic of his thought are his theory of intellect, whose cognition renders it self-knowing knowledge: consciousness as self-consciousness; his doctrine of what is an essentially structured cosmos reflecting the comprehensible rationality of its absolute principle, the Godhead; and his theory of the rainbow. Dietrich was particularly influenced by Albert the Great, while he himself influenced the Proclus commentator Berthold of Moosburg.

Originally from Saxony, Dietrich of Freiberg (c. 1240/1250–1318/1320) was a member of the Dominican order who served as its Provincial Superior for the province of Germany from 1293 to 1296, as well as being its Vicar General from 1294 to 1296. In 1296/1297 in Paris, Dietrich obtained his master's degree in theology (*magister in theologia*), teaching there for about 2 years. In 1310, he was commissioned to lead the order as its Vicar Provincial. Dietrich probably died c. 1318/1320.

The bulk of his writings Dietrich devoted to specific philosophical problems. From the start, he considered intellect to be the central topic of

philosophical investigation. In his treatise, *On the Origin of Categorially Determined Reality* (*De origine rerum praedicamentalium*), Dietrich explores the relation between nature – after God, the intelligences (*intelligentiae*: immaterial forms), the spiritual substances and the heavenly bodies, the sublunary sphere dependent on these – and intellect. While Henry of Ghent asserted that intellect is affected by natural objects, Dietrich took the opposite view: intellect constitutes the essential being, the quiddity (“whatness”), of the natural object and in this quiddity the very “what” (*quid*) itself of the object. This he holds because the natural object cannot distinguish between itself as “what” it is and its “whatness,” or essence, nor can it in turn combine these so differentiated components. Intellect alone is able to do this. Intellect is not passive, but rather active, since it is intellect which through the process of definition provides the natural object its essence. Indeed, Dietrich ascribes to intellect the function of efficient cause (*causa efficiens*): Its very differentiation (between the components of the natural object as the object of cognition) is its efficacy, for it effects the definition and through the definition renders the natural object cognizable as something, as “what” it is. For intellect, it is only in this way that the object even becomes an object at all – as a unity of “whatness” and “what,” both constituted by intellect. Cognition of an object therefore means, “intellect effects its definition,” differentiating through the definition the “whatness” from the “what” and, at the same time, combining the “whatness” and the “what.”

Nonetheless, intellect is also passive, inasmuch as the cognizing possible intellect presupposes the activity of the agent intellect, for the possible intellect grasps its objects by conceiving this very activity. Indeed, the agent intellect is also an efficient cause (*causa efficiens*). In itself, in an intuitive act, the agent intellect cognizes: its principle, God, itself, and the universe of beings. In the possible intellect, however, the agent intellect effects the general contents (*species intelligibiles*) cognized by the possible intellect in cognizing the agent intellect, and the possible intellect cognizes the agent intellect only in cognizing these general contents. Exclusively in the

state of bliss (*in beata vita*) is the agent intellect not merely efficient cause, but also formal cause, when it is unified as a form with the possible intellect as a kind of matter – that is how man essentially cognizes God, according to Dietrich in his treatise *On the Beatific Vision* (*De visione beatifica*). All this illustrates the way in which Dietrich tends to proceed, drawing theologically important conclusions from philosophically justified presuppositions. Such presuppositions rest methodologically on rational argumentation concurring, as much as possible, with arguments of authority. Even so, for Dietrich, reason takes precedence before authority.

Authority for the view that the possible intellect in its cognizing enjoys general cognition is provided by Aristotle with his theory of science. Thus, Dietrich concludes his treatise *On the Intellect and the Content of Cognition* (*De intellectu et intelligibili*) by enumerating the features that an object must have in order to be an object of scientific cognition. What is important is that it has being, that it has general validity and necessity, and that the fundamental grounds for cognizing something are provided, hence that the elements of definition are given. Cognition, insofar as it is knowledge, cannot change; for change transforms cognition into non-cognition – on this premise Plato, Aristotle, and Dietrich all agree.

Intellect which knows that it knows and knows what it knows is for Dietrich “being” which conceives and which in conceiving conceives its object; such intellect is, at the same time, being which conceives itself as its object and therein is conscious conception, consciousness as self-consciousness, *ens conceptionale in quantum huiusmodi*. In this view, sense perception and imagination are conceptual beings (*entia conceptionalia*). The intellectual object alone is the same as its conception; solely for intellect is its conception intellect itself – is intellect itself its own object. Hence, intellect is consciousness of itself.

In his philosophy of nature, Dietrich treats such topics as continua, contraries, and optical phenomena. One continuum is time, which for Dietrich possesses merely intramental being, a view combining the philosophies of time developed by

Aristotle, Augustine, and Averroes. Dietrich differs from Aristotle to the extent that he situates contrariety only in the third kind of quality, which includes passive qualities and affections, no longer allying it with four categories. This reflects his consistent aim of reducing the principles of nature.

Dietrich's place in the history of science is assured by his work *On the Rainbow (De iride)*, with its theory perfected only centuries later by Descartes and Newton. While most of his predecessors compared the colors of the rainbow to the spectrum issuing from the sun's rays on passing through a water flask, tending to equate the latter with a cloud or a collection of drops, Dietrich was the first to trace the light's path through the individual drop, discovering two refractions at the surface of the drop nearer the observer and one internal reflection at the surface farther away. So explaining the primary, or lower, rainbow, Dietrich elucidated the production of the secondary, or upper, rainbow as involving two refractions at the surface of the drop nearer the observer and two internal reflections at the surface farther away – thus accounting for the color inversion in the secondary rainbow.

### Cross-References

- ▶ [Albert the Great](#)
- ▶ [Berthold of Moosburg](#)
- ▶ [Consciousness](#)
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### Ḍirār ibn Amr

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#### Abstract

Ḍirār ibn ʿAmr (c. 728–796) was an early Muslim controversialist whose theories helped shape the development of Islamic theology.

He was associated with, but subsequently disowned by, the burgeoning Muʿtazilite school, a rationalist movement in Islamic theology. He is credited with advancing an apophatic theology, a materialist physics, and an ambivalent resolution to the problem of human action and divine predestination. His positions have survived almost exclusively in doxographic accounts of Islamic thought.

## Biographical Information

Ḍirār's lifespan is uncertain: it will be noticed that many scholars give a later death date of 815 (from a report of a 90-year lifespan in al-Jāhīz; see van Ess 1992, 2.32n.3). He was an Arab from Kufa in Iraq, a hotbed of early Imamist (proto-Shīʿite) thought. He travelled widely: to Basra, the early center of Muʿtazilism, perhaps as far as Yemen, and eventually to the court of the Abbasid Caliphs, Baghdad. His occupation as a court theologian of sorts inaugurated a tradition that led to the flourishing of state-sponsored Muʿtazilism in the early ninth century. He is attributed with numerous works on specific topics, including many refutations of contemporary sects (see van Ess 1993, 5.229–231 for a list). Only one of his works survives, a recently recovered treatise critical of hadith (traditions ascribed to the Prophet); his philosophical and theological positions must be recovered largely from hostile and later witnesses. By such witnesses, he is generally counted as a Muʿtazilite; major figures in early Muʿtazilism, however, such as Abū l-Hudhayl and Bishr ibn al-Muʿtamir, sought to distance him from the movement.

## Philosophy

Although his contributions were inspired by theological concerns, Ḍirār is associated with a number of innovations which may be considered philosophical in nature; such was the case with most theorists of his era who ventured beyond the immediate scriptural, jurisprudential, and political aspects of Islamic life.

Early Muʿtazilites were especially creative in developing cosmologies which could account for contemporary natural scientific theories, usually based on Greek antecedents, in the context of Islamic revelation. The atomistic trend in Islamic thought, whereby the constituents of the universe were reduced to atoms and their accidents, faced several early challenges, among which was Ḍirār's theory of "constituent parts" (*abʿād*). For Ḍirār, bodies are made up of these constituent parts, which are co-extensive with physical properties: colours, weight, coolness, and so on. Another class of accidents supervene on bodies: these include states of being, such as knowledge or pain and the capacity to act (e.g., *Maqālāt* [i.e., al-Ashʿarī 2005] 305–6). The first class of properties endures, whereas the second class is momentary. The human capacity to act, however, was occasionally counted among the *abʿād* either by Ḍirār or his followers (e.g., *Maqālāt* 345). Van Ess has commented on parallels in the commentary tradition on *De gen. et corr.* (1992, 2.42–43; English trans. 2018, 2.46–47). The most notable consequence of Ḍirār's view, however, was its neglect of substance as a physical principle underlying accidents (or constituent parts, for that matter). Bodies simply appear in the world formed out of their constituent parts, which can change to a certain extent. A human being, for example, is only the sum total of his constituent parts, with the momentary accidents supervening in turn (*Maqālāt* 330, where capacity to act is included among the *abʿād* again). This meant that the human being has no soul as such.

Ḍirār had a novel approach to the most vexing issue of the time, human agency. Strict monotheists and, later, mainstream Sunni theologians tended toward determinism, considering any attempt to justify human free will to be an diminution of God's omnipotence. Muʿtazilites, however, were notorious for their theodicy, which required the establishment of human responsibility for their acts. Ḍirār's position added "acquisition" to the resolution of human acts: God is the ultimate creator of acts (including perception), whereas humans "acquire" them. Yet, crucially, both parties are agents "in reality" (e.g., *Maqālāt* 281). This double agency

acknowledged several issues in causality, allowing for acts (and natural events) to be analyzed as real events while preserving God's role as the ultimate agent: a single act, as al-Ash'arī puts it, could have two agents (281). Later theologians would transform Ḍirār's model of "acquisition" so that the human side of the partnership would become significantly secondary.

Ḍirār introduced two somewhat contradictory innovations to theology. For one thing, he articulated a negative theology which sought to obviate the difficulties involved in predicating attributes of God by taking their inverse: God is not said to be "knowing," for example, but rather "not ignorant" (e.g., *Maqālāt* 166). On the other hand, Ḍirār proposed a quiddity (Ar. *māhiyya*, "whatness") for God which could be perceived by humans upon the creation of a "sixth sense," that is, in the afterlife (Malāḥimī 474–5). This intervention was notable in its approach to theophany, allowing for a category of sense perception beyond the ordinary for an extraordinary object. It also introduced a major metaphysical concept, of essences in themselves, early to Islamic theology.

## Cross-References

► [Proofs of the Existence of God](#)

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## Divine Law

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### Abstract

This article deals with the question of how the notion of divine law was defined in medieval philosophy by exploring the thought of a number of prominent thinkers in the Jewish, Islamic, and Christian philosophical traditions – Judah Halevi, al-Fārābī, Maimonides, and Thomas Aquinas. All these thinkers were acquainted with the Platonic–Aristotelian tradition that laid much of the basis for medieval political philosophy and they all grappled with this tradition in formulating their approaches. Moreover, many played a prominent role within their religious community. For them the problem of divine law was not simply an interesting theoretical question but a problem that lay at the heart of their particular religious commitment. They saw their task not only as defining the characteristics of divine law but as defending the divine nature of their own religion. The article concludes with the seventeenth century philosopher Spinoza and explores the relation between his approach and the approaches of his medieval predecessors.

## Introduction

What characteristics must a law possess in order to be considered "divine?" How is such a law to be distinguished from laws legislated by human beings or from the form of law known as "natural?" The question of the definition of divine law, and the positing of the very existence of such a law, are intricately related to one's conception of God and God's relation to humanity. Or to formulate it from a different perspective, it is related to how one views the structure of the world and the

role played by God and by human beings in this structure. Is God cognizant of human beings and exercises an immediate providential role toward humanity, which assumes the expression of laying down law among other activities. What is the purpose of such a law? How is it revealed and how can one verify that a particular law is in fact God's command. Even if one does not accept the view of God's immediate relation to humanity, and, by extension, rejects the view that God legislates particular laws, can one nevertheless accept the notion of certain laws being "divine" in a meaningful sense? What would "divine" mean in this context and how would it be distinguished from laws that are considered to be human?

### Judah Halevi

The thought of the twelfth century Spanish–Jewish philosopher Judah Halevi provides a good illustration of many of the issues involved in the notion of divine law. Halevi begins his magnum opus, the *Kuzari* with the following story: An angel appears to the pagan king of the Khazars, and informs him that his thoughts are pleasing to God but not his actions. The king is faced with the dilemma of discovering which actions are pleasing to God, and in his quest, he turns to various sages to ascertain the answer. In Halevi's story, just as in the historical narrative upon which it is loosely based, the king ultimately chooses Judaism. Halevi takes poetic license in his retelling of the tale by having the king turn first to a philosopher to discover the desirable actions. Halevi's "philosopher" responds to the king's question by first summarizing many of the main points of the philosophers' credo, which is essentially based on the thought of the tenth century Islamic philosopher al-Fārābī: God is the source of emanation of the world and its order, an emanation that is without a beginning or an end. God is not cognizant of individuals and their acts, nor is God capable of volitional activity. The perfection of the individual lies in the perfection of the intellect, culminating in conjunction with the Active Intellect and immortality. Ethical character traits are necessary for bringing one's intellectual potential to fruition

by creating the proper external (social) and internal (psychological) state, which enables the individual to engage in the diligent search for truth leading to the attainment of conjunction. Halevi's "philosopher" concludes (*Kuzari* 1:1):

If you attain such a state of knowledge, do not be concerned with which religious law (*shari'a*) you follow in order to glorify God, or by what speech, language, and actions. You may also create for yourself your own law (*dina*), as well as for your family and the members of your state if they accept it, in order to glorify and praise God and to conduct yourself in an ethical manner. Or you may follow a law based on the rational *nomoi* laid down by the philosophers, and strive for purity of the soul. In conclusion, seek purity of the heart in any manner that you are able, after you acquire knowledge of all the sciences. Then you will reach your goal – conjunction with the spiritual being, that is to say, the Active Intellect. Perhaps it will then bestow upon you prophecy and inform you hidden matters by way of veridical dreams and truthful visions.

In this manner, the "philosopher" informs the king in a not so subtle manner that his dream is not a revelatory one at all; it is in fact a false one, the product of his own vain imaginings. True prophecy is attained as a result of achieving the state of conjunction with the Active Intellect. For the Aristotelian philosopher there is no divine law in the sense of a law whose immediate author is God. There exists no set of ritual acts that are preferable to any other, as long as the core of the religion is of an ethical nature and does not interfere with the pursuit of perfection, if not actively promote it. Halevi's "philosopher" appreciates the positive role religion plays in society. It is important that the members of society glorify God in prayer and ritual acts, not because God derives any benefit or pleasure from these acts or is even aware of them, but because of their beneficial affect upon their practitioners. Therefore, Halevi's "philosopher" is indifferent to the question whether one should choose an already existent religion or creates one's own religion according to the principles laid down by the philosophers.

The answers the king receives to his quest on the part of the proponents of Christianity, Islam, and Judaism, on the other hand, share in common the notion of a personal, volitional creator of the world who has the ability to communicate with



humanity. The religion commanded by God by means of revelation is the one that is pleasing to God. The question that is raised by this approach is how to establish the truth of revelation and hence whether a particular religion is in fact divine. For Halevi the answer lies in the nature of the miracles accompanying the revelation. The grandeur of the miracles that defy any naturalistic explanation and the multitude of eyewitnesses to their occurrence attest to the truth of the message and the fact that God is the author. The most reliable sign for Halevi is the audible speech that God created and which conveys the divine message directly to the people. This view emerges explicitly from Halevi's treatment of the revelation at Mount Sinai in which the Ten Commandments were given (*Kuzari* 1:87):

Fire encircled Mount Sinai and remained there for forty days. The people saw it, and they saw Moses enter it and emerge from it. The people heard the pure speech in the [giving of the] Ten Commandments. . . The multitude did not receive the Ten Commandments from solitary individuals or from a prophet, but from God. However, they did not possess Moses' strength to behold that grand scene. Henceforth, the people believed that Moses was addressed by a speech that originated with God. It was not preceded by any thought or suggestion in Moses' mind. Prophecy is not, as the philosophers think, the conjunction of the soul whose thoughts are purified with the Active Intellect, also termed the Holy Spirit and Gabriel, and the apprehension of it. It is possible [according to the philosophers] that at that moment [of conjunction] the person would imagine in a vision, either while asleep or awake, that another person is speaking to him. He would hear imaginary speech in his soul, not by way of his ears. He would see this person in his imagination, and not by way of his eyes. He would then say that God spoke to him. These notions were negated by the great Gathering [at Sinai]. Accompanying the divine speech was the divine writing. God engraved these Ten Commandments on two tablets of precious stone, and gave them to Moses. The people saw the divine writing, just as they heard the divine speech.

The two different conceptions of God's relation to the world, that of the philosopher and that of the Jewish sage (as well as the Christian and Moslem sages) lead to two very different conceptions of divine law. Halevi is well aware of the naturalistic explanation the philosophers offer for

understanding the nature of revelation. From his perspective, the philosophers treat all religions essentially as human-made law. He knows that the philosophers draw a distinction between different laws by their content and their purpose, or by their material, formal and final causes – namely, by whether the law is based on rational-ethical *nomoi* and designed to contribute to human perfection or not. Moreover, they distinguish between the efficient cause of different laws in terms of the perfection of the legislator of each. For Halevi, however, divine law is precisely a law whose immediate efficient cause is God. He does not reject the view that divine law is distinguishable from all other legislations also by its content and purpose. He devotes much of his treatise to explore this issue and highlight the distinguishing characteristics of the divine law in these areas. Halevi's God is a wise deity who does nothing in vain or in an arbitrary manner, hence everything commanded by God must have a purpose and is designed to promote it in an ideal manner. Nevertheless, what makes a law divine in his view is first and foremost that it is given directly by God; all the other distinctions follow from this fundamental one. That there are rational *nomoi* is not disputed by Halevi. Every society, even a band of thieves, realizes that they must be governed by certain ethical propositions in order to survive (*Kuzari* 2:48). Passages in the *Kuzari* reflect Aristotle's distinction between natural and conventional/human law – namely law that consists of those general propositions that are binding everywhere and law that consists of particular practices and enactments that may vary from place to place (*Nicomachean Ethics* V.7, 1134b–1135a). For Halevi, while divine law contains laws that resemble natural law and human law, it is fundamentally different from both. In being commanded by God, it is ideal and completely obligatory not only in its general ethical directives but in all its particular commandments, whether they are of a social or ritual nature. Moreover, for him the divine law, as opposed to human law, remains forever constant in all its particulars just as human nature remains forever the same. The divine law molds the soul of the individual, and not only society at large, in a

perfect manner that is known only to God (*Kuzari* 1:79; 2:48–50; 3:7–11, 23; 4:19). This is the view of divine law that Halevi develops in his rejection of the approach of the philosophers.

## Al-Fārābī

Halevi's "philosopher" belongs to the tradition of the great tenth century Islamic Aristotelian philosopher, al-Fārābī, whose approach to law is anchored in Plato's *Republic*, particularly in the notion of the philosopher-king, and in Aristotle's *Ethics*. In many of his writings, al-Fārābī dwells on the problem of the nature of the ideal polity, its lawgiver, and the characteristics of the law that he legislates. Following his Greek predecessors, al-Fārābī thinks of law primarily in terms of its final and formal causes, or its purpose and the way it goes about in achieving it. He traces the differences in the purpose and content of each body of law to the character of its legislator. In the *Book of Religion* he writes:

Religion (*milla*) is opinions and actions, determined and restricted with stipulations and prescribed for a community by their first ruler, who seeks to obtain through their practicing it a specific purpose with respect to them or by means of them [...] If the first ruler is virtuous and his rulership truly virtuous, then in what he prescribes he seeks only to obtain, for himself and for everyone under his rulership, the ultimate happiness that is truly happiness, and that religion will be virtuous religion (*Political Writings*:93).

Al-Fārābī goes on to deal with the nature of the opinions and actions prescribed in the virtuous religion. The opinions deal with God, the spiritual beings together with their ranks and functions, the generated material beings and how they are ordered, the nature of prophecy, and ultimate reward and punishment. These true opinions, al-Fārābī clarifies in the continuation of his remarks, and in more detail in his other writings, are often presented in metaphorical or imaginative form, as befitting the state of society for which they are intended. The virtuous religion also presents tales of edification describing the prophets and virtuous rulers and well as the wicked and what became of them. The actions it prescribes are

divided into those relating to the praise of God and the righteous, as well as condemnation of the wicked, and those concerning the mutual dealings of individuals with each other in society and how a person should conduct oneself. Al-Fārābī sees the virtuous religion as similar to theoretical and practical philosophy, and subordinate to these two branches of philosophy – the first one dealing with the order of existence and the second with human governance.

Al-Fārābī lives in an age in which society is governed by revelatory religion, a fact that he can hardly ignore. Yet it is interesting to note that he refrains from using the term "divine" (*ilāhī*) in characterizing religion. He characterizes religion either as virtuous (*ṣaḍīla*) or errant (though some of the terms he uses for religion – *sharī'a*, *sunna*, *milla*, *dīn* – have the connotation of divine). He may have desired to sidestep the problem of dealing directly with Islam in developing his theoretical model, though he certainly thought that Islam should be understood in accordance with this model. Nevertheless, there is no suggestion in his model of a single virtuous religion – the contrary is true – or even of a virtuous religion that is the seal of all virtuous religions, as Islam is formally regarded by its adherents. This can be seen even more clearly from al-Fārābī's other political writings such as the *Political Regime* and the *Opinions of the People of the Virtuous City*. Al-Fārābī's model is a dynamic historical one in which one virtuous religion succeeds another, each with the appearance of a new ideal lawgiver, and each is framed in accordance with the changing conditions. Al-Fārābī does not ignore the relation of virtuous religion to revelation. He draws an integral connection between the two, as can be seen from the following passage in the *Book of Religion*:

Now the craft of the virtuous first ruler is kingly and joined with revelation from God. Indeed, he determines the actions and opinions in the virtuous religion by means of revelation (*wahy*). This occurs in one or both of two ways: one is that they are all revealed to him as determined; the second is that he determines them by means of the faculty he acquires from revelation and from the Revealer, may He be exalted, so that the stipulations with which he determines the virtuous opinions and

actions are disclosed to him by means of it. Or some come about in the first way and some in the second way. It has already been explained in theoretical science how the revelation of God, may He be exalted, to the human being receiving the revelation comes about and how the faculty acquired from revelation and from the Revealer occurs in a human being (*Political Writings*:94).

Revelation for al-Fārābī is a natural phenomenon that characterizes the reception of one who attains the state of conjunction with the Active Intellect, as seen from his description of the first ruler (*The Political Regime*:36). Al-Fārābī certainly does not think that God is the immediate efficient cause of revelation, just as God is not the immediate efficient cause of any natural phenomenon. While al-Fārābī's depiction suggests that God is in some manner directly responsible for the law laid down by the first ruler, his reference to theoretical science in this context indicates that he views this phenomenon along the lines of the Greek philosophical tradition – a point that is confirmed by his other writings. The “faculty” the first ruler acquires in revelation is not a new faculty at all. It is essentially the understanding of how to translate his perfect knowledge of the order of existence and of the purpose of human beings into an ideal polity that directs its members to the attainment of human perfection and ultimate felicity. In his *Selected Aphorisms*, al-Fārābī lists all the gifts possessed by the first ruler that enable him to accomplish this task – namely, perfect wisdom, prudence, rhetorical excellence, a perfect imagination, courage, and not possessing any physical impediments (*Political Writings*:37). In other words, the virtuous religion is seen as the product of the conscious deliberations of the ruler who possesses all these qualifications. These deliberations may be said to be the result of “revelation,” which essentially is an emanation from the Active Intellect that strengthens the activity of the individual's intellect and imagination, thereby enabling the individual to lay down a perfect law. Al-Fārābī's view that at times all the actions and opinions are revealed to the first ruler “as determined” should not be interpreted as indicating that God in this instance is more directly involved in laying down the virtuous religion. Al-Fārābī alludes to the view that in this instance the

faculties of the soul, particularly the intellect and the imaginative faculty, ascertain the opinions and actions to be laid down in the virtuous religion while the individual is in the prophetic state – that is to say, in the state of experiencing intellectual illumination – rather than his laying down the particulars of the religion on the basis of conscious deliberations while no longer in this state.

For al-Fārābī then, the virtuous religion is a natural phenomenon from a number of perspectives. It is the product of revelation, which itself is a natural attainment by the individual of perfect intellect. Furthermore, it is designed to direct society to the natural perfection of humanity that results in ultimate eternal felicity, which is a natural consequence of the attainment of perfection. If we equate al-Fārābī's virtuous religion with divine religion or law, the line between the natural and the divine is completely blurred in his thought. Divine law not only incorporates natural law as known by reason and which provides the foundation for human or conventional law; it is also the ideal expression of natural and human law. What divine law is not, according to this conception, is a law that God directly legislates. It is the latter notion of divine law, as we have seen, which Halevi seeks to defend against al-Fārābī's approach. Halevi is not in principle averse to blurring at times the distinction between the natural and the divine. All natural phenomena, he notes, are from a certain perspective divine in that they are created by God (*Kuzari* 5:21). When it comes to understanding the divine law, however, he insists upon maintaining the distinction between the natural and the divine. The former reflects God's governance by way of the fixed activities of His intermediaries while the latter is the product of God's immediate, personal activity.

### Moses Maimonides

Al-Fārābī's political philosophy left a deep impress on subsequent Islamic thought. In a crucial sense, Avicenna, Ibn Bajja, and Averroes were al-Fārābī's disciples in this area, as was the Jewish philosopher Maimonides. Maimonides not only applied al-Fārābī's political thought to his

philosophic understanding of Judaism, but also to his pioneering Jewish legal activity. When Maimonides embarked on the project of writing the first complete code of Jewish law, he appears to have been strongly influenced by al-Fārābī's discussions of the characteristics of the virtuous religion. The question that faces students of Maimonides' thought is the limits of this influence. Does Maimonides understand Mosaic Law completely in accordance with al-Fārābī's model, or does he adopt this model only in part.

For Maimonides, the divine law is distinguished from all other legislations in that it imparts true opinions to its adherents, thereby showing them the way to intellectual perfection and true felicity (*Guide of the Perplexed* 2:40; 3:27). In Maimonides' terms, it is directed to the "welfare of the soul" and not only to the "welfare of the body," or body politic, which is the goal of non-divine legislations. Moreover, the divine law inculcates the moral virtues that contribute to the "welfare of the body" by prescribing actions that are perfectly equibalanced, neither too extreme nor too lax, whereas non-divine legislations fall short in this matter (*Guide* 2:39). On these points Maimonides' views are anchored in al-Fārābī's thought. Moreover, he opens his legal code, *Mishneh Torah*, with a section devoted to legally binding opinions regarding God and the order of the world that conform to al-Fārābī's conceptual scheme. Maimonides also agrees with al-Fārābī that only one who attains intellectual perfection can lay down a divine law. He employs this point to argue that one can distinguish true divine law from its imitators by looking at the intellectual and moral characteristics of the lawgiver (*Guide* 2:40). But he stops far short of al-Fārābī by maintaining that there was and will always be only one divine law, and that is the Law of Moses. More important, he appears to regard Moses as merely the recipient and transmitter of the divine law, with God being the actual author who communicates the Law to Moses by means of a created divine voice (*Guide* 2:33). In other words, Maimonides appears to be closer to his coreligionist, Judah Halevi, than he is to al-Fārābī by treating God as the immediate efficient cause of the divine law, with the divine voice created by God and heard by all of Israel attesting to the truth of this point.

Maimonidean scholars have debated the problem whether Maimonides in fact believed that God, and not Moses, was the immediate author of the divine law as contained in the *Torah* and that God created an audible voice heard by all Israel as the *Torah* relates. A number have argued that Maimonides' esoteric view on this matter was that Moses himself was the legislator of the law in one or both of the two ways described by al-Fārābī in the passage from the *Book of Religion* cited above. Maimonides draws a number of parallels between the divine law and nature. Like nature, he notes, there is nothing in the divine law that is in vain. Like nature the divine law does not pay attention to the isolated, but to what is beneficial in the majority of instances (*Guide* 3:25–26, 34). If we interpret Maimonides as agreeing with al-Fārābī that the divine law is the product of a naturally attained ability, even if Maimonides regards the level of perfection attained by Moses as a unique occurrence, then the distinction between divine law and nature breaks down even more. For Maimonides, as for al-Fārābī, the divine law is the ideal expression of both natural law and conventional or human law. It was framed by one who attained ultimate perfection and was designed to promote it in the most effective manner possible within a polity. Based on his perfect theoretical and practical apprehension, Moses organized the Jewish polity in a manner that best imitates God's ordering of the world.

Maimonides leaves little doubt that even non-prophetic legislators partake of a divine though natural gift – namely, the ability to rule. While people are by nature social animals, they are not by temperament capable of living together without destroying each other. Only one with the ability to rule, an ability that Maimonides traces to an emanation from the Active Intellect to those possessing a superior imagination, can bring about the social harmony necessary for communal existence. Yet in lacking theoretical perfection these rulers and lawgivers are not concerned about inculcating true opinions, nor are they capable of organizing society with the view of directing it to final perfection (*Guide* 2:37, 40). Only one who combines intellectual and imaginative perfection, the prophet, is the one who receives the emanation from the Active Intellect

to both faculties and is capable of ruling society in an optimal manner. Only the individual who achieved the ultimate intellectual perfection, Moses, was capable of legislating a permanent law that merits the label “divine.”

Yet even if we accept the interpretation that Maimonides understands divine law completely in accordance with a naturalistic model, his approach to the issue is not framed by purely theoretical philosophical considerations. His primary concern is to defend Mosaic Law as the unique divine law in a manner that is at least consistent with what he regards as philosophic truth regarding God’s governance of the world. The concern to uphold the validity of Mosaic Law is all the more evident if we interpret Maimonides as agreeing with the traditional belief that God is the immediate author of the law given to Moses. For all his commitment to medieval Aristotelian philosophy in general, and the commitment to al-Fārābī in particular, Maimonides’ first commitment remains to Judaism.

### Thomas Aquinas

The characterization of one’s loyalty belonging primarily to one’s religious tradition rather than to philosophy per se is certainly true also for the great thirteenth century Christian philosopher, Thomas Aquinas. The influence of the Aristotelian tradition and that of Maimonides on Thomas’ political thought is striking. Yet, Thomas makes use of the philosophic tradition only insofar as it does not negate any of Christianity’s basic tenets. He is closer to Halevi than Maimonides in this matter. Thomas’ God is a very personal God, as is true of any Christian who believes in the Incarnation, a belief that flies in the face of the Aristotelian tradition.

In his *Summa theologiae* (Q90–108) Thomas distinguishes between different types of law in a much sharper and far more detailed manner than any of his predecessors. He is a strong proponent of the idea of an eternal natural law that is known by human beings by virtue of a reason that partakes of divine reason. He regards human law as the application of natural law to particular circumstances by means of practical reason. Thomas remains firmly in the Aristotelian tradition on

these points. Yet in addition to natural and human laws, Thomas posits the existence of divine law, which is not simply the ideal form of natural and human laws by another name, and he goes to great lengths to show its necessity. Law as such has as its final end happiness, but as Thomas’ discussion clarifies, both natural law and the human law derived from it are incapable of directing human beings to eternal happiness. Only the divine law can lay down the ideal external and internal acts by which to attain this happiness. For Thomas, as in the case of Halevi, only God knows the path by which God is to be reached, and this is made known only by revelation. Thomas further argues that only the divine law is concerned with humanity’s relation to God while human laws are concerned solely with human relations. Even in those cases that human law devises institutions relating to divine matters, it is only for the sake of human relations (Q99, A3). Echoes of this view can be seen already in the thought of Halevi and Maimonides.

Yet Thomas, as opposed to Halevi and Maimonides, accepts the existence of two divine laws and not one – the one contained in the Old Testament and the one contained in the New Testament. In order to account for two divine laws he must accept a historical model, one that posits progress over time in which the people become prepared for a more perfect law. The New Testament with its teaching and commands is the Law that leads to divine grace and eternal felicity by being a law that leads to perfect virtue (Q91, A5). He assigns an intermediary role to the Old Law. It goes beyond human law that is concerned only with earthly good by paving the way for the New Law; it does not in itself, however, make its adherents fit to attain everlasting happiness. Thomas devotes much attention to the divine wisdom as it is reflected in all aspects of the Old Law before coming on to show how the New Law completes and perfects it by directing more of its attention to the internal state of human beings and bringing about the reception of divine grace.

Thomas also distinguishes the Old Law and the New Law by their immediate agents. The New Law was transmitted directly by God, while the Old Law was given to Moses by God through the intermediary of the angels (Q98, A3; though

compare to *Quaestiones disputatae* 12, 14 where Moses receives intellectual vision without angelic help) – a view that characterizes prophecy in general in Maimonides’ thought, but not Mosaic prophecy given directly by God, at least according to his exoteric view on the matter. It should be noted that in other writings Thomas is influenced both by Maimonides’ view of the special nature of Mosaic prophecy as well as his naturalistic theory of prophecy in general. Nevertheless, he breaks with Maimonides by treating the biblical prophets as attaining their prophecy by divine grace and not because of their natural dispositions. Nor is the particular content of their prophecy in his view dependent upon the faculties of the prophet’s soul, or even on the angels who serve as intermediaries, but on God. For all of Thomas’ indebtedness to Aristotelian thought and his acceptance of much of their view of the natural order, in all matters pertaining to revelation he ascribes to God a personal role.

## Baruch Spinoza

The seventeenth century Dutch philosopher, Baruch (Benedictus) Spinoza could not be more different than Thomas on the last point. God in his view is not a personal deity at all, and all divine activity is natural. In his *Tractatus theologico-politicus*, Spinoza sets out to overturn the project of the medieval political philosophical tradition in general, and Maimonides’ project in particular. For what is this project if not to understand the content, and not just the phenomenon, of biblical revelation philosophically, and show how the religion that was given by way of revelation promoted human perfection within a polity in an ideal manner. The foundation for this approach is the argument that revelation is only received by one who is intellectually perfect. On this basis one could read Scripture as containing theoretical truths, albeit often in metaphorical form, and one could see its commands as providing the ideal path to ultimate felicity. This approach to Scripture is undermined by the argument, which Spinoza goes to great lengths to make regarding the Old Testament in his *Tractatus theologico-politicus*, that the characterization Maimonides

draws of non-prophetic lawgivers – namely, individuals with a perfect imaginative faculty but imperfect intellect, hence they did not know where true perfection lies and how to direct the nation to it – is true also of all the biblical prophets including Moses. According to Spinoza, Moses possessed a perfect imagination but far from perfect intellect. He knew how to organize a nation of slaves but not how to lead them to a perfection that he himself lacked. What follows is that the Old Testament cannot be a source for theoretical truths, nor does it direct one on the path to felicity. It is a law that enabled the Jews to attain social stability for awhile and nothing more. In other words, it could aim no higher than earthly good. If Moses presents the law he laid down as designed to do more than that, and that he received this law by hearing an audible divine voice, then he was simply deluding himself and others in Spinoza’s view.

All the terms we have used till now take on different meanings in the context of Spinoza’s philosophy. Laws that are based on historical revelation, that is the product of those with superior imagination, do not deserve the epithet “divine.” Divine law is equated with natural law, which for Spinoza is the law that is known by the light of reason rather than by revelation. In other words, true revelation is the knowledge attained by the great philosophers and not the knowledge attained by the prophets. Furthermore all particular legislations cannot be considered to be divine for divine/natural law, according to Spinoza, has the following traits: (1) it is universal; (2) it is not dependent upon historical narrative; (3) it does not command ritual; (4) ultimate reward is integral to its fulfillment, that is to say it is the natural consequence of living according to the light of reason (*TTP*, chap. 4). While it is true that Spinoza attempts to interpret the New Testament as divine law, and this view brings him into an affinity with Thomas Aquinas, his interpretation of the New Testament shares little with Thomas’ view. For Spinoza, Jesus, as opposed to Moses, is the paradigm of the true philosopher teaching the universal truths of reason, nothing more.

In a crucial sense, Spinoza shares much in common with al-Fārābī, and with this point we come full circle. For both al-Fārābī and Spinoza



the divine and the natural are synonymous and there is no expression of divine will outside of the order of nature. Al-Fārābī's first ruler is the perfect philosopher. Divine law for al-Fārābī is the product of a perfect intellect and the ultimate expression of natural law in the context of any given society. If one rereads the speech of the philosopher at the beginning of the *Kuzari* cited at the beginning of this article, one might for a moment think that this philosopher is a proto-Spinozist. Yet for all the similarities between al-Fārābī and Spinoza there remains a great abyss between these two thinkers. Al-Fārābī accepts the Platonic model of the philosopher king and applies it to revelatory religion. He develops a model by which the revelatory religions can be viewed as expressions of philosophy and as directing their adherents to true felicity. It is the tie between religion and philosophy that Spinoza seeks to break; it is the view that religious law leads to true felicity, and hence should be the law of the state, that Spinoza writes his theological-political treatise to combat. Al-Fārābī maintains the optimistic Platonic view that the state can be ordered to actively promote true human perfection. Maimonides redefines Judaism accordingly, going so far as to dogmatize it in the attempt to convey the opinions, and not just the actions, that should be accepted by all. Spinoza's goal is the more modest one of making society safe for philosophers by not interfering with their pursuit of truth. For him this cannot be accomplished by understanding Scripture philosophically, let alone as providing theoretical truths closed to philosophy, but by undermining the authority of Scripture in teaching any theoretical truths or laying down the path society must follow. Thus, Spinoza sets the course for a goal alien to al-Fārābī, and certainly to most of the medieval political philosophical tradition, namely, liberal secular society no longer bound to the idea of revelatory religion but to human/divine reason alone.

## Cross-References

- ▶ [al-Fārābī, Abū Naṣr](#)
- ▶ [Judah Halevi](#)
- ▶ [Moses Maimonides](#)
- ▶ [Thomas Aquinas](#)

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## Divine Power

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### Abstract

The explicitly scholastic Divine Power distinction developed out of the twelfth century theological discussion of the nature of God's power. At issue, initially, was the desire to preserve the constancy of God's nature and

yet to preserve his freedom from any sense of necessity. The distinction emphasized the difference between what God's raw power was capable of and God's power as identified with what he actually wills. The understanding of this distinction was later influenced by canonist discussions of papal power, and the distinction often came to be interpreted as two different powers that belonged to God. The development of this later understanding is frequently viewed as playing an important role in the emergence of the modern period.

While the history of the question of what God can and cannot do certainly has a long and almost untraceable history, the distinctive approach to the question in the Middle Ages owes much to the twelfth century debates between Peter Abelard and Peter Lombard and the forging of the influential formulation of the problem in Lombard's *Libri sententiarum*.

Abelard, as in most things, is renowned for holding a controversial position on the extent of God's power. His thinking on the subject stems from what became known as the principal opinion of the twelfth century nominalist school, viz. once something is true, it is always true (*semel est verum, semper est verum*). God's will, like his knowledge, never changes. Whatever has been, is, or will be are events God has always known and events God has always willed. For God, then, to act differently would be to deviate from the axiom that what is true is always true. The consequence of such thinking manifests itself in a God whose power, from the point of view of other twelfth century thinkers, was very limited. God's capacity to act is limited to what he has done, is doing, or already plans to do. While Abelard can hold that God can do whatever he wills, he must admit that God can *only* do what he wills and nothing more.

For many thinkers such a restriction on God's capacity was unacceptable. Because of his influence on the rest of the Middle Ages, Lombard was the most important of Abelard's critics. But Lombard was more than a critic. In distinctions 42–44, where Lombard explicitly treats the issue of

Divine Power, he adopted many of Abelard's formulations, including the fact that God's knowledge and God's will do not change with the passing of time. However, in distinction 43, Lombard takes a stand against Abelard's conclusion that God can only do what he wills. Lombard makes a separation between God's pure capacity and his volition, saying, "God is able to do many things he does not will to do, and is able not to do what he does." In short, Lombard holds that sheer power goes beyond volition. God contains within himself the raw power to do anything that does not involve a contradiction. Whether he wills such things is a different matter.

With the introduction of a distinction between God's sheer capacity and his ordained will in his *Libri sententiarum*, Lombard determined the direction of all subsequent discussions in the medieval period. By the mid-thirteenth century, we find in the *Summa* of Alexander of Hales one of the fullest early descriptions of the distinction. Alexander writes that God's power, considered *absolute*, exceeds the divine will. But when God's power is considered from the standpoint of what God actually wills, *ordinate*, then God's power and will are coextensive (*Summa Halensis*, pt. 1, inq. 1, tr. 4, q. 1, m. 2, c. 2). At this point in history, the language of *potentia absoluta* and *potentia ordinata*, found in Alexander, did not suggest that there were two different powers in God from which he acted, but rather expressed two ways of looking at God's one single power. One way of looking at the power was absolutely or *absolute*, in abstraction from all other considerations. The second way was as an ordained power or *ordinate*, in connection with what God actually wills. The idea that there were two distinct powers in God was a later innovation.

Despite this nuanced use and sophisticated understanding of the Divine Power distinction developed by several thinkers throughout the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, the discussion of God's power at the level of *potentia ordinata*, for some, still appeared to place an unacceptable restriction on what God can do here and now. Thus, it appeared to carry with it a certain propensity toward the necessitarianism of the extreme Aristotelianism that many feared. This

affinity with a doctrine of necessity came to be a concern for thinkers during and after the condemnations of 1277. Consequently, some theologians after 1277, particularly concerned with safeguarding the freedom of God, were prone to use the distinction in different manner than was first intended, namely, as a distinction between different sources of power from which God could choose to act.

In addition to the concerns of post-1277 theologians, there was also a notable contribution from the burgeoning field of canon law at the turn of the fourteenth century. In attempts to safeguard the freedom of papal power, canon lawyers began speaking of papal power in terms of a distinction between power *de facto* and power *de iure*. Behind this distinction was the belief that the Pope had certain powers afforded him by the law (*de iure*), but that he also had the power to act outside of the law and even change the law (*de facto*). How canon law came to have an influence on the theological discussions of Divine Power is a complex story. However, the influence is unmistakable. John Duns Scotus often uses the language of *de facto* and *de iure* to accentuate the difference between a *potentia absoluta* and a *potentia ordinata* (e.g., *Ordinatio* I, dist 44; see Courtenay 1990: 101–103).

Throughout the rest of the fourteenth century, the Divine Power distinction was employed in various and often confused ways. Sometimes it was used only to highlight the hypothetical possibility that God could have acted differently, assuming of course that God's nature and will were other than they are. Other times, the distinction was used to emphasize the pure contingency of the created order. Such use emphasized that even though things typically act in a certain way, they need not necessarily act that way. God could in fact act out of his absolute power and change the current order and nature of things. This latter view, unfairly or not, has become in posterity closely associated with the *via moderna* of medieval nominalism and thinkers such as William of Ockham. Moreover, this latter use of the Divine Power distinction, emphasizing the contingency of the created order, was not without consequences for the progress of thought.

In the field of philosophy, the use of the distinction lies near the heart of fourteenth century mistrust about the level of certainty that natural reason could deliver. The introduction of the idea that God could change the created order left the once necessary relations between subject and accident, cause and effect, open to doubt. God could, for example, make a fire without heat despite its obvious contradiction with the current nature of things. Likewise, no longer could one be certain that if there was a cause it had to have an efficient cause. The oft repeated phrase, that "what God can do through secondary causes, he can do himself" suggested that although the natural order apparently requires that every event has a proper and mediate cause, God can on occasion suspend this requirement. God, in fact, could intervene and create the effect directly. In short, the use of Divine Power distinction to accentuate two unique powers in God caused many, by the mid to late fourteenth century, to call into question the amount of certainty that natural knowledge could claim for itself.

Theological discussions were also impacted by the later use of the Divine Power distinction, particularly regarding the issue of justification. Since the necessity of the created order was called into question by the activity of God's absolute power, it became plausible to conclude that former assurances of salvation through the activity of the church and causal effects of participation in the Eucharist no longer carried as much weight. In place of the older theology, which firmly accepted that God only acts from his ordained power, a new theology was offered that emphasized a covenantal relationship with God. This newer theology asserted that there are no assurances in the order of creation or in the ordained ministry of the church about the procurement of salvation. Rather it is always possible for God to act otherwise. For example, the question of whether God could damn Peter and save Judas was often discussed. Heiko Oberman has done much to connect this emerging theological discussion to the momentous events of the Reformation.

Finally, the influence of the Divine Power distinction also had ramifications for the beginnings of modern science. Scholars have highlighted the

fact that the ability to question the necessity of the created order made it possible for thinkers to begin envisioning new conceptual models of the world. Once the necessity of assumed relations was called into question, new possibilities could be envisioned. Pierre Duhem, at the beginning of the twentieth century, was one of the first historians of science to insist on the importance of the principle of *potentia absoluta* for understanding the emergence of modern science. Since he first presented this thesis, a long debate has continued over its validity. More recently, Edward Grant has renewed in certain respects the thesis of Duhem, and Francis Oakley has pointed to evidence of the continuing use of the Divine Power distinction well into the modern period.

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- ▶ John Duns Scotus
- ▶ Peter Abelard
- ▶ Peter Lombard
- ▶ William of Ockham

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## Divine Suffering (Theopaschism)

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### Abstract

Divine suffering (theopaschism) was a recurrent philosophical issue within theological discourse in the Middle Ages. Informed by the Scriptures, the Church Fathers, and then varied Hellenistic philosophical frameworks, Christian theologians largely agreed God was incapable of suffering as the divine nature was eternal, perfect, and immutable. Suffering meant there was a deficiency or change in the nature of something, which was deemed impossible for God, who by definition, was in the perfect state of eternal happiness. Theologians asserted that God was impassible, that is, without passion (*apatheia*) or disturbance that would entail change toward the more deficient. At the same time, the majority of theologians professed that Jesus Christ, the Word of God

and second person of the Trinity, was incarnated and suffered death upon the cross for our salvation. Medieval theologians negotiated this tension between divine impassibility and *apatheia* with their belief in Jesus Christ, who was of the same substance with the Father God and the Son (Word) of God who suffered and died through crucifixion. From the early church throughout the Middle Ages, theologians advanced various arguments, wherein they sought to protect the divine nature from suffering while also professing the Word of God suffered in the flesh to heal and restore humanity.

### **Anthropomorphism and Divine Suffering Within the Biblical Narrative**

From the Pentateuch to the writings of the New Testament, God is depicted by anthropomorphic language, for instance, the Book of Genesis declared that the Lord “was sorry that he had made humankind on earth, and it grieved him to his heart” (*Genesis* 6:6). Furthermore, the emphasis on divine wrath persisted throughout the Scripture, as the Apostle Paul declares, “For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness” (*Romans* 1:18). Medieval theologians argued that anthropomorphic language was not to be taken literally as God was not an actual “strong tower” (*Proverbs* 18:10) or “refuge and fortress” (*Psalms* 91:2) any more than literally moved to human emotions such as compassion and repentance. The biblical narrative transitions from the more anthropomorphic to a historical account of Jesus Christ, who is “God with us” (*Matthew* 1:23) as the Word of God “lived amongst us in the flesh” (*John* 1:1–14) and was “like his brothers and sisters in every respect. . . to make a sacrifice of atonement for the sins of the people” (*Hebrews* 2:17). God is literally enfleshed and incarnated in Jesus of Nazareth, which led to questions on the relationship between the divine nature and divine suffering, such as does God in Christ Jesus experience hunger, suffering, and death?

The foolishness of these questions was not lost within the New Testament. In his first letter to the Corinthian church, Paul declared, “For Jews demand a signs and Greeks desire wisdom, but we proclaim Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles, but to those who are the called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God” (*1 Corinthians* 1:22–24). Returning to this declaration in the thirteenth century, Thomas Aquinas asserted that the cross of Christ is foolishness to the perishing because it contains the impossible by human wisdom, which is, “God dies, and that the omnipotent falls prey to the hands of violent men” (*In 1 Cor.* 1.3 [no. 47]). Not only unbelieving Jews or Greeks, but the earliest followers of Jesus struggled with his crucifixion and death. While walking with his disciples, Jesus revealed the Son of Man (himself) must undergo “great suffering” and “be killed” to fulfill his mission. Upon receiving this news, Peter took Jesus aside and rebuked him because the Messiah was not to be killed. Aroused by these interventions of his disciple, Jesus denounced Peter by declaring, “Get behind me, Satan! For you are setting your mind not on divine things but on human things” (*Mark* 8:31–33). The disciples expected Jesus to liberate Israel; thus, for the Messiah to suffer crucifixion ran contrary to their worldview. Following the resurrection of Christ, the early church leaders and subsequent theologians reinterpreted the crucifixion as part of the salvation story, which now extended to all who believed in the salvific power of Christ crucified.

The centrality of Christ crucified in the Christian tradition is underscored by the Eucharist, which was instituted by Jesus in the upper room, when he took and broke a loaf of bread, gave it to his disciples, instructing them, “This is my body, which is given for you. Do this in remembrance of me.” Jesus then took the cup and taught them, “This cup that is poured out for you is the new covenant in my blood” (*Luke* 22:17–20). Christ crucifixion is professed in the liturgies and creeds of the Catholic Church (i.e., Latin and Greek churches of the Middle Ages). Christ crucified stands at the center of the sacramental life; however, theologians have wrestled with divine

suffering, in part, due to Greek philosophical teachings and, more so, on account of the biblical testimony that attests to a sovereign, perfect, and eternal God.

## Hellenistic Philosophy and Divine Suffering

The question of influence is difficult when ascertaining the variegated relationships between the Hellenistic philosophers and Christian theologians related to the issue of divine suffering. Adolf von Harnack (1851–1930) is well-known for arguing that Greek philosophy sullied the original teachings of Christianity (Harnack 1900). Following Harnack, it became a commonplace to assert that Platonism contorted the teachings of Jesus, including the doctrine that taught Jesus was the same nature as God as God alone can save humanity, exemplified by Athanasius of Alexandria (296–373) with the Nicene Creed of 325 (Elert 1957). The relationship between Hellenistic philosophers and Christian theologians was diverse and without a true center; however, it may be concluded that medieval theologians privileged the Scriptures and the rule of faith (*regula fidei*) over philosophical commitments. The Church Fathers adhered to the biblical notion of divine participation by correlating passibility and impassibility to proclaim that God loves us by divine compassion (Gavrilyuk 2004).

The Greek philosophical tradition espoused diverse teachings related to divine impassibility, but the prevailing position was that the gods could not be incarnated and suffered as it denoted change from perfection to imperfection. Critiquing Homeric stories about the gods and goddesses in the *Republic*, Plato (ca. 429–347 B.C.E.) argued that if gods changed, then it was to deficiency as the supreme divine nature can only be made a lesser being (*Republic* 380E–381A). Within his treatise *Timaeus*, Plato emphasized the mediator – the demiurge or motherly receptacle – who supported and located all changing things in this world (*Timaeus* 40E–41A). For Plato, the ultimate reality is eternal and immutable, whereas change always leads to the destruction of things (*Laws*

894A). Echoing Plato's critiques against the mythic stories on the gods assuming human form, Aristotle (384–322 B.C.E.) asserted that the unmoved mover was impassible and immutable; therefore, the divine nature was unmoved by this material world (*Metaphysics* 1073A). Christian theologians agreed with these teachings about divine perfection and immutability; however, at the same time, they believed the Word of God walked among us and suffered death for our salvation.

Early Christian theologians usually relied on the interpreters of Plato, notably Plotinus (ca. 205–269/270 C.E.), who synthesized various teachings from the Greek tradition. Plotinus advanced a tripartite hierarchy where the One was alone, transcending being and understanding; then second, the Mind (Intellect) was the mediating receptacle for intelligible forms; and third, the Soul was the lowest form that brings life into this world. Plotinus taught that the human ascent to the One entailed leaving our bodily and spiritual senses in flight from the “alone to the alone” (*Enneads* 6.9.11.51). Following Plotinus, late-antique theologians depicted the spiritual ascent toward the Father God in a similar manner; albeit the Unknown One (of Plotinus) was now revealed in Jesus. Whereas Greek philosophers largely rejected divine suffering in any form, Christian theologians professed, “God was pleased to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, by making peace through the blood of his [Jesus] cross” (*Colossians* 1:20).

The Jewish philosopher, Philo of Alexandria (25 B.C.E.–50 C.E.), had significantly influenced Christian reflection on the divine nature and the Logos (Word) of God. In his treatise on divine immutability titled *On the Unchangeability of God* (*Quod deus immutabilis sit*), Philo affirmed the impassibility of God without employing the common Greek term *apatheia* (without passion) within this or any of his extant writings. Rather than employing the term *apatheia*, Philo depicted God as “non-turning (*atreptos*)” and without change; consequently, anthropomorphisms ascribed to God were intended for instruction without ontological significance. Rather than creating God in the image of philosophical



constructs, Philo employed Hellenistic teachings to distinguish the Lord from Hellenistic gods (Hallman 2007). Influenced by Philo's interpretive approach, the Church Fathers privileged the allegorical (spiritual) reading of Scriptures, which safeguarded the transcendent God from any literal take on the anthropomorphisms.

### Divine Impassibility in the Second and Third Centuries of the Eastern Church

From the second century onward, theologians declared God suffered and died in Jesus Christ, the Incarnate Word of God, while insisting the divine nature was impassible. Christian apologists defended the rule of faith (*regula fidei*) against alternative readings of the Scriptures, including Docetism, which insisted the Son of God could never suffer bodily; therefore, the appearance of Christ crucified was phantasmal. Patripassianism (akin to Sabellianism Modalism) was another alternative reading that taught God existed in three modes (rather than in three relational persons) but was always one; therefore, Christ was the Father who literally suffered and died on the cross. Against these and other alternative positions, the Catholic Church professed that the Word of God, as a distinct hypostasis from the Father and Holy Spirit, died in his real flesh and bone body.

Eminent early theologians, including Ignatius of Antioch (ca. 35–108 C.E.), Justin Martyr (100–165 C.E.), and Irenaeus of Lyons (130–202 C.E.), taught that God was immutable and impassible and then reaffirmed the biblical story of God's descent in the person of Jesus Christ. With martyrdom awaiting him, Ignatius sent a letter to the Ephesian church, conveying his determination to follow the sacrificial example of Jesus Christ, who he called the "first passible and then impassible" incarnate God. According to Ignatius, the suffering incarnate God was worth emulation. Justin Martyr, who converted from Middle Platonism to Christianity, taught the incomprehensibility of God (*First Apology* 61.10) and then declared that the Scripture revealed a compassionate and long-suffering Father who healed

humanity through the Word of God. The Word of God reveals the Father but in Paul's words declared, that we now "see in a mirror, dimly...know only in part" (*I Corinthians* 13:12). Writing against Gnostic teachers in *Against Heresies (Adversus Haereses)*, Irenaeus asserted that God was impassible and immutable as he affirmed divine wrath without recognizing underlying contradictions against divine impassibility. Rather than outright rejecting divine suffering, early theologians embraced Christ crucified as the quintessential spiritual example of a life devoted to our loving Father, who is capable of divine wrath without enduring change in the divine nature. Tensions in the theological discourse on divine suffering continued among leading theologians including Alexandrian luminaries who reaffirmed divine impassibility with the salvific death of Jesus Christ.

Guided by Philo and Middle Platonism, Clement of Alexandria (150–215 C.E.) insisted that there were no natural relations or proper analogies between God and creation (*Stromata* 2.16.74–75). Whereas Ignatius imitated the passion of Jesus by martyrdom, Clement taught that the immutable and impassible nature of God was to be imitated by Christians (e.g., *Stromata* 5.11.67). Despite holding to divine impassibility in a vigorous way that passed his antecedents and contemporaries (Hallman 2007), Clement described God as the loving Father, and the Logos was called the image dwelling in us as our companion and counselor who feels with and for us (*Protrepticus* 10.84). Following Clement, Origen of Alexandria (185–254 C.E.) reflected upon the implications of God "for and with us" in Jesus Christ. Origen's most remarkable teachings on divine suffering are in his homily on Ezekiel 6:6, where he asserts the savior "descended to earth in pity for the human race, He suffered our sufferings before he suffered the cross and thought it right to take upon Him our flesh. For if He had not suffered, He would not have come to take part in human life. First he suffered then he descended and was seen." Historians have recognized the uniqueness of this passage from Origen, although, whether it was meant as a pedagogical point or a critique of divine impassibility is open to interpretation (Hallman

2007). Origen taught “God is impassible” and then later, in the same passage, asserted “God feels compassion for the one to be pitied; for God is not heartless” (*Selecta in Ezekiel* 16:8). Having reaffirmed divine compassion, Origen insisted on a figurative reading of biblical passages that depicted God with emotions that entail change and interruptions to eternal divine happiness (*Homily on Numbers* 23:2). Origen contended that God was unmoved by anger; therefore, divine vengeance was to be understood as instructive for correcting humanity. In *On First Principles* (*Peri Archon*), Origen declared that the divine Logos and human soul (of Jesus) are closely united but concluded the Word of God never suffered what Christ experienced within the body and soul (*Peri Archon* 2.9; 4.15).

Following Clement and Origen, purportedly, Gregory the Wonderworker (who was a student of Origen) wrote a treatise to Theopompus (*Ad Theopompum*) wherein he strongly affirmed divine suffering. Gregory contended if we held to the impossibility of divine suffering, then it prevented the divine will from acting freely. If the divine will is limited by divine nature, then, God cannot be truly omnipotent. Furthermore, Gregory distinguished divine suffering from true suffering, God freely chose to suffer for our salvation, and thus it was useful and salvific, which is different from real suffering. Gregory’s teachings are not entirely satisfying since human suffering can simultaneously be voluntary, utilitarian, and real suffering; nonetheless, his argument that divine suffering ultimately conquered real suffering and death was a notably unique teaching that went largely unnoticed by medieval theologians (Hallman 2007).

The father of Latin theology, Tertullian of Carthage (160–240), believed the Incarnation revealed that God suffered and changed (Hallman 2007). Furthermore, in *Against Marcian*, Tertullian argued that God had emotions that differed from human emotions in condition and expression in accordance with the incorruptible divine nature (*Adversus Marcionem* 2.16.6). Passibility was not according to divine nature as God is eternal and acting without the possibility of suffering (*Adversus Marcionem* 1.8.3). Many of these

aforementioned teachings of the Church Fathers became foundational for reflection in the fourth century when Emperor Constantine (ca. 272–337 C.E.) convoked the first ecumenical (i.e., universal) council at Nicaea (325) to promote unity in the Catholic Church (Hallman 1989/90).

### Nicene Creed and Divine Suffering

Over 300 bishops attended this council, wherein the Nicene Creed was acclaimed as the catholic faith. The Nicene Creed professed “one Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God, begotten of the Father, the only-begotten, that is, of the same essence of the Father, God of God, Light of Light, very God of very God, begotten, not made, being of one substance (*homoousios*) with the Father.” Thereafter, the creed declared “for us men, and for our salvation,” the Son of God “came down and was incarnate and was made man; He suffered.” The Constantinopolitan Creed of 381 reiterated the Nicene Creed, most notably, omitting “suffered” by adding Jesus Christ was “crucified” for “our salvation.” By the end of the fourth century, the imperially sanctioned creeds of the Catholic Church declared Jesus Christ was of the same substance as the Father and became incarnated, suffered, and was crucified, for our salvation. Reflecting upon the ecumenical creeds, the fifth-century theologians affirmed that the Son of God was crucified and then wondered, does this mean the divine nature suffered in Jesus Christ? The Nicene Creed, the Scriptures, and the Church Fathers were bedrock sources for reflections upon divine suffering from the fifth to the fifteenth century.

### Cyril of Alexandria

Cyril of Alexandria and his rival Nestorius of Constantinople both assented to the Nicene Creed; however, the question of divine suffering led to a controversy resolved at the Council of Ephesus (431) (O’Keefe 1997; Gavriluk 2004). Nestorius taught that the divine and human natures were joined (*synapsheia*) in Jesus Christ

rather than, as Cyril professed, this one unity (*henosis*) within the Incarnate Word of God. By teaching two natures (subjectivities) in Jesus Christ, Nestorius protected the divine nature from human suffering. Having taught “One nature (or hypostasis) of the Incarnate Word of God” as axiomatic to Christian faith, Cyril then furthered his argument in the *Twelve Anathemas* against Nestorius, where he declared, “Whosoever shall not recognize that the Word of God suffered in the flesh, that he was crucified in the flesh, and that likewise in that same flesh he tasted death and that he is become the first-begotten of the dead, for, as he is God, he is the life and it is he that giveth life: let him be anathema (anathema twelve).”

Cyril placed limits on Platonism by teaching divine suffering occurred in the flesh of the Word of God (Elert 1957). Within his later writings, such as the *Scholia on the Incarnation (Scholia de incarnatione Unigeniti)*, Cyril shifted to “the impassible suffering” Son of God (O’Keefe 1997) and then returned to the theopaschite question in his mature treatise, *On the Unity Christ (Quod unus sit Christus)* (Hallman 1997). Although Cyril reached the status of a Church Father by the middle of the fifth century, his theopaschite teachings were problematic, thus marginalized and ignored up through the Council of Chalcedon (451). Council fathers at Chalcedon (save the Antiochene theologians) accepted divine suffering as a catholic teaching but resisted (ignored) Cyril’s *Twelve Anathemas* provocative language on the Word of God who suffered and died in the flesh (Diepen 1953).

Interventions by the abbot John Maxentius and his fellow Scythian monks, who interpreted the Chalcedonian Definition (451) with a Cyrillian emphasis on the Word of God who suffered in the flesh, led to the vindication of Cyril’s theopaschite teachings during the Second Council of Constantinople (553) under Emperor Justinian (ca. 482–565). Following this rehabilitation of his marginalized teachings, Cyril’s contributions shaped theological discourse in the Catholic Church (Greek East and Latin West) that proclaimed God freely loves the world by entering suffering and enduring death on the cross (Gavrilyuk 2004). Cyril’s teachings on divine

suffering stand as one turning point from Hellenistic constructs of divine passibility to a biblical understanding of God participating in this world (Elert 1957; O’Keefe 1997).

### Augustine of Hippo and the Latin Tradition on Divine Impassibility

Turning momentarily from the crucified Christ to divine impassibility broadly in the writings of Augustine of Hippo (354–430), John Scotus Erigena (815–877), and Anselm of Canterbury (1003–1109) provides us with seminal teachings on the impassibility of the Father God in the Latin theological tradition. Augustine argues that human emotions ascribed to God are analogies intended to condescend to base human weakness (*De civitate Dei* XVI.53). He contends that divine pity toward humanity is devoid of misery; therefore, “if you take away the compassion which involves sharing of misery with him whom you pity, so that there remains the peaceful goodness of helping and freeing from misery, some kind of knowledge of the divine pity is suggested” (*De Diversis Quaestionibus ad Simplicianum* II.3). On divine repentance, Augustine contended that God’s mercy or repenting does not entail change since it was present by divine foreknowledge (*Enarrationes en Psalmos* 105.35). Augustine argued that divine judgment and divine wrath occur without emotional disturbance in God. For Augustine, *apatheia* or *impassibilitas* in Latin denotes an attribute understood as “a life without those feelings that take place contrary to reason and disturb the mind, [which] is clearly good and greatly desired, but does not belong to this life” (*De civitate Dei* XVI.8.4). Augustine insisted that nothing could hurt the divine nature but recognized emotive language was necessary even though words imperfectly described the loving outreach of God.

In *On the Division of Nature*, John Scotus argued in no way can the divine nature be acted upon as if God is a passive object. His commitment to divine impassibility comes to the foreground when recounting divine love may be understood in a metaphorical way. John Scotus

stated that God does not act or is acted upon, neither does God love nor is love. No category of action can be attributed to God; thus according to John Scotus, God is the “cause of all love, and is diffused in through all things, and gathers all things into one, and comes back to an end in Himself the loving movements (*De divisione naturae*).” Divine beauty draws all things to God; therefore, the divine subject is not acted upon as an object of love rather it is the one that draws all through divine beauty, that is, by the nature (attributes) of God.

The advent of scholasticism came with Anselm of Canterbury during the eleventh and the early twelfth century. Wrestling with paradoxes between divine impassibility and divine pity within *Proslogion*, Anselm declared that God shows pity by saving the wretched; then conversely, God could not truly be pitiful because the divine nature remains untouched by human sufferings and sinful deeds. Here, returning to Jesus Christ in *Why God Became Man (Cur Deus Homo)*, Anselm concluded that whenever “we say that God suffers anything lowly or weak, we do not understand this in respect of the height of the impassible nature, but in respect of the weakness of the human substance which He wore” (*Cur Deus Homo* 1.8). Without suggesting strong dependence or direct influence, Anselm and medieval theologians discussed divine impassibility with terms that resonated well with the Greek philosophical tradition. When turning from their discussion of impassibility of God the Father to the crucified Word of God, medieval theologians distinguished between the divine nature and the human natures of Jesus Christ; thus in the passage cited above in *Cur Deus Homo*, the focal point of suffering is the human substance (nature) of the Incarnate Word.

### Thomas Aquinas and Divine Suffering

Thomas Aquinas’ (1225–1274) contributions are unmatched by most Latin theologians except for Augustine, who he cites more than any other theologian or philosopher (Aristotle was his second most cited source). Thomas increasingly

relied on the Greek and Latin Church Fathers after collecting their writings throughout Dominican priories. Like the Scythian monks (Thomas never read their writings), Thomas held the Chalcedonian faith and Cyril’s *Twelve Anathemas* together, albeit, in a more rigorous philosophical framework. Reflective of the Scythian monks and Cyril, Thomas asserted that God suffered in a qualified manner in the Word of God. Employing the patristic notion of the “communication of idioms or properties (*communicatio idiomatum*),” he declared attributes belonging to the human and divine natures (of Jesus) may be predicated of both because of the union of the two natures in the Word of God (Gondreau 2009).

The Chalcedonian Definition (451) professed the unity of the one Word of God with a distinction between the human and divine natures (two nature Christology) where the “one and same Christ, Son, Lord, only-begotten, acknowledged in two natures which undergo no confusion, no change, no division, no separation.” Additionally, in his *Tome to Flavian*, Pope Leo affirmed the unity and distinctions in the Word of God by teaching, “Each form accomplishes in concert with the other what is appropriate to it, the Word performing what belongs to the Word, and the flesh (or the human nature) carrying out what belongs to the flesh (*Tomus ad Flavian*).” Following Cyril’s teachings in tandem with the Chalcedonian Definition, Thomas declared that the one hypostasis (or subject) of the Word of God possesses two natures wherein the human and divine are both attributed to the Incarnate Word.

Following John Damascene’s (676–749) teachings on the communication of the idioms, Thomas asserted Christ’s human actions belonging to the hypostasis of the Son of God. Thomas advanced a unique position (unshared amongst scholastics) teaching the humanity of Christ is the instrument (*organum*) by which the conjoined divinity acts within the one Word of God (*Summa Theologica* III, q. 62, a. 5). Jesus’ sufferings may be predicated of the divine nature because of the uniting of the two natures in the Word of God. Clarifying his argument, Thomas stated if the two natures are understood abstractly, then there is no predication between them, but when taken in

“concrete terms” as revealed in the hypostasis of the Incarnate Word, then one may “predicate indifferently what belongs to either nature” (*Summa Theologica* III, q. 16, a. 5). The distinction between the divine nature in itself and in the Word of God was vital for Thomas who explained the passion of Christ “belongs to the supposit (hypostasis) of the divine nature by reason of the passible nature assumed, but not on account of the impassible divine nature” (*Summa Theologica* III, q. 46, a. 12). One of the foremost interpreters of Thomas, John of St. Thomas (1589–1644), unpacked his teachings by explaining all predicates of the human and divine natures are concretely attributed to the supposit (hypostasis) of the Word; therefore we may assent to “the truth that God has died and suffered, etc., and that man is creator and God.” However, if nature is to be understood abstractly and apart from the supposit, then there can be no such sharing of this kind between the human and divine predicates (*Introduction to the Summa Theologiae of Thomas Aquinas*, Bk. I. Pt. III).

In addition to the Chalcedonian faith and John Damascene, Thomas returned to Cyril’s *Twelve Anathemas* within his monumental *Summa Theologica*. Thomas, like Cyril, emphasized the one hypostasis (or supposit) of the Word of God. Recounting the decisions at the Council of Ephesus (431), Thomas cited Cyril, “If anyone divides between two person or subjects those things which are said of Christ in the evangelical and apostolic scriptures...and applies some to a human being understood precisely as distinct from the Word of God, and others to the Word of God the Father alone, because only these are fitting of God, let him be anathema” (*Summa Theologica* III, q.2, a. 3, c.). Thomas contended that Christ’s sufferings must be attributed to the one subject of the Word of God, including the impassible divine nature, although, suffering is through reason of the human nature within the one hypostasis of the Word. Later in the *Summa Theologica*, Thomas cited again from Cyril’s *Twelve Anathemas*, declaring, “If anyone does not confess that the Word of God has suffered in the flesh, and been crucified in the flesh, let him be anathema,” then he concludes, “the suffering of

Christ belongs to a subject of the divine nature, by reason of the passible nature he has assumed, but not by reason of the impassible divine nature” (*Summa Theologica* III, q. 46, a. 12, c).

The Catholic Church, according to Thomas, teaches that “the impassible God suffers and dies” (*In 1 Cor.* 15:1 [no. 896]). Cyril, the Scythian monks, and, then centuries later, Thomas taught that the Word of God – who is fully divine and fully human – suffered in the flesh, although the divine nature was impassible. To clarify the difference between the Word of God who suffered in the flesh and the impassible divine nature, it is helpful to recount observations of a contemporary scholar who argued persons (e.g., subject and hypostasis) suffer, whereas nature does not suffer. The nature makes suffering possible in the given subject (Marshall 2009); thus, the humanity and flesh of Jesus made suffering possible in the Word of God.

Thomas distinguished between statements about Jesus as the subject (hypostasis) and assertions pertaining to his relations with human beings. Certain statements ascribed to Jesus do not belong to his nature; rather, they are made in connection with personal and relational properties (*Summa Theologica* III, q. 15, a.1, ad. 1). Among statements that are part of the constitution or nature of Jesus, Thomas included Christ incarnate who suffered for us, whereas the cry of forsakenness on the cross (*Matthew* 27:46 and *Mark* 15:34) belonged to the (second) relational type; therefore, these words were declared on behalf of humanity rather than reflective of the subjectivity of the Incarnate Word of God (*Summa Theologica* III, q. 15, a.1, ad. 1).

## Divine Suffering and Medieval Philosophy

Without suggesting consensus, it may be concluded that medieval philosophers and theologians largely affirmed that the divine nature does not suffer or change; at the same time, they professed that Jesus Christ (Word of God and same substance with the Father) suffered and died on the cross for our salvation. Rather than resolving and reducing the mystery of salvation to a philosophical or theological argument, medieval theologians recognized



ambiguities and tensions within the mystery of salvation; then here, returning to Cyril, the Scythian monks and Thomas (among other theologians) declared that the Word of God suffered and died in the flesh (humanity) for our salvation.

## Cross-References

- ▶ Augustine
- ▶ Church Fathers
- ▶ John Maxentius and the Scythian Monks
- ▶ John of Damascus
- ▶ Plotinus, Arabic
- ▶ Thomas Aquinas

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## Domingo de Soto

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### Abstract

Domingo de Soto (1494–1560) was a sixteenth-century Paris-trained Spanish theologian. He is seldom remembered now, but his work was instrumental in the Thomistic revival of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. His philosophical influence was most significant in three areas. First and foremost were his contributions to the development of Thomistic natural law, especially concerning the development of individual, subjective rights within a natural law moral and legal framework. Second was his recognition that objects in free fall accelerate uniformly, which has been shown to have influenced Galileo’s thinking about free fall. Third was his infusing the logic of terms and propositions with sign theory, which was an important step to the development of semiotics and the logic of ideas, which subsumed logic to epistemology and dominated logical theorizing for nearly 300 years.



Domingo de Soto was born at Segovia in 1495. He began his studies at Alcalá but moved to the University of Paris in 1517. While at Paris (1517–1520) he studied under the influential nominalist Juan de Celaya and perhaps even attended lectures by Francisco de Vitoria, who was to found the “School of Salamanca” of which Soto was destined to become one of its greatest lights. He returned to Spain in 1520 to teach philosophy at Alcalá. In 1525 he joined the Dominicans and soon moved to the University of Salamanca. He published the first edition of his *Summulae* during this period. He taught theology at Salamanca from the “Chair of Vespers” from 1532 to 1549. His work on natural philosophy, *Super VIII libros Physicorum Aristotelis commentaria* dates from this period of Soto’s career. He also played a significant role in the first sessions of the Council of Trent (1545–1547). He was Charles V’s official theologian during the Council and was instrumental in the development of the Council’s position regarding grace and original sin. It was during this period that he wrote *De natura et gratia*, which was to have a significant influence on Molina. In 1552 he was promoted to the “Chair of Prime” in theology at Salamanca, replacing Melchior Cano. He retained this position until his retirement in 1556. It was during this period that he wrote his famous *De justitia et jure*. Soto died on 15 November 1560.

Soto’s influence on contemporaneous thinkers is greater than his current reputation among English-speaking historians of philosophy might suggest. In natural philosophy, he is thought to have been a significant influence on Galileo and is considered to have perhaps even helped lay the conceptual groundwork for the modern theory of dynamics. He also played a significant role in reorienting logical studies around the notion of a sign (*signum*), which was key to subsuming logic to epistemology and necessary for the development of the so-called logic of ideas. And in legal philosophy, Soto introduced and developed a subjectivist conception of rights, fusing it to the Thomistic objectivist conception of rights (*dominium*) and creating a new category of intrinsic, inalienable rights within individuals (Brett

1997, 2014). He was also instrumental in the sixteenth-century systematization and synthesis of Roman and canon law, which was a watershed moment in the history of legal and political thought (Gordley 1991).

The most noteworthy accomplishment of Soto’s natural philosophy seems to have been his description of free fall. In his commentary on Aristotle’s *Physics* Soto noted the phenomenon of uniform acceleration in a freely falling body through a uniform medium. This was at least 80 years before Galileo published his account of freely falling bodies in his *Dialogue on Two New Sciences*. Soto additionally noted that because of the uniformity of the acceleration, the speed of the falling body could be calculated via the mean velocity theorem, which had been developed by the Oxford Calculators. Another point of contact between Soto and Galileo appears to have been in the notion of *resistentia interna*, as argued by Camacho et al. (1994).

Duhem seems to have been the first to have noted a connection between Soto and Galileo, but William Wallace, who has devoted considerable effort to tracing the roots of and influences on Galileo, has done the most to bring Soto’s accomplishment in natural philosophy to light. Though there is clearly an influence between Soto and Galileo, there is nevertheless a fundamental difference between Soto’s mere description of this aspect of motion and Galileo’s analysis of it. There is no indication that Soto’s was anything other than an intuition or a serendipitous observation, unlike Galileo’s. In contrast to Galileo’s account, Soto’s was apparently not based on anything that might qualify as experimental data grounding his intuition.

Domingo de Soto’s *Summulae*, his main work on logic and logical theory, was indebted to Peter of Spain’s *Tractatus*. It is noteworthy for the emphasis it placed on the doctrine of signs. Although not unprecedented, in that Robert Kilwardby and, more famously, Roger Bacon in *De signis* had previously advocated taking the concept of sign as conceptually basic, Soto’s development of this move in Book I of the *Summulae* was what proved revolutionary. Pace John Deeley (Poinsot 1985), it was Soto whose

work initiated the trend to what Locke was soon to call “semiotic” (Locke 1975). This trend moved away from the formal aspects of logic and toward the psychological ones because of the reorientation of logic around the concept of sign and the recognition that signs – whether natural, conventional, or customary – principally require being conceived to be significative. Soto’s reorganization of logic around signs was what the Conimbricenses (the Jesuit commentators of Coimbra) and John Poinsett picked up on and brought to bear on the theological questions that so animated traditional scholastic logical studies. And it was through these thinkers that Soto’s focus was transmitted to the scholastic logics of the seventeenth-century, such as Martin Smeglecki’s, Bartholomew Keckermann’s, and Franco Burgersdijk’s. And finally, from them it migrated to the early modern logical works more familiar to us, such as Arnauld and Nicole’s *Logica or the Art of Thinking* and Locke’s *Essay*.

Within legal philosophy, Soto’s *On Justice and the Law* has proved very influential. The foundations of Soto’s political and legal thinking were not pragmatically oriented, like Machiavelli’s or other Renaissance humanists’. His foundations were more theoretical and were marked by a return to Thomas Aquinas’ natural law theory. Soto did not shy away from the practical applications and consequences of his legal thinking, especially regarding the Spanish conquests in the Americas and economic problems in Europe. But he was not striving to build an account of legal and moral principles out of experience. In this Soto was a member of a significant Iberian tradition of natural law theorists who revived and developed Thomas’ thought call the “School of Salamanca.” Credit for initiating this school goes to Francisco de Vitoria, one of Soto’s teachers at Paris (most likely) and his colleague at Salamanca. In addition to Soto, this tradition was to contain Luis de Molina and, most importantly, Francisco Suárez. The significance of this tradition lies mainly in the influence it held for the Northern European natural law theorists, either directly as in the case of Hugo Grotius or indirectly via Grotius and other lesser Dutch thinkers, as in the cases of Pufendorf, and Locke. Soto’s

contributions to this tradition are only now being explored by Spanish-speaking historians; there is little scholarship in English except for Hamilton’s dated (1963) treatment of the Iberian tradition as a whole and Annabel Brett’s works touching on Soto (see Bibliography). Anglophone scholarship on Soto suffers from a lack of translations. Aside from a translation of Bk. VI, q.2, art. 3 of *De justitia et jure* (Grice-Hutchinson 1952) and of *De natura et gratia* as an appendix to a recent PhD dissertation (Gaetano 2015), none of his works are available in English.

The Iberian natural law tradition began with the belief that there exists an order proper to creation which determines the rightness of positive law and which we can come to know through an analysis of the natures of created things. How, in other words, we ought to be is distributed in the world, determines what constitutes a proper or legitimate civil or canon law, and, by the fact of its distribution in the world, is present to the mind if only we would open our minds to receiving it. Soto begins *On Justice and the Law* by explaining the ambiguous notion of *jus* or law/rightness. He then subsumes this notion to a conceptual framework that recognized three types of law: eternal law, which is God’s order imposed onto things as their final causes; natural law, which is composed of the marks by which the mind comes to identify God’s eternal laws; and positive law, which is composed of states’ civil laws and the Church’s canon law. Soto then addresses various issues in distributive justice (Book III) and commutative justice (Book IV). The remaining eight books address numerous specific topics, including just war theory, property rights, contractual law, and economic issues.

All of Soto’s contributions to the development of this tradition stem from his addition of a subjective conception of rights to this framework (Hill forthcoming). A subjectivist conception of rights involves the recognition of rights inherent in, and maybe even inalienable from, the natures of humans as such rather than rights some individuals might have over the use of other things. For Soto, this arose because of the recognition that the natural inclination we have for self-preservation is morally significant as grounds for rational

behavior. It resolved a central tension in Thomistic natural law theory between morally insignificant natural inclinations and morally significant rational inclinations (Brett 1997). This novel idea was then put to use by Soto in rejecting absolutism and imposing limits on political authority (Soto 1556, bk. IV. q. 4, art. 1); in grounding international law (Brett 2014), in seeking to limit the abusive *encomienda* system in the Spanish Americas (Hernández 1991), the origins of private property (Soto 1556, bk. IV, q. 3, art. 1); in rejecting the idea of the “underserving poor” (Blank 2015); and in his conception of a just price for commodities and goods (Elegiod 2009).

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## Dominicus Gundissalinus

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### Abstract

Dominicus Gundissalinus (or Gundisalvi), Spanish Domingo Gundisalvo, c. 1110–1190, Archdeacon of Cuéllar (in the Diocese of Segovia), is the most prominent representative of the so-called Toledo School of Translators. Not only did he translate over 20 philosophical tracts from Arabic into Latin, including works of al-Kindī, al-Fārābī, Avicenna, Ibn Gabirol, and al-Ġazālī, he also authored five philosophical works: *Tractatus de anima*, *De immortalitate animae*, *De unitate et uno*, *De processione mundi*, and *De divisione philosophiae*. Relying on Arabic as well as

Latin sources, these works represent original, and often pioneering, contributions to the history of psychology (as the first instance of a Latin reception of Avicennian psychology), ontology, and metaphysics (with the introduction of the term “metaphysica” to the Latin West), as well as epistemology (giving up the traditional *ordo scientiarum*, i.e., the scheme of the liberal arts, in favor of an Aristotelian division of the sciences). In particular, his theory of knowledge and science, which is built around important elements from Aristotelian epistemology, was very influential in the Paris Arts faculty during the thirteenth century and was taken up by, among others, Arnulfus Provincialis, Robert Kilwardby, and Remigio dei Girolami. Some of Gundissalinus’ works were translated into Hebrew.

Dominicus Gundissalinus (or Gundisalvi), Spanish Domingo Gundisalvo, c. 1100–1190, Archdeacon of Cuéllar (in the Diocese of Segovia), is the most prominent representative of the so-called Toledo School of Translators.

Gundissalinus, who may have studied in France (possibly at Chartres) before he made his first appearance in Toledo in the year 1162, translated important philosophical texts from Arabic into Latin. Among his more than 20 translations, which he prepared with the collaboration of the Jewish scholar (Abraham) Ibn Daud and others, are such important works as al-Kindī’s *De intellectu*; al-Fārābī’s treatise *Kitāb ihṣā’ al-‘ulūm*, adapted under the title *De scientiis*; Avicenna’s *De convenientia et differentia subiectorum* as well as his *Liber de anima seu sextus de naturalibus* (its translation being dedicated to the Archbishop John of Toledo) and his *Liber de philosophia prima sive scientia divina*, called *Metaphysica* (all three from his encyclopedia *Kitāb al-Shifā’*); the *Fons vitae* by Ibn Gabirol (Avicbron); and the *Summa theoricæ philosophiæ*, i.e., the *Maqāṣid al-falāsifa* by al-Gazālī, and others.

Moreover, Gundissalinus is the author of five philosophical works (Dominicus 1897). His *Tractatus de anima*, which marks the beginning

of the reception of Avicennian psychology in the Latin world, attempts to provide a purely rational account of the soul, its nature, and powers (Dominicus 1940). This topic is extended in his treatise *De immortalitate animae*, which seems to have been plagiarized by William of Auvergne. As in the former work, Gundissalinus’ declared intention is to put forward strictly rational arguments to prove the immortality of the soul, claiming that his proofs do not rely on external reasons – as the traditional proofs of the soul’s immortality are said to do – but that, following Aristotle, they proceed *ex propriis* (Dominicus 1999). The opusculum *De unitate et uno* develops Gundissalinus’ metaphysics along the lines of a discussion of the unity of the constitutive principles of reality, i.e., matter and form, taking over central issues from medieval Platonism and Ibn Gabirol in particular. This text, which was long attributed to Boethius and commented upon by Conrad of Prussia, enjoyed great popularity during the Middle Ages. (Some of its doctrines became common maxims, e.g., “Quidquid est, ideo est, quia unum est.”) (Dominicus 2006) The cosmological treatise *De processione mundi*, which carries on the discussion concerning the composition of matter and form, now with special attention to the *creatio ex nihilo*. In this tract, which was influenced not only by Ibn Gabirol, but also by Hugh of Saint Victor, Abraham b. Daud, and Hermann of Carinthia, Gundissalinus demonstrates an awareness of the distinction between philosophical and theological argumentation, contrasted explicitly by him, which is very remarkable for his time. It is worth noting that two of these works were translated into Hebrew, namely, the *Tractatus de anima*, by an anonymous translator in thirteenth-century Spain, and the *De unitate*, by Judah Romano in the first half of the fourteenth century in Rome.

Gundissalinus’ most elaborate work systematically, however, is (Dominicus 2007) *De divisione philosophiæ*. Drawing on Arabic sources (al-Fārābī, Avicenna, al-Gazālī, etc.) as well as on Latin texts (Boethius and the “School of Chartres”), Gundissalinus displays a comprehensive theory of human knowledge and science. The systematic importance of this work is twofold: on



the one hand, it breaks up the traditional scheme of the liberal arts in favor of an Aristotelian division of the sciences capable of integrating the newly “discovered” disciplines, i.e., the sciences of nature (such as optics and statics) as well as politics and metaphysics, the latter of which was first introduced to the Latin West under the name “*metaphysica*” by Gundissalinus. Yet, Gundissalinus’ *Divisio philosophiae* does not limit itself to open the traditional *ordo scientiarum* for new “material,” but, at the same time, its very concept of philosophy as a science distinct from theology as well as its specific foundation of the epistemological status of the different sciences and their irreducible plurality leads also to a formal reassessment of the notion of philosophy and science itself. Thus, for Gundissalinus, as for Aristotle, to whom he refers repeatedly in this context, the distinctiveness and autonomy of the particular sciences are grounded in their having different objects and methods, while their interrelatedness and interdependence result from their possible subordination one to another and from their internal differentiation.

Though the importance of this Toledan translator and philosopher for the history of philosophy is nowadays well acknowledged, his influence has still not been studied thoroughly. When dealing with Gundissalinus’ *Nachleben*, namely that of his *De divisione philosophiae*, histories of philosophy usually refer only to Michael Scot (d. before 1236) and his homonymous tract, which is preserved only in fragments, and to Robert Kilwardby (d. 1279) and his famous division of philosophy, *De ortu scientiarum*. Little is known, however, about the 50 years between these two testimonies to Gundissalinus’ influence. Yet it is precisely this period that was most crucial for the epistemological and institutional development of philosophy in the Paris Arts faculty. Even though this development has in itself not yet been analyzed in a conclusive manner, recent research on the Arts faculty has shown that Gundissalinus and his *De divisione philosophiae* played a central role in the constitution of philosophy as a distinct science in the Parisian milieu. Thus, it must be said that the so-called philosophical introductions at the Arts faculty by Arnulfus Provincialis, John

of Dacia, and many others, as well as that by Remigio dei Girolami, are highly dependent on Gundissalinus in their presentation of a clear and methodologically reflected understanding of philosophy.

## Cross-References

- ▶ [Arabic Texts: Natural Philosophy, Latin Translations of](#)
- ▶ [Arabic Texts: Philosophy, Latin Translations of](#)
- ▶ [Avicenna](#)
- ▶ [Boethius](#)
- ▶ [Epistemology](#)
- ▶ [al-Fārābī, Latin Translations of](#)
- ▶ [Form and Matter](#)
- ▶ [al-Ghazālī’s Maqāṣid al-Falāsifa, Latin Translation of](#)
- ▶ [Ibn Sīnā \(Avicenna\), Latin Translations of](#)
- ▶ [Ikhwān al-Ṣafā’, Encyclopedia of](#)
- ▶ [Isaac Israeli](#)
- ▶ [John of La Rochelle](#)
- ▶ [al-Kindī, Latin Translations of](#)
- ▶ [Metaphysics](#)
- ▶ [Philosophical Psychology, Jewish Tradition](#)
- ▶ [Philosophy, Jewish](#)
- ▶ [Platonism](#)
- ▶ [Remigio dei Girolami](#)
- ▶ [Robert Kilwardby](#)
- ▶ [Schools in the Twelfth Century](#)
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## Doxographies, Graeco-Arabic

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### Abstract

Due to the predominance of Aristotle in Arabic philosophy, there was a limited interest in his predecessors and the other philosophical schools of antiquity. Among the Greek doxographies available in translation were the *Placita philosophorum* ascribed to a certain Aetius, Hippolytus' *Refutatio omnium haeresium*, and a *History of the Philosophers* ascribed to Porphyry of Tyrus, known only in quotations, but very influential on similar Arabic compositions as the *Chest of Wisdom*, ascribed to Abū Sulaymān al-Sijistānī, al-Mubashshir ibn Fātik's *Choicest Maxims and Best Sayings*, al-Shahrastānī's *Book of Religions and Sects*, and al-Shahrāzūrī's *Promenade of the Souls and the Garden of Rejoicing in the History of Philosophy*. Some Muslims

with a positive attitude towards the Greek heritage tried to find their belief in the creation of the world and the hereafter already represented by the ancient Greek thinkers, what resulted in outright falsifications, which became in their turn mingled with the information found in the translations from the Greek. The standard of the Arabic doxographies was also impaired by the inclusion of material from the so-called gnomologies, where the ascription of anecdotes and wise sayings to the various philosophers was even more confused than in the Greek tradition.

The Greek heritage in Islam was dominated by a syllabus established in the late Alexandrian school, that is, Aristotle in Neoplatonic interpretation, and in close connection with the medical teachings of Galen of Pergamon (129–216 CE), whose philosophical ambitions largely coincided with the Stagirite, for example, in the rejection of atomism, which later proved to be so stimulating in Europe since the Renaissance. Aristotle used to develop his ideas in a kind of dialogue with his predecessors, who became thus known through his works. But as he was, among Muslim philosophers, regarded as the summit of human thought which only rarely might be superseded, the interest in his forerunners as well as in other philosophical schools was limited. Avicenna (980 or earlier–1037) lists, in his encyclopedic *Kitāb al-Shifā'* (*The Book of Healing*), the various doctrines of the Presocratics without quoting them by name. In a polemical correspondence with al-Bīrūnī (973–1048), he rejects the latter's idea that the sphere of fire below the moon might be not one of the four elements but only a transformation of heated air due to the speed of the heavenly spheres. He blames al-Bīrūnī for falling back onto the monism of the Presocratics, among whom he mentions Thales, Heraclitus, Diogenes, and Anaximander, here erroneously substituted for Anaximenes. The Jewish thinker Moses Maimonides (d. 1204), who was fully dependent on Arabic philosophy, gives, in a letter to Samuel ibn Tibbon, his translator into Hebrew the advice not to waste time with “old philosophy” and names in

this respect Empedocles, Pythagoras, Hermes, and Porphyry.

On the other hand, Muslims showed a great interest in world history, also seeking answers to questions such as who were the inventors of philosophy, when they lived, or whether they had any relations with the prophets of the Old Testament seen as forerunners of Muḥammad. Thales and the Seven Sages were as popular as in antiquity, and they appear even in the Persian epic of Ganjāwī Nizāmī (1141–1209), who lets Aristotle, Thales, Apollonius of Tyana, Socrates, Porphyry, Hermes, and Plato pronounce before Alexander the Great various speculations about how the world came into being, partly by the will of the creator, partly in an automatic process. These ideas have almost nothing to do with their actual teachings.

Serious information was available in the *Placita philosophorum* translated in Baghdad by Qusṭā ibn Lūqā (820–912), who ascribed them like others to Plutarch, whereas the real author is now assumed to be a certain Aetius (Daiber 2008). Their opinions are arranged according to subject matters, beginning with “nature,” “principles,” “the world,” “God,” “demons,” and so on. Diogenes Laertius, with his classification according to schools and biographies, remained unknown. There existed, however, a similar work ascribed to Porphyry of Tyrus (Cottrell 2008), translated from a Syriac intermediary version and now lost in its entirety, but quoted rather often (see the entry on Porphyry, Arabic in this volume). Via the Syrian Christian tradition, Muslim authors became acquainted with the *Refutatio omnium haeresium* of the Roman presbyter Hippolytus (third century CE), who tried to show the inconsistencies of the various pagan doctrines. This tract was also used by the author of the *Turba philosophorum* for his quasi-philosophical introduction into his alchemical compilation (Rudolph 2005).

The most important Arabic doxography was the *Ṣiwān al-ḥikma* (*The Chest of Wisdom*), hitherto ascribed to Abū Sulaymān al-Sijistānī al-Manṭiqī (d. 987), which exists now only in two large extracts, one of them available in print. It contains entries on 170 men, most of them Greeks, among them Thales, Anaximenes, Anaxagoras, Pythagoras, Socrates, Plato, Aristotle,

Alexander the Great, Diogenes the Cynic, Theophrastus, Hermes, Solon, Homer, Democritus, Euclid, Hippocrates, Ptolemy, Apollonius of Tyana, Galen, and John Philoponus, followed by Arab authorities like the famous translator Ḥunayn b. Isḥāq. The Egyptian scholar al-Mubashshir ibn Fātik composed in the years 1048 and 1049 his *Mukhtār al-ḥikam wa-maḥāsini al-kalim* (*Choicest Maxims and Best Sayings*), which enjoyed great popularity. Besides sages of the Egyptian Hermetic tradition, the legendary Luqmān of pre-Islamic Arabia (cf. sura 31), and the Church Fathers Basilus and Gregorius, the latter probably Gregorius of Nazianz, it has entries devoted to Homer, Solon, Zeno of Elea, Hippocrates, Pythagoras, Diogenes the Cynic, Socrates, Plato, Aristotle, and Alexander the Great. One of the number of existing manuscripts, preserved in Istanbul in the Topkapı Saray Museum (Ahmet III, 3206), is enriched with excellent miniatures exhibiting the Greek sages in Oriental garb. The work was about 1250 translated into Castilian under the title *Bocados d'oro*, followed by versions in Latin, French, Provençal, and English. The latter is believed to have been the first English book that appeared in print. Al-Shahraṣṭānī's *Kitāb al-milal wa-l-niḥal* (*Book of Religions and Sects*), written in 1127, classifies the various Muslim and Christian denominations and pagan beliefs according to their relative nearness to the Islamic dogma. The Greek philosophers, who are followed by a lengthy chapter on Avicenna, are relegated to the end of the book because of their being most far away from the prophetic revelations (Janssens). Al-Shahrazūī's (d. between 1287 and 1304) *Nuzhat al-arwāḥ wa-rawḍat al-afrāḥ fī ta'rīkh al-ḥukamā'* (*Promenade of the Souls and the Garden of Rejoicing in the History of Philosophy*) relies heavily on his predecessors and is, therefore, of value for the establishment of their texts and the identification of doubtful readings of Greek names (Cottrell 2004–2005).

These doxographies share with Diogenes Laertius the peculiarity that anecdotal material from the so-called gnomologies was inserted to enrich the tales of the philosophers' lives and teachings. It corresponds only rarely with historical

reality, for example, when Socrates is asked why seawater is salty whereupon he urged the questioner to tell him first what kind of profit he would have from knowing it. This corresponds with the change from natural philosophy to ethics, what was well known to Muslim authors (Strohmaier 2003). Muslim doxographers were not aware of the fact that the gnomologies were plagued by great disorder regarding the ascription of the wise sayings and anecdotes to the various authorities. This went even so far that Socrates did find in the end his accommodation in the barrel of Diogenes. He was depicted as a great ascetic who despised the pleasures of this world and attacked idolatry, what caused the king of his time to kill him by poison. This was repeated even by the late Ayatollah Khomeini (1902–1989) who would, therefore, praise him as “a great theologian” (Strohmaier 1997).

In certain pious and mystic circles that were uneasy about Aristotelian rationalism, the pre-Aristotelian philosophers earned the reputation as bearers of an older and therefore more trustworthy wisdom. In consequence, a most radical tendency to assimilate the early Greek thinkers to Muslim beliefs led to outright falsifications. In the Pseudo-Ammonius' *Ārā' al-falāsifa* (*The Opinions of the Philosophers*), probably written already in the ninth century CE, the Presocratics, together with Plutarch, the Stoa, Epicurus, Pyrrhon, and Proclus, present creationist and Neoplatonic speculations, relying, though, partly on Hippolytus (Rudolph 1989). Later authors took this pseudo-epigraphy as seriously as the more reliable information gained from the translations from Greek.

This line was not followed by Ibn al-Qifī (1172–1248) in his *Ta'riḫ al-ḥukamā'* (*History of the Philosophers*), where he describes Thales as the first materialist who denied the existence of a creator and believed instead in the eternity of the world and also of the human race (Wöhrlé 2014). Others sought to balance the contradicting reports by recurring to the idea that the ancient thinkers had undergone in their minds a development from an original truth to heresy. Al-ʿĀmirī (d. 992) in his *Kitāb al-amad 'alā l-abad* (*Book of the Final End in the Eternity*) kept to the idea, already cherished by the Church Fathers, that some of them had got their knowledge in Egypt and the Orient. Empedocles,

who lived at the time of the prophet David, would have kept company with Luqmān, the Arabian sage, and learned from his wisdom. But after his return to Greece, he followed his own imagination, what seemed to contradict the belief in the hereafter (Rowson 1988). Mullā Ṣadrā Shīrāzī (1571–1640), the leading representative of late Persian Shī'ite Neoplatonism, maintains that all of the old Greek philosophers believed in the creation of our world at a certain time and that the doctrine of its eternity only appeared when their followers did not understand any longer their wisdom.

## Cross-References

- ▶ [Abū Sulaymān al-Sijistānī al-Mantiqī](#)
- ▶ [Alexandrian Tradition into Arabic: Philosophy](#)
- ▶ [al-ʿĀmirī, Abū l-Ḥasan](#)
- ▶ [Atomism](#)
- ▶ [Church Fathers](#)
- ▶ [Mathematics and Philosophy in the Arab World](#)
- ▶ [Moses Maimonides](#)
- ▶ [al-Mubashshir ibn Fātik](#)
- ▶ [Philosophy, Arabic](#)
- ▶ [Porphyry, Arabic](#)
- ▶ [Presocratics in the Arab World](#)
- ▶ [al-Shahrastānī, Muḥammad ibn ʿAbd al-Karīm](#)
- ▶ [al-Shahrazūrī, Muḥammad ibn Maḥmūd Shams al-Dīn](#)
- ▶ [Theology Versus Philosophy in the Arab World](#)
- ▶ [Translations from Greek into Arabic](#)

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## Durand of St. Pourçain

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### Abstract

Dominican theologian best known for his deviation from Thomas Aquinas's teaching at a time when his order was involved in the promotion of Thomism. The first recension of his commentary on the *Sentences* (1307) was badly received by the order's authorities who, despite the appearance of a second, more

compliant version (1311), censured Durand's work in 1314 and again in 1317. In 1313, Durand was nevertheless appointed as lector at the papal curia in Avignon. In 1325, he was promoted as bishop of Meaux, an office which he held until his death in 1334. Between 1318 and 1325, Durand produced a final revision of his commentary. His work also includes five *Quodlibets* (1312–1316) and a treatise on the origin of political power (1329). He intervened in the major controversies of his time regarding apostolic poverty and the beatific vision. Durand's thought reflects the intellectual climate following the 1277 Paris condemnation, especially in its open departure from Aristotle, a stance which best explains his critical attitude toward Thomism. Durand draws a clear distinction between reason and authority which leads him to reject the notion of theology as a science. Theology rests on faith alone, and its object is not to produce knowledge about God but to direct us toward salvation. Pivotal to Durand's thought is the notion of relation, which acts as explicative principle notably in epistemology and in divine causality. Guided by a nominalist understanding of universals, Durand rejects the notion of intelligible species and explains cognition as a direct relation between the intellect and a singular object present to it. Likewise, he denies all causal power to divine ideas in order to underline the relation of dependence of creatures on God's free action. A forerunner to Ockham's nominalism, Durand seeks to eliminate unnecessary instances in favor of an affirmation of God's absolute power and infinity.

### Corpus of the Article

The independent outlook of the Dominican theologian set him against his order's authorities at a time when it was actively involved in the promotion of Thomas Aquinas's doctrine. Born in Auvergne around 1275, Durand joined the Dominican convent in Clermont and was later sent to Paris to continue his studies at St Jacques. In 1307, he produced a first recension of his

commentary on the *Sentences*, probably a preliminary work prepared in some Dominican *studium*. In its open departure from fundamental Thomist theses in spite of recent Dominican legislation, this early commentary was badly received by the order's authorities. As a result, Durand was compelled to write a more compliant recension of his commentary, a work which corresponded in all probability to his first reading of the *Sentences* at the University of Paris, between 1310 and 1312.

During his short regency at Paris, Durand produced two *Quodlibets* and a couple of treatises, *De habitibus* and *De libero arbitrio*. In early 1313 Clement V appointed him as lector at the papal curia in Avignon, a post ratified in 1316 by the succeeding pope John XXII. During his time in Avignon, Durand determined in three quodlibetal disputations.

Wanting to set a precedent of Durand's case, in 1314 Dominicans issued a censure containing problematic theses extracted from both versions of his commentary. This censure was followed by another one 3 years later, this time aiming specifically at Durand's deviation from Aquinas's doctrine. Both censures were led by the provincial of France, Hervaeus Natalis, an advocate of Thomism and Durand's most determined opponent.

In 1317 Durand was appointed bishop of Limoux, an office which freed him from Dominican jurisdiction. In 1318 he was transferred to the bishopric of Le Puy, which he left in 1325 owing to a conflict with his canons. He regained Avignon, where he acted as theological advisor to the pope on several occasions: in 1318, in the case of the rebel *fraticelli*; again in 1322, during the poverty controversy with the Franciscans; and finally, in 1326, regarding the inquiry into William of Ockham's orthodoxy.

Between 1318 and 1325, Durand produced a final recension of his commentary, reaffirming his previous position, while mitigating its most problematic aspects. This version is alone acknowledged by the author as an authentic expression of his thought. It was widely diffused in the sixteenth century in a number of printed editions. This new redaction probably motivated a final tract against Durandus, *Evidentiae contra*

*Durandum*, produced in 1325 by a Dominican author known as Durandellus.

In 1326, Durand was appointed as bishop of Meaux. To this period belongs his political treatise on the origin of power, *De origine potestatum et iurisdictionum quibus populus regitur* (1329). Between 1331 and his death in 1334, Durand was involved in the beatific vision controversy, which saw the Paris theological establishment set against pope John XXII's opinion. Durand gave his expert opinion on the subject in *De visione Dei quam habent animae sanctorum ante iudicium generale* (1332), a work which earned the pope's hostility but whose view was posthumously vindicated by the succeeding pope, Benedict XII. Despite a life punctuated by controversy, Durand was highly respected in the later Middle Ages.

The character of Durand's thought is well illustrated by his double sobriquet of *doctor modernus* and *doctor resolutissimus*: an independent spirit prepared to espouse the most original views, while refusing to capitulate to recent magisterial trends. Drawing a clear distinction between reason and authority, Durand claims that when the issue does not directly concern an article of faith, "we should rely on reason rather than on the authority of some doctor, however famous" (*Sent.*, Prol.). On matters of faith, however, theology does not proceed demonstratively but derives its knowledge from revelation and rests on authority alone. Durand thus rejects the Thomist notion of theology as a speculative "science." The object of theology is not God's nature but the meritorious acts that lead to salvation.

Revealing of the intellectual climate following the 1277 Paris condemnation, Durand is very critical of Aristotelian philosophy and its relevance to theology. It is this stance which probably best explains his departure from Thomism. Three themes are particularly illustrative of Durand's thought and its polemical nature: the notion of "relation," the theory of cognition, and divine causality.

On the basis of a modal doctrine indebted in principle to Henry of Ghent, Durand defines relation as a mode of being really distinct from its foundation. As a mode, relation is both distinct from substances, in that it is incapable of



subsisting by itself, and irreducible to absolute accidents (like quality and quantity) in that it does not affect composition. Durand thus challenges the traditional interpretation of Aristotelian categories as a division between substances and accidents in order to introduce an alternative ontological division based on “absolute” and “relative” beings. The modal conception of relation presented obvious advantages for answering a number of questions. In Trinitarian theology, Durand rejects Duns Scotus’s notion of “formal distinction” between the essence and the divine persons in favor of a *real* distinction based on the notion of relation as a diminished being. As he saw it, a real distinction of this kind facilitates an explanation of personal distinction in God without jeopardizing the unity of the essence. On the question of the soul and its faculties, intellect and will constitute one and the same reality in the soul: they are distinct only according to their relation to the different acts of cognizing and willing, respectively.

In epistemology, Durand denies the existence of an intelligible species as a necessary principle of cognition. Cognition consists in the direct relation between the intellect and an object present to it. There is no need to posit an additional reality that would move the intellect to its object and make it intelligible. Durand’s reason for rejecting Aristotelian epistemology is closely connected to his commitment to nominalism: the primary object of knowledge is not a universal concept but a singular object outside the mind. A universal is only the end product of a process of intellection that starts with the perception of a singular object.

Durandus’s criticism of intelligible species forms part of a wider intellectual project which reacts against the positing of intermediary principles purporting to build a fool-proof causal system between God and his creation. This forerunner to Ockham’s principle of economy constitutes an attempt to safeguard God’s absolute power and the voluntary character of his creation. One expression of this is Durand’s denial of all causal power to divine ideas. God pre-contains creatures not formally, according to a pattern of imitability, but *virtually*, according to the way in which an efficient cause pre-contains its effects. The

relation between God and creatures is then not formal but strictly causal. Likewise, against the Thomist theory of sacramental causality based on some superadded virtue infused in the sacrament, Durand claims that the sacrament becomes efficacious rather on the basis of a voluntary pact established between man and God. Finally, Durand denies the necessity of an infused habit of grace in order to attain salvation. On the basis of his absolute power, God could affect the salvation of a man who has died without grace.

Durand’s readiness to depart from Aristotelian philosophy bears as much affinity to the approach of Franciscans such as Bonaventure and Peter John Olivi, as it heralds Ockham’s “nominalism” in both its epistemological and theological dimension. This could explain why Durand became the chosen target of Dominican censure, over other non-Thomist Dominicans like James of Metz or Dietrich of Freiberg. To question Aquinas on avowedly un-Aristotelian grounds was like revisiting the 1277 Paris condemnation.

## Cross-References

- ▶ [Aristotelianism in the Greek, Latin, Syriac, Arabic, and Hebrew Traditions](#)
- ▶ [Bonaventure](#)
- ▶ [Dietrich of Freiberg](#)
- ▶ [Henry of Ghent](#)
- ▶ [Hervaeus Natalis](#)
- ▶ [James of Metz](#)
- ▶ [John Duns Scotus](#)
- ▶ [Parisian Condemnation of 1277](#)
- ▶ [Peter John Olivi](#)
- ▶ [Thomas Aquinas](#)
- ▶ [Thomism](#)
- ▶ [Universals](#)
- ▶ [William of Ockham](#)

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## Economic Thought in the Middle Ages

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### Abstract

In the High Middle Ages, a distinctive Christian approach to economics starts to take form in relation to ecclesiastical properties. A paradigm of unselfish but productive use of wealth is set, using poverty as a model. From the eleventh century, canon law unfolds this broad paradigm drawing on Roman law: a juridical condemnation of usury is put forward which, however, is linked to derogations grounded on nonlegal principles.

During the thirteenth century, theologians take the lead in economic debates, influenced by two diverging approaches. A doctrine of usury and a theory of just price are developed, drawing on Aristotle. Loan on interest is rationally condemned on the assumption that money is sterile; economic exchange is explained as an objective process guided by proportional reciprocity.

Debates on voluntary poverty, on the other hand, reaffirm the importance of high-medieval conceptions. Trade is described as an activity from which the community derives benefits, and

the merchant's wealth is seen as the result of his status of expert trained in determining the value of goods. Canon law exceptions, combined with high-medieval emphasis on productivity, slowly undermine the usury doctrine. Credit provided by reputed professionals or institutions (merchant-bankers, municipalities) is seen as productive and permitted, while usury is associated with moneylenders.

The distinctiveness of the Christian approach emerges in comparison with other traditions. Jewish conceptions, developed within talmudic jurisprudence, rely on the idea that money is a material object without productive potential. This rationale is used to explain prohibitions of usury and to allow credit profits in the form of loans on security. Islamic tradition is heavily influenced by the predominance of religion. Economic issues, mainly discussed within Islamic jurisprudence, are rarely considered in purely philosophical terms. This leads to a distinctive approach, condemning credit gains except if lenders suffer the risk of losing their capital.

Strictly speaking, it is difficult to claim the existence of medieval economic thought. Though issues related to economics are considered in a number of texts, these are generally analyzed in the context of broader frameworks that refer to theological, legal, and philosophical problems. In spite of the fact that medieval thinkers put forward principles that in the long run will have an impact on economic analysis, these concepts belong to the different spheres (religious, legal, moral, etc.)

in which they are embedded. These ideas are also by-products of the language in which they are described, a century-old vocabulary that often takes form outside any concerns for economy. Given the influence of religion, one needs to take into account various economic traditions (Christian, Jewish, and Islamic), overlapping at times but also profoundly different. These traditions are not self-contained. They often interact with other ones, for example, Greek philosophy and Roman law. Such a complex frame needs, thus, a multilevel investigation.

The economic vocabulary that takes form during the Middle Ages goes back to the basic text of the Christian tradition: the Bible. The Gospels, for instance, provide a wide range of metaphors related to trade and money that hint at a productive use of riches combined with charitable redistribution. Perhaps one of the strongest economic images is provided by the mystery of the incarnation, by the choice made by God, infinitely powerful and wealthy, to become human, a decision that leads to the apparent contradiction of a Christ who embraces poverty while preserving his divine richness. This metaphor, named the “sacred commerce,” reveals, as well as many others (e.g., the parable of the talents and that of Jesus feeding the 5000), a crucial point: the dialectical relation between wealth and poverty, both in spiritual and in material terms (Todeschini 2009).

The ideas included in the Bible are further developed by the fathers of the church. Stimulated by this tradition, thinkers like Basil of Caesarea, John Chrysostom, Ambrose of Milan, Saint Augustine, and many others do address economic and social subjects. Charity is not seen as goods and money going from the hands of the wealthy to those of the needy, but it is considered as a complex exchange through which the opposition between material and spiritual wealth can be solved. Through the good use of riches, exemplified by charitable donations controlled by ecclesiastical authority, the poor gain the material aid that they need, while the rich earn salvation. Another relevant contribution comes from the monastic experience of the High Middle Ages. The choice of individual poverty by monks aiming to follow the example of Christ is

combined with the collective possession of land by monasteries. Moreover, monastic rules insist on good management of these properties, since an efficient system of exploitation provides goods that are not only necessary for self-consumption but also useful to relieve the poor in case of need (Todeschini 2008; Naismith 2015).

In the following centuries, economic issues are discussed in a number of writings, such as Carolingian laws, early papal norms, local synods, and councils. Yet, it is in the second half of the eleventh century, during the so-called Gregorian reform, that these discussions are carried on more systematically. The aim of this reform is primarily political (i.e., to restore the principle of the church’s self-government). Some relevant economic principles are, however, also put forward; possibly the most fruitful on theoretical grounds is that the church has a right to possess goods and revenues. Such a statement implies a juridical definition of what is ecclesiastical property, a definition that is first set by Peter Damian in a letter concerning episcopal goods. This definition can be briefly summarized in three points: (1) The ecclesiastical patrimony is sacred and thus inalienable; it can be increased but it cannot be reduced. (2) The church is not the owner of this patrimony but simply a manager of it on behalf of Christ and the poor. (3) A productive use of this patrimony is to be considered useful, since Christian society as a whole, and especially the poor, will benefit from such a use. It should be added that the content of this letter, shortly after its publication (1051), was embodied in ecclesiastical legislation (Todeschini 2004; Naismith 2015).

After the Gregorian reform, the Christian tradition is ready to extend its vision from ecclesiastical institutions to lay economy as well. During the second half of the twelfth and the first decades of the thirteenth centuries, a relevant contribution to this process comes from the expansion of the church’s legislation. Two major works set the beginning and the end of this period of intense juridical activity: the *Decretum*, a selection of various ecclesiastical writings (biblical passages, patristic works, papal norms, etc.) compiled around 1140 by the Camaldolese friar Gratian, and the *Liber extravagantium*, a collection of

papal decrees and canons of general councils issued by Pope Gregory IX in 1234. In these texts, issues emerging in the current “Commercial Revolution” are discussed in the light of the Christian tradition, in specific sections (addressing to theft, buying and selling, financial activity, etc.). It should be recalled, however, that in these juridical collections, economic issues are still mainly treated in connection to clerics and the church and that issues such as simony, tithes, and ecclesiastical revenues continue to be widely discussed (Todeschini 2009).

The “rediscovery” of Roman law starting at the end of the eleventh century also gives a strong boost toward a more theoretical approach. Besides opening a discussion on the connection among existing juridical systems (civil and canon legislation, natural and divine law, etc.), it provides a set of legal definitions (i.e., contracts), principles, and terms in which the economic ideas embedded in the Christian tradition could be organized. Furthermore, it favors a wide-ranging work of interpretation by lawyers in which canon and Roman law systems are often combined together according to the principle of *utriusque ius*. The relevance of these interpreters should not be undervalued, since their influence is often comparable to that of the main juridical texts and in some cases their comments will be included in the latter in the form of official glosses. It is in this period that, under the influence of law, the still jumbled tradition of the High Middle Ages tends to evolve into more systematic reasoning, and the first technical definitions of concepts like usury and just price start to take form.

Concerning usury, biblical prohibitions and their high-medieval interpretation were to be taken into account. While the Bible suggested a somewhat broad juridical definition of usury, in patristic and Gregorian texts, this activity is rather described as antisocial conduct (e.g., the tendency of hoarding wealth). If Gratian’s *Decretum* describes usury as “to receive something in excess of the principal” initially lent, the canon lawyer Huguccio of Pisa, at the end of the twelfth century, provides a definition grounded on the formal distinction between lease and loan contracts. While in the latter the ownership of the loaned good

passes to the borrower, in the former such a transfer does not occur; therefore, whereas the lessor can rightly claim a payment, a loan must be free of charge (otherwise it turns into usury). Huguccio hints at a principle that will turn out to be very successful in subsequent discussions: the use and the ownership of money may not be separated (Langholm 1992; Ceccarelli 2006).

In their quest for a definition of usury, ecclesiastical law and canon lawyers enlarge the analysis to a broader set of contracts: loans on security, partnerships, “life rents,” buying and selling on credit, dowries, etc. This way of reasoning allows detection of many cases of “hidden usury,” but also the discovery of several exceptions to the prohibition of receiving something in excess of the capital: 12 in all, according to the renowned list provided by Henry of Susa in the mid-thirteenth century. The rationale behind these derogations has two basic features. One (connected to the theories of the Gregorian reform) points out that due to its special status, the church could receive something in excess of the capital. The other comes from two Roman law principles, “loss occurring” (*damnum emergens*) and “profit ceasing” (*lucrum cessans*), which allowed consideration of interest as a form of compensation. During the thirteenth century, canon lawyers will cautiously start to combine these two features (i.e., status and compensation) in order to explain why merchant-bankers may claim the payment of interest without necessarily being considered usurers (Ceccarelli 2006).

In this century, theologians gradually supersede jurists in discussing economic issues. Initially included in major theological genres (such as *Summae*, commentaries on the *Sentences* of Peter Lombard, *Quodlibetal Questions*), by the last decades of the century, economic discussions are also addressed in specific writings devoted to buying and selling, usury, and restitution of disreputable gains. Though scholastic reasoning does not create legal norms, the great authority enjoyed by theologians leaves a strong mark on the Christian tradition of economics. A good example can be found in penitential handbooks that, from the late thirteenth century, aimed at popularizing theological teaching through

confession in order to bring the rules of Christian economic conduct to the masses (Langholm 2003).

Besides canon law and its interpretation, theological reasoning concerned with economics has two basic points of reference: Greek philosophical writings and the discussions on voluntary poverty. In the *Nicomachean Ethics* and in the *Politics*, translated in Latin in the mid-thirteenth century, Aristotle provided a language and a logical framework suitable for describing medieval economy on technical and moral grounds. Starting with Albert the Great, thinkers can draw on Aristotle for a number of concepts: the distinction between commutative and distributive justice, the just price as the benchmark to follow in exchange, and the idea that money measures the value of goods and hence in itself is not productive (Kaye 1998). Its influence is even greater regarding the approach to be followed, fostering efforts to explain in rational terms biblical prohibitions and canon law rulings. This leads scholastic thinkers to develop the so-called theories of usury and of the just price, in an attempt to provide a synthesis between Greek philosophy and religious doctrines (Langholm 1992). From the late thirteenth century, Galenic theories also begun to be influential, suggesting broader and more flexible ideas of equality. Aristotelian explanations of economic exchange are reconsidered in the light of a dynamic vision of it, in which justice could come from the interaction among conflicting forces (Kaye 2014).

Another relevant, and usually underestimated, stimulus comes from the issue of poverty in which some of the major scholastic thinkers of the thirteenth century are involved: Bonaventure of Bagnoregio, Thomas Aquinas, John Pecham, Peter John Olivi, etc. Dominicans and Franciscans, in order to defend their vow of mendicancy, are forced to define what poverty is in either theological, juridical, or economic terms. Drawing on the principles of the Gregorian reform (i.e., individual poverty, common property, and productive management of it), the writings in defense of voluntary mendicancy stress the importance of how material goods are used. This emphasis is rather common, but it is particularly clear among

Franciscans, whose rule forbids even collective property, claiming the right to use goods without possessing them. In short, the issue of poverty leads to a thorough analysis on subjective needs, and on the ways to evaluate material goods, that will have an incidental but substantial fallout on ideas concerning wealth and profit. As a matter of fact during the last decades of the thirteenth century, many of these concepts flow into writings devoted to lay economy. This explains why the great majority of scholastic thinkers who address economic issues come from the ranks of the Dominican and Franciscan orders. Their judgment of individual enrichment is related to poverty, just as much as it is to the Gospels, canon law, and Aristotle (Lambertini 1994–1997; Todeschini 2009).

Drawing on patristic teachings, theologians argue that the Edenic condition of common property was altered by the fall of man. Private ownership is considered a by-product of positive law and political institutions, yet scholastic thinkers generally agree that it may be revoked only under exceptional circumstances, namely, extreme economic need. With private wealth taken for granted, theological writings may focus on how gains are generated in economic transactions (Langholm 1992; Wood 2002).

A significant section of scholastic thought thus deals with trade and the profits that derive from it. By the mid-thirteenth century, the unfavorable view of trade based on the biblical episode of Christ's eviction of the merchants from the temple is replaced by a positive image of commerce that stressed its social usefulness. Among Franciscan in particular, merchants are depicted as professionals who satisfy the needs of a community by transporting goods from a region in which there is an abundance to another in which there is scarcity. The peak of this line of reasoning can be found in John Duns Scotus, who argues that where there is a lack of merchants, rulers should promote policies to attract them, in order to support the economic well-being of the state (Langholm 1992; Wood 2002; Todeschini 2009).

Theologians also try to establish why a merchant may buy a commodity at a certain price and resell it at a higher one. These discussions are



influenced by three different traditions: (a) Aristotle's commutative justice, which suggested that a criterion of proportional reciprocity should be followed in exchange, thanks to a medium able to measure the value of goods (i.e., money); (b) Roman law, which establishes that the cost of a commodity is determined by free bargaining, as long as it does not exceed by half the price normally fixed in the marketplace (principle of *laesio enormis*); and (c) the fathers of the church who teach that an object's value depends on its subjective utility and that only those who have a good reputation are to be allowed in the marketplace (Langholm 1992; Kaye 1998).

It is only in the thirteenth century that, strictly speaking, the debate about just price gets started. Although scholastic thinkers do acknowledge that objective factors – such as supply, demand, and production costs – have a direct incidence on prices, the idea of just price relies heavily on a subjective conception of value. A good example is provided by Peter John Olivi who, around 1290, argues that a good's economic value is dependent on its utility, either subjective (*complacibilitas*) or objective (*virtuositas*), and on its scarcity (*raritas*), but also on labor, expenses, and risks (*labor, expensae, periculi*) that individuals undergo during its production and commercialization (Langholm 1992; Todeschini 2009; Olivi 2016).

According to theologians, the number of features that need to be taken into account during the exchange does not allow precise determination of a just price; therefore, such a measure may fluctuate within a wide range of values (*latitudo*). This concept, derived from the debate on voluntary poverty, overcomes the problem, still unsolved in Thomas Aquinas, of the strict equivalence between exchanged goods claimed by divine law. By the end of the century, many theologians put forward the idea that the just price must be seen in the light of positive law, a framework in which a geometrical, and thus unbalanced, notion of justice is possible. In John Duns Scotus, for example, the perfect equivalence between things exchanged claimed by divine law (*equivalentia rei et rei*) is replaced by a latitude of values by referring to positive law (Kaye 1998, 2014).

In practical terms the issue appears to be less complicated, since the just price tends to equal the one determined by the marketplace in normal conditions. In order to explain an equivalence as such, scholastic thinkers adopt an expression – “common estimation” (*communis aestimatio*) – which has a twofold significance. On the one side, it may be considered as the result of supply and demand in its entirety, suggesting thus the idea of a suprapersonal and self-regulated process (Langholm 2003; Kaye 1998). On the other side, “common estimation” refers to the price settled by those individuals that the “market community” acknowledges as public professionals of commerce. For instance, according to Henry of Ghent, it is the fully experienced merchant (*expertissimus mercator*) who marks the just price of a commodity in the marketplace, and not the other way around, determining thus, through his professional skills (*industria*), the just value of a good (Todeschini 2009).

When discussing issues related to credit and usury, theologians have to deal with a frame in which the overlapping teachings of religion, law, and philosophy interact with everyday economic life. Usury is thus a complex phenomenon: it is a sin condemned by the Bible (i.e., divine law); it can be broadly seen as an improper use of wealth, as it was during the Gregorian reform, or strictly defined on juridical grounds, as canon lawyers do; it can be considered on its own, but it usually involves different contracts and contracting parties; finally, following Aristotle, it may also be explained in rational terms.

Focusing on this latter feature, it must be acknowledged that scholastic thinkers during the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries spare no effort to work out the so-called doctrine of usury. In order to prove, in rational terms, that usury is not only a sin but also against nature, a number of arguments are elaborated. Some are logically weak and quickly rejected, but others receive long-lasting approval. Drawing on canon law, theologians pick up the idea that in a loan property passes to the borrower and thus that it is unjust for the lender to ask for interest. Many arguments refer to the principle, inferred from Aristotle, that money in itself bears no fruit and that,

therefore, it is unreasonable to claim a compensation for its use. Another successful argument is that of “economic duress,” by which scholastic thinkers mean that a needy borrower does not fully consent to pay for a loan (Langholm 1992; Wood 2002; Armstrong 2016).

This theoretical framework does not conclude the theological debate on usury, but it has to coexist with several other points of view that tend to undermine its basis. Like canon lawyers, theologians are concerned with those cases in which payment of interests is not assimilated to usury. While the principle of “loss occurring” is rapidly accepted, that of “profit ceasing” is more controversial, but by the end of the thirteenth century, it finds a good number of supporters, especially among Franciscans (Langholm 1992).

Exceptions do not only refer to juridical abstractions but more commonly are inspired by everyday life. Scholastic thought widely acknowledges a peculiar status to a prominent figure of the late-medieval economy, the multispecialized businessman devoted to trade, banking activity, and textile manufacturing. This entrepreneur, whom theologians name *mercator*, responds to the model of good management and productive use of wealth propounded by the church, since he prefers to reinvest profits rather than hoarding them. As Peter John Olivi argues, money borrowed or lent by such businessmen ceases to be a barren measure of value and becomes a productive capital. Following this approach, in the fourteenth century, the Catalan theologian Francis Eiximenis can state, without putting the doctrine of usury in doubt, that merchants may sell the use of their money (Ceccarelli 2001; Todeschini 2008).

The emphasis on contracting parties’ status is favored by a shift in ecclesiastical legislation starting in the late thirteenth century. Canon law leaves aside the contracts in which usury can be found and focuses on those who commit this sin, heavily condemning a specific professional category: public moneylenders. During the fourteenth century, theologians are still concerned with the technicalities of usury, but they also devote great attention to a feature like the public reputation of

the contracting parties (Ceccarelli 2006; Todeschini 2009).

Another element complicating the picture comes from the discussion of annuities, a widespread type of loan on interest that was the result of a sale combined with usufruct of real estate (a parcel of land, a mill, a house). In the last decades of the thirteenth century, theologians reject the idea that such a contract amounts to usury and instead make a distinction between money and the right to receive money. Such a distinction bypasses many arguments concerning the doctrine of usury, yet it does not lead to its dismissal (Langholm 1992; Wood 2002; Kaye 2014). It may appear to be the by-product of a formalistic way of reasoning, typical of scholasticism, but as a matter of fact, it is connected to the economic paradigm developed during the Gregorian reform. While canon lawyers limited this type of credit to ecclesiastical institutions, theologians like Godfrey of Fontaines and Gerard of Abbeville deem it extendable to laymen. Not surprisingly, during the fourteenth century, the sale of a right to receive money is adopted by some theologians to support an emerging form of institutional credit: public debt (Todeschini 2009; Armstrong 2003).

A final feature that has to be considered derives from the Franciscan claim to use goods without possessing them. By shifting this idea from the realm of poverty to that of profit, John Duns Scotus suggests that the use and ownership of money may in some cases be separated, implicitly putting in doubt a basic argument of the rational condemnation of usury. This argument is seldom adopted, yet it may explain why, around 1320, two Franciscans, Gerard Odonis and Francis of Meyronnes, state that usury can only be condemned on the basis of the Bible, since no rational arguments prove that it is unjust (Langholm 1992; Ceccarelli and Piron 2009).

The Christian tradition is not the only one which has addressed economics. It is possible to find evidences of economic reasoning in medieval Jewish and Islamic sources as well. As in the previous case, religion is significant to the point that it is possible to consider two distinct economic conceptions that are typical of Islamic and Jewish tradition.

The latter one is grounded on the *Talmud*, a juridical text of the third century in which the broad economic prescriptions of the *Torah* are presented in a systematic form. From the eighth century, this source (in which religious and legal realms are strictly related) undergoes a process of revision through the two main genres of Jewish jurisprudence. Rabbinic advices on specific issues (*responsa* or *teshuvot*) allow interpretation of the *Talmud's* general norms in the light of the economic context of the communities of the diaspora. Talmudic commentaries expand economic reasoning by explaining and elucidating its juridical content. This latter approach reaches its highest point with Maimonides' *Mishneh Torah* (1178–1180), in which Aristotelian teachings are used to review the Jewish tradition and to provide an updated set of economic rules (Ohrenstein and Gordon 1992; Soloveitchik 2005).

Notwithstanding Aristotle's influence, the distinctive feature of talmudic jurisprudence lies in a material conception of money. Being considered only as a metal object, money is seen as an unreliable tool in establishing the value of commodities. In the exchange process, the price of money is determined by the quantity of goods that it allows one to purchase, and not the other way around. This approach, which basically denies any abstract or productive meaning to money, does not affect a substantially favorable opinion as to economic exchange and trade. Although buying and selling are seen as an extension of barter (in which monetary prices have only a surrogate function), prices established by market transactions are generally considered to be just. On the marketplace, the commodity embodies, in monetary terms, both objective factors (labor and costs) and individual judgments concerning its usefulness. On the same basis, investments in commercial ventures (*iska*) can determine a profit for the lender, since this gain is determined not by the money lent but by the merchandises exchanged (Ohrenstein and Gordon 1992).

The talmudic conception of money is crucial to understand the way credit contracts are dealt with in the Jewish tradition. Drawing on the *Torah*, the *Talmud* forbids both usury (*neschek*) and lending on interest (*tarbith*) among Jews, while it allows

them when the counterparts are foreigners. In general terms, rabbinic advices and talmudic commentaries connect these prescriptions to the religious obligation of communal solidarity. Yet they also explain them on juridical-economic grounds. The payment of interest is forbidden since it is impossible to establish the price of money in abstract terms, that is, without an immediate relation to other goods. On the contrary, such value can be determined when the money lent is related to commodities by means of a pledge on a borrower's property that, in case of default, passes to the lender. This logical frame is employed by medieval talmudic jurisprudence to develop a multifaceted system of credit structured on a number of contracts: double sale, deposit, mortgage loan, and simple pawnbroking (Soloveitchik 2005). This approach is not only revealing as to the uniqueness of this tradition; it may also explain the growing hostility toward Jewish moneylending expressed in Christian writings (Todeschini 2004).

From the eighth to the fourteenth century, a number of Muslim thinkers are engaged in discussing economic issues, in particular within the Sunni tradition. The most influential contributions come from two well-defined, but different genres. The first is Islamic juridical literature, and it follows a peculiar approach: a case-by-case analysis, on the basis of agreement among diverging opinions and reasoning by analogy, which leaves little space for theory. These texts aim at determining whether contracts are consistent with the Islamic law (*sharī'a*), that is, the teachings of the Qur'ān and the *Sunna*, integrated by the interpretation (*fiqh*) provided by the leading Sunni legal schools. The second genre is that of the political-philosophical treatises, mainly in the form of *Mirrors for Princes*. It is influenced by the Aristotelian tradition of the *oikonomika* (the "science of household administration") and thus opened to a broader theoretical reasoning (Ghazanfar 2003).

Differences also concern the topics that are addressed: while jurisprudence deals with credit activity, political philosophy focuses on merchants and trade. Such partition is determined by Islamic law prohibitions concerning economy: *ribā'* (broadly identifiable with lending on

interest), *ḥarām* (commerce of impure goods), and *ġarar* (selling of risk). By the eleventh century, jurists (especially in the prevailing Hanafite school), supported by the ‘Abbāsīd caliphs who favored the merging of Islamic and civil law, obtain full jurisdiction on these issues. The results of these processes are significant in economic discussions: (a) they deeply interconnect religious and legal spheres, and (b) they exclude theological–philosophical reasoning from juridical interpretation (Johansen 1999).

Discussions on credit are thus developed focusing on single types of contracts to determine whether *ribā’* or *ġarar* are involved. Since these bans were not originally set in juridical terms, the judgment provided by legal experts is dependent not only on the formal structure of contracts but also on other elements (e.g., the kind of commodity). Along with a general disapproval of loans on interest and an unfavorable opinion of credit sales, a number of particular cases and diverging opinions tend to coexist. There are rare attempts to find a rational basis of the prohibitions. Some, like al-Ġazālī (1058–1111) and Averroes (1126–1198), echoing Aristotle, argue that they derive from a broader ban to sell goods (e.g., money, provisions, etc.) that are used as a medium in economic exchange. Others, like Ibn Qayyim (1292–1350), state that they aim at safeguarding economically those who are in need from exploitation (Vogel and Hayes 1998).

The most common rational explanation put forward by Abū Dāwūd and Ibn Māja during the ninth century claims that the prohibitions condemn riskless gains. It is drawn from juridical discussions of commercial partnership contracts (*mudaraba*), in which the lender is entitled to receive a share of profit as long as he is liable for the invested capital. This rationale is highly influential, and it is adopted to argue in favor of several types of agreements in which capital and labor are involved, well beyond the realm of trade investment. It also fosters a peculiar approach concerning risk, setting a distinction between reasonably foreseeable events from which it is possible to profit and highly unpredictable occurrences whose economic exploitation is forbidden by *ġarar*. The link between capital liability

and credit profits can be considered the most distinctive feature of the Islamic tradition. It allows development of a conception of finance consistent with religious and legal teachings, in which principles such as “loss occurring” and “profit ceasing” are not needed (Vogel and Hayes 1998).

Besides considering partnership contracts as standard trading techniques and reasserting that *ribā’* is forbidden by Islamic law, the political–philosophical literature seldom addresses credit activities. Money is generally seen as the medium that allows measurement of the value of goods, yet this argument is never considered in relation to the prohibition of *ribā’*. This lack of interest is counterweighted by a wide-ranging acknowledgment of marketplace functioning and by a favorable opinion of wealth derived from commerce. Drawing on al-Ġazālī’s moral justification of trade profits, political–philosophical treatises explain price increase in terms of a compensation for labor, costs, and risks suffered by merchants. The interplay between supply and demand as price determinants is fully described in the twelfth century by al-Dimashqī and al-Dīn al-Ṭūsī and later further developed by Ibn Khaldūn (1332–1406). The latter even provides relevant insights concerning consumption by distinguishing between the satisfaction of necessities and the desire of conveniences. However, *Mirrors for Princes* do not emphasize the role of merchants in Muslim society and seldom refer to trade as an activity that can increase the economic well-being of the community (Ghazanfar 2003).

## Cross-References

- ▶ [Albert the Great](#)
- ▶ [Canon Law](#)
- ▶ [Church Fathers](#)
- ▶ [Francis of Meyronnes](#)
- ▶ [al-Ġazālī, Abū Ḥāmid Muḥammad](#)
- ▶ [Gerald Odonis](#)
- ▶ [Ibn Rushd, Muḥammad ibn Aḥmad al-Ḥafīd \(Averroes\)](#)
- ▶ [John Duns Scotus](#)
- ▶ [John Pecham](#)

- ▶ Natural Law
- ▶ Natural Rights
- ▶ Peter Damian
- ▶ Peter John Olivi
- ▶ Peter Lombard
- ▶ Poverty
- ▶ Thomas Aquinas

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## Emotions

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### Abstract

Two basic ancient approaches to emotions were the compositional theory of Plato and Aristotle and the Stoic judgment theory. Ancient philosophical theories were employed in early Christian discussions of sin and spiritual experiences. The most influential theological themes were the monastic idea of supernaturally caused feelings and Augustine's analysis of the relations between the emotions and the will. Early medieval Latin discussions were formed by the reception of ancient themes through monastic, theological, medical, and philosophical literature. Avicennian faculty psychology strongly influenced early thirteenth-century theories of the nature and taxonomy of emotions. Albert the Great and Thomas Aquinas combined Avicennian and Aristotelian themes. Aquinas' account of emotions in his *Summa theologiae* was the most extensive medieval contribution to the subject. The increasing interest in psychological voluntarism led many Franciscan authors to abandon the traditional view that emotions belonged only to the lower psychosomatic level. John Duns Scotus, William Ockham, and their followers argued that there were also emotions of the will, such as the unpremeditated acts of complacency and dislike and the moods of pleasure or distress – ideas which Adam Wodeham developed into the direction of Stoic cognitive theory. Aquinas' taxonomy of emotions and Scotus' analysis of the emotions of the will were the medieval theories which continued to influence early modern discussions.

The medieval psychology of emotions was essentially based on ancient sources. The new developments included the discussion of emotions as part of the Avicennian faculty psychology, thirteenth-

century systematic taxonomies, and late medieval reevaluations of the sharp divide between the emotions and the will.

The philosophical analysis of emotions (passions) was introduced by Plato and developed further by Aristotle, who distinguished between four basic components of an occurrent emotion. First, the “cognitive” element is an unpremeditated evaluation that something positive or negative is happening or may happen to the subject or to someone else in a way that is relevant to the subject. Second, the “affective” element is a pleasant or unpleasant feeling about the content of the evaluation. Third, the “dynamic” element is a behavioral impulse toward action typically associated with the actual emotion. Fourth, there are typical “physiological” reactions.

This compositional approach has been very influential in western thought. As for the first element, practically all ancient and medieval theories were cognitive, associating some kind of evaluation with an emotion. While the Stoics argued that emotions were basically false judgments of the rational soul, it was more usual to follow Plato and Aristotle, who distinguished between the nonemotional intellectual power and the lower emotional parts. This was the prevailing medieval view until John Duns Scotus introduced the conception of passions of the intellectual faculty of the will.

Plato and Aristotle taught that emotions were noneliminable psychosomatic reactions of an emotional part of the soul, which was divided into concupiscible and irascible powers. The Stoics argued that emotions were eliminable value judgments by which people mistakenly evaluated things from their subjective perspective. They divided emotions into four basic types, depending on whether the object was evaluated as a present or future good or a present or future evil (Table 1).

**Emotions, Table 1** The four basic emotions of the Stoics

		Time	
		Present	Future
Value	Good	Pleasure	Desire
	Evil	Distress	Fear



This classification was quoted in many popular works, such as Boethius' *Consolatio philosophiae*, and was generally known in medieval times. The best-known part of Stoic philosophy is the philosophical therapy of emotions (*therapeia*) described in works by Cicero, Seneca, and Epictetus. Stoic therapy aimed at *apatheia*, the extirpation of emotions. The Stoic therapy was cognitive because emotions were regarded as false judgments. Other Hellenistic philosophers mostly followed Plato and Aristotle, arguing for the moderation of emotions (*metriopatheia*) – *apatheia* was regarded as impossible and inhuman. While Plato and his followers stressed the control and shrinking of emotions by the intellect, Aristotle also taught the edification of emotions as part of the good life and the importance of learning to feel right. Plotinus argued for *apatheia*, though this did not involve the disappearance of the emotional part – earthly emotions became useless in higher Neoplatonic spheres.

The Alexandrian theologians Clemens and Origen combined Stoic and Platonist ideas, arguing that freedom from emotion was part of Christian perfectibility and the precondition of divinization through participation in divine love (*agape*). This mystical union was described in highly emotional language, but supranaturally caused spiritual feelings, as experiences of the apathetic soul, were not called emotions. John Cassian made this combination of divine love with freedom from mundane emotions known in western monasticism. The Cappadocian fathers and Augustine, in contrast, were more inclined to *metriopatheia*. Monastic psychology also made use of the originally Stoic doctrine of first movements, which Origen, followed by Augustine and many others, applied to the Christian conception of sin. The Stoic idea, described by Seneca in *On Anger* (2.1–4), was that even apathetic people might react quasi-emotionally on exceptional occasions, but this was not really an emotion because it did not involve judgmental assent. Augustine taught that sinful thoughts which frequently occurred because of original sin became sins through assent. This was later developed into a detailed theory of the modes of assent as the degrees of venial and mortal sin. The

monastic literature on mystical ascent also developed introspective analysis of subjective feeling, which Bernard of Clairvaux called the sense of being affected by divine action.

In early medieval times, a new nonreligious impulse to analyze emotions was supplied by Latin translations of some philosophical and medical works. One of these was the late eleventh-century partial translation of the Arabic medical encyclopedia of 'Alī ibn al-'Abbās al-Maġūsī, the *Pantegni*, which contained various remarks on the emotions based on Galen's medical philosophy. Some elements of ancient medical and philosophical theories of emotions were also included in the translations of Nemesius of Emesa's *De natura hominis* from the late fourth century and John Damascene's *De fide orthodoxa* from the eighth century. An important psychological source book was the translation of the sixth book of Avicenna's *Shifā'*, often called Avicenna's *De anima*. Aristotle's *De anima*, which became the principal textbook in the middle of the thirteenth century, was translated c. 1150 by James of Venice.

The medical theory of the emotions concentrated on the Galenic ideas of the humors and the system of the spirits, the vitalizing spirits in the heart and the psychic spirits in the nerves and the brain. In the *Pantegni*, the physical aspects of the emotions were dealt with as slow or quick movements of the vital spirits toward the heart or away from it. This led to a popular medical classification of emotions (Table 2):

Avicenna divides the faculties of the sensory soul into apprehensive powers and moving powers. The apprehensive powers involve five external senses and five internal senses. The moving powers are divided into commanding and executive powers. Emotions are acts of the sensory commanding moving power, triggered by occurrent evaluations by estimative powers and

**Emotions, Table 2** The medical classification of the emotions

		Direction	
		Centrifugal	Centripetal
Intensity	Slow	Joy	Distress
	Quick	Anger	Fear

accompanied by bodily affections and behavioral changes. The moving power of the intellectual soul is the will which, together with practical intellect, should control the emotions. The sensory commanding faculty is divided into the concupiscible and the irascible. The reactions of the concupiscible power are desires for things taken to be pleasurable, and the reactions of the irascible power are desires to defeat adversaries and repel things regarded as harmful. Avicenna also analyzed feelings as pleasant or unpleasant perceptions associated with estimative and moving acts. An influential part of his theory was that the estimative power moves the commanding power by noticing the helpful and harmful aspects of things, which are called “intentions.” As an occurrent emotion involves the acts of two separate powers, there must be some kind of governing awareness which combines these two acts.

Many authors employed the Avicennian view of emotions, one problem of which was that classification of emotions into those of concupiscible and irascible powers did not unproblematically correspond with Aristotle’s view that these powers had contrary acts. An influential new taxonomic idea introduced to solve this problem in the 1230s was that the objects of the contrary concupiscible acts were simply pleasurable or painful and the objects of the irascible acts were in addition arduous, difficult to obtain or to avoid. (Early examples of this terminology are found in the anonymous treatises *De anima et potentiis eius* and *De potentiis animae et obiectis*.)

The most detailed early thirteenth-century classification was developed in John of la Rochelle’s *Summa de anima*. He regarded emotions as the acts of two moving powers, the concupiscible and irascible, both of which have several reaction types divided into contrary pairs. The concupiscible pairs are associated with contrary dispositions of liking (*placencia*) or disliking (*displacencia*) and irascible emotions with strength (*corroboratio*) and weakness (*debilitas*). The new systematic idea was to use these dispositions of feeling and behavior reactions as classificatory principles. The contrary emotions of the concupiscible power are classified as follows (Table 3):

Of irascible emotions with the “arduous and difficult objects,” ambition and hope (*spes*) pertain to future honor and prosperity, hope involving the belief that they will be achieved. The opposites are poverty of spirit and despair. Three emotions, pride, lust for power, and contempt, are associated with attempts to strengthen one’s social ranking and power. The opposite of pride and lust for power is humility, and the opposite of contempt is reverence. Of the acts directed toward evil things, courage is a desire to meet the enemy with confidence, anger is a desire for revenge, and magnanimity is rising up against evil. Three forms of the flight from evil are somehow opposites of courage: penitence toward past evil things, impatience with present evil things, and fear of future evil things (Table 4).

Also following Avicenna’s faculty psychology, Albert the Great and Thomas Aquinas treated

**Emotions, Table 3** John of la Rochelle’s classification of the concupiscible emotions

	Self-regarding reactions				Other-regarding reactions	
	First orientation	Action initiation	Toward results	Toward durable results	Desiring good or evil for others	Distress about results
Liking	Appetite	Desire	Joy	Delight	Love hate	
Disliking	Distaste	Aversion	Pain	Distress		Envy pity

**Emotions, Table 4** John of la Rochelle’s classification of irascible emotions

Strength	Ambition	Hope	Pride	Lust for power	Contempt	Courage	Anger	Magnanimity
Weakness	Poverty of spirit	Desperation	Humility		Reverence	Fear		
						Penitence		
						Impatience		

emotions as acts of the sensory moving powers. While Albert employed the classifications of Nemesius of Emesa and John Damascene, Thomas Aquinas put forward a new taxonomy which was probably influenced by John of La Rochelle. Albert argued that emotions should be regarded as qualities as Aristotle described them in *Categories* 8. Aquinas defended the traditional characterization of them as movements of the soul, finding the basic classificatory principles of emotions in Aristotle's doctrine of contrary movements in *Physics* V.5.

In discussing emotions in *Summa theologiae* II-1.22-48, Aquinas first divided them in terms of objects: the concupiscible emotions react to what seems good or evil at the sensory level, whereas the irascible emotions react to arduous sense-good and sense-evil. The sensory moving faculties are activated by objects through cognition, and the modes of the resulting emotional movements serve as further qualifications in defining particular emotions. The Aristotelian contraries of movements are of two types: approach to something and retreat from it or movements associated with contrary endpoints. The contrary movements of the concupiscible power are of the second type, toward contrary ends (sense-good and sense-evil). The contrary movements of the irascible power are of the first type, with respect to same objects.

Aquinas classifies (1) love, (2) desire, and (3) pleasure or joy as the three self-regarding concupiscible emotions with respect to the sense-good; the contrary movements with respect to sense-evil are (4) hate, (5) aversion, and (6) pain or distress. As for the irascible emotions, the arduous future sense-good may give rise to (7) hope or (8) despair, the arduous future sense-evil to (9) fear or (10) courage, and the arduous present sense-evil to (11) anger – this is without a contrary pair.

Aquinas' attempt to deal with emotions using Aristotle's doctrine of movement was not without its problems. In distinguishing between love, desire, and pleasure as the incipient movement, actual movement, and rest, he confusingly seems to treat emotions as the behavioral changes they are supposed to cause. These movements are not included in the distinction between the formal constituent, that is, the movements of the moving

power, and the material constituent, that is, the physiological changes, such as the movements of the heart, the spirits, and the humors. The background of the sometime equation of emotions with behavioral movements is that these are more appropriate to the analysis through Aristotle's *Physics* than the movements of the moving power which remain less clear. As for pleasure and distress, Aquinas explains that while one might speak about a stone as loving its natural place and desiring to be there, it does not make sense to speak about the pleasure or pain of a stone. Like Aristotle and Avicenna, Aquinas holds that pleasure or distress is a pleasant or unpleasant awareness and this is an aspect of emotions in general since some kind of pleasure is involved in positive emotions and some kind of pain in negative ones.

Aquinas' discussion of emotions, the most extensive in medieval literature, involves detailed terminological, psychological, and ethical remarks on each emotion type. Like all medieval authors, Aquinas argues that the intellectual soul should keep emotions under strict control, but he also criticized the Stoic *apatheia*. His theory and taxonomy were very influential until the seventeenth century.

John Duns Scotus regarded the taxonomies based on the notion of arduousness as artificial, and he also criticized the influential Avicennian idea that there are "intentions" in things which can be grasped by an estimative power which then moves the motive power – representations of a certain kind simply cause behavioral changes in some animals and others in others. The original part of Scotus' approach to emotions was to question the sharp divide between the passions of the sensory soul and the analogous phenomena in the will. According to Scotus, when one's will is fulfilled or frustrated, the next step is the apprehension of the actuality of what was desired or its contrary. Regarding this stage, Scotus says, "there follows a passion of the will, joy or distress, which is caused by the object present in this way." These passions are not directly caused by the will and are not free (*Ordinatio* III.15).

Scotus' longer list of the factors which are sufficient to cause distress as a passion of the

will involves apprehensions that something takes place contrary to one's (1) actual will against it, (2) natural inclination to happiness even though no particular act of will is actual, (3) emotional dispositions of the sensory soul, or something takes place (4) in accordance to what is reluctantly willed in circumstances in which the opposite is preferred but cannot be achieved (*velleitas*). There are corresponding factors which are sufficient to cause pleasure of the will. The intellectual soul is regarded as very emotional – its feelings are influenced by actual volitions or nolitions as well as by the inclinations of the will and the sensory part of the soul.

Scotus also treats liking and disliking, the unpremeditated first reactions and necessary concomitants of other acts, as analogous to sensory emotional reactions except that they are free acts. Ockham's theory of emotions is largely based on Scotus' ideas. John Buridan, who otherwise followed Scotus and Ockham, stated that liking and disliking as immediate reactions are not free and in this respect are also similar to sensory emotions in general. Influenced by Scotus' idea of emotional will, Adam Wodeham argued that volitions and nolitions are valuations, to which all human emotions can be reduced because of the unity of the soul. This assimilation of emotions to evaluative thoughts shows similarities to the Stoic theory, although Wodeham does not refer to Stoic authors.

Medieval theories of emotions were discussed in many influential Renaissance works, some of these concentrating on the differences between the theories of Scotus and Aquinas. John of la Rochelle's taxonomy of emotions was also known through a paraphrase in Gregor Reisch's popular early sixteenth-century encyclopedia *Margarita philosophica* (12.4–5).

## Cross-References

- ▶ Adam Wodeham
- ▶ Albert the Great
- ▶ Augustine
- ▶ Ibn Sīnā, Abū 'Alī (Avicenna)
- ▶ Internal Senses
- ▶ John Duns Scotus

- ▶ John of La Rochelle
- ▶ Philosophical Psychology, Jewish Tradition
- ▶ Thomas Aquinas
- ▶ Will
- ▶ William of Ockham

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## Epistemology

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### Abstract

In a general sense, epistemology aims to provide criteria for knowledge, and in a more restricted sense, an elaboration of a theory of scientific knowledge. The Medievals, under

the influence of Aristotle and a brand of Platonism, defend a heightened conception of knowledge defending the infallibility of objects (due to their necessity and universality) in as much as that of discursive methods (theories of demonstration). After a refresher on this double heritage, we will examine three models of scientific reasoning developed in the Middle Ages bolstered by different procedures of guaranteeing the certainty of knowledge and its application to a contingent world.

In general terms, epistemology can be taken to be a theory of knowledge, the examination of criteria of cognitive apprehension broadly construed, or in a more restricted sense, a theory of scientific knowledge the result of which being discursive procedures of deduction. The common ground between these two conceptions of knowledge is the central role played by a set of recurring concepts: certainty, truth, and assent. They are distinguished by their essential differences at the level of the objects of knowledge and above all, by their procedures of justification. If the first mode of knowledge reflects a quasi-everyday sense of the term, the second designates a perfect or even ideal state. In the Middle Ages, the term *notitia* was used to capture the first sense, and *scientia* to capture the second. *Notitia* includes fallible epistemic states that may turn out to be false, and which would merit more the name belief, while *scientia* is construed as that which uncovers the criteria of infallibility. The common point of the medieval approach to this notion is the exclusion of falsity, in virtue of the principle of *nihil scitur nisi verum*. Our interest here is in this stricter sense.

Medieval reflections on *scientia* primarily aim toward the elaboration of a theory of demonstrative knowledge, largely inspired by the Aristotelian tradition of the *Posterior Analytics*. This tradition, which stresses the deductive procedures that a science must put in place, is reinforced by Aristotle's remarks about science being an epistemic virtue, that is an *habitus*, characterized by its permanence and its inclination toward truth as opposed to mere opinion (*Categories* Ch. 8, *Nichomachean Ethics* VI, 3). Infallibility is

thereby assured both by the subject and in method. This Aristotelian tradition is reinforced by a convergence with another tradition: the Platonism disseminated by St. Augustine. This tradition thus adds a demand of universality and immutability in the object of knowledge: science is certain knowledge of a universal and immutable object. This double heritage drove the Medievals to establish a theory of strict scientific knowledge and to face the gap that imposes itself between this conception of science and other forms of discourse. We will put the emphasis in this perspective on two points salient to medieval epistemology, one part being the status of its object, in particular its contingent objects, the other part the question of the epistemic criteria required to distinguish cognitive states.

Medieval conceptions of epistemology are rooted primarily in the theory developed in Aristotle's *Posterior Analytics*. The difficulty of this text, which is amplified by problems of translation, created as many problems regarding epistemological thought for the Medievals as it did solutions. In a general way, the following elements must be underscored. First, we find in this text an objective and discursive double determination of science. Indeed, science must be based on a universal, necessary, and eternal object (*Posterior Analytics* 1, 2, 71b 9–12; see also I, 30). We seem able, therefore, to exclude the idea of a science of the particular and contingent. Nevertheless, the exclusion of separate Forms (*Posterior Analytics* 1, 11) provides an empirical basis to science. Second, from the discursive point of view, knowledge is obtained by means of demonstration, so that all science is syllogistic and rests on a deductive structure. One such structure requires a kind of epistemic primacy of premises that guarantee a transfer of evidentness and truth. It is thus necessary that the premises, in addition to their necessity and universality required by the nature of the object, are equally true, primary, better known, prior to, and the cause of the conclusion (*Posterior Analytics* 1, 2, 71b 20–22). Even though the notion of certainty is not explicitly addressed by Aristotle, it is this focus on the primacy of premises and on the transference of their epistemic qualities that makes it possible for

the Medievals to explicitly develop the question of the reliability of science and its objects. The junction of these two determinations, objective and discursive, thus leads to the recovery of the ontological order by the discursive order, and a kind of isomorphism between them. In this way, to have scientific knowledge is to have a causal knowledge of an essence. This strict conception of science, as a body of adequate propositions to a particular kind of object, introduces a difference of kind between science and opinion. Since there is no science of that which can be otherwise, the disposition of reason toward this type of object cannot be described as science (*Posterior Analytics* 1, 33). This kind of epistemic state, capable of truth and falsity and marked by instability, is called opinion, and is able to induce accounts of different natures. Aristotle, by notoriously excluding that the same thing can be both an object of science and an object of opinion, seems to introduce a difference of kind and not merely of degree between science and opinion; a difference already reinforced by the exclusion of opinion from the set of intellectual virtues (*Posterior Analytics* I, 33, *Nicomachean Ethics* VI, 3). It is thus a strict conception of knowledge that the Medievals inherit from the *Posterior Analytics*. This conception is reinforced by one of the important mediations in the receptions of the text, namely Themistius' paraphrase, translated (from an Arabic version) by Gerard of Cremona. At the beginning of the second chapter (p. 247), the Byzantine commentator opposes a common sense and a proper sense of the notion of *scientia*. According to this latter sense, there is science if and only if we are capable of accounting for the reason why some thing exists, such that we accept that it cannot be otherwise. The Medievals find themselves thus confronted by a text that offers schema apt to guarantee the certain acquisition of truth, but at the cost of a strong dichotomy between science and opinion and the necessary and the contingent, at the heart of the field of epistemology. We have an example of the distress that may have given rise to this situation in one of the first medieval readers of the *Posterior Analytics*, John of Salisbury. In the *Metalogicon*, all the while emphasizing the difficulty of the text on account



of both the translation and the subject matter, John emphasizes that the modes of reasoning central to the book are primarily mathematical reasoning which deals with necessary objects. Thus, demonstrative logic is reduced to the mathematical, while the contingent is the object of probable logic that finds its tools in the *Topics* (see IV, 6, 8 and II, 3).

One of the aims of medieval epistemology is thus to soften, as much as possible, the scope of science without giving up the deductive rigor and certainty of its principles.

What makes the task of medieval philosophers more difficult is that these elements of the Aristotelian doctrine are reinforced by the second ancient tradition, namely, the tradition of Augustine's Platonism. In the *Theaetetus* (of which the Medievals were unaware) and the *Meno* (translated in the twelfth century but not widely read), Plato criticizes different definitions of science based on sensation and opinion, emphasizing from his position the gap between knowledge and opinion and between necessity and contingency. One such criticism opens the door for the Theory of Forms. Thus in the *Timeaus*, which is the principal source of information on Platonism in the Middle Ages, Plato contrasts the plausible knowledge of the sensible from the knowledge of the universal and necessary forms (27–28). This contrast is further reinforced by Augustine who is the chief figure in the Christian incorporation of Platonism. In the *83 Diverse Questions*, q. 9, Augustine insists on the impossibility of perception of attaining authentic truth (*scincera veritas*), given the mutability of its object. In this way, only intangible objects that participate in the Divine and that are only knowable by the intellect falls within the scope of science as self-evident.

This act of excluding the sensible and the contingent from the domain of science rests on the Platonic theory of Forms assimilated in the Divine Idea and transposed in the Divine Intellect. These Ideas, both specific and generic, constitute the ontological structure of the world since it is from them that God created the sensible world (*83 Diverse Questions*, q. 46). These Ideas give an account of the nature of things and enable their permanence and stability since they are eternal

and immutable. The Augustinian position is basic since it legitimates the rationality of the sensible world and the legitimacy of a scientific study of creation, all the while echoing the foundation of such a science in God's knowledge. The principle that governs the creation of each thing (the special formulation), which is found in the Divine Understanding, must be found. It comes back to the human soul to know these Ideas, insofar as it is rational and reflects God's image, and once it is purified (that is to say, turned from the sensible). It is thus in the contemplation of these immutable Ideas where the highest activity of the rational soul is located. Augustine states explicitly (*Trinity* XII, 4) that it is in this activity that the soul reflects God's image. Science is thus that through which the soul becomes like God. To fill in this notion of the contemplation of Divine Ideas, Augustine develops an account which is one part theory of illumination and another which reinvests into the changing Stoic distinction between science and wisdom. In the first place, since truth is accessible to God and to Divine Ideas, human knowledge requires Divine Support: on the model that light illuminates sensible objects and renders vision possible, Divine Truth must illuminate intelligible objects in order to make them accessible to human intellect (*On the Teacher*, c. 39–40). Science as the certain and complete apprehension of an intelligible object is then not conceived on the model of abstraction but on that of perception or immediate universal intuition. Nonetheless, the understanding of a necessary and immutable universal is not exclusive to a worldly knowledge for, on the one hand, the process of the soul's turning to God depends on the sensible (see for example *De Ordine* II, c. 30–40), and on the other, like Plato, Ideas function to stabilize the sensible, so that Augustine distinguishes science as apprehension of the temporal with wisdom as the apprehension of the Divine.

Despite this distinction at the level of objects, the epistemic properties of certainty, evidence, and truth may be the same. To this Platonic dimension is a text which was important in the early Middle Ages for the theory of the faculties implicated in the knowledge of the sensible and the intelligible, respectively. It is the distinction

between cognitive faculties proposed by Boethius in the fifth book of the *Consolation of Philosophy*. This fundamental text for the theory of knowledge in medieval philosophy, prior to the rediscovery of Aristotle, proposes a complete description of the ways of knowing, paralleling and compatible Augustine's. The context is that of God's knowledge of future contingents and Boethius aims to show that one object is known differently depending on the quality of the faculty. At a first level is situated the activity proper to each sense. Sight and touch have different objects, given their functional differences (for instance, the simultaneity of sight opposes the succession of vision). At a second level, imagination allows the passage of matter to form (*figura*). It is the first level of abstraction that consists in a synthesis of the sensible given and to set aside the sensible particularities. At a third level, reason introduces true abstraction, that is, universalized abstraction. The particular form of imagination is robbed of its individual characteristics, which leads to the creation of a common form by means of an abstractive induction. Finally at the last level, intelligence allows the constructed universal to pass into a simple form (the Divine Idea) by the direct contemplation of the mind's eye. There is thus a set of faculties hierarchically organized by the function of their objects. Each superior faculty contains the inferior and has thus access to its objects, which implies a limitation of the inferior faculties: the senses are not moved without a material object, the imagination has not the capacity to abstract the universal, and reason lacks access to simplicity. In contrast, reason knows the particular since it rests on the senses and imagination to construct its object (i.e., a definition). Intelligence is the synthesis of all faculties: it is knowledge of the simple and the complex, the material and the spiritual, the particular and the universal. This triple heritage, Platonic, Augustinian, and Boethian, informs all epistemological reflection prior to the rediscovery of Aristotle. We find this in Bernard of Chartres, for instance, in his commentary of the *Timeaus* (*Glosae super Platonem*, 8, 325–353, with portent to *Timeaus*, 51de). Indeed, Bernard crosses reflection on objects and the faculties to reach a hierarchy of

faculties tied two at a time to the difference of nature between objects and to the degrees of epistemic justification implied. At a first level, sensation is tied to the sensible and produces an opinion entirely dependant on the testimony of the senses. On its own, this opinion can turn out to be true or false. Thus, opinion must be confirmed by reason which alone will be stabilized by the intellect. At the level of reason and intelligence, the objects are the intelligibles which are immutable; an immutability that bases certainty. Science is thus the certain apprehension of immutable objects.

Since the end of the twelfth century, the medieval philosophers were seeking to determine the criteria of knowledge inheriting a double tradition proposing an elevated cognitive model, tied to a demand of infallibility in the object of knowledge as well as in the subject. Philosophical thought on knowledge must then face the inevitable gap (already noted by John of Salisbury) between, on the one hand, a restrictive conception of scientific discourse and, on the other hand, the extension of the domain of objects. To account for the appropriation of ancient thought on science and its softening, we will briefly look at three models accounting for the three distinct approaches to this key question of infallibility. The first model, exemplified by Robert Grosseteste, consists in taking up the double Aristotelian and Augustinian heritage to articulate the distinction between science and wisdom. The second model, exemplified by Thomas Aquinas, proposes a naturalist reading of science that accounts for the contingency of the sensible. Finally, the last model, which we can call nominalist, and which is exemplified here by John Buridan, seeks an account for the science of the contingent in an Aristotelian framework.

The importance of Robert Grosseteste for medieval thought on Epistemology is measured in two ways: he is the first known commentator of the *Posterior Analytics* (c. 1220), a commentary which is marked by a strong consideration for Themistius; and he elaborates a theory of *scientia* which blends the double influence of Augustine and Aristotle. This first form of incorporation of Aristotle's discourse on science will have a lasting impact throughout the whole Middle Age.

Robert Grosseteste proposes a general definition for science in relation to the notion of belief in his commentary on chapter 33 of the *Posterior Analytics*. Here, he gives a broad meaning of *opinio* as *assensus* or *fides* which includes both science and belief since all that is known is believed. This brand of assent is specified in science and belief both by the function of the considered object and the degree of possible certainty. Belief is indeed the adherence of a proposition accompanied by fear (*timor*) that the opposite is true. In other words, belief leaves the possibility open that what we assent to turns out to be false. Belief can thus not exclude the possibility of error. Grosseteste restricts the notion of belief further by making it pertain exclusively to contingent things (*Commentarius*, I, 19, p. 278, 16–279, 29). Because of this, belief is not knowledge of the thing in its purity, that is to say its essence, but merely in its appearance, thus *qua* material and mutable thing. It is the possibility for the object to change that impedes the certainty of belief (280, 49–53 & 61–67). Conversely, knowledge eludes this deficiency at the level of object and its consequences at the level of certainty. Knowledge is indeed one disposition (*habitus*) acquired by necessary means and based in necessary things that cannot be otherwise, since it obtains purity and truth of the essence (281, 85–88 & 283, 136–137). In this way, it can be defined as complete knowledge of the thing in itself (278, 10–11). Nevertheless, Grosseteste distinguishes between several more or less strict senses of *scientia*. In a broad sense, science is the apprehension of truth, including contingent things (be it the indefinite contingent or the contingent understood as that which is produced most often). This broad sense of knowledge captures most of the restricted sense of opinion and it permits the preservation of the everyday use of knowledge to designate epistemic states that are not infallible. In contrast, the proper sense of knowledge rests on immutable objects and assumes the apprehension of the cause of the thing by means of demonstrative procedures (I, 2, 99, 9–100, 25). Like John of Salisbury, Robert Grosseteste maintains that this strict sense is exclusively concerned with

mathematics, which is absolutely exempt from deceit (I, 11, 179, 141–142).

Grosseteste thus defends a conception of knowledge as justified true belief (assent) and makes a distinction central in his general definition between different kinds serving as part of the nature of justification and part of the nature of the object in question. Knowledge in its strictest sense must appeal to demonstrative procedures apt to discovering the immutable essences of things. There is then no science of the contingent, properly speaking, since it is a form of essentialism that guarantees the certainty and infallibility of science. The nature of the known object conditions the type of certainty accessible. This essentialism is in turn guaranteed by the superior level that of the Forms or Divine Ideas (I, 7, 139, 96–130). It is at this level that Grosseteste reintroduces the Augustinian theory of illumination into the Aristotelian schema. This seems like the ultimate guarantee for knowledge and offers the highest possible degree of certainty by granting access to an absolutely immutable object. Thus, the role of abstraction is otherwise reduced, at least subordinated to the intellectual perception of Divine Ideas, made possible by illumination (I, 14, 212, 216–216, 291). In this way, despite the privileged granted to demonstrative procedures, knowledge is conceived on the model of vision; spiritual vision that apprehends intelligible when the mind's eye is illuminated by spiritual light (I, 19, 279, 29–280, 49).

The second model of *scientia*, exemplified by Thomas Aquinas, abandons the attempt to articulate Plato and Aristotle and goes no further than a natural model of abstraction to account for both the certainty of science and the possibility of knowing the contingent.

Strictly speaking, knowledge must benefit from a degree of certainty that guarantees absolutely its infallibility. This infallibility is grounded in both the nature of the discursive procedures employed and in the nature of the objects known. Because of this, by lecturing chapter 33 of the first book of the *Posterior Analytics* (*Expositio posteriorum*, L. I, l. 44), Thomas takes up the distinction between knowledge and belief by means of the distinction between objects.

Belief is defined as the adherence to immediate and nonnecessary propositions (I, 44, 5). Belief does not necessarily call to discursive procedures, and rests on contingent things that are able to be otherwise. This opposition between science and belief, intensified by the opposition between necessary and contingent, drives Thomas to a strict conception of knowledge as complete and evident knowledge of the thing's essence (I, 4, 2). Thus, it is essentialism that guarantees epistemology but which also introduces a radical difference between intellectual knowledge and sensible knowledge which belongs to opinion (I, 42, 6). The guarantee brought by essentialism, however, is reinforced by the discursive structure of science, which is a demonstrative habitus. Thomas thus develops a foundationalist conception of knowledge where the epistemic justification is primarily inferential: it is the reduction or resolution of conclusions to their principles that allows for the accordance with certainty required by knowledge. The syllogism serves to make explicit this reduction to principles and allows thus to evaluate the certainty of the known proposition. It is thus, overall, the certainty of the principles, by transference of justification, that guarantees the certainty of knowledge in general (see for instance *Met.* L IV, 1 6, n. 12). It is therefore the double essentialist and axiomatic model that grounds the infallibility of science for Thomas, at the cost of an important limitation in its scope.

This double essentialist and foundationalist orientation of science is nonetheless balanced by a strong dose of empiricism. Indeed, empiricism is reintroduced at a first level as a condition for the abstraction of essences and the access to principles. Thomas proposes a strict empiricist reading of the last chapter of book 2 of the *Posterior Analytics*: it is by an inductive step based on repeated experiences that we are able to abstract the necessary universal from the multiplicity of sensible contingents, in identifying an ontological structure vouching for permanence (*Expositio*, L II, 1. 20, n. 12–14). Contrary to Grosseteste then, Thomas excludes all intuition of essences, which are necessarily built for us. Empiricism works on a second level in allowing the reintroduction of a connection between science

and opinion. Effectively, Thomas admits that, in a broad sense or by analogy, we are able to label as science the certain assent (*existimatio certa*) to some contingent objects (*Expositio*, I, 42, 9). This extension of the sense of science is tied in part to the revival of the notion of *materia subiecta* introduced by Aristotle in the first book of the *Nichomachean Ethics*. Indeed, Thomas emphasizes in his commentary that scientific method must be adapted to its object and that it is wrong to demand a mathematical certainty for contingent things (*Sententia ethicorum*, I, 3, 1–5). In the case of natural science, Thomas admits that there is no science of the contingent as such. On the other hand, the scientific knowledge of essences makes a quasi-science of the contingent possible, insofar as we consider things that happen for the most part (*ut in pluribus, ut frequenter*). There would be no demonstration in the strict sense in the case of natural events that are frequent without being necessary. Through discursive procedures we obtain the certainty that the thing is true, not absolutely (*simpliciter*), but relatively (*secundum quid*) (II, 12, 5). The double empiricist and essentialist dimension of Thomas' epistemology allows an extension of the notion of science since there exists ontological structures that guarantee the regularity of phenomena and since we are able to recognize these structures. The contingent is an object of science in a broad sense that no longer allows complete infallibility but preserves a strong degree of certainty nonetheless. The science of the physical world will not be a demonstrative science in the strict sense, but it approaches it enough in the science elaborated in the *Posterior Analytics* to be qualified, despite all, scientific knowledge.

The third medieval model of *scientia* that we will examine draws on this weakened notion of knowledge to bolster the possibility of a science of the contingent. This model, used by the nominalists, notably John Buridan, separates the isomorphism between discourse and objectivity which underlies the two preceding models. The demands of necessity and universality, put forth by Aristotle and understood in a strict discursive sense, are taken to mean that the object of science is always the particular contingent. The aim is then

to preserve a form of certainty independent of all objective determination. The contribution of a nominalist like John Buridan to the theory of science plays out on a double level: on the one hand, in the preservation of a qualified infallibility of knowledge; on the other, in the semantic reinterpretation of the Aristotelian demands of necessity and universality.

Buridan defines knowledge by stressing its psychological dimension: knowledge is a species of the genus assent, in the same way as opinion. Knowledge and opinion are borne on an immediate or mediate proposition (the conclusion of reasoning). The distinction between these two kinds of assent does not primarily stem from the object in the place but from logical and psychological determinations that accompany each assent, since both science and opinion are able to bear on the same object (*Quaestiones super posteriorum*, I, 32). Distinguishing these two assents is thus primarily the manner in which they relate to their object. Opinion, according to the classic definition, accompanies the fear that the opposite is not true (*cum formidine*). Conversely, knowledge accompanies both certainty or firmness and evidentness. It is this double constraint of certainty and evidentness that guarantees the truth of the proposition known and begets the infallibility of knowledge (see *Quaestiones super posteriorum* I, 32; and, I, 2 et I, 7; *Summulae* VIII, 4, 3). Evidentness adds an objective determination to certainty which, understood as a psychological quality, could eventually accompany a false belief. It is thus at the level of evidentness that we find the definition of the true as the infallible apprehension of the truth. Yet Buridan distinguishes between two forms of evidentness: the first is said to be absolute, it is the evidentness of known by reflection that absolutely restrain assent; the second is said to be relative and depends on the ordinary course of nature. It gives an account of the evidentness of the principles of natural science known by induction. These principles, founded on the regularity of nature and a certain necessity of natural phenomena, can be made false by a supernatural power. But this hypothesis that underscores simply the contingency of creation does not consider the formation

of reliable propositions about natural events. Natural science is thus the apprehension of conclusions relative to regular phenomena deduced from principles known by induction (thus by means of experiment) and warranted by sufficient practical evidence, even if theoretically a counterexample cannot be absolutely counted out. On the side of knowledge, certainty and evidentness of knowledge guarantee both a certain disposition toward propositions and the permanence of this disposition.

From here, Buridan can resume the question of the status of the objects of science. While endorsing his Aristotelian orthodoxy and rejecting the idea of a science of the contingent (*Quaestiones super posteriorum*, I, 32), Buridan proposes no less than the grounding of science in a world of concrete particulars. Effectively, the distant objects of all science are those things signified by the terms that compose known propositions, and these terms are individual contingents (*Quaestiones super posteriorum*, I, 15; *Super ethicorum*, VI, q. 6). It must be explained how premises are able to be presented as necessary and eternal by Aristotle (74b5-7). Buridan holds that no creature (thus no proposition) can be eternal and necessary in this temporal sense. Similarly, nothing signified can be said to be necessary in itself. It is thus at the level of terms that the question of the necessity of eternity must be settled, by strict semantic means. Buridan effectively appeals to natural supposition to account for the omnitemporal reference of terms used in scientific propositions and to account for the unfalsifiable character of these propositions. Common concepts that compete for individual apprehension are indifferent to temporal determinations (*Quaestiones super posteriorum*, I, 16). The common concept indifferent to time is conceived on the model of genus and species and the elimination of specifying and individuating differences. Thus, we have general and abstract common concepts that are indifferent to the issue of time. These concepts form the basis of general signification of terms taken as universals and induce their omnitemporality: signification *sine tempore*. The mind then possesses the tools (a copula that cosignifies all times) to compose these concepts

and form propositions indifferent to time. The natural supposition must then account for the supposition of terms of one such mental proposition. Terms with such supposition have thus one form of perpetuity that allows saving Aristotle's intention to make premises and conclusions of propositions necessary and eternal, in the omnitemporal sense. Thus, a scientific proposition is an omnitemporal point of view, that is, unfalsifiable and evident, on a particular and contingent world.

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## Cross-References

- ▶ [Adam Wodeham](#)
- ▶ [Albert the Great](#)
- ▶ [Aristotelianism in the Greek, Latin, Syriac, Arabic, and Hebrew Traditions](#)
- ▶ [Augustine](#)
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## Epistemology, Byzantine

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### Abstract

Byzantine views on knowledge are strongly influenced by late antique Neoplatonic Aristotelianism. A basic assumption in this tradition is that the nature of cognitive states is dependent on the nature of the cognitive objects (which have independent existence). Thus, the possibility of knowledge is secured by the existence of knowable things. Modifications of the Neoplatonic views are sometimes prompted by religious considerations, but these are more to do with emphasis than with content. It was strongly emphasized by the Byzantines, for instance, that God’s essence is beyond knowledge. Likewise, the Platonic theory of recollection was repeatedly condemned because it seemed to entail the soul’s pre-existence; on the other hand, the idea that the soul at birth is a *tabula rasa* was in conflict with the Christian doctrine that it is created perfect, and therefore Aristotle’s theory of concept formation was interpreted (e.g., by Eustratios of Nicaea) in a way that allowed for rational principles to be innate. In fact it is not uncommon to find in Byzantine writers rationalist accounts tracing the source of knowledge to innate soul-principles side by side (or nearly so) with endorsements of empiricist views suggesting that the first principles of knowledge are constructed from the individual forms of things.

## Epistemology in Byzantium

There are no writings from the Byzantine period purporting to deal exclusively or exhaustively with questions relating to the nature, scope, and sources of knowledge. Such questions are

addressed primarily in four different (although partly overlapping) contexts: in discussions of the soul's various cognitive states and faculties, in discussions of the several divisions of philosophy, in discussions of Aristotle's theory of demonstration, and in discussions of Plato's theory of recollection. In addition to the relatively few works that partly focus on knowledge, there are of course numerous philosophical texts that allow inferences about some of the epistemological assumptions of their authors.

One pervasive assumption, inherited by the Byzantine philosophical writers from antiquity, is that the nature of cognitive states (e.g., knowledge [*epistēmē*], skill [*technē*], experience [*empeiria*], and practice [*peira*]) is dependent on the nature of the cognitive objects. Thus, knowledge is infallible on account of the unchangeability of its objects, which are universals, whereas skill is liable to err on account of the propensity of its objects, which are individuals, to change. Different cognitive objects are cognized by different cognitive faculties. Individuals are cognized by sensation, if they are present, and by imagination, if they are absent; universals are cognized by opinion, reason, and intellect. At any rate, this is what many Byzantine students of philosophy imbibed from textbooks such as David's *Prolegomena* or Nikephoros Blemmydes' *Epitome logica*. On occasion, Byzantine writers expressly identify the objects of the three parts of theoretical philosophy, that is, natural philosophy, mathematics, and theology with the objects of opinion, reason, and intellect, respectively.

The idea that human intelligence is insufficiently equipped for the knowledge of things divine has always been present in Greek philosophical thought. In Greek Patristics, this idea is endorsed in a radical version, inasmuch as God's essence (*ousia*) is considered to be in principle indescribable and incomprehensible and the object of faith alone; on the other hand, his attributes, including existence, unity, and being the creator of the world, are thought to be susceptible of proof. In the late Byzantine period, Gregory Palamas (1296–1359) introduced the notion that God's activities (*energeiai*) can be directly

perceived as "uncreated light." This perception (*aisthēsis*) involves both body and mind.

Apart from that, the influence not only of the Patristic but also especially of the Platonic tradition contributed to instil in Byzantine thinkers a general distrust of the senses as sources of knowledge. In his *Semeioseis gnomikai* (c. 1326), Theodore Metochites expressed sympathies for a view, which he ascribed to the ancient skeptics and traced back to the elenctic dialogues of Plato, namely that knowledge is impossible, at least in the domains of natural philosophy, ethics, and the arts (*technai*), where the objects studied are in constant flux. Theology, he thought, was a different case: the truth about things divine can be attained, but only through inspiration from above. As for mathematics, Metochites argued, in the *Semeioseis gnomikai* and elsewhere, that it is superior to natural philosophy, in that it alone studies objects that are in the strict and proper sense knowable (*epistēta*). Usually, he described these objects as being mental forms resulting from a process of abstraction starting with sense-objects, but he left no doubt in his *Poem 10* that he really conceived of abstraction as only an aid to the recognition of forms already pre-existing in the soul, and thus probably adhered to the "projectionism" of late antique philosophers of mathematics such as Iamblichus and Proclus.

A concern with skepticism is evidenced also by two later attempts to refute skeptical arguments: a very short pamphlet by Nicholas Chamaetos Kabasilas in the mid-fourteenth century, and a slightly longer one of uncertain date, transmitted as chapter 3 of the so-called *Metaphysics* of Herennius, but this is not sufficient to justify some earlier scholars' belief in a revival of skepticism in the fourteenth century. Doubts about the possibility of knowledge *tout court* were never entertained in Byzantium, although such doubts concerning the realm of coming-to-be and passing-away may to some extent account for the apparent difficulties faced by Byzantine thinkers in dealing with Aristotle's theory of demonstration, to which we shall now turn. The *Posterior Analytics* was probably never included in the standard curriculum, but it is preserved in more than 100 manuscripts, and at least four

commentaries on the second book were written in the Middle and Late Byzantine periods. Those by Theodore Prodromos (born c. 1100) and George Pachymeres (1242–c. 1310) have not yet been published in print, whereas Leo Magentenos' commentary was edited by Wallies in CAG 13.3 under the name of John Philoponus. We shall return to the earliest and most important among them, namely that by Eustratios of Nicaea (c. 1050–1130), edited by Hayduck in CAG 21.1, after some brief remarks on the Aristotelian theory itself.

According to it, we have scientific knowledge of a fact if and only if we can demonstrate not only that it is a fact but also that it is a necessary consequence of other facts that are already known (“for science involves an account”). For fear of an infinite regress, Aristotle assumes that all the propositions that make up an individual science follow from a number of indemonstrable and necessary propositions or first principles. The problem dealt with in *Posterior Analytics* 2.19 is how we come to know the first principles. Part of Aristotle's solution to this problem is his theory of concept-formation. Scientific propositions typically take the form of one term's predication of another, quantified, term; as a consequence, knowledge of scientific truths is largely reducible to the possession of scientific concepts. At any rate Aristotle does not seem to feel the need to distinguish between the questions of how we come to know the first principles of science and how we come to have scientific concepts.

Scientific concepts are universals: species, genera, differentiae, properties, and accidents. The Neoplatonic theory of “three types of universals” was widely embraced in Byzantium. According to this theory, the word “dog” can refer (a) to the Form of Dog in God's mind (the universal *ante res*); (b) to the universal canine features somehow exhibited by Max, Meg, and Millie (the universals *in rebus*); and (c) to the concept of a dog in a human mind (the universals *post res*). The universals *in rebus* were thought of as being inseparable from the individuals by whom they were exhibited. Universals *post res*, which constitute the terms of scientific propositions, were thought of as being formed by a

process of “conglomeration” from individual forms received by the senses. This raises the question of what such a process must be like in order to convert the collected memories, or experience, of what is normally a proper subset of all existing individual cases into a true universal. Given the above-stated view on universals *in rebus*, it seems that this process must involve abstracting from all the individual features with which the universal features are inextricably united in the individuals; more alarmingly, perhaps, it must allow for terms to be predicated of other terms with necessity, in spite of the fact that our experience of the things referred to by those terms is normally limited to a proper subset of all existing individual cases (the problem of induction).

The standard late antique interpretation of Aristotle's theory of concept-formation assigns a crucial role in this process to the active intellect. Exactly what the active intellect is was explained very differently by the commentators: for Alexander of Aphrodisias it is a single and external entity, but for the Neoplatonic commentators it is part of each individual human soul. Its function is to make potential objects of intellect into actual ones, as light makes potential colors into actual ones. Sensible forms stored in imagination are potential objects of intellect, so far everyone agreed. But how are they reduced to intelligibility? The Neoplatonists would say that they must be matched against other forms, or rational principles (*logoi*), constantly being inscribed in the soul by the active intellect. For them, it is the reading of this script that Plato has in mind when he formulates his theory of recollection. This theory, as known from the *Meno* and the *Phaedo*, was universally repudiated in Byzantium, since it was considered to entail the pre-existence and even transmigration of souls.

It has been argued recently (Ierodiakonou 2010) that Eustratios introduces a Christian alternative to both Plato's theory of recollection and Aristotle's theory of concept-formation, which allows for innate knowledge without necessitating the assumption of the pre-existence of the soul. In a digression from his general introduction to *Posterior Analytics* 2.19 (257.33–258.27), Eustratios explains that the common and self-evident

concepts in the soul are resonances of the intuitions (*epibolai*) of the intellect. They are originally concealed owing to the influence of the vegetative and the animal parts of the soul, but with guidance from sense-perception or rational account the rational soul will eventually arrive at reflection upon them – which is not, Eustratios stresses, the same as recollection. Ierodiakonou drew the conclusion that Eustratios wished to “clearly distinguish his view from those of Plato and Aristotle in part in order to be in line with Christian dogma,” more specifically the doctrine that the soul, which is created with the body, is created perfect (*ibid.*).

That Eustratios did have this Christian doctrine in mind is borne out by a passage in his commentary on *Nicomachean Ethics* 6.3, where Aristotle’s statement that the principles must be better known than the conclusions in order for there to be scientific knowledge is defended as being “neither newfangled nor at loggerheads with [the Christian doctrine of] the first creation of man” (297.15–16). Here Eustratios explicitly states that the fact that man is created perfect from the beginning entails that he is active on the level of intellect, not only on that of discursive thought, which is to say that he comprehends the intelligibles immediately by simple intuition. But he can only do this insofar as he retains the position allotted to him by the Creator and directs his desire toward the intellectual realm: since he inclines toward a sensual life, he is deprived of his proper perfection and his intellectual eye is clouded. This is why he has recourse to sense-perception: through its activity, that is, the immediate cognition of particulars, it provides the intellect with material from which to construct universal concepts, which are likewise immediately cognized and from which scientific propositions follow. In this way, man is healed from his affliction and can again turn his attention toward the intellectual realm and his Creator. As to its substance, intellect is not liable to destruction, but its activities in this world involve imperfect and destructible things and will therefore perish. “It is natural, then,” Eustratios concludes, “that the inductive construction of the axioms of the sciences supervenes on the original perfection of the

intellectual part of the soul and its subsequent defection” (298.4–6). It has been pointed out (by Trizio 2016, 177–187) that – apart from the crucial detail that the soul is created with the body – Eustratios’ view has much in common with that of Proclus. What is not so clear is to what extent Eustratios believed that his view was different from Aristotle’s. One account in the late antique commentators that comes fairly close to Eustratios’ is the commentary on *De anima* 3.4, 429b29–430a2 by Philoponus, another Christian. Philoponus distinguishes between different degrees of “first” as well as “second potentiality,” and does not hesitate to ascribe to Aristotle the view that “the active intellect perfects the potential intellect and brings it to actuality, not by placing in it forms which are not there, but by bringing to light forms that are latent and concealed, owing to the torpor ensuing from birth” (40.34–37 ≈ Sophonias, 135.22–24). Now, Eustratios ascribes to Aristotle the view that intellect is potentially present in the soul from the beginning and brought to actuality through sense-perceptions (*In An. post.* 257.30–32). He also interprets him as saying that the soul, prompted by the senses, brings the rational principles (*logoi*) in itself from a non-active to an active state (265.18–24, and cf. 265.6–10), and he seems to agree that this is true. On the other hand, he repudiates the view that souls “substantially (*kat’ ousian*) proceed from potentiality to actuality and come to cognition of the immediate premisses through the senses” (258.22–23). It should be noted, however, that he never expressly ascribes this latter view to Aristotle; and so possibly, like Philoponus, he distinguishes the substantial actualization that he denies from the actualization that he affirms and ascribes to Aristotle, as starting out from a more remote potentiality.

Even if Eustratios sought for a position that he felt was “in line with Christian dogma,” he evidently did not have to abandon the paradigm of Neoplatonic Aristotelianism to find it. A position close to his was taken by Nikephoros Choumnos (1250/1255–1327), in his essay *Against Plotinus*. Choumnos’ express purpose is to prove that souls do not exist prior to their bodies; he admits that the

acquisition of knowledge poses a problem to which the theory of recollection may at first sight seem to offer the only solution; but this theory entails the pre-existence of souls to their bodies, and therefore he submits an alternative theory. According to the latter, since the soul is a perfect and immortal thing, its activities are likewise perfect and immortal. Thus, the human intellect – which is created simultaneously with the body – is exercising perfect knowledge from the very start, although its activity is often obscured through its immersion in flesh and matter. In some domains, no external aid is required; but in others, the intellect needs organs, in the first place discursive reason and opinion, and more remotely, sense-perception and imagination, to tear apart the material veil and show forth its cognitive light, which is of such a nature and intensity as to saturate all knowledge. What is commonly thought of as the acquisition of knowledge, then, seems on Choumnos' view to be in fact only the intellect's becoming aware of the actual knowledge that it already has. In fact, his account is not dissimilar to Neoplatonic accounts of recollection; yet he argues vehemently that since knowledge, being a substantial activity of the immortal soul, cannot be lost, that is, forgotten, neither can it be recollected. It is not quite clear whether the domains in which he considers no external aid to be required include theology or mathematics, or both. Probably he would assume, like Socrates in the *Meno*, that discursive reason is needed to become aware of mathematical knowledge. It is even less obvious exactly how the veil surrounding the intellect is supposed to be torn apart by the lower soul-faculties, but one may note that there is no reference in Choumnos' text to the exercise of any Christian virtues or ascetic practices.

A rationalist epistemology of the Neoplatonic type was also propounded in Barlaam of Calabria's *First Letter* (1336), written in reply to Gregory Palamas' doctrines. According to Barlaam, scientific knowledge rests on innate "substantial principles" (*ousiōdeis logoi*) in our souls, which are images of the creative principles in the Divine Intellect and thus indicative of the true causes of the natures of things. In other writings, however, Barlaam took a more empiricist

stance (see Sinkewicz 1981). The same apparent inconsistency is shown by his adversary, Nikephoros Gregoras, who railed, in his *Florentius* (c. 1333), against Barlaam's Aristotelianism and the notion that the first principles of science can be created from particular forms, pointing out that the latter are constantly changing. Later, however, in the context of his criticism of Palamas' doctrines, he argued that all scientific knowledge has its ultimate source in "self-taught" sense-apprehension; for God, he says, "has wisely distributed and deposited in nature beforehand this kind of primitive (or 'principle-generating', *archegonous*) roots like seeds, a very strong support for all the scientific disciplines and proofs, on the basis of which the very incontrovertible deductions of the truth are brought to a conclusion" (*Hist.* 3:405.6–406.17). A way to reconcile these passages might be to assume that Gregoras found fault with Aristotle not so much for being an empiricist on the source of knowledge as for being a radical conceptualist on universals; it is the conjunction of these two views that is asserted in the *Florentius* to be incompatible with the view that there is scientific knowledge. Empiricism requires the existence of universal forms in the particulars; conversely, to save conceptualism within the domain of natural philosophy, one must have recourse to some other source of knowledge.

## Cross-References

- ▶ [Aristotelianism in the Greek, Latin, Syriac, Arabic, and Hebrew Traditions](#)
- ▶ [Barlaam of Calabria](#)
- ▶ [Epistemology](#)
- ▶ [Eustratios of Nicaea](#)
- ▶ [Gregory Palamas](#)
- ▶ [John Philoponus](#)
- ▶ [Metaphysics, Byzantine](#)
- ▶ [Natural Philosophy, Byzantine](#)
- ▶ [Nicholas Chamaëtos Kabasilas](#)
- ▶ [Nicomachean Ethics, Commentaries on Aristotle's](#)
- ▶ [Nikephoros Blemmydes](#)
- ▶ [Nikephoros Gregoras](#)

- ▶ [Philosophical Psychology, Byzantine](#)
- ▶ [Posterior Analytics, Commentaries on Aristotle's](#)
- ▶ [Sense Perception, Theories of](#)
- ▶ [Skepticism](#)
- ▶ [Theodore Metochites](#)
- ▶ [Universals](#)

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## Essence and Existence

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### Abstract

The dispute over essence and existence has a long and storied history in the Middle Ages, and for good reason. For medieval thinkers these concepts form the backbone of nearly every other metaphysical concern they have. The scholastic tradition looks to Boethius and Avicenna to go beyond an Aristotelian system that sees little need to make a distinction between essence and existence. Through the writings and disputes of Thomas Aquinas, Giles of Rome, and Henry of Ghent among others, a highly sophisticated debate took form about the nature of this distinction:



whether it is real, rational, or somewhere in between? It was a debate that left a lasting imprint on the rest of scholasticism, reaching all the way to Suarez. At stake in the dispute are concerns about the complexity of the created order, its created and therefore contingent status, as well as concerns about the nature of possibility and its knowability. Amid the highly technical debates ranging from Boethius to Suarez, medieval thinkers knew that it was in the precise and technical formulation of the relationship between essence and existence that such critical issues were to be decided.

In 1982, John Wippel wrote: “A complete history of this controversy concerning the relationship between essence and existence remains to be written” (Wippel 1982b: 392n37). This claim stands as true today as it did then. The dispute itself is as long as it is complicated. Questions of interpretation are debated today almost as fiercely as the problem itself in its own day. Given this complexity, this article can only serve to point out the general contours of the debate and to highlight the most influential contributions.

## Early Influences

To begin we must turn to Boethius. However, to turn here first is already to make an interpretative choice. On the one hand, Boethius’ influence on the later scholastic disputes on the question is unmistakable. On the other hand, there is no scholarly consensus over whether Boethius himself ever actually conceived of such a distinction between essence and existence. The center of the controversy is found in the second axiom laid down by Boethius in a small theological treatise, referred to in its abbreviated form as *Quomodo substantiae*. Here, Boethius writes: *diversum est esse et id quod est*, “‘being’ and the ‘that which is’ are diverse.” Evidently, Boethius believes something to be distinct, but determining just what the *esse* and the *id quod est* are has proved to be an extremely difficult task.

There are some who see Boethius as simply making an Aristotelian distinction between primary (*id quod est*) and secondary (*esse*) substances (see Nash-Marshall 2000: 234). However, others think Boethius is going beyond Aristotle and identifying existence as a separate ontological component of every existing individual. Pierre Hadot, who pays particular attention to the Neo-Platonic influences of Boethius, argues that the distinction in Boethius is not between essence and a concrete instantiation. He insists, rather, that it is a distinction between the absolute act of existence and the individual being, which receives its own existence through its participation in the said act of existence (Hadot 1963). Granting this interpretation, we can see a real beginning to the essence–existence distinction. The essence of the *id quod est* cannot be said to be the cause of its existence. Rather, the *id quod est* is a *composition* between the absolute act of existence, *ipsum esse*, and the finite form that participates in that existence. By such participation, form limits and constricts the absolute existence to its finite character as it exists in the *id quod est* (see Nash-Marshall 2000: 231).

In the end, the right interpretation of Boethius is less important to the history of this medieval discussion than what his medieval successors took away from Boethius. Here, they saw proof that an Aristotelian essence of a thing was not sufficient to account for its actuality. This essence required something else, namely, *esse* and the causal efficacy of a divine creator. Much of the subsequent controversy is a reoccurring consideration of precisely this issue: is essence sufficient for existence, and, if not, what else is needed, where does it come from, and how is it related to its essence?

In addition to the early influence of Boethius on later scholastics, the work of Avicenna must also be recognized. While Boethius’ contribution focuses primarily on the notion of the absolute activity of *esse* and the insufficiency of an essence to explain existence, later scholastic thinkers generally looked to Avicenna to find a strong notion of a thing’s essence as having a kind of reality in its own right, distinct from its concrete existence. This is particularly noteworthy, given that it

remains controversial whether this emphasis on essence actually distorts Avicenna's position. Some scholars continue to argue that, in the end, existence is the true primary concept for Avicenna (e.g., Druart 2006: 337).

The *locus classicus* of this distinction, as Avicenna describes it, is found in his *Metaphysics of the Healing*, Book I, Chap. 5. It is here that he makes a famous distinction between what he calls the "existent" and the "thing." The former, for Avicenna, is the concrete existing thing replete with all the attributes and accidental predications that come with being a part of the actual world. The latter – the "thing" – is that which has a nature that makes it what it is (I.5.9). This nature of a "thing" is the true and essential core of any particular existent. Now, somewhat surprisingly, the term existence can be predicated of both the "existent" and the "thing." The "thing," Avicenna says, can be signified by the term existence, but only to signify, what he calls, the proper existence of some entity. But existence can also signify the affirmative existence of an entity. While the former sense of existence indicates the "whatness" of any reality stripped of every concomitant feature, the latter is meant to signify something beyond the mere essence of a "thing," namely, *that* the "thing" is.

For Avicenna, that a kind of existence is predicated of a "thing" and its essence is not necessarily an indication that he thinks an essence somehow has its own *separate* ontological status and then is subsequently composed with a further existence. On the contrary, it is more likely that this is his way of indicating that the same entity can be looked at from different perspectives. We can, on the one hand, consider something as an extra-mental reality partaking of all its accidental properties. From this vantage point, we are emphasizing its affirmative existence and its status as an existent. But we can also see the same reality stripped of its accidental characteristics including its extra- or even intra-mental existence. Here, we are attentive to the essential core of what exists, and thus we are attentive to its proper existence as a "thing."

With this said, it is important to recognize that scholastic commentators have not always read

Avicenna this way. In fact, many contemporary scholars have been working hard to combat precisely the reading given by these later scholastic interpreters (e.g., Rahman 1958, 1981). Henry of Ghent, for one, points to a certain text in Book V of Avicenna's *Metaphysics* as the source of his understanding of the "being of essence" or *esse essentiae* (Henry of Ghent, *Quodlibet* 1, q. 9). With this phrase – which would quickly enter into scholastic parlance generally – he meant to attribute a kind of independent existence to an essence prior to its status as actually existing. In Book V, cited by Henry, Avicenna does give explicit attention to the proper existence as distinct from its affirmative existence. Here, Avicenna is at pains to identify the whatness or essence of any reality, stripped of all concomitant and extraneous features. In considering animality, he notes that even though, inasmuch as it exists, it "exists with another," its proper existence remains distinct. Any additional element, such as its actual or affirmative existence, whether in the mind or extra-mental reality, should be seen as an addition that "occurs to it" (V.1.18 trans. Marmura 2005:153). To the minds of his scholastic readers, this phrase, "occurs to it," suggests that the "thing" with its proper existence need not be seen as dependent on the mind or some concrete instantiation for its meaning and reality. Concern will often be raised about the somewhat ambiguous ontological status of the being of an essence independent of its actual existence. Suarez, for one, will point to this as a fatal ambiguity that mars the discussion of essence and existence from this point forward (see Wells 1962: 437, 444). Despite these ambiguities and possible concerns, Avicenna remains extremely important. It is from these influential passages that Aquinas and all of the major thinkers in the thirteenth century will take their starting point.

## The Scholastic Controversies

Aquinas supplies ready evidence of Avicenna's influence as well as the nature of the scholastic reception suggested above. In his commentary on Aristotle's *Metaphysics*, he offers what will

become the general characterization of Avicenna's position in the Middle Ages. There, he writes that Avicenna is correct to assert that existence is other than its essence, but, if existence as "occurring to" (*accidit ei*) an essence is to be understood as a kind of accident, then he mis-spoke (bk. 4, lect. 2, n. 558). (For an argument that this is not what Avicenna is doing, see Rahman 1981.) Aquinas does not want us to see a thing's existence as something different from the concrete existing individual itself. He writes that "it designates the same thing as the term which is applied to it by reason of its essence" (n. 558). While Aquinas' position on essence and existence is most famous for its insistence on a real distinction between essence and existence, he does not allow himself to suggest that essence might have an existence of its own or some reality apart from its existence: thus, his rejection of Avicenna's language of existence as "occurring" to an essence.

Aquinas' most definitive treatment on the subject is, of course, found in his treatise *De ente et essentia*. This is one of Aquinas' earliest works and marks the beginning of the most formative period of the dispute over essence and existence. In this work, he indicates one of the major theological issues at stake in this question for thirteenth-century theologians. He also provides one of the key arguments that will be considered again and again either as support for the real distinction or as an argument that must be refuted.

The key theological issue at stake for Aquinas is the simplicity of God. Aquinas' metaphysical presuppositions force him to deny any material composition in angels. But this leaves him with a real difficulty of explaining just why angels do not possess the same absolute simplicity as God. He finds his answer to this conundrum in the real distinction between essence and existence. While angels do not have a material composition, they remain like other material creatures on account of the fact that their existence is not their own, but is received from another (*DEE*, c. 4, para. 6).

The most compelling argument that Aquinas gives for this distinction and the consequent complexity in creatures is found in the fourth chapter of his treatise. He argues that whatever cannot be

conceived of apart from something is in no way distinct from it. But, he reasons, the essence of man and of a phoenix, for that matter, can be conceived without being conceived as existing. Thus, their essence and existence must be distinct (*DEE*, c. 4, para. 6). Those who want to deny the real distinction will repeatedly face this objection and more often than not will deny the minor premise, viz., that an essence can truly be conceived without also conceiving its existence.

Aquinas' treatise marks one of the first formalized scholastic defenses of the real distinction. However, his is not the only influential voice. In fact, what later came to be identified as the Thomistic position may owe less to Aquinas himself than to one of his students, Giles of Rome. Giles treats the distinction between essence and existence in several places, but his two most explicit works on the topic are his *Theoremata de esse et essentia* and his later *Quaestiones disputatae de esse et essentia*. With these two works, undoubtedly influenced by his well-documented disagreements with his Parisian colleagues, Henry of Ghent and Godfrey of Fontaines, Giles established himself as one of the central disputants in perhaps the most contentious debates at Paris during the 1270s and 1280s.

Though divine simplicity seems to be the dominant concern of Aquinas, in these works and others, Giles repeatedly indicates that he thinks the real issue at stake here is the possibility of creation and the truly contingent nature of reality. Without a real composition, Giles argues that all creation is impossible and all reality is in fact necessary (e.g., *TCC*, prop. 29). This is something that comes out clearly in the fifth theorem of his *Theoremata* as he provides an analogy as to how we are to understand this composition. He writes: "to understand the creation of beings, which requires a composition of essence and existence, we may think of that kind of generation which Plato speaks of" (*TEE*, th. 5, Murray 1953: 37). Giles is referring to the way a Platonic Form, even as it enters into a kind of composition with the particular thing, remains its own distinct and separate entity. He compares this to the way the "self-existing" existence remains separate from the existence of a thing, "in so far as from this

separate existence the existence flows into the essence of a creature in which the essence participates" (*TEE*, th. 5, Murray 1953: 37).

Two elements of this description need to be emphasized since they are repeatedly affirmed by Giles. The first is that existence must be seen as its own reality apart from its attachment to any essence. Thus, the composition of essence and existence must be seen as a composition of two things (*duae res*) (e.g., *TEE*, th. 19; *QDEE* q. 9). The second, which follows from this, is that Giles, unlike Aquinas, introduces the separability criterion of the real distinction; namely, he insists that essence and existence are, in principle, separable things. Both of these elements will become essential components of the standard formulation of the real distinction. Likewise, it will increasingly become the standard description of the Thomistic position, much to the dismay of those Thomists who believe Giles has severely distorted the true position of Aquinas.

Giles is not immune from the critiques of his own contemporaries either. While among them is, as noted above, Godfrey of Fontaines, his most severe critic is Henry of Ghent. Henry looks at Giles' description of essence and existence as two realities (*duae res*) and insists that if essence is going to be considered an independent thing apart from its affirmative or actual existence, then essence and existence cannot really be distinct (*Quodlibet* 1, q. 9). In order to explain why this is so, Henry introduces what he calls an "intentional distinction" between essence and existence. With echoes of Avicenna in the background, Henry argues that if essence is separable and prior to its actual existence in the world, as Giles suggests, then it must retain a kind of existence and therefore cannot really be separated from existence. To clarify his position Henry identifies two kinds of existence: the being of the essence (*esse essentiae*) and the being of existence (*esse existentiae*). Henry insists that an essence prior to its creation has a kind of existence that it receives from its formal cause (i.e., the ideas of the divine mind or the divine exemplar). To say something has *esse existentiae*, therefore, is not to attribute existence to something that previously existed without existence (as if this made sense), nor is

it to attribute existence to a thing twice. Rather, it is to indicate a new relation of efficient causality in addition to the relation of formal causality between God and the creature. Thus, Henry concludes that there is not a real distinction between essence and existence, but an intentional one (*Quodlibet* 10, q. 7). While notoriously ambiguous, the notion of an intentional distinction is generally taken to mean that there is a recognizable difference between a thing's existence and a thing's essence that is not merely a product of the mind. Nevertheless, contra Giles, there is no sense that essence and existence can ever be truly separate or that one can be entirely without the other.

Besides the disagreement over terms and formulations, Henry's different position can also be attributed to a difference in concern from either that of Aquinas or Giles. While Aquinas is concerned with divine simplicity and Giles is preoccupied with preserving the possibility of creation, Henry is most explicitly concerned with preserving a kind of scientific knowledge of possibilities. For him, having knowledge about the merely actual is deemed insufficient as long as the actual could, in principle, be different. To have knowledge, then, derived from what is merely possible is thought to provide a much higher level of certainty. One of the most conspicuous places where this concern is raised is in Henry's interest in the proofs for God's existence. Knowledge of God's existence derived from the actual existence of a creature was thought by Henry to be inferior and less certain than knowledge of God's existence derived from the mere possibility of creaturely existence (see *SQO* a. 25). However, in order for such knowledge to be possible, he needs to find an object of such a science. Clearly, the ability to posit a kind of existence for not yet actualized, but possible, essences is a key component of preserving this kind of knowledge.

While the voices of Aquinas, Giles, and Henry are certainly the most influential for any further discussions of the distinction within the scholastic tradition, some of the earliest historical perspectives on this distinction divide up the history of the dispute slightly differently. No one has done more to shape the way we think about the history of the

dispute than Francis Suarez. In his 31st question of his *Disputationes metaphysicae* he recognizes three distinct schools of thought.

The first school is what Suarez labels the *thomisticae*. He asserts that this school holds that the distinction between essence and existence was a distinction between *duae res*, two distinct or independent realities that could in principle be separated (*DM* 31, I, 3–10). Thus, we can see how dramatically the influence of Giles would come to distort the original position of Aquinas for centuries.

The second school is identified as the *scotisticae*. Suarez describes the distinction defended by Scotus and those of his school as a modal distinction between the essence as a genuine reality and its existence as particular mode of being. While this is the picture that posterity attributes to Scotus, we receive little clarity on the matter by looking to Scotus himself. Scotus devotes little to no explicit positive attention to how he views the relationship between essence and existence (O'Brien 1964: 61). What little there is to be found comes indirectly from a discussion on the nature of Christ and his human existence (*Ord.* III, d. 6, q. 1). From this discussion, Suarez concludes that this modal distinction is a weaker type of real distinction, where the essence remains an independent reality, but that the same cannot be said of existence. As a mode, existence acquires an ontological status similar to that of whiteness, which cannot exist without a subject, even though the subject *can* exist without whiteness (*DM* 31, I, 11). Contemporary scholars remain divided over whether Scotus ever actually recognized a modal distinction and where it fell among the distinctions of real, formal, and rational. Suarez further shows his lack of historical precision on the matter by attributing this position to Henry of Ghent as well. While this is not a particularly accurate description of Henry's position, Suarez certainly characterizes him this way because of the resemblance of the intentional distinction to Scotus' modal distinction.

Finally, Suarez points to a third historical position, which asserts that the essence and existence of a creature are distinguished by reason alone. Under this heading, Suarez includes an eclectic

mix of people that cannot be said to form one particular school. Here, he includes Godfrey of Fontaines, Durand of St. Pourcain, Peter Auriol, and Gregory of Rimini among many others (*DM* 31, I, 12). Having mentioned the nominalist Gregory of Rimini, it is notable that Suarez fails to mention William of Ockham, who should be included in such a list. And while no one position can capture such an eclectic mix of people, Ockham's rejection of any thing other than a rational distinction between essence and existence is notable for its simplicity and reliance on the formulation of the real distinction provided by Giles. In *Quodlibet* 2, q. 7, Ockham considers the claim that essence and existence are two distinct things (*duae res*) and therefore separable. He concludes that if essence and existence are really two things, they must be either substances or accidents. But, being neither, they therefore cannot be two things nor can they be separated. Thus, no real distinction exists.

## Final Remarks

Suarez' historical survey of this distinction, while perhaps misleading at times, is nevertheless helpful in that he brings a critical eye to the long tradition that has preceded him. In ending his survey, he points to what he sees as a critical ambiguity that has haunted the dispute as far back as Avicenna. For him, this ambiguity lies in the notion of essence and its status as an independent reality (*res*), a proper existence, or the being of an essence (*esse essentiae*). Suarez argues that in any conception of the distinction between essence and existence, an essence can be seen *both* as an actuality *and* as a mere potentiality. However, it is extremely important to be aware of which perspective one takes. He argues that any real distinction, either between two things or a thing and its mode, is simply nonsensical when essence is considered as actual. What else can we mean by an actual essence except that it is in existence? Thus, there is no distinction in this case. But if essence or the *esse essentiae* is conceived as the mere potentiality of some actual essence, then clearly actual existence need not be



involved. However, in this case, Suarez insists that we are not talking about some reality or a thing, but about no-thing (*DM* 31, II, 1). In this way, he can explain away what has always been one of the most critical arguments on behalf of the real distinction since Aquinas first raised it: namely, that it appears that we can think of an essence apart from its existence. Suarez will gladly admit this, yet he will point out that what is being thought of in this case is not the actual essence of some reality, but a potentiality or mere possibility that is distinct from existence. Moreover, this possibility cannot be attributed to some existing essence. Rather, the possibility belongs to the potency within the cause of the actual essence, not the essence itself. In the case of creatures, the possibility of an actual essence lies in the potency of God to make such a reality exist (*DM* 31, II, 2). In this light, the affirmative existence (*esse existentia*) becomes, for Suarez, a superfluous entity. It can bear no relation to the nonentity of a potential essence, nor is it needed to accompany an actual essence, for such an entity, simply by being actual, already exists.

In this final analysis, Suarez draws out what has been a central tension of this controversy almost from its inception. He draws attention to the fact that the problem of essence and existence is really a problem about the nature of possibility and reality. It is a dispute that asks about the ontological status of possibilities. It asks: how can such possibilities be known scientifically if they do not first have some ontological weight? It is equally a question about the source of possibility. If possibility is a feature of language and derived from the actual world, then in what sense can the world be said to be contingent? If possibility retains its own independent status, does this allow for contingency, but at the same time limit the range of God's power? But if possibility is identified with God's power absolutely, then is there any sense in which possibility can be understood scientifically, and does this render God's actions altogether inscrutable and ultimately arbitrary? The dispute over essence and existence, therefore, forms the metaphysical backbone of nearly every other issue important to medieval thinkers. Thus, it is only appropriate

that Aquinas begins his treatise on essence and existence with the saying of the Philosopher: "a small error in the beginning leads to a large error in the end." It is undoubtedly the scholastics' deep appreciation of this point that motivates their tireless investigation of essence and existence and the metaphysical subtleties that follow.

## Cross-References

- ▶ [Being](#)
- ▶ [Boethius](#)
- ▶ [Giles of Rome, Political Thought](#)
- ▶ [Henry of Ghent](#)
- ▶ [Ibn Sīnā, Abū 'Alī \(Avicenna\)](#)
- ▶ [John Duns Scotus](#)
- ▶ [Thomas Aquinas](#)

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## Ethics

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## Abstract

Neoplatonists, who argued for the immortality of the soul and complete happiness only after the death of the body, seemed to early medieval thinkers the best of ancient moral philosophers. The study of Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics* in the thirteenth century did not altogether change this perception. It did mark the beginning of heated debates about what people can know by reason, unaided by special grace, about human freedom of choice, the relation between virtue and happiness, and a host of other issues. Naturally acquired virtues, which play only a small role in the ethics of Thomas Aquinas, gained greater importance in the ethics of later masters. Taking a closer look at Aristotle's *Ethics*, fourteenth-century masters wondered which of his various claims were meant to be conceptual, not merely generalizations about empirical psychology. Does Aristotle think that moral virtues are by their very nature inseparable, so that there is a necessary connection between them, or only that people

rarely acquire one moral virtue without acquiring all the others? Arguments focused especially on what virtuous dispositions explain about morally good actions. If only someone with a virtuous disposition can choose morally good acts for good reasons, how can they make the choices necessary to acquire a virtuous disposition? Aristotle's theory looks circular. Maybe virtuous dispositions instead explain how someone can choose morally good actions consistently, easily, and with pleasure. But do these factors make the actions any better in moral terms? If not, do virtuous dispositions truly figure in ethical theory, or are they important only in psychological accounts of human action? These fourteenth-century arguments represent a significant advance in ethical theorizing, at least as philosophers understand it today.

A full account of medieval ethics would have to include the Byzantine, Muslim, and Jewish traditions, each with its own periodization and leading theorists. Here we shall focus on medieval ethics in the Latin West, which many think reached its peak in the thirteenth century, with the study of Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics*. The work of Thomas Aquinas (d. 1274) attracts particular attention by today's philosophers. Indeed, interest in the ethics of Aristotle and Aquinas runs so high that two clarifications are necessary.

First, scholars of the Latin West did not need Aristotle to introduce them to the naturalistic ethical theories of antiquity. They learned about Stoic and Neoplatonic ethics – even something about Epicureanism – from works by Cicero, Seneca, Macrobius, and many other authors. With no access to Aristotle's *Ethics* at all, Peter Abelard (d. 1142) developed an impressively complete ethical theory. Second, Aquinas belonged to the very first generation of Latin scholars to study the complete text of Aristotle's *Ethics*. Masters of later generations usually gave the kind of naturally acquired virtues that Aristotle describes a larger role in their ethical theories than Aquinas himself did. Reading only selections from

Aquinas' work, people today sometimes mistake his discussions of God-given virtues for discussions of naturally acquired virtues. A closer look at Aquinas' *Summa theologiae* reveals that naturally acquired virtues play only a small, strictly subordinate role in his ethical theory.

In Questions 63 and 65 of the *Prima secundae* (the first part of the second part of the *Summa*), Aquinas argues that all virtues we acquire through our own resources, without any special grace, are intrinsically imperfect or incomplete (*imperfectus*). They constitute virtues only in a relative sense (*secundum quid*), for they have as their end the imperfect happiness attainable in this life, not the ultimate end of complete happiness in the afterlife. Aquinas therefore places more weight on faith, hope, and charity: theological virtues supernaturally “infused” by God. More important, he posits a long list of infused moral virtues with the same names as their naturally acquired counterparts (justice, courage, temperance, etc.). These God-given moral virtues, presented by Aquinas as virtues *simpliciter*, differ in kind, not merely in degree, from naturally acquired virtues. They take as their rule divine law, not human reason, and can be increased only by God, not by our own actions. According to Aquinas, seven other God-given dispositions rank even higher infused moral virtues on the scale of excellence. These are the Gifts of the Holy Spirit discussed in patristic writings and mentioned in scripture: wisdom, knowledge, understanding, counsel, courage, piety, and fear.

The questions about grace and merit with which the *Prima secundae* ends represent a transition to the *Secunda secundae* (the second part of the second part), where Aquinas seldom even mentions naturally acquired virtues. He organizes this part of the *Summa* around seven God-given virtues: the three theological virtues of faith, hope, and charity, followed by the cardinal virtues of prudence, justice, courage, and temperance. More specific God-given virtues appear as parts of the cardinals: either as integral parts of a cardinal virtue, different species (“subjective” parts), or related secondary virtues that an individual might or might not develop (“potential” parts).

The seven Gifts are included, too, with four woven into the section on theological virtues, and the remaining three woven into the section on the cardinal virtues.

Other than Aquinas' fellow Dominicans, most later medieval thinkers rejected his dual scheme of naturally acquired and infused moral virtues. The secular masters Henry of Ghent (d. 1293) and Godfrey of Fontaines (d. 1306/1309), the Franciscans John Duns Scotus (d. 1308) and William of Ockham (d. 1347), even the Dominican Durand of St. Pourçain (d. 1334), all argued strongly against positing moral virtues infused by God. They thought a simpler scheme, with only naturally acquired virtues and the infused virtues of faith, hope, and charity, far superior. The growing importance attached to naturally acquired virtues drew sharp criticism from the Augustinian Gregory of Rimini (d. 1358). In his commentary on Book II of the *Sentences* (dist. 26–28, q. 1), Gregory argued that only God-given moral virtues are genuine virtues; nobody lacking God's special grace can even perform a morally good act. Gregory listed Aquinas among the "saints and doctors" who agreed with him. In fact, Aquinas occupied a middle ground between the warring factions; but at least Gregory came closer to understanding his ethics than readers who overestimate its Aristotelian aspects.

Can one even abstract a moral philosophy from Aquinas' works? Of course, the answer depends on one's conception of moral philosophy. Medieval discussions of the subject changed considerably over time. We might distinguish roughly between three periods: the first, when most scholars took Neoplatonic ethics as the finest example of ancient moral philosophy; the second period, beginning in the early thirteenth century and ending in 1277, when theologians at Paris successfully opposed a new, more narrow conception of moral philosophy; and the third, enormously diverse period from the end of the thirteenth century onward, when scholars turned more toward problems of ethical theory. One such problem was whether ethics can qualify as a "science" in the strict Aristotelian sense.

## Moral Philosophy and Moral Science

Scholars of the Roman Empire divided philosophy into logic, physics, and ethics, giving ethics pride of place. The main purpose of philosophy as a whole was the same as the purpose of moral philosophy: to articulate a conception of the highest or supreme good (*summum bonum*) – that which makes us happy and which we seek strictly for its own sake – and to explain how we can attain it. In order to explain how we can attain it philosophers had to specify the role of virtue. Is virtue constitutive of, partly constitutive of, or instrumentally related to the happy life? Equally important, philosophers were expected to present their view of God (or the gods) and spell out the implications for human life. While they were free to claim, as Epicureans did, that the soul dies with the body and that the gods take no interest in human affairs, it was incumbent upon them to argue for these points.

Augustine (d. 430) suggested that pagan thinkers got the big questions right but usually got the answers wrong. For him the supreme good was God, not happiness, virtue, or any other human state of mind. In Book VIII, Chapter 9 of *City of God* (*De civitate Dei*) Augustine praised "the Platonists" – meaning Neoplatonists – for recognizing that the soul is immortal, that God is the supreme Good, and that our own happiness lies in the enjoyment of God. Nevertheless, he faulted all pagan philosophers for teaching that we can make ourselves good and happy. For Augustine, both virtue and happiness are gifts of God's grace, not natural consequences of human self-development.

Augustine's idea of moral philosophy survived well into the twelfth century. Consider, for example, Abelard's *Dialogue* (*Collationes*) between a Philosopher, a Jew, and a Christian. Describing ethics as the branch of learning at which all others aim, the Christian suggests that there are differences only about how to name it. Christians call this discipline "divinity" because it aims at reaching God, whereas philosophers call it "morals," because people come to God by means of good behavior. Not only does Abelard's

Philosopher agree, he also agrees that ethics concerns the supreme good and how we attain it, that the soul is immortal, and that philosophers look forward to happiness in the afterlife.

The thirteenth century witnessed striking changes in the intellectual milieu. With the rise of universities came conflicts between two newly created professional classes: the faculty of theology and the (lower) faculty of arts, dedicated to the study of logic, grammar, and rhetoric, and Aristotle's works. Thanks to the labors of translators, a vast body of material about natural philosophy, psychology, and ethics became available in a fairly short time – not only works by Aristotle but also works by various commentators, including and especially the Muslim commentator Averroes. While this new material attracted interest in all universities, members of the Paris arts faculty embraced it with exceptional enthusiasm. Bonaventure (d. 1274), Aquinas, and other theologians soon began writing and preaching against doctrines circulating in arts: the denial that the individual soul is immortal, that humans have free choice, and other doctrines many considered ruinous to moral philosophy.

The controversy at Paris came to a head in 1277, when the bishop condemned over 200 theses as “obvious and loathsome errors.” Among them were the claims that “Happiness is had in this life and not in another,” that “After death a human being loses every good,” and sundry theses either denying or limiting the will's free choice – all propositions the bishop believed members of the arts faculty had declared “true according to philosophy.” The condemnation did not imply that philosophy proved the condemned propositions false, only that it did not prove them true, and no mention was made of Aristotle. In theology as well as arts, at Paris and elsewhere, Aristotle remained the most heavily cited philosophical authority until the end of the Middle Ages.

Some masters continued the Neoplatonic pattern, treating as central to moral philosophy the immortality of the individual soul and happiness in the afterlife. Others, convinced that we cannot know these truths by natural reason unaided by grace, conceived of moral philosophy along

different lines. The study of Aristotle's works raised important new issues and generally transformed the language of debate. In substance, though, medieval ethics remained heavily eclectic. Most scholars, even masters of arts, had at best a weak sense of the historical Aristotle. Sometimes their distortions of his *Ethics* arose from efforts to interpret it charitably; sometimes they probably owe more to ignorance of what the text actually says.

One should not assume that most medieval scholars studied Aristotle's *Ethics* in the period after 1246–1248, when they had access (in theory) to a complete Latin translation of the work. While virtually all students of arts and theology heard lectures on some books of the *Ethics*, many never heard lectures on all of it, let alone read the text. The references to Aristotle with which they embroider their works often come from collections of excerpts, works by other masters, or a combination of the two.

In a way, the *Ethics* did less than the *Posterior Analytics* to shape later medieval discussions of ethics as a “science” or area of knowledge. (*Scientia*, the Latin word often translated as “science,” can equally be translated as “knowledge.”) Following Aristotle, masters distinguished between theoretical sciences, practical sciences, and mere arts or skills, such as medicine and navigation. Where theoretical sciences aim at truth for its own sake and practical sciences guide us in choosing actions, arts and skills aim at producing some external result beyond the action itself. Nobody doubted that ethics is practical; but is it a science in the strict sense? Despite Aristotle's references to ethics as a science, one might wonder how it could satisfy the stringent requirements set forth in Book I, Chapters 1–4, of the *Prior Analytics*. There Aristotle argues that someone can have unqualified knowledge or science (*epistēmē*) only of self-evident propositions and conclusions deduced from them through a demonstrative syllogism.

Are at least some moral principles self-evident (*per se nota*)? Aquinas, Duns Scotus, and William of Ockham all agreed that some are. By the same token, all singled out some first principle of practical reason – a very general one, such as “Good is

to be done; bad is to be avoided” – and presented it as the foundation for precepts of natural law. Natural law figures no less prominently in the works of Scotus and Ockham than it does in the works of Aquinas (Möhle 2003; McGrade 1999). All three believed that ordinary people can, and often do, recognize the truth of basic moral principles.

Why, then, are Scotus and Ockham sometimes seen as proponents of divine command theory? Confusion arises partly from comparisons between nontechnical discussions by Aquinas and highly technical discussions two or three generations later, by masters preoccupied with Aristotle’s requirements for unqualified knowledge. For example, Aquinas claims that all other precepts of natural law are “based on,” or “flow from” from the first, foundational principle. God could add new precepts, but even God cannot dispense from such basic principles as the one that prohibits killing an innocent person. Aquinas grants that God can command such a killing, as he did in ordering Abraham to sacrifice Isaac; yet Aquinas denies that this was really a case of dispensing from the prohibition against killing.

As Scotus sees it, the command to Abraham shows that God can dispense from the prohibition against killing, and indeed, from all precepts of the Decalogue except the first three. Scotus, however, divides the first three precepts from the others with reference to requirements more stringent than Aquinas’. The first group consists of principles either true by the very meaning of their terms or that follow necessarily from such principles. Although precepts of the second group fail to meet these high standards, Scotus describes them as evidently true and immediately recognized to be greatly in accord with principles that do meet the standards.

Ockham takes a more expansive view of self-evident moral principles. He includes not only principles true by the meaning of their terms but also principles evident from experience, such as “An angry person is to be mollified by fair words.” Ockham shares Scotus’ view that God’s command can override a moral principle that the agent would otherwise be obliged to follow, as it did in the case of Abraham. But what modern authors

usually mean by “divine command theory” involves a more radical thesis, attributed to Ockham in the seventeenth century by Francisco Suarez (d. 1617): no act is bad except insofar as it is prohibited by God. There is no persuasive evidence that Ockham defended this view (Kilcullen 1993).

On the whole, divine command theory represents a concern for early modern thinkers, not for their medieval predecessors. For examples of issues that did interest later medieval thinkers readers might consult a work by John Capreolus (d. 1444): the *Defenses of the Theology of St. Thomas Aquinas (Defensiones theologiae Divi Thomae Aquinatis)*. The leading Dominican at Paris in the early fifteenth century, Capreolus labored to defend Aquinas against criticisms raised by Scotus, Durand, Gregory of Rimini, and other fourteenth-century authors. No objections connected with divine command theory were among them. Instead Capreolus included arguments about the natural desire for happiness, about the connection of the cardinal virtues, and about “whether naturally acquired virtues (*virtutes habituales*) are necessary for human beings.” Disputes on the first two topics began in the early Middle Ages. The third did not emerge as an area of concern until the fourteenth century, when scholars began arguing about the place of virtues in ethical theory.

## Happiness and the Supreme Good

Is happiness the supreme good? Is it our sole ultimate end, so that whatever actions we choose, we always choose them for the sake of happiness? Medieval thinkers addressed these questions long before they encountered the puzzling line of argument in Book I of the *Nicomachean Ethics*. Their differences of opinion owe something to different impressions they had of Augustine’s teachings.

Again and again Augustine claims that the supreme good is neither virtue nor pleasure nor any other psychological aspect of a human being. The supreme good is God; happiness lies rather in our enjoyment of God. In declaring the supreme good something external to human beings

Augustine firmly rejects the anthropocentrism dominant in ancient ethics. As we are made happy by God, so too are we made good by God, not by our own learning and practice.

Did Augustine regard happiness as the ultimate end of all human actions? His successors came to different conclusions, with good reason. In some places, especially in early works, Augustine seems to accept the thesis that whatever we seek, we seek for the sake of happiness. He aims mainly to establish that only eternal, God-given happiness can truly satisfy us. In other works Augustine stresses instead two different kinds of motivations, which he relates to two different kinds of goods: a worthy or intrinsic good (*bonum honestum*), which has value in its own right, and a merely useful good (*bonum utile*), which has value only as a means to something else. Worthy goods have “intelligible beauty”; these are goods to be enjoyed, never used. Indeed, Augustine claims that the greatest human perversion consists in willing to use objects of enjoyment, or willing to enjoy objects of use. The emphasis here – on different motivations we might have for valuing an object or person, not on the all-embracing quest for happiness – accords with Augustine’s conviction that we truly love something only if we love it for its own sake.

Boethius (d. c. 524) solved the problem of the supreme good in a way readers today find rather strange. In Book III of his *Consolation of Philosophy* (*De consolazione philosophiae*), Lady Philosophy argues that the supreme good is happiness and the supreme good is God. Because there cannot be two different supreme goods, God himself is happiness. The argument depends on the idea that happiness, like goodness and justice, belongs to the divine essence. As it is more correct to say God is goodness and justice than that God is good and just (because God has no accidental properties), so it is more correct to say that God is happiness than that God is happy.

Anselm of Canterbury (d. 1109) agreed that God is the supreme good, that God is goodness, and that God is justice, but he resisted identifying God with happiness. Hence Chapter 1 of Anselm’s *Monologion* moves directly from the axiom that whatever we desire, we desire because

we regard it as good, to distinguishing between goods with intrinsic worth (*honestum*) and goods that are only useful. In later works, such as *On the Fall of the Devil*, Anselm enlists the distinction between two goods to argue for two related inclinations (*affectiones*) of the will. If we always will whatever we do for the sake of happiness, even for the great reward of eternal happiness, God looks like nothing more than a means to our own ends. Focusing on the problem of motivation, Anselm argues that God must have created humans and angels, beings he holds morally responsible for their actions, with two inclinations of the will: the inclination to happiness or what is advantageous (*commodum*), which even animals have, and the inclination to justice, righteousness (*rectitudo*), or what has intrinsic worth. Anselm considers the inclination to one’s own advantage natural and inalienable. In contrast, he thinks that the inclination to justice was separated from human nature through Adam’s sin and can be restored only through God’s grace. Without this inclination, Anselm laments, the will is never free, because our natural freedom of choice is useless.

The study of Aristotle’s *Ethics* did not alter the basic division between theorists who saw nothing morally problematic about happiness as the end of all our actions and those who did. Like Boethius, Aquinas argued that the highest good of human beings is happiness. Happiness is our ultimate end, so that whatever we desire, we desire for the sake of happiness. Happiness, however, can be understood either as an object or as our attainment or possession of that object. In the first sense, Aquinas explains, God himself is happiness; in the second, happiness is our enjoyment of God. His ethical theory represents the best-known example of medieval eudaimonism.

As Aquinas endorsed, with modifications, the position of Boethius, so Scotus endorsed, with more radical modifications, the position of Anselm. Detaching Anselm’s analysis from its theological mooring, Scotus recast the inclination to justice as an inalienable feature of the human will, indispensable for moral agency. On his view, even fallen human beings without God’s grace can choose actions because we regard them as good in themselves, not merely because we regard them as



good for us. Granted, our natural inclination to happiness is so strong that we could not reject (*nolle*) perfect happiness if offered. Nevertheless, Scotus contends, we could still not will (*non velle*) such happiness; so the will's choice would still be free, not necessitated by the natural appetite for happiness.

Ockham carried this line of reasoning to a more extreme conclusion: we could choose to reject even perfect happiness if offered. Did Ockham also claim that we can will evil as such or will evil for its own sake? On this topic there is room for doubt. Unlike most of his predecessors, Ockham considers the axiom, "whatever we will, we will under the aspect of a good," either true although completely trivial or substantive but false. If what one means by "good" is just anything at all that people will, the axiom is true. On the other hand, if one means by "good" something useful, pleasurable, or intrinsically valuable, the axiom loses its status as a true but empty proposition and becomes a substantive proposition about human psychology. In this second sense, Ockham argues, the proposition is false, because we can will an act we believe to be neither useful, nor pleasurable, nor intrinsically valuable, such as worshipping false gods. Ockham does not say that we can will such an act because we believe it to be evil, only that we can will it while recognizing that it is good in none of the three ways indicated.

## The Connection of the Virtues

Of all ancient arguments for the unity of the virtues, the arguments by early Stoics conflicted most sharply with common sense. They presented every virtue as an aspect of a single, indivisible wisdom. On this view, whoever truly has one virtue has them all; whoever lacks any virtue actually has no virtues. Stoics embraced two paradoxical corollaries: that all sins or faults (*peccata*) are equal, and that an individual progresses in an instant from having nothing but vices to having all of the virtues.

As Stoics saw all virtues as aspects of human wisdom, so Augustine saw all virtues as aspects of God-given charity. The superficial resemblance of

his position to Stoic teachings made him all the more concerned to spell out the differences. He did so in a letter to Jerome attacking the intellectualism and perfectionism of Stoic ethics (Letter 167). For Stoics, Augustine explains, virtue is a kind of wisdom that hardly anyone ever achieves. For Christians virtue is a kind of love that many people have as a gift of grace. Where Stoics insist that those who fall short of perfect virtue have no genuine virtues at all, Christians recognize that nobody on the face of earth has perfect virtue. None are without sin; and since sin comes from vice, none are without vice. But this does not imply that Christians with charity have no virtues. They progress by degrees, increasing in virtue over time, like someone moving from darkness into light.

Augustine's letter attracted considerable attention in the Middle Ages. Not only did the Christian in Abelard's *Dialogue* use it refuting the all-or-nothing conception of virtue and the equality of sins, Peter Lombard included excerpts from it in Book III, Distinction 36 of his *Sentences* (*Sententiae*). The *Sentences*, compiled entirely from Peter took to be patristic teachings, went on to become the standard theology textbook for medieval universities.

When they had only Books I–III of Aristotle's *Ethics*, readers assumed that he regarded moral virtues as separable. Surely a person could perform just acts (for example) without performing brave ones, thereby acquiring the virtue of justice without the virtue of courage. Only when they had the complete *Ethics* did scholars learn the argument in Book VI, Chapter 13, for the mutual connection between all moral virtues and the intellectual virtue of prudence. Some found the argument convincing. Others suggested that only the four cardinal virtues are inseparable from each other. Peter John Olivi (d. 1298), one of Aristotle's sharpest critics, attacked a key premise in his argument: that prudence has an indivisible unity. According to Olivi, each moral virtue does have a prudence related to it, but these various prudences are distinct dispositions. Thus a person can be virtuous in one area, such as matters involving temperance, and still vicious and imprudent in other respects.

Perhaps the most significant development of the fourteenth century was Scotus' reframing of the dispute as one about the necessary connection of virtues. In his commentary on Book III, Distinction 36 of the *Sentences*, Scotus divides prudence much as Olivi does. He grants that no moral virtue can exist without the prudence related to it, because the very concept of moral virtue includes prudence. Nevertheless, he argues, there is no necessary connection between moral virtues or between the prudences related to them. An individual might even attain perfection in one virtue while wholly lacking another, just as she/he might have perfect hearing while wholly lacking the capacity to see. Scotus does not suggest that this is likely. His interests lie chiefly in conceptual issues, not in empirical psychology.

### Dispositions, Actions, and Free Choice

Early medieval thinkers knew that ancient philosophers classified virtue as a psychological disposition (*habitus*), not as a kind of passion or mental act. Whether Augustine also regarded virtue as a disposition, albeit one given by God, became a topic of dispute in the late twelfth and early thirteenth centuries. But by the mid-thirteenth century the idea that God infuses virtuous dispositions into human adults, perhaps even into baptized babies, was well entrenched. As a result, the first Latin commentators on Aristotle's *Ethics* saw no conflict between philosophers and theologians about classifying virtues as dispositions. They did, however, see a major conflict between the structure of pagan and Christian ethics. The anonymous commentator of the Paris arts faculty and Robert Kilwardby (d. 1279) both explained it in the same way. Philosophers teach that our own good actions precede and produce virtuous dispositions; theologians teach that virtuous dispositions are infused by God, so that the disposition precedes and causes good actions. Philosophers think that actions are worth more than dispositions, whereas theologians take the opposite view (Buffon 2004).

Do naturally acquired dispositions suffice to ensure morally good actions? Even scholars who

studied the complete *Ethics* resisted its suggestion that truly virtuous people are beyond the reach of temptation. As they saw it, even the best disposition never ensures that someone will act well; it only inclines him to do so. The virtuous person can fail to choose good actions, even choose bad ones, so that his character gradually degenerates.

Is a virtuous disposition at least necessary for morally good acts? In Article 1 of *On the Virtues in General* (*De virtutibus in communi*), Aquinas says that we should distinguish between what someone does and the way in which she does it. Someone without a virtuous disposition can indeed choose morally good acts for good reasons. However, she cannot choose such acts consistently, easily, and with pleasure. According to Aquinas, these are the three reasons why people need virtuous dispositions.

Discussion in the early fourteenth century turned to a different problem: what virtuous dispositions explain about morally good actions – not whether they benefit us but why it is necessary for a theorist to posit such dispositions. Working to develop a naturalistic account of ethics, masters took a closer look at Aristotle's theory. Does it avoid circularity? If only someone with a virtuous disposition can choose a morally good act for the right reason, how can anyone choose the kind of actions he must in order to acquire a virtuous disposition? On the other hand, if virtuous dispositions do not account for the moral goodness of a person's actions, what do they explain?

If we must posit dispositions in order to explain how someone can choose morally good acts, consistently, easily, and with pleasure, do these factors make the chosen acts better in moral terms, or do dispositions figure only in psychological explanations? Are consistency, ease, and pleasure even features of actions, or rather features of agents? Scotus pioneered this line of reasoning in Book I, Distinction 17 of his *Ordinatio*. Durand took it farther, developing it into a full-scale assault on Thomistic ethics. His objections were not soon forgotten. A century later, when Capreolus penned his *Defenses*, he casts Durand as Aquinas' chief critic on this topic (Kent 2005, 2008).

Fourteenth-century debate about virtuous dispositions can be perplexing, for virtually all participants agree that an action is morally good only if the agent's choice accords with "the dictates of right reason." By this they mean a correct judgment by the agent herself about what she should do in this particular situation, including the appropriate end of action. For example, it is not enough that she choose to return money she borrowed from Joe when she promised to return it; she must choose to return the money because she owes it to Joe, not because she hopes to be praised or fears that he might harm her. On what issue, then, did fourteenth-century scholars divide? Some, such as Gerald Odonis (d. c. 1349), endorsed what they took to be Aristotle's position: only people with virtuous dispositions can make morally good choices, because they alone can have the right motivations. Others, including Scotus and Durand, insisted that people without virtuous dispositions can have the right motivations and make morally good choices. If ordinary, non-virtuous people lack this capacity, how can they ever make the kind of choices necessary in order to acquire a virtuous disposition?

This is not to say that ordinary people are able to judge and choose correctly in all of the complex situations that a virtuous person can; nor is it to say that they will find it as easy as a virtuous person to choose the correct act for the right reason, rather than from some self-serving motivation. The thesis is more modest: it is possible for ordinary people to make morally good choices in some situations, however seldom they do. This is the very position that Buridan attributes to Aristotle in Question 4 of his commentary on Book VI of the *Ethics*. On his view, Gerald's interpretation leaves Aristotle with a circular account of the relation between virtuous dispositions and morally good actions.

Philosophers still worry that Aristotle's *Ethics* looks circular, just as they still wonder whether various premises in his arguments are meant to be conceptual truths or claims about empirical psychology. The range of interpretations is no smaller than it was in the fourteenth century, when scholars of the West began arguing about the

place of virtues in the overall structure of Aristotle's theory.

## Cross-References

- ▶ [Anselm of Canterbury](#)
- ▶ [Augustine](#)
- ▶ [Ethics, Byzantine](#)
- ▶ [Ethics, Jewish](#)
- ▶ [Godfrey of Fontaines](#)
- ▶ [Gregory of Rimini](#)
- ▶ [Happiness](#)
- ▶ [Henry of Ghent](#)
- ▶ [John Capreolus](#)
- ▶ [John Duns Scotus](#)
- ▶ [Nicomachean Ethics, Commentaries on Aristotle's](#)
- ▶ [Peter Abelard](#)
- ▶ [Robert Kilwardby](#)
- ▶ [Thomas Aquinas](#)
- ▶ [William of Ockham](#)

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## Ethics, Arabic

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### Abstract

Revealed religions have presented very vigorous moral codes and placed great emphasis on personal and social salvation, attainable through the respect of the law received directly from God. All of them have created norms originating in a conception of humans as ethical beings searching for happiness through the improvement of their natures and modes of conduct. Because these religions were closely linked to community life, ethics became linked to politics. In the Arab world, ethics developed from the Qur'an and other religious sources,

and also from Greek philosophical texts. Whatever forms it took, ethics strove to establish the criteria by which a given form of human behavior could be considered morally good. The subject received serious theoretical consideration in the work of some philosophers, subsequent to their readings of Plato's *Republic* and Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics*. Arabic philosophers saw it as being within an anthropology inspired by Greek philosophy and also linked it to politics. Its purpose was to understand human life and reach humankind's ultimate goal: happiness.

The difficulties entailed in the distinction between morals and ethics are well known. The amount of entries on the topic in the most notable dictionaries and philosophical lexica shows the difficulties involved in disentangling the meanings of these terms. Sometimes, the field in which they are used is presented as the defining difference between them: while morals seem to have more to do with religion, ethics could be taken as being more linked to philosophy. In support of this differentiation based on the area of use, it is usually advanced that Socrates is considered as the pioneer of the part of philosophy to which ethics and politics belong, practical philosophy, which studies individual or collective human action. However, this distinction is not clear: that morality is more closely related to precepts and norms, to laws and rules, and ethics is more concerned with human behavior in relation to virtue or excellence, does not prevent ethics from being the science of morals, the part of philosophy that has taken up the study of human behavior.

This is related to the way in which the issue of ethics has been formulated in the Islamic world, whose foundational text in itself contained a hermeneutics to which its followers had to commit: Muslims must read the word, the word of God, which is the text revealed to the Prophet. But this is not merely about reading what is written. Laid down as eternal and immutable, the Qur'an is not impassive: the purpose in reading it is to give meaning to the text, to interpret it, to understand it. This is a reading that wishes to discover what

the text really says, even if what it really says is actually different for each of the believers who read and interpret it. From this emerged the science of interpretation, whose aim was to reach the true and original meaning of the revealed text, hidden behind its apparent meaning.

The reading and interpretation of the revealed text gave rise to different applicable levels of meaning. These outlined a set of ideas that were subsequently developed, explained, and commented upon by very diverse groups of thinkers who, in trying to unravel what is hidden behind the text, revealed the sometimes-invisible contradiction between the apparent or external and the hidden or internal that is found at many of these levels. The ethical-judicial field was one of the main areas of interpretation, a fact that allowed the Qur'an to become the sole law of Islam; at once, a religious, political, and ethical law, by which all of Muslim society must be governed.

In addition to containing the doctrinal principles of Islam, the Qur'an became a behavioral guide for believers that covered all aspects of human life. Its dogmatic content is very limited; nevertheless, it has functioned as a normative ethical code, which attempts to determine how one should live under the one God. It contains numerous passages regulating the moral life of believers; but strictly speaking, it is not a book of ethics, which sets out moral theories. Nevertheless, Islamic law was founded on this Book and developed into a system of obligations; it established what form should be taken by human beings' relationship with God, with other humans, and with themselves. Fundamentally, it prescribes that God is in command and humankind must obey, and therefore, must "submit" to Him. Morality was, therefore, expressed in terms of divine acts and dictates. Reason had to abide by divine mandate and recognize that which God has willed for all eternity; therefore, morality could not be based on autonomous reason, but on the imperatives of the Law.

However, because human conduct is based more on moral than legal judgments, it was necessary to make decisions and formulate valid behavioral rules, which were taken by jurists to

have emanated from Divine Will. For this reason, it was in the field of law that the first developments of scriptural morality appeared. Along with the reflections of the theologians, the aim was to provide an answer to the main question surrounding the divine mandate: should it be obeyed because whatever God orders is inherently good or, conversely, is it good because it is a divine mandate? Similar issues received a double theoretical formulation on whether ethics should be considered an objective or subjective set of norms. The answer depended on the legitimacy conceded to human reason as a source of ethical knowledge. If its legitimacy was accepted, then the objectivity of the mandates had to be recognized, because they are good and just in themselves. This was the solution arrived at by the Muʿtazilite theologians. However, if the independence of reason was not accepted, rather it was excluded from revelation, then the mandate had to be considered as good, and this precisely because God has willed so; therefore, ethical normativity would depend entirely on the will of God, a position that asserts ethical subjectivism. This was the voluntarist solution formulated by the majority of traditionalist theologians.

As this idea impregnated all aspects of Muslim life, morality was externalized into a wide range of expressions, which cannot be exclusively limited to philosophical ethics, but took in other fields, such as education and literature (*adab*), which reflected profane morality, as well as religion itself. This moral feeling can be seen in general literary works, in gnomic, mystical, and religious texts.

Ideas from non-Islamic traditions were added to the first ethical reflections by jurists and theologians. On the one hand, there was literature of Persian origin with ethical-religious ideas based primarily on Zoroastrianism, embodied in fables, aphorisms, poems, anthologies, and other texts. On the other hand, there were materials from the Greek world, which in addition to its gnomic literature, brought a folk ethics, understood as medicine for the soul, and a philosophical ethics, which favored the appearance of a moral thought that was focused more on humankind than on God or the law – a moral thought which reconciled and

ordered reason and desires in an attempt to avoid conflict between them and to ascribe human reason its true worth.

All of this paved the way for the development of the four types of ethical thought, which, according to Hourani (1975), appeared in the Islamic world: (1) Normative religious ethics, (2) Normative secular ethics, (3) Ethical analysis in the religious tradition, and (4) Ethical analysis by philosophers. It is this last point that concerns us here.

The ethical theories born out of the Greek philosophical tradition reflect Platonic and Aristotelian thought, and combine them with some elements taken from Stoicism. With a few exceptions, almost all of these theories show a close link between ethics and politics, considering them as two sides of the same reality relating to humankind, understood in its individual and social dimensions that were inseparable in a society, like the Islamic one, that had its beginnings in the link between religion and community. The union of ethics and politics was seen in this way by Ibn Rushd (*On Plato's Republic*): "This art has been divided into two parts. In the first part, the habits and volitional actions and conduct are treated generally, and here, is made known their relation to each other and which of these habits is for the sake of the others. In the second part is made known how these habits are established in the souls, which habit is ordered to which other habit so that the resulting action from the intended habit may become as perfect as can be, and which habit hinders which other habit" (Lerner 1974).

On the other hand, the ethical reflections seem to correspond to two different traditions. One is more popular, understanding ethics as medicine or therapy for the soul, as a necessary preparation for initiation into the study of philosophy. The other is more scientific and is based on the knowledge of Greek philosophical texts, considering ethics as demonstrative knowledge.

Plato's dialogues were known, and it was soon discovered that Socrates had been the instigator of the ethico-political current in Greek philosophy, as stated by several Arab biographers and historians of Greek culture and philosophy. The attribution of numerous statements and anecdotes of



ethical nature to Socrates show the high appreciation that the Greek philosopher's figure had in the Islamic world and in Arabic literature for his remarkable contribution to the ethics. The Islamic thinkers knew Aristotle's different works on ethics, but it was the *Nicomachean Ethics* that definitively shaped ethical thought in Arabic philosophy. This work offers a model of the ideal life different to that presented in the Qur'ān, as well as instructions on how this can be achieved in human society. Aristotle's text was translated, although information on the translation is not very clear among the Arab bibliographers. Regardless of the translator's identity, it is important to emphasize the wide spread and influence enjoyed by this work in the Arab world. Al-Fārābī wrote a commentary on it. Ibn Sīnā seems to have been inspired by it. Traces of it can be seen in Ibn Bājjā. Ibn Rushd wrote a commentary or paraphrase on it, of which the Hebrew and Latin versions still survive. Aristotle's work was, therefore, much read and commented in the Islamic world.

Al-Kindī (d. c. 870) showed a degree of interest the ethics of politics and a certain Stoic influence, maybe originating in Simplicius' commentary on Epictetus' *Manual*. In his *Epistle on the Quantity of Aristotle's Book*, al-Kindī grants ethics a place among the sciences as the first of the practical sciences. His conception of the soul is linked to Neoplatonism. He maintains that the soul belongs to the spiritual or divine world, to which it must return. In order to return to its world of origin, the soul must free itself from sensory ties, through the four Platonic virtues: wisdom, justice, courage, and moderation. In another of his treatises, related to the "consolation of philosophy" genre, he insists on the idea of abandoning mundane things to focus on the intelligible world. Humankind's goal should be the Platonic idea of imitation of God, attained by way of human virtues. This is what human happiness is about, something attainable by each person through his or her individual action.

Al-Fārābī (d. 950) wrote his *Enumeration of the Sciences* with a definite program, which does not include ethics among the sciences described. He knew Greek ethics, because he had read

Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics*. The Aristotelian idea that ethics is part of politics is picked up and assimilated by this Muslim philosopher, as can be seen from the use made of it in his works on politics. When dealing with the political regime most able to guarantee excellence and human virtue to citizens, he presents philosophy as a reflection on happiness and how it can be achieved in human community. The idea that all things tend toward good is the guiding principle of his thought on happiness, the ultimate aim aspired to by humans as composed of the body and soul. His ethical doctrine, which leads to politics, is set within an Aristotelian psychology and involves a metaphysical exploration of reality. He also recognizes the importance of Socrates' way, characterized as consisting on the investigation of justice and the virtues.

Happiness is studied in several of his books: the aim of human life is to attain happiness. But the happiness he concerns himself with is not happiness as understood in the Qur'ān, where it seems to refer to the state that will be reached by the blessed in the next life (XI, 105–108). The happiness that al-Fārābī is thinking of is reached in this world; it is the happiness related to humankind in general and not to Muslims in particular. This happiness is obtained on two levels, the individual and the social: it is a happiness that only humans, in the realization of their potential as individuals, can reach by cultivating moral and intellectual virtues, something that it is only possible to achieve within a society. His concept of freedom, which is of Greek origin, is pervaded by the Muslim tradition in which he lived, as can be seen in the abundant use of Islamic terminology.

Happiness is every man's ultimate goal: "Because the purpose of man's existence is the attainment of ultimate happiness, in order to obtain it, he must know what it is, establish it as his aim and give it his attention; then, he must know what qualities are needed to reach happiness and then, he must put them in to practice," he states in *The Political Regime*. This is a happiness that implies knowledge and action, theoretical and practical learning: humans must first of all discover those things that help to attain happiness and must then carry them out.

It is difficult to define the nature of happiness. At times, it seems to be a purely theoretical activity, at others, an exclusively political one; at yet other times, it appears to both a theoretical and political activity. The purpose of human life is the attainment of happiness, since it is a purpose chosen for itself, not for any other reason. Whoever wishes to attain it must follow a path: "The human things through which nations and citizens of cities attain earthly happiness in this life and supreme happiness in the life beyond, are of four kinds; theoretical virtues, deliberative virtues, moral virtues, and practical arts" (*The Attainment of Happiness*) (Mahdi 1969). The first three virtues mentioned relate to philosophy in the narrower sense. Therefore, happiness can only be reached through philosophy.

In this text, he makes no reference to the individual as the most important subject of happiness, and instead, uses the terms "nations" and "citizens," and therefore, speaks in the plural. Human nature can only be perfected in a social context: "In order to preserve himself and to attain his highest perfections, every human being is, by his very nature, in need of many things which he cannot provide all by himself. . . . Therefore, man cannot attain the perfection, for the sake of which his inborn nature has been given to him, unless many societies of people who co-operate come together who each supply everybody else with some particular need of his" (*The Perfect State*) (Walzer 1985). Faithful to the Muslim community in which he lives and to the Platonic and Aristotelian tradition, al-Fārābī does not see happiness or humankind's supreme and ultimate perfection as pertaining to the isolated and solitary individual, but as something that can only be attained in a society, with the help of someone to point out the way. He follows Plato in maintaining that humans need a teacher or guide who can lead them toward happiness. This teacher or guide is the philosopher, who must become the ruler of the excellent or perfect city, the only society in which humans can achieve true happiness.

The philosopher-ruler must have perfect knowledge of the political science, because this is the only route to happiness: political science is primarily concerned with happiness. It also deals

with actions, ways of living, moral qualities, customs, and voluntary habits. Political science is about the knowledge of those things that the inhabitants of cities can use to reach happiness through political association. Politics then, becomes a science integral to the purpose of humankind. Using politics, the philosopher-ruler must find the excellent, perfect, ideal city in which citizens have the best possible conditions so that each, according to their abilities, can realize their ultimate potential, their perfect ethical life.

Life in society is necessary for the attainment of this goal. A person cannot tackle life's necessities and assure his existence in solitude. People must unite with others in perfect or imperfect communities. There are several kinds of societies, but true happiness must be obtained in the right kind of City: "The most excellent good and the utmost perfection is, in the first instance, attained in a city, not in a society which is less complete than it. But since good, in its real sense, is such as to be attainable through choice and will and evils are due to will and choice only, a city may be established to enable its people to co-operate in attaining some aims that are evil. Hence, felicity is not attainable in every city. The city, then, in which people aim through association at co-operating for the things by which felicity in its real and true sense can be attained, is the excellent city, and the society in which there is a co-operation to acquire felicity is the excellent society" (*The Perfect State*, Walzer 1985).

This city fulfills the order of the universe and society is ordered in its image. It falls to the prophet-legislator to make this perfect state into a reality, through the enlightenment received from the Active Intellect. It is also necessary that humans believe in this mission, which implies knowledge of the hierarchical order of the universe and reflection on it in order to perceive clearly the place and function of the prophet-legislators, philosopher-ruler, and first chief.

This chief should possess all the perfect qualities and bring together all governing duties, applying political science as its greatest expert. He is a statesman, philosopher and prophet, legislator, and educator. He is a philosopher because he is endowed with speculative and practical

knowledge. Through philosophy, he can know the divine order of the universe; it follows that the Excellent City's most important governor must have a thorough knowledge of theoretical philosophy, because only through this can he set about ordering society in the same way that God Most High has ordered the universe. This imitation is the supreme purpose of all philosophy, according to the maxim he takes from Plato. The task of practical knowledge lies in the awareness of all the actions needed to establish and preserve virtuous customs and habits in the city, those able to lead the inhabitants toward true happiness; a task that requires long experience.

This ruler, on whom depend the good deeds of citizens aimed at reaching happiness, has the ability to define, determine, and direct these actions toward happiness. Only the government of the state by philosophy can guarantee this. In this way, al-Fārābī established how the state he had in mind – a true likeness of Plato's *Republic* – should be governed by norms originating in reason, by virtue of the knowledge of the whole universe acquired by the philosopher. Any community that was not governed by rational laws would be an imperfect state.

However, the attainment of happiness also has another aspect, the individual, because living in a city is not enough to obtain supreme happiness. There is one prominent idea in al-Fārābī's writing: the attainment of happiness is an individual task, because humankind's path toward it begins with the realization of one's individual potentialities; a human being does not achieve perfection alone due to a set of innate principles with which he or she is born, but through activity. The attainment of intellectual virtues leads humans, with the aid of moral virtues, to theoretical contemplation, but only after choosing between the different options offered by reason. This path is not found in the city, but in an individual's personal life, as can be inferred from *The Perfect State*: "The presence of the first intelligibles in man is his first perfection, but these intelligibles are supplied to him only in order to be used by him to reach his ultimate perfection, that is felicity. Felicity means that the human soul reaches a degree of perfection in its existence where it is in no need of matter for its

support, since it becomes one of the incorporeal things and of the immaterial substances and remains in that state continuously for ever. But its rank is beneath the rank of the Active Intellect" (Walzer 1985). The attainment of individual happiness must follow a path from grammar to logic and from there to the rest of philosophy.

Ibn Sīnā (d. 1037) emphasized the distinction between theoretical philosophy and practical philosophy. The purpose of the latter is to acquire opinions on human action. He divided it into three classical parts: ethics, economics, and politics. Ethics is concerned with showing humans what their actions and habits should be like so that their lives in this world and the next can be happy. However, he did not deal with ethics in his vast work. He insisted on humankind's need for a social context, in which to develop perfectly, which makes it seem that his conception of ethics is much related to politics: Muslim law is the norm that defines the conduct humans should follow in individual and social life.

Ibn Bājja (d. c. 1138) adopted the Aristotelian contemplative ideal, according to which humankind's happiness depends on fully realizing the intellectual life. This is achieved when the human intellect becomes one with the Active Intellect, which leads the author to develop the classical theme of intellectual progression, from a state of pure intellectual potentiality to maximum focus and contact with the Active Intellect, only attainable by some. This purpose, intellectual perfection, can only be achieved in the perfect and virtuous state, founded on nature, whose inhabitants are united by love and whose actions are always upright.

But as the perfect city does not exist, the only happiness in the four imperfect, unjust, and perverse states is that of the recluse, the individual who obtains happiness by his or her own thought and by his or her own reason. Ibn Bājja's most important work, *The Regimen of the Solitary*, is not a treatise on political science, rather a guide to the attainment of true happiness, intended for the philosopher living in the imperfect city. This man orients his search for happiness toward the only place where no external authority can oppress or subjugate him, that is, inside himself, in so far as

Ibn Bājja transforms the political and community reason of his predecessors into individual ethical reason, rejecting the political role of the philosopher and favoring the solitary life. Because of this, in his thought reason becomes ethical reason, because the problem he debates in his work is fundamentally ethical: the only attainable happiness in the cities is that of the recluse who reaches happiness through his own cognitive abilities and their inherent perfection. The individual, therefore, becomes the true subject of ethical life, a truly free, autonomous, and self-sufficient subject, who achieves the inherent and specific function of the human being: the perfection of intellectual ability. Moral actions perfect life, correspond to the spiritual form, and ennoble humans; but purely intellectual acts convert them into the most excellent and divine beings.

Ibn Ṭufayl (d. 1185) took this view of ethics to its extreme. A person cannot reach true happiness using reason even while living in a society: the philosopher must live totally alone, outside society; nonphilosophers cannot be enlightened, because they are ruled by external ritual norms, imposed by a religion. Happiness is only reached in solitude.

Ibn Rushd (d. 1198) dealt explicitly with ethics and politics as interrelated forms of knowledge, convinced that the supreme good, ultimate perfection, and happiness of humankind could only be reached in the perfect city. In his paraphrase of Aristotle's *Rhetoric*, he develops the theory of *eudemony* as an essentially community and social happiness. He highlights the importance of political discourse for the community, since language should give rise to virtuous and just actions as an essential condition for an honest and reasonable life. Finally, he states that rhetoric is composed of the arts of discourse and ethics; that is, of politics.

Throughout the *Faṣl al-Maqāl*, Ibn Rushd speaks of the ultimate human happiness linked to the religious Law. At the beginning of his paraphrase of Plato's *Republic*, he states that the work deals with practical or political science, whose object differs from that of the theoretical sciences, because its purpose consists of actions that belong to volition, based on free will and choice: actions that must be characterized as

ethical depend on human volition, and as such, humans are able to control them. Two areas are distinguished within the science of ethics. The first is general or theoretical and deals with the customs and habits of the soul, the general problems on which political actions are based. The second is strictly practical: it shows how those customs and habits are established in the soul and how their organization takes place within social groups. According to Ibn Rushd, Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics* is related to the first area, while the second area is the subject of Aristotle's *Politics* and Plato's *Republic*.

In his commentary on the *Nicomachean Ethics*, where Aristotle talks about the subordination of the sciences and states that politics is the science that can provide humans with the most desirable purpose, as the good of humankind, Ibn Rushd insists that the main purpose of ethical discourse is the government of the city and, more specifically, the good that must be striven for in that government. He recognizes that the most important thing about politics is the noble art of governing the city, and therefore, what must be taught is how political government should be directed toward the happiness of the citizens. Politics should also contain observations relating to human happiness, which can only be attained if humans are considered as citizens of a state and not as isolated beings, as maintained by Ibn Bājja and Ibn Ṭufayl. The virtues by which human beings can reach happiness can only be obtained while living in a community: a lone human being cannot achieve all the virtues, that are impossible to reach unless there is cooperation within a group of individuals. In order to develop their ethical lives, humans need the help of others: the final result is a society in which religious law and political law make possible the attainment of happiness through philosophy, whose study is commanded by the religious law itself.

## Cross-References

- ▶ [Doxographies, Graeco-Arabic](#)
- ▶ [al-Fārābī, Abū Naṣr](#)
- ▶ [Ibn Bājja, Abū Bakr ibn al-Sā'ig \(Avempace\)](#)

- ▶ [Ibn Rushd, Muḥammad ibn Aḥmad al-Ḥafīd \(Averroes\)](#)
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## Ethics, Byzantine

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### Abstract

Ethics in Byzantium was not a systematic philosophical discipline, but an occasional response to particular problems posed in everyday life or in interpreting the Scripture. Ethical views on virtues and vices, evil and passions, the Good, the commandments and their observance, labor, marriage and family, sexual life, spiritual exercises, death, resurrection, deification are scattered through a diversity of texts, philosophical, theological, and hagiographical, letters, “mirrors of princes,” etc. Moral reasoning was inseparable from theology and ethics

could not be autonomous but, with few exceptions, was a Christian ethics for a particular Christian society. The two ingredients of Byzantine ethics were early Greek Patristic thought and ancient Greek ethical theories (Stoic, Neoplatonic, and Aristotelian). Revelation, hence scriptural authority and tradition, was the ultimate source of Byzantine ethics.

### The Nature of Byzantine Ethics

It is questionable whether the notion of *philosophical ethics* as an autonomous inquiry that examines or establishes the principles of human morality existed in Byzantium. Certainly, moral concerns were present in everyday life and the formulation of codes of moral behavior was familiar to Byzantine culture. However, Byzantine *ethics*, that is, in the sense of a second-order activity that reflects on and makes self-conscious this morality, did not seem to exist. Nevertheless, we must be aware that the concept of “Christian ethics” is also questionable, at least before modernity. In Byzantine texts occur ethical judgments, exhortations to virtue, and statements describing moral experience in a way that is perhaps more important to the fields of religion and psychology; and there are also statements defining ethical terms. Concepts and maxims did not form a whole of universalizable and justified propositions that evaluate or determine kinds of behavior. One may get the impression that the Byzantines deal with problems in a rather unsystematic way as an occasional response to particular problems posed by practice or while interpreting Scripture. This tendency is reflected in texts that are abundant in admonitions and edifying stories – with recurring themes as spiritual exercises, the treatment of the body, virtues, or marriage – but include no systematic treatises. Also, ethics did not find its way to the philosophy curriculum.

Another basic aspect of Byzantine ethics is that it is an ethics for a Christian society, that is, shaped in the context of a premodern spirituality according to which human conduct is dependent on God’s will and the society has an eschatological orientation. Hence, there is no sharp

distinction between religious and secular ethics or between the public and the private; moral reasoning is inseparable from theological and the realm of ethics cannot be autonomous. A non-Christian ethics is inconceivable in Byzantium and Byzantine ethics cannot in principle be something distinct from (or independent from) religious ethics – with few interesting exceptions.

Being Christian, Byzantine ethics does not avoid an inherent paradox: it is addressed to man in general (as an image of God) claiming for universality, but it is adjusted to a particular society; it can only have temporal character, codifying the way of life of a community that heads to the Kingdom of Heaven, and it seems solidified in a society that understands itself as the realized Kingdom of God. In addition, it conceives moral precepts and goodness in terms of commandments and obedience respectively, and at the same time in terms of personal relation and love. Such an ethics cannot be easily characterized as deontological, of divine command or virtue ethics.

If the questions “how should I live?” or “what kind of life is ethical?” were central questions of Greek ethics, for the Byzantines philosophy – as theoretical endeavor – is not entitled to answer such fundamental questions. It was only in twelfth century that the question of the nature of ethics as a discipline was put by the commentators of Aristotle’s *Nicomachean Ethics*; and the answer was that it could be a science but not in the strict Aristotelian sense, because it does not proceed from universal premises.

Perhaps the only possible mission of Byzantine ethics would be the rational and systematic exposition of principles already accepted or the discussion of moral problems with the help of Greek moral thought. What Byzantines preferred was to see ethics (and “Christian philosophy”) as a way of life based on the imitation of Christ and aiming at the formation of the “new man.” The essence of Christianity was not taken to be a moral teaching or a law, that is, to impose moral rules and principles. Byzantines did not seek to determine what action is right in any given circumstance (judged by justified general principles) but to evaluate a person’s life considered as a whole; it is the communion of human being with the source of



goodness that warrants its authentic relations with other people and finally the realization of itself. Ethics concerns the individual, its horizontal relations to other individuals (after Jesus' command to love one's neighbor as oneself), and also man's vertical relation to God, a personal relation with the final goal of the restoration of the "society of righteous."

## The Sources of Byzantine Ethics

The two ingredients of Byzantine ethics are Greek patristic thought and Greek moral philosophy.

(a) *Patristic Foundations*: Byzantine ethics is indissolubly bound to the moral teaching of the Early Church that was based on Scripture, through its interpretation by the Greek Fathers (especially in cases where the allegorical method was used to extract its "moral meaning"). The scriptural basis of Byzantine ethics is revealed in almost every text and is exemplified in the long tradition of exegetical treatises (e.g., on *Job* or on Paul's *Epistles*). In the Greek East there was not a single figure whose thought influenced ethics, like Augustine in the West. Influential texts were Clement of Alexandria's *Paedagogus*, Origen's *On Principles* III, Cyril of Alexandria's *Catecheses*, the speeches of John Chrysostom, and the Cappadocians' ethical works. Basil of Caesarea wrote many ascetic and ethical works that influenced the development of Eastern monasticism and addressed many issues concerning the attainment of the perfect virtuous life.

The numerous and popular *Lives* of ascetics were a reminder that spiritual perfection though an ideal can be attained in this life. Toward this ideal aimed hundreds of practical *Chapters* (e.g., Maximus the Confessor), a series of works *On Virginité*, numerous *Sayings of Fathers*, and ascetic manuals like that of Macarius, Evagrius Pontikos, Neilos, and Diadochus of Photike. This kind of literature and its theology of temperance reached its climax at the Collection of *Philokalia*

(*Love for What Is Beautiful/Good*) that has remained popular for centuries among Orthodox people. The terms "ethics" and "ethical" occurred in Patristic literature mainly to denote Christian moral life, and Byzantine Fathers of the fourth and fifth century (e.g., John Chrysostom and Theodoret) insisted on the organic relation between ethics and dogma.

(b) *Ancient Greek ethical tradition* is the second ingredient of Byzantine ethics. In the formation of their moral teaching, the Fathers used ideas and concepts derived from Greek philosophy. They owe much to this tradition and this fact was recognized by pagans and by Christians. Origen and Gregory of Nyssa had already accepted the utility of certain aspects of pagan ethics and in many issues the Greek ethics was not to be reversed but integrated. The late antique amalgam of Platonism, Stoicism, and popular moral tradition was quite familiar to Fathers and the Byzantines learn it both indirectly and directly through *florilegia* and by studying the ancient texts.

Some major topics of Late Antiquity ethics found their way to other literary forms such as epistolography; for example, a considerable bulk of letters of consolation based on a long tradition, Christian and Pagan. The ideal of a wise man and the figure of the philosopher teacher as a paradigm, moral exhortation, the inner relation between virtue and knowledge (and vice to ignorance) passed to Christian morality. Greek ethical concepts as pleasure and happiness (*eudaimonia*) lost their importance; the assimilation to God was the ultimate goal, but even this echoed a Platonic dictum. Stoic ethics was present in the Christian adaptations of Epictetus' *Manual* and can be traced later on in Barlaam's *Ethics According to the Stoics* and mainly in Pletho's *On Virtues*, greatly indebted to Epictetus. (Neo)Platonic ethical theory influenced Byzantine ethics in many issues, like its solution to the problem of evil. More importantly, the main structure of Byzantine moral theological thought (via the Cappadocian Fathers) owes much to later Platonic tradition: to overcome the passions and the corporeal

existence; the purification of the soul by virtue in order to attain to the supreme good and contemplate (or unite with) God; or the ethical connotations of the ascent to the ontological hierarchy. The popularization of philosophical ethics and the therapeutic role of philosophy contributed so that the moral treatises of the Christian writers found an audience prepared and eager to use them as a practical guide to moral growth.

### Aristotelian Ethics and Its Byzantine Reception

The presence of Aristotelian ethics can be attested in two ways: the influence of Aristotle's ethical views and the occupation with Aristotelian texts. While Aristotelian logic had a continuous presence in Byzantine thought and education through handbooks and the *Organon* itself, the fate of *Nicomachean Ethics* was different. A great number of the manuscripts (almost 200) of the three Aristotelian ethical treatises verifies the interest in reading and commenting on them in the twelfth century, when the Byzantines undertook the task to write commentaries on works of Aristotle, among them the *Nicomachean Ethics*. So did Eustratios of Nicaea, Michael of Ephesus, and others. Eustratios used Platonic and Christian elements and discussed not only definitions and terms but also the ethical views of Aristotle. Michael followed Alexander of Aphrodisias and Alexandrian Neoplatonists; the comments on Books 2–4 are a compilation of Neoplatonic scholia. Pachymeres in *Philosophia* XI was not an "explanator" and omitted several chapters of *Nicomachean Ethics*; his text is more like an epitome with few additional remarks. Two paraphrases were composed later by Konstantinos Palaeokappas (?) and Ps.-Olympiodorus; the latter – once attributed to Emperor John VI Kantakuzene – must be a paraphrase of the comments by the Neoplatonic Olympiodorus. It is difficult to say that the study of *Nicomachean Ethics* changed ethical reasoning in Byzantium as it did in the West. Anyway, the interest in Aristotle was not confined to commentaries but it is evident in texts of Psellos, John Italos, Nikephoros Blemmydes, and other Byzantine

philosophers and scholars who were familiar with the Aristotelian texts. The debate of Platonists and Aristotelians in the fifteenth century touched also ethical issues. Of interest is the critique of Aristotelian ethics by Plethon, who doubted whether the Aristotelian mean helps to make the fundamental distinction between good and evil (as a result of Aristotle's degradation of the soul) or to understand the relation of pleasure to happiness.

### Texts and Thinkers

Certainly, a unified picture of Byzantine ethics throughout 12 centuries is misleading; the same is true for a dual-aspect approach that distinguishes sharply between an ascetic and a "humanistic" current. There are differences and tensions between monks, clergymen, and intellectuals; they depend on many factors, like the writers' intellectual and religious background and milieu, their apprehension of ecclesiastical and historical realities, and their intended audience. The texts produced mostly in Constantinople, in monastic circles or in the imperial court and addressed to the Emperor, monks, intellectuals, laypersons, or ordinary people.

Secular ethics as such could not exist in Byzantium and the superiority of "extreme philosophy," that is, ascetic morality, is stressed in many Patristic texts. We can discern two aspects of religious ideal behavior, the ascetic ideal (the mortification of the flesh and the life of a hermit) and the monastic ideal (the virtue of humility and the communal life). The majority of early theological literature and treatises like *On Virginity* emphasized these ideals. The same line of thought continued in early Byzantium with Maximus the Confessor's various *Chapters*, John of Climacus' *Heavenly Ladder*; later with topically arranged *florilegia* like John of Damascus' *Sacra Parallela*; and, finally, with Symeon's the New Theologian *Ethics* and *Catecheses*, Nicetas Stethatos' *Three Hundred Practical Chapters* (on the purification of the intellect, on love, and on the perfection of life), and the Hesychastic movement with

Gregory Palamas. Nicholas Kabasilas' *On the Life in Christ* is a landmark in Byzantine spirituality. Although this rigorous discipline was addressed mainly to monks, it played a decisive role in the formation of Byzantine ethics.

A few reactions against the unqualified acceptance of these ideals were noted; intellectuals such as Bishop Eustathios of Thessalonike (twelfth century) praised also virtuous married people and Plethon attacked Christian monasticism in general. There are also moderate views that are not antireligious but relatively independent from the Orthodox learning and influenced by Greek philosophy (Psellos, Metochites' *Ethical Discourse*). Subversive texts like the *Lives of Fools in Christ* (St. Symeon, St. Andrew) and the *Didactic Admonitions* (known as *Spaneas*) or the idiosyncratic case of anti-Christian ethics (Plethon). The primacy of religious ethics did not prevent several forms of secular ideals of behavior to emerge in texts of Psellos, Kekaumenos, or Eustathios concerning family and women, the moderate enjoyment of life, the knightly ideal, etc. The optimistic view trusted God, no matter how weak human nature was considered to be, but many intellectuals held a pessimistic attitude – especially in the Empire's hard times – and were reluctant to endorse Christian virtues without qualification, while expressing a feeling of vanity not calmed by the acknowledgment of God's providence.

Ethical views are scattered through a diversity of texts, not only philosophical or theological. Hagiography and epistolography are valuable sources for everyday morality and historiography offers pages where moral criteria are applied at the description of characters. The "mirrors of princes" were more an ethical discourse than a political treatise; in many examples of this genre is depicted the ideal image of the Emperor – a combination of Christian virtues and other moral principles. Rhetoric speeches and exercises, though full of clichés and conventional themes, contributed to the discussion of characters and virtues. All these literary genres often function as a magnifying or a distortive mirror, nevertheless they are indispensable for the study of Byzantine ethics.

## Concepts and Themes

Major and favorable themes are: virtues and vices, evil and passions, the Good, the commandments and their observance, labor, marriage and family, sexual life, spiritual exercises, asceticism, Church and secular power, social problems, wealth and poverty, war, death, resurrection, and deification. Moral considerations are grounded in human nature and its relation to God not in the abstract but in the postlapsarian condition. The scope of ethics is determined by the evaluation of this condition – whether man is totally corrupted or likeness to God was dimmed but remains capable to attain similitude. In either case man cannot be the foundation of ethics, notwithstanding the possibility of moral knowledge. Revelation, hence scriptural authority and tradition, turns to be the ultimate source of Byzantine ethics.

How can good be defined? The *Euthyphro's* dilemma can be Christianized: Is the good because God loves it [or: commands it] or God loves it [or: commands it] because it is good? For the Byzantines, the second option is unthinkable because it assumes a morality independent of God's will. Their choice of the first option was not weakened by the obvious difficulty that in this case morality could be the product of an arbitrary will. In their theological perspective, God is conceived not as an impersonal cause but as a person whose will created the world; and this will is also expressed by the moral order of this world.

For human beings the options are two: (a) estrangement from God and good, and a voluntary spiritual death. (b) The care of the self: deliberate obedience to divine commands and purification of the intellect and of the senses. The ultimate goal of *homo byzantinus* is deification, to live a "life proper and according to nature, i.e., assimilating to divine nature." This goal cannot be achieved without God's cooperation and it is in this life that man has to regain his authentic being: holy men and, primarily, Jesus are the embodied models to be imitated. Pleasure was almost expelled (see however Metochites), but the vocabulary of love reenters to express the personal relation of man to God. Man is united with the object of its desire – "sinks in God's

beauty and love; pleasure and divine sweetness surge within him” (Symeon). This mystic communication with God is suitable to the realities of *homo byzantinus* who, although a member of the Church, felt insecure and subordinated himself to various political and social hierarchies. The superiority of contemplative life is undeniable, not only in its ascetic form.

As for the practice of Byzantine ethics, we have to keep in mind that though the texts are full of canons and precepts and declare constantly the ideal of a pious ascetic life we must not get the wrong impression that this normative ethics ruled over Byzantine society – no matter how theocentric it was. The attitudes of Byzantines toward sexual life, wealth and poverty, philanthropy, or marriage reveal an antinomic element in ethical theory and practice. On the one hand, obedience to prescriptive rules enacted from above (God, Emperor), intolerance and repression; on the other hand, dispensation, adaptation of the rules to given circumstances and to man’s condition, that is, the principle of “economy,” accepted by the Church and justified by Incarnation. There was a dissonance between the immutable principles of “official” religious ethics and the moral behavior of everyday faithful people.

### Virtues and Vices

Virtue (*arete*), excellence of character, is in accordance with human nature, while vice and evil are against nature. Byzantine texts treat of moral subjects by using clichés, maxims, and conventional themes (*topoi*) that were common in Greek literature and rhetoric; for example, the theme of the man at a crossroad and the choice between a life of virtue and one of vice. Catalogs of virtues and vices were inherited from the Stoic and Platonic tradition and from the Bible, and the Byzantines adopted Greek definitions and classifications. In Fathers like Maximus or Gregory Palamas and also in theologians and philosophers like Psellos, Blemmydes, or Metochites, virtue is connected to knowledge and it serves as a means to the knowledge of God. It is through exercise that human beings can control irrational desire and replace it by rational will. However, in the theological literature the attainment of virtue is not possible by the

soul’s own faculties, but it is considered as a gift; other thinkers, especially in the Paleologan renaissance, appreciated more the contribution of reasoning and knowledge to this goal.

Maximus in his *Chapters on Love* recapitulated the earlier Patristic tradition: to the cardinal (“general”) virtues of the “heavenly man” – righteousness (justice), moderation, prudence, and courage – the three main theological virtues are introduced: faith, hope, and love. To all these many were added, some in a new Christian sense: philanthropy, piety, humility, mildness, and clemency. Vice (*kakia*) is a habitually evil disposition, an inclination to wrongdoing and to sin that alienates from God. To the eight sinful desires (*logismoi*) that named Origen – gluttony, fornication, avarice, grief, wrath, torpor, vainglory, and arrogance – many were added. They belong either to the reasoning faculty, to emotion, or to desire. The vices of reasoning (impiety, heretical opinion, faithlessness, and blasphemy) are worse in effects than those of the two lower parts of the soul, for example, anger, wrath, bitterness, fear, cowardice, zeal, envy, vainglory, or luxuriousness, prostitution, theft, divinations, painting of the face. Reasoning is enlightened when love and charity as well as purity and virtue rule over the two other parts. Intellect is where morality resides since there occur the deliberations of acts; so there could be no actual evil if not a previous evil thought – the sin concerns first of all the intellect.

### Free Will and the Problem of Evil

For the Byzantines, the cause of evil can be neither God nor matter. The Neoplatonic doctrine for the evil as the privation of the good makes evil compatible with free will and providence but it does not solve the empirical problem. One solution is that God has his own unknown reasons to permit wrongdoing; this purposefulness of evil supports a “soul-making theodicy.” The choice of evil is a matter of free will, though it may be due to ignorance, weakness of will, pride, or disobedience. Even if the blame is put on devil, it is by his own will that he became the originator of the evil. Besides, a man who would never commit the evil in virtue of his nature is not free. So, the

existence of evil is the proof of man's freedom and a consequence of its use. Yet the threat to the existence of ethics is not removed if God's foreknowledge makes all human actions predestinated and determined. Thinkers like Photios and Blemmydes believed that predestination (too close to the Greek concept of fate) is incompatible to the Christian conception of freedom. Many others, like Germanos, John of Damascus, Psellos, Metochites, and Scholarios, asserted that the belief in Providence does not contradict human free will; foreknowledge is not the cause of things to happen. So rational action and moral responsibility are possible in regard to "things that depend on us." The issue was also present in the Platonists–Aristotelians controversy in the fifteenth century; thus Plethon argued for fate (*hemarmene*) and necessity, whereas Theodore Gazes demonstrated Plato and Aristotle in agreement.

We can say that for the Byzantines behavior is judged as "good" or "bad," but this evaluation is not the ultimate insofar as it is made on general ethical principles. Putting aside the emphasis on reasoning or experience, what counts is whether behavior, that is, human life, is grounded in "real life" ("in Christ," as Kabasilas would phrase it) or leads to (spiritual) death; hence the "ontological" character of Byzantine ethics. In a context that is characterized by theological traditionalism and philosophical antiquarianism, the emphasis would be on ascetic or on secular features, on rigorous canons or on their "economical" enforcement, on sin or on penitence. Goodness and holiness can be seen as two aspects of the human life that is being lived as a response to God's "wishing-to-be-in-us" (Rowan Williams). And thus Byzantine ethics appears not so much as a theoretical discipline to be found in statements or arguments, but as a practice narrated in a variety of texts.

## Cross-References

- ▶ [Aristotelianism in the Greek, Latin, Syriac, Arabic, and Hebrew Traditions](#)
- ▶ [Ethics](#)

- ▶ [Eustratios of Nicaea](#)
- ▶ [Happiness](#)
- ▶ [Maximus the Confessor](#)
- ▶ [Michael of Ephesus](#)
- ▶ [Nicomachean Ethics, Commentaries on Aristotle's](#)
- ▶ [Political Philosophy, Byzantine](#)

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### Ethics, Jewish

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#### Abstract

In the Aristotelian schema of the sciences, ethics and politics were closely intertwined: ethics had social dimensions, even though it studied the individual, and politics was ethical,



even though it focused on society and the state. In medieval Islam and Christendom, Jewish ethics evolved through the interaction with non-Jewish philosophy. The goal of Jewish ethics was to produce the virtuous individual who possesses the character traits necessary for the attainment of wisdom that culminates in the knowledge of God. Jewish ethics posited a dialectical relationship between religion and philosophy: the cultivation of the virtuous character was a rational project predicated on the study of philosophy and the employment of reason, but the goal of this endeavor was the knowledge of God to the extent this is feasible for humans. The knowledge of God, in turn, was expressed in actions that imitated God's perfection in the sociopolitical sphere. The dominant theme of medieval Jewish philosophical ethics was the meaning of happiness and the ways to attain it. Within the discourse on happiness, Jewish philosophers reflected on the meaning of being human; the relationship between the body and soul; the conditioning of character through acquisition of virtues, desirable virtues, and undesirable vices; the human propensity to sin; and God's rewards and punishments in his works and in the afterlife. These themes were discussed in diverse literary genres, such as self-standing philosophical treatise, commentaries on Aristotle's *Ethics*, supercommentaries on Averroes' commentaries on the *Ethics*, biblical commentaries, and ethical wills. The major contributor to Jewish philosophical ethics was Moses Maimonides (d. 1204) who effected the most extensive integration of Aristotelianism and rabbinic Judaism. Post-Maimonidean Jewish philosophical ethics in Christendom was framed in the context of the interreligious debate on the salvation of the individual soul, a contested terrain between Judaism and Christianity.

### **Jewish Ethics: A Religio-Philosophic Discourse**

Within medieval Jewish philosophy, ethics holds a peculiar status. On the one hand, the number of Jewish philosophical texts devoted exclusively to

ethics (i.e., a theory of character formation and right action) was relatively small. On the other hand, ethical reflections were inseparable from metaphysics, cosmology, psychology, epistemology, politics, and theology so that ethics was inherently linked to reflections on the origin and structure of the world, the nature of human beings, the purpose of human life, the production and effects of knowledge, philosophy as a way of life, the ideal political regime, and the relationship between humans and God. The broad scope of Jewish philosophical ethics was especially evident from the second half of the twelfth century, after it absorbed the Aristotelian classification of the sciences. For Aristotle and the Aristotelians, ethics belonged to practical philosophy that studies voluntary actions and involves deliberations about things that are subject to change. Although ethics studies the individual and politics studies on society and state, ethics and politics were closely intertwined: ethics has social dimensions and politics is ethical.

Jewish ethics evolved through the interaction with non-Jewish philosophy in medieval Islam and Christendom. Utilizing concepts and theories articulated first by non-Jews, Jewish philosophers adapted them to the case of Judaism, often in order to argue the spiritual superiority of Judaism over the competing religions and schools of thought. Since Jewish philosophers held that, in principle, human reason and divine revelation cannot be in conflict with each other, non-Jewish sources were used to the extent that they were deemed to be true. If an apparent conflict between the ethical ideals of Judaism and other ethical teachings arose, it was due either to misunderstanding of philosophy or to misinterpretation of the divinely revealed tradition.

The goal of Jewish ethics was to produce the virtuous individual who possesses the character traits necessary for the attainment of wisdom that culminates in the knowledge of God. To be virtuous, one had to observe divinely revealed commandment, but such observance was predicated on holding true opinions about God and the world, knowledge that could be obtained only through the study of philosophy. Jewish ethics, thus, posited a dialectical relationship between religion and philosophy: the cultivation of the virtuous

character was a rational project predicated on the study of philosophy and the employment of reason, but the goal of this endeavor was the knowledge of God to the extent this is feasible for humans. The knowledge of God, in turn, was expressed in actions that imitate God's perfections in the sociopolitical sphere. Thus, ethics exemplifies the fundamental compatibility between divinely revealed Judaism and the pursuit of wisdom in medieval Jewish philosophy.

The dominant theme of philosophical ethics was the meaning of happiness (*hatzlaha*; *osher*) and the ways to attain it. In accord with Aristotle, happiness was understood to mean human flourishing, or well-being, and it was regarded as an objective standard rooted in the nature of human beings, a standard that organizes all activities into a meaningful pattern for the duration of one's entire life. The happy or flourishing life is a life in which what is objectively good for human beings is attained when they conduct themselves in a particular manner and undertake those activities that promote what is objectively good for humans as members of the human species. Within the discourse on happiness, Jewish philosophers reflected on the meaning of being human; the relationship between the body and soul; the conditioning of the character through acquisition of virtues, desirable virtues, and undesirable vices; the human propensity to sin; and God's rewards and punishments in this world and in the afterlife. The views of medieval philosophers about happiness changed over time, reflecting changing historical circumstances and varying interactions with non-Jewish schools of thought.

Jewish ethical writings were composed of various literary genres. One literary type was the self-standing treatise devoted primarily to ethical issues as articulated by the prevailing philosophical conventions. Maimonides inaugurated a second literary genre when he included his ethical reflections as part of his legal works, thus demonstrating that Aristotelian ethics was integral to Judaism. Maimonides paved the way for Jewish commentaries on Aristotle's *Ethics*, a third literary genre, mostly written as supercommentaries on Averroes' commentaries on the *Ethics*. Whereas these commentaries were composed for the small

intellectual elite of trained philosophers, they influenced the larger educated public when their ideas were incorporated in philosophical commentaries on the Bible. Thus, the biblical commentary itself served as vehicle for the dissemination of philosophical ethics. A fifth literary genre for Jewish ethics was the "ethical will," namely, texts of moral instruction technically addressed to the son of the author but intended for the education of the larger reading public. Finally, philosophical ethics was popularized when authors trained in Jewish philosophy composed rhymed prose to critique certain social classes or expose social ills. By using satire and parody, they eloquently and wittily inspired the reading public to cultivate certain virtues and avoid certain vices. Although these texts are not technically philosophical, they reflected the philosophical education of their authors and the philosophic sensibility they intended to disseminate. Through these genres, ethics played an important role in the formation of medieval Jewish culture and education. Ethics was an applied science par excellence.

### Rationalist Religious Ethics in Islam

Saadia Gaon (d. 941) inaugurated Jewish philosophical ethics in the tenth treatise of *al Amānāt wa-l-i'tiqadāt* (*The Book of Doctrines and Beliefs*) (Rosenblatt 1948). Saadia wrote this text to defend rabbinic Judaism against the critique of the Karaites, Jews who regarded Scripture alone as normative source of Jewish law and who denied the authority of rabbinic Oral Law. Following the example of the Mu'tazilite school of *kalām* (i.e., Muslim speculative theology), Saadia attempted to demonstrate that rational arguments are compatible with Scriptural and rabbinic teachings. As a Jewish Mu'tazilite, he was concerned with the themes of divine unity, divine justice, rewards and punishments, and good and evil actions. Saadia was the first to introduce philosophical anthropology as the basis of Jewish ethics and the first to note that the goal of Jewish philosophic learning is the attainment of happiness.

Saadia establishes that happiness pertains to the quality of the human soul, and therefore, he examines various theories on the nature of the human soul and its association with the body. According to Saadia, humans are a temporary combination of two substances – body and soul – both created by God and are united by him. The soul is not strictly speaking a non-corporeal substance; rather, it is made of a refined substance that is not devoid of matter altogether, even though it is qualitatively different from the corporeal body, “a dark place” in which the luminous soul is imprisoned for the duration of its life on earth. The human soul needs the body as its instrument of action, and therefore, the well-being of the soul is predicated on the well-being of the body, although the latter requires control of the body by the soul.

The interdependence of body and soul explains why Saadia insists on the doctrine of bodily resurrection: even though on earth the two substances separate and the soul of the righteous continues to live on as immortal substance, in the end of time as a result of divine intervention, the individual soul will be recombined with its corresponding body. For the duration of human life on earth, a proper balance between the soul and body constitutes the morally good life, for which one is rewarded with eternal life and the recombination of body and soul in the eschatological remote future. The ethically good life is thus a balanced life in which all the aspects of the human composite are given appropriate expression within a hierarchy of goods. The ideal practice that yields the good life is rooted in moderation and self-control, but Saadia does not provide the details how to achieve the ideal balance because the moral path is already charted by the precepts of the revealed Torah as interpreted by the rabbis.

During the tenth and eleventh centuries, two strands shaped Jewish philosophical ethics in Islam: the sociocultural program known as *adab* and systematic philosophy (*falsafa*), especially the blend of Neoplatonism and Aristotelianism generated by the Ismāʿīlīs. The *adab* culture was based on knowledge culled from prose books of tales, fables, anecdotes, practical advice, and popularization of scientific information, all gleaned

from the philosophic and scientific heritage of the Hellenistic world interspersed with some material from India. In the *adab* program, the Hellenistic ideals of moderation and self-control were combined with educational ideals that fit the needs of the Muslim state and the peculiarities of the Muslim religion. The philosophers (*falāsifa*) shared the *adab* culture but went beyond it by establishing ethics as “the science of character” (‘ *ilm al-Ahklāq*) (Fakhry 1994). These speculations were based on Aristotle’s *Nicomachean Ethics* which was translated into Arabic by Ishāq b. Ḥunayn (d. 911). The most thorough reworking of Greek ethics in Islam was articulated by al-Fārābī (d. 950), who composed a commentary on Aristotle’s *Nicomachean Ethics* (no longer extant) as well as systematic reflections on happiness in several works. His fusion of Aristotelian ethics, Plato’s political philosophy, and Plotinus metaphysics will exert deep influence on Moses Maimonides (d. 1204), but until then Jewish philosophers were influenced by the Ismāʿīlī strand of Shīʿite Islam whose, spread by the religious brotherhood from Basra, *Ikhwān al-Ṣafāʾ* (Sincere Brethren of Purity). Their philosophic encyclopedia blended elements from Neo-Pythagoreanism, Neoplatonism, Hermeticism, and Aristotelianism, an amalgam that did not appear to threaten the religious mentality of Muslims or Jews, because it retained the belief in the personal immortality and viewed the pursuit of intellectual perfection as a religious activity.

Solomon ibn Gabirol (d. 1058) in Muslim Spain is a typical example of a Jewish thinker whose ethics combined the *adab* culture with the Aristotelian “science of character” and Ismāʿīlī metaphysics. Gabirol drew on Ḥunayn b. Ishāq’s collection of aphoristic, biographical, gnomic, and anecdotal literature entitled *Adab al-Falāsifa*, which was translated into Hebrew under the title *Musrey ha-Philosophim* (*The Moral Teachings of the Philosophers*). For this reason, another collection of Arabic moral aphorisms that circulated in a Hebrew translation under the title *Mivhar ha-Penanim* (*Choice of Pearls*) was attributed to Solomon ibn Gabirol. From the vast encyclopedic knowledge of Arabic learning, Ibn Gabirol culled his philosophic-scientific knowledge, molding it

all into his own philosophy that had a strong Neoplatonic tinge, while also departing from prevailing Neoplatonism on some important points. His *Iṣlākh al-Akhlāq* (*Tikkun Middot ha-Nefesh; Improvement of Moral Qualities*) is a distinct Jewish contribution to the “science of character” in Islamic philosophy.

For Gabirol, human temperaments are rooted in human physiology, as understood by the medical ethics of Galen and Hippocrates. Hence, moral training is biologically based. Echoing a common theme in the writings of the *Ikhwān*, Gabirol presents the human species as a microcosm in which the four elements and the four humors reflect the mathematical assumptions of the Pythagorean tradition. The rational soul is defined as “pure, stainless, and simple,” and the proper management of the body by the soul should exhibit the control of the rational soul. Human well-being in this life requires the hegemony of reason over the passions and appetites of the body. If reason fails, one falls prey to the irrational desire of the body and loses the “enduring happiness which man can reason in the intellectual world, the world to come” (Wise 1966 [1902]: 31). The principles that underlie proper human conduct constitute the medicine of the soul, which is analogous to the medicine of the body. The wise man is like “skillful physician who prepares prescriptions, taking of every medicine a divine quality” (Wise 1966 [1902]: 34).

The ultimate end of this medical management is not life in the temporal order but rather the everlasting existing of the rational soul in the intelligible realm. The ideal person is one who reaches a well-balanced condition of the body and soul: he makes the rational soul govern his passions. The ideal virtues include meekness, modesty, capacity to love, compassion and mercy, cheerfulness and good disposition, good will and contentment, alertness, generosity, and valor. The vices include pride, impudence, capacity to hate, cruelty, wrath, envy, sloth, niggardliness, and cowardice. The virtues are generally in accord with rabbinic tradition, except for the virtue of magnanimity, which reflects his courtier social setting. The moral life means the conditioning (or “improvement”) of the soul’s desire: by

perfecting oneself morally and intellectually, the human soul can attain the ultimate religious goal of human life.

Other Jewish philosophers in the eleventh century – Joseph ibn Zaddik and Abraham bar Hiyya – shared this outlook, whose most elaborate expression can be found in the work of Bahya ibn Paquda (d. 1156) *Farā’id al-Qulūb* (*Hovot ha-Levavot, Duties of the Heart*) (Mansoor 1973). Ibn Paquda shared the intellectualist religiosity of the Jewish thinkers and the Neoplatonic metaphysics presupposed by them, but he was critical of a superficial endorsement of the *adab* culture among the Jewish courtiers. He held that the essence of being human is the intellect and human well-being depends on the excellence of the intellect. Since the rational soul does not belong to this world, the happiness of the soul cannot be experienced in this world, but only in the afterlife. The quality of one’s life will determine whether or not the individual rational soul will attain the desired perfection. Bahya’s book is most similar in orientation to al-Ġazālī’s *Kimyati Saadat* (*The Alchemy of Happiness*) whose goal was to show how life in accordance with the teaching of the Qur’an leads to love of God, the ultimate end of human life. Like al-Ġazālī, Bahya offers a therapeutic program that can either prevent the sickness of the soul or halt it in case sickness takes root. Yet the proper care of the soul is feasible only for those who possess an accurate knowledge of the structure of the universe created by God and a correct understanding of the human condition.

By the mid-twelfth century, the notion that happiness pertains to the perfection of the soul and that it is attainable for those who observe the Torah and ensure that their reason controls their emotion and bodily urges was shared by many Jewish philosophers. However, the more Jewish philosophers gained access to the teachings of Aristotle, the more they understood the perfection of the soul exclusively in terms of perfection of the rational soul, namely, the intellect. Consequently, reflections on virtue and happiness were now intertwined with an elaborate theory of knowledge and much of it was derived from the Hellenistic commentators on Aristotle.

The most extensive integration of Aristotelianism and Jewish ethics was effected by Moses Maimonides. Although he was deeply indebted to Muslim and Jewish predecessors, especially al-Fārābī, Ibn Bājja, Ibn Gabirol, and Ibn Pakuada, Maimonides created a new ethical discourse on virtue and happiness by making explicit the Aristotelian foundation of rabbinic ethics (Weiss 1991). For Maimonides, Aristotle's teachings, to the extent that they are true, are perfectly compatible with the revealed Torah and that as such they are authoritative to Jews. Moreover, Maimonides claims that the Torah should be read as an esoteric text whose inner meaning is identical with Aristotle's physics and metaphysics. The Torah teaches philosophical truths necessary for the attainment of happiness in the language of human beings, namely, through figurative speech. Finally, Maimonides claims that the Torah established the ideal political regime in which human happiness can be attained, provided one know how to interpret the Torah correctly and understands its philosophical meaning.

Maimonides adopts the Aristotelian notion that to become morally virtuous, humans must practice the middle way (Weiss and Butterworth 1975), but he also departed from the Aristotelian ideal in some important respects. Maimonides agrees with Aristotle that a human being is born with certain disposition, due to a particular material makeup, and that humans can acquire good character traits by habitually practicing good deeds. When humans act "just right," they acquire the intrinsic states of character out of which flow good actions. Maimonides has to work out the tension between moderation and supererogation that existed in rabbinic moral philosophy. He does so by asserting that the middle between extremes characterizes God's mode of operation; the ways of God describe those moderate traits. The Torah commands humans to walk in God's path, namely, to choose the mean between extreme (Maimonides 1949, Hilkhot Deot 28:9).

The moral virtues require the exercise of practical reasoning, and its excellence is the virtue of practical wisdom. On the surface, it seems that practical reasoning is unnecessary because the Torah itself determines what the right action is in

each and every case. Yet practical reason played an important role in Maimonides' virtue ethics (Kreisel 1999). On the basis of al-Fārābī's *Aphorisms of the Statesman*, Maimonides speaks about the practical intellect ('*aql al-`amali*') as a faculty involved in ethics and politics, enabling humans to govern, and to produce "knowledge of the regimen to be adopted by the individual or by society in the pursuit of its well being" (Kreisel 1999: 75). Maimonides, however, subsumed practical reason into the activity of the imagination, a mental capacity that is particularly strong among prophets and legislators, all except the Prophet Moses, whose imagination was perfect, but whose prophetic experience itself did not involve the imagination. It was only the communication of Moses' perfect cognitive experience to the people of Israel at Sinai that involved the power of imagination, translating conceptual knowledge into figurative speech. Much of Maimonides' philosophical ethics focuses on analysis of the perfection of Moses' prophecy that anchors the perfection of Mosaic Law.

Practical wisdom is indeed an intellectual virtue that features prominently in the good life, but it does not constitute the ultimate end of human life; that status is reserved to theoretical wisdom. To be fully perfect, the human intellect must transcend the feature that makes it human, namely, its association with the body (Kellner 1991). By cognizing the intelligible order of reality, the human rational potential is both actualized and substantialized. The perfect intellect – the acquired intellect – is a substance separable from the body as Aristotle hinted in *De anima* III:3. This state of being is what the rabbis designated as the world-to-come (*olam ha-ba*), which Maimonides defines as "the ultimate end toward which all our efforts ought to be devoted . . . the ultimate and perfect reward, the final bliss that will suffer neither interruption nor diminution" (Mishneh Torah, Hilkhot Teshuvah 9:2). Maimonides' interpretation of *olam ha-ba* diminishes the apocalyptic and eschatological features of that concept in rabbinic Judaism, since *olam ha-ba* is but a state of being of the perfected rational soul. But who can achieve such elevated state of being? Maimonides leaves the answer to this question rather obscure, giving rise



to ongoing controversy. In general, Maimonides understood *olam ha-ba* as an ideal whose pursuit gives direction to human life, but whose attainment is nearly impossible because it requires acquisition of the sciences, as well as acting in accordance with the Torah's prescriptions. Such restrictive interpretation of *olam ha-ba* makes the traditional belief in personal immortality highly suspect. While Maimonides listed this belief among the thirteen dogmas of Judaism, he viewed it as necessary for the life of the Jewish polity rather than a true belief.

### Jewish Ethics in Medieval Christendom

In the thirteenth century, rationalist vision of the philosophical life disseminated among the learned Jewish elites in Spain, Provence, and Italy through translations of philosophical texts from Arabic into Hebrew, philosophic-scientific encyclopedias, summaries and paraphrases of philosophical texts, and philosophical commentaries on the Bible that implemented Maimonides' hermeneutical principles. Demographic and political changes shifted Jewish life from Islam to Christendom, but Jewish thinkers perpetuated the terminology, themes, authoritative texts, and outlook of the Judeo-Arabic philosophical tradition. Jewish philosophical ethics was now composed in a Christian environment and written exclusively in Hebrew. Jewish thinkers helped to translate the Aristotelian corpus from Arabic and Hebrew into Latin, but, in turn, Aristotelian scholasticism would shape the Jewish-Christian intellectual and religious encounter. Whereas in Islam philosophic ethics generated political theories about the ideal regime necessary for the attainment of happiness, in the Christian West, philosophical ethics was configured in the context of the interreligious debate about the salvation of the individual soul, a contested terrain between Judaism and Christianity.

Shem Tov Falaquera (d. 1290) in Christian Spain illustrates the transition of Judeo-Islamic philosophic tradition to the new Christian milieu (Jospe 1988). Falaquera's *Reshit Hokhmah* (*Beginning of Wisdom*) was based on al-Fārābī's

*Enumeration of the Sciences*, and it illustrated how philosophic knowledge constitutes human happiness: through the study of philosophy, one could acquire correct knowledge about the world and the proper ways to conduct oneself in the world. Falaquera, who was familiar with Aristotle's *Ethics*, radicalizes the legacy of Maimonides by clarifying that moral perfection in itself does *not* constitute the ultimate end of human life. The ultimate end of human life is contemplation of necessary truths, culminating in the knowledge of God. Taking his cue from the philosophical elitism of Ibn Bājja, Falaquera (even more than Maimonides) highlights the alienation of the philosopher, who devotes his life to the contemplation of truth, and the uneducated masses who pursue imaginary happiness. Falaquera proposed asceticism conflict with the political nature of humans, emphasized by Plato, Aristotle, al-Fārābī, and Maimonides, and even calls into question the need of humans to propagate the species through sex. Since female sexuality is one of the major detriments to philosophic happiness, Falaquera's book is replete with misogynist comments (Jospe 1986). In general, Jewish Aristotelian philosophers excluded women from the attainment of intellectual perfection and the blissful joy of the world-to-come.

The philosophic ethos was not only a cultural posture; it also affected the interpretation of Scripture as the followers of Maimonides applied his general hermeneutical principles to the interpretation of Scripture. One such example was the Provençal thinker Joseph ibn Kaspi (d. c. 1335) whose knowledge of Aristotle's *Ethics* was derived not only from Arabic summaries of the text, as was the case of Falaquera, but also from Averroes' *Middle Commentary on the Ethics*, which was now available in a Hebrew translation by Samuel ben Judah of Marseilles (Berman 1967), who also translated Plato's *Republic* into Hebrew. The availability of these two texts in Hebrew during the 1320s would change the course of Jewish ethical discourse. Ibn Kaspi summarized this rather cumbersome translation in his *Terumat ha-Kesef* (*Offering of Silver*) in addition to a digest of Aristotle's *Ethics* (Mesch 1975). He regarded the *Ethics* as a practical guide



for the urbane, philosophically sophisticated Jews who wished to harmonize rabbinic Judaism and philosophy. Entitled *Yoreh Deah (Teacher of Morals)*, Ibn Kaspi's "ethical will" to his son, Solomon, is a kind of Jewish *adab* literature (Abrahams 1954 [1926]). Referring to *Adab al-Falāsifa* of Ishāq b. Ḥunayn and to Aristotle's *Ethics*, Ibn Kaspi claims that that the Torah itself (both Written and Oral), if interpreted correctly with the help of Maimonides' *Guide* and Aristotle's works (especially *Physics*, *Metaphysics*, and the *Ethics*), enables one's soul to experience the world-to-come, the *summum bonum (hato'v ha-shalem)*. The very commandments of the Torah perfect the practical and theoretical aspects of the soul, leading one to eternal life. For Ibn Kaspi, then, there is no tension whatsoever between Aristotle's *Ethics* and the Torah, because "the Greek philosopher lived during the Second Temple, and he learned from the Jewish Sages all the true things that he wrote" (Abrahams 1954 [1926]: 133). In fact, Aristotle "had presumed to interpret our precious truths, attributing the exposition to himself, while he stole it all from the books written on the subject by King Solomon and others" (Abrahams 1954: 141).

An even more profound and extensive engagement with Aristotle's *Ethics* was articulated by Levi ben Gershom (Gersonides), the most original Jewish philosopher whose astronomical expertise brought him to be associated with the Papal court in Avignon during the 1320s. A scientist who was at the forefront of the study of mathematical astronomy as well as a serious practitioner of astrology, Gersonides construed ethics as "a necessary human response to the randomness of this reality through new form of reading the Bible" (Green 2016: 9). His biblical commentaries, composed after 1328, are derived from the biblical texts practical and useful "lessons" (*toalot*) and showed how the character of biblical narratives exemplifies specific virtues. Thus, the practical virtue of diligence (*haritzut*) is illustrated in the conduct of the patriarch Abraham (Horwitz 1997), and the practical virtue of endeavor (*hishtadlut*) is demonstrated in the conduct of several biblical characters: Isaac's endeavor to bless Esau, Rebecca's attempt to ensure that her son Jacob

will be blessed, Joseph's endeavor to bring his father and family to Egypt, and Miriam's attempt to save her brother Moses. What is novel about Gersonides's ethics is the attempt to root moral perfection in physical perfection, that is, to provide a biological (i.e., scientific) explanation to moral conduct (Gaziel 2008). Gersonides went beyond Maimonides' *Eight Chapters*, by highlighting a "new layer of virtues such as *hishtadlut* (endeavor), *haritzut* (diligence), and *hitkhakmut* (cunning) in certain strategems which are focused on creating the material strength necessary to overcome the random whims of fortune. None of these virtues claims to know or change the decree of the stars with human force, but through physical and material strength one can strive to evade or withstand its impact" (Green 2016: 33). Ethics was thus another expression of Gersonides' rationalist worldview.

Although Jewish philosophers became more familiar with Aristotle's *Ethics* in the early fourteenth century, the science of ethics remained secondary in importance to physics and metaphysics for the following reasons. First, with respect to ethics, there was little conflict between traditional Judaism and philosophy; they both shared the pursuit of wisdom, the ethos of self-control, and the ideal of moderation. The main challenge of Aristotelianism lay in physics and metaphysics, and for this reason, Jewish philosophers devoted their attention to these sciences. Second, in the Aristotelian schema of the sciences, "practical philosophy" was secondary in importance to "theoretical philosophy," and ethics was viewed either as the preparatory acquisition of the virtues or as the application of theoretical knowledge to social reality. And third, in Judaism, the praxis of religious life was determined by *halakhah*. The Jewish philosophers lived by the strictures of Jewish law but after Maimonides none of them made a significant contribution to the study of *halakhah*. The science of ethics was thus absorbed into philosophy of law, rather than viewed as an independent science that charts its own praxis.

During the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics* began to engage

Jewish philosophers more than ever before. In 1405, the *Ethics* was translated anew into Hebrew by Rabbi Meir Alguades, the Chief Rabbi of Castilian Jewry and a personal physician to several Castilian kings. He consulted not the Arabic original of Averroes' *Middle Commentary* but also the Latin translation by Hermann the German, which had been composed in 1240 and was the standard version among Christian scholastics, the original translation of Samuel ben Judah and another anonymous translation, which was ascribed not to al-Fārābī, the actual author, but to Thomas Aquinas (Berman 1978, 1988). Thus, by the early fifteenth century, the *Ethics* was available in Hebrew in a hybrid text that fused elements from Ibn Rushd, al-Fārābī, and Aquinas, and this Hebrew translation generated new Hebrew commentaries by Joseph ibn Shem Tov in the 1440s (Regev 1983). He composed a short commentary, a summary on *Ethics*, and eventually a long commentary. On the basis of these studies, he was able to compose *Kevod Elohim (The Glory of God)*, a systematic attempt to prove that Aristotle's ethics and Judaism were perfectly compatible (Ibn Shem Tov 1556). As a financier in the court of King Enrique IV, Ibn Shem Tov was familiar with Latin commentaries on the *Ethics* and with the function of the *Ethics* as a guide to right conduct among the governing elite. Like the authors of the *adab* literature in Islam, who were interested in the *Ethics* because it showed how to wed wisdom and politics, Ibn Shem Tov appreciated the relevance of the *Ethics* to his own life at the court. Although by the 1440s the Jewish courtiers lost their political power in Spain, the *Ethics* could still provide them with ideological justification to their elitist self-perception (Tirosh-Rothschild 1998: 212–224).

For Ibn Shem Tov, the *Ethics* is to be read as a recommendation for the social-moral life. What Aristotle says about human happiness (both practical and theoretical aspects) pertains merely to temporal life in this world, because as a pagan, he did not have access to the revelation of Scriptures. Jews should consult Aristotle if they wish to know how to conduct themselves in this world, especially, if they wish to hold their position in the court. Aristotle was correct to state that human happiness does not lie in the acquisition of wealth,

power, honor, fame, or bodily pleasures, as most people assume, but in an activity of the soul in accordance to virtue. He was also correct to subordinate the moral virtues to the intellectual ones and to place speculative reason above practical reason. But most important, Aristotle was right when he emphasized that only the knowledge of God constitutes ultimate happiness. Through the contemplation of God, man lives not only human life, but the “divine life which is the most happy.”

Taking his cue from Thomas Aquinas' commentary on the *Ethics*, Ibn Shem Tov argues that Aristotle spoke only about temporal, imperfect happiness in this world, which is *not* the ultimate end of human life. The ultimate felicity or perfect happiness is to be found only in the afterlife and is only attainable by following the Torah. The distinction between two orders of happiness – an imperfect, natural, and temporal happiness and a perfect, supernatural, and eternal happiness correspond to the distinction between the natural and the supernatural, between philosophy and revealed knowledge, between conventional law and divine law, and between reason and faith. This outlook was shared by most Jewish thinkers in the second half of the fifteenth century, giving Jewish philosophy a much more traditional bent.

Alguades' new translation of the *Ethics* together with Ibn Shem Tov's commentary became the standard text among Sephardic Jewish intellectuals in the late fifteenth and throughout the sixteenth centuries. Isaac Arama (d. c. 1492), for example, used it extensively and adopted Ibn Shem Tov's views (Septimus 1999). Like Ibn Shem Tov and Aquinas, Arama also distinguished between two orders of happiness – temporal and transcendent. With great respect for the practical reasoning of the *Ethics*, Arama attempted to show that the moral teachings of the Torah were compatible with it. Whether the Torah is “this-worldly” or “other-worldly” was one of the bones of contention in the Jewish-Christian polemics. Arama was involved in various polemical exchanges, and he reports a debate with a Christian preacher in which Arama used the practical reasoning of the Torah as a claim for its superiority over the Christian doctrine of grace. In the fifteenth century, the *Ethics* was commonly

used by Jewish philosophers who viewed it either as response of practical wisdom, useful especially for the ruling classes, or as a text that showed the compatibility of rational knowledge and religious faith or as support against Christian polemicists. In the last decade of the fifteenth century, another Hebrew translation of the *Ethics* with a commentary was composed by Baruch ibn Ya'ish, indicating not only the continued Jewish interest in the ethics but also familiarity with new humanists' translations of the *Ethics* (Tirosh-Samuels 2003: 423).

The Italian humanists translated the *Ethics* anew and composed new commentaries, comparing Aristotle's analysis of human well-being with post-Aristotelian moral philosophies, especially Stoicism and Epicureanism (Trinkaus 1965, 1970). In 1416–1417, Leonardo Bruni composed a new Latin translation to the translation of Robert Grosseteste's text, and in 1457, the Byzantine humanist, Johannes Argyropoulos, translated the *Ethics* into Latin from the Greek original. The humanists in Italy were obsessed with the meaning and purpose of human life, perhaps because they did not belong to any existing social institution or more personally, because of the precariousness of the tumultuous politics of Italian city-states in the fifteenth century. The basic insecurity of the humanists led them to adopt Stoic themes and postures toward the vicissitudes of life. The humanist discourse on happiness has a noticeable pessimistic strain and "snobbish aloofness" even when it is expressed by people who were successful in politics and quite wealthy. The Stoics' emphasis on virtue as the only good, their rejection of external goods, and the counsel of apathy were easily combined with Christian values and postures. The *Ethics* continued to inspire European translations into vernacular languages as well. It was translated into Italian by Bernardo Segni (1504–1558), and in the 1540s and 1550s, the Italian Benedictine scholar, Joachim Perion, an avowed Ciceronian, translated the *Ethics* once more into Italian, provoking much criticism from other humanists. His translation led to yet another Italian translation published in Venice in 1558 and later in Paris by the French humanist Denys Lambin (Lines 2013; Miller 2012).

Jewish intellectuals in Italy were fully aware of the humanist movement and in some cases contributed to it by teaching leading humanists and introducing them to Jewish and Muslim philosophical sources and to kabbalah, the Jewish mystical tradition (Idel 1983). Yohanan Alemanno (d. 1504) is an example of a Jewish humanist who embraces the new cultural sensibilities and involves himself in the expansion of the discourse on happiness. His *Song of Solomon Virtues* was composed as the introduction to his commentary on the Song of Songs entitled *Hesheq Shelomo (The Desire of Solomon)* at the request of Pico della Mirandola in 1488–1489. The biblical king was considered the author of the Song of Songs, which the medieval scholars (Jewish and Christians) largely interpreted as an allegorical text about the progression of the soul, culminating in the mystical union with the Active Intellect or with Christ. Pico was interested in the Song of Songs as a guide for the attainment of intellectual perfection in this life. Alemanno translated for Pico the commentary of Moses Narboni on Ibn Ṭufayl's *Hai ibn Yaqzan* and composed his own commentary on the Song of Songs to help Pico better grasp the meaning of the allegorical text.

Alemanno composed the *Song of Solomon's Virtues* to present a Jewish alternative to Renaissance Platonism (Lesley 1976). He believed that a proper exposition of Solomon's successful attainment of perfection would inspire other Jews to follow the rigorous but not impossible program to achieve perfection within the boundaries of Jewish life. As a biography of an illustrious historical persona, it was also in accord with the humanist attempt to draw lessons from history. To instruct Jews of his time how to attain perfection in this life, Alemanno composed the detailed analysis of King Solomon's virtues and achievements, culminating in conjunctions with God, or more precisely with the six Sefirah, Tife'eret, the center of the Sefirot that emanated from God. Combining Aristotle's analysis of the virtues in the *Ethics* with post-Aristotelian treatment of the Roman rhetoricians, especially Cicero, Alemanno articulates an elaborate analysis of human virtues and the requisite knowledge that enables one to acquire the virtues. The virtues, the arts, and the

sciences are all arranged in an architectonic order from the lowest to the highest. This structure comprises a “ladder of perfections” that Solomon himself ascended and which the reader is invited to imitate.

The impact of humanism on Jewish thought was evident not only in Italy but also in the Ottoman Empire where Jewish refugees from Iberia reconstituted Jewish cultural life and consolidated the medieval intellectual heritage. This community absorbed individuals who for decades lived as Crypto-Jews under the watchful eye of the Inquisition. When these ex-conversos joined the Jewish fold, they introduced their coreligionists to university learning in which Aristotle’s *Ethics* was paramount. The most important contribution to Jewish ethics in the sixteenth century was made by Moses Almosnino (d. c. 1581), a teacher, preacher, judge, and communal leader in Salonica (Bnaya 1996). His new commentary on the *Ethics*, *Peney Moshe (The Countenance of Moses)*, shows intimate familiarity with a long list of Christian commentaries on the *Ethics* by Eustratius, Albert the Great, Thomas Aquinas, Gerald Odonis, John Buridan, Walter Burley, Faber Stapulensis, Jacobus (Jacques Lefvred’Etaples), and Agostino Nifo. Relying on these commentaries is indicative not only of the breadth of Almosnino’s knowledge but also of the continued interest in Aristotle’s work during the sixteenth century.

Like other humanist scholars, Almosnino devoted much effort to determine the correct text of Aristotle’s *Ethics* by comparing the textual variants at his disposal (Tirosch-Samuelson 2003: 426–438). Yet the main contribution of *Peney Moshe* lies not in philological observations but in the attempt to anchor the *Ethics* in the Bible and rabbinic literature while disseminating an ethics derived from late scholastic commentaries. The commentary on the *Ethics* enabled Almosnino to preach and teach that moral perfection for Jews could not come except through a unique blend of philosophy and faith. The teaching of Aristotle, so Almosnino argued, is best exemplified by the moral teachings of King

David and King Solomon, recorded in Psalms, Proverbs, and Ecclesiastes as interpreted by the rabbinic sages. Like Alemanno, Almosnino portrays King Solomon as the embodiment of the Renaissance ideal *homo universalis*, the wisest of all ancient sages, and claims that the religious poetry of King David compares favorably to Greek and Roman poetry. The very attempt to prove that the Bible equals the aesthetic, moral, and intellectual achievements of the ancients necessitates a rereading of Scripture against this background of humanist culture. The result was a distinct Jewish moral philosophy that fused Jewish, Aristotelian, Platonic, and Stoic elements. In the ancient Jewish sources, Almosnino rediscovered the humanist emphasis on the dignity and worth of the human personality, the primacy of the human will, and the striving for personal immortality through cultivation of moral virtues. As much as intense suffering made the Iberian Jews receptive to the humanist emphasis on human emotions and passions, so did the Bible provide them with evidence that the virtuous man who lives by the Torah is able to transcend the limitations of this world.

In regard to the moral virtues, Almosnino takes a different approach than Maimonides and his Greek source, Aristotle. For Almosnino, the moral life is not only a means to an end but the very core of religious life in this world. The moral life that is guided by practical reason is informed by values of religious tradition. By imitating divine perfections revealed in the Torah, the devotee can acquire the moral virtues and attain the necessary self-spiritualization that leads to *devequt* in this world and eternal life after death. Moreover, for Almosnino, the moral life of action is the very arena where one manifests the perfection of the will and the total devotion to God. Hence, the highest virtue in this life is not the intellectual virtue of philosophical wisdom but rather the virtue of prudence. Such an approach is closer to the Christian understanding of the moral life than to Maimonides’. Unlike Maimonides, Almosnino views love as the perfection of the will and, therefore, the perfection of practical

reason. The love of God belongs to the realm or praxis (*ma'aseh*) rather than theoria (*iyyun*). The ultimate end of human life is the love of God, a love of the honorable that enables the human will to resist the passions. It is through the love of God that one attains the perfection of all virtues in this world and for which one is rewarded with eternal life. The love of God is everlasting and inexhaustible because it is an unconditional love. Love is not communication between two perfect intellects but love of the infinite details of the beloved. Only a perfect will that can discern the infinite variations of particulars can love God, the most perfect will, unconditionally. Those who unconditionally love the Torah, the manifestations of God's infinite love, love God and enjoy everlasting salvation.

Almosnino's religious ethics was expressed didactically in his *Regimento de la vida* (*Sefer Hanahagat Ha-Hayyim; The Book of the Regimen of Living*), which he composed in Spanish with a Hebrew introduction for the instruction of his nephew (Zemke 2004). Moral, intellectual, and religious training, which lead to human well-being, must begin at a young age since the disciplined acquisition of virtues liberates the soul from its corporeal conditioning, restoring it to its heavenly abode. The book was most popular in the community of ex-conversos in Amsterdam and was printed in Latin characters in 1729. But it was in this very community that medieval Jewish philosophical ethics encountered the most devastating critique when Spinoza (d. 1677) challenged the identification of Torah and Wisdom that undergirded the entire discourse. His ethical theory is deeply rooted in medieval philosophy (Jewish as well as Christian) but also resonates with Stoic teachings that enjoyed significant revival during the sixteenth century.

With Spinoza, the premodern discourse on virtue and happiness within the Jewish religious tradition reaches closure. Although the discourse changed over time in accordance with Judaism's interaction with surrounding civilizations, the discourse perpetuated certain themes. Jewish approach to happiness has much in common with Aristotle's view since both Jews and the

Greek philosophers agree that happiness is predicated on the cultivation of virtues and the attainment of knowledge. At the core of the Jewish conception of happiness is the identification of Torah and Wisdom, which entails that Jews pursue wisdom as part of their loyalty to God. As Jews encounter philosophy and its related sciences in medieval Islam, they expand the category of "wisdom" and devise new courses of study for the education of the virtuous person. These changes provoked debates about the curriculum and generated the rise of alternatives to rationalist philosophy – kabbalah. Yet both philosophy and kabbalah agree that the ultimate end of life pertains to the soul and that it can be experienced fully only in the afterlife. Since focus on the salvation of the soul was also the bone of contention between Jews and Christians and the cause of much of Jewish suffering in the late Middle Ages, the debate on happiness shaped the interaction between the two monotheistic religions, even though Jewish intellectuals expressed themselves in terms borrowed from their cultural environment. Aristotle's *Ethics*, the major text that analyzed virtue and happiness, provided the conceptual vocabulary for reflections on virtue and happiness in the matrix of the Jewish religion.

## Cross-References

- ▶ [Aristotle, Arabic](#)
- ▶ [Ethics, Arabic](#)
- ▶ [al-Fārābī, Abū Naṣr](#)
- ▶ [Happiness](#)
- ▶ [Ibn Rushd, Muḥammad ibn Aḥmad al-Ḥafīd \(Averroes\)](#)
- ▶ [Ikhwān al-Ṣafā', Encyclopedia of](#)
- ▶ [Moses Maimonides](#)
- ▶ [Nicomachean Ethics, Commentaries on Aristotle's](#)
- ▶ [Philosophical Psychology, Jewish Tradition](#)
- ▶ [Philosophy, Jewish](#)
- ▶ [Political Philosophy, Arabic](#)
- ▶ [Saadia Gaon](#)
- ▶ [Virtue and Vice](#)

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## Eustratios of Nicaea

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### Abstract

Eustratios of Nicaea was an extremely erudite Byzantine scholar who produced commentaries on Aristotle's ethical and logical treatises. He seems to have belonged to the intellectual circle of Anna Komnene in the 1120s/1130s. His works, in which he followed ancient commentaries, some of which are now lost, but also added his own remarks, were particularly instrumental in the transmission and rediscovery of Aristotelian thought in the Latin West.

### Biography

Eustratios was born in c. 1050 and died in c. 1120. He was a pupil of John Italos, but during his master's trial in 1082, he managed together with some other pupils of Italos to convince the synod of their innocence and signed a letter in which they anathematized Italos' heretical doctrines. At the time, Eustratios was merely a deacon, but he soon became the Metropolitan of Nicaea. He was also asked by the emperor Alexios I to participate in various theological debates with the Latin Church and with the Armenians (or Monophysites), until he himself was finally condemned for heresy in 1117. The reasons for his condemnation are a rather complicated matter involving both theological and political issues, but the main charge against him was his sharp distinction between the divine Logos and Christ incarnated, a distinction which presented Christ as less than equal to his Father. In this connection, it is also important to note that Eustratios, just

like his teacher Italos, was famous for his strong conviction of the propriety of using Aristotle's syllogistic in theology; he even stated that Christ himself had argued with the help of Aristotelian syllogisms. Indeed, Eustratios tried in his theological treatises to prove the truth of Christian dogmas by using logical arguments, which often take the form of a series of standard syllogisms of the three Aristotelian figures or of Stoic indemonstrable arguments. The titles of two of these treatises are indicative: *Syllogistical demonstration of how to honor and worship the holy icons* and *Refutation of those who claim that Christ has one nature, on the basis of logical, physical and theological arguments*. Thus, he was forced to abdicate but was rehabilitated after his death and cited as an authority at the council of 1157. Most probably, during the years of his theological disgrace, Eustratios took part in Anna Komnene's project for the revival of Aristotelian scholarship and produced his exegetical works. Anna Komnene in the *Alexiad* (14.8), the history she wrote of the events during the reign of her father Alexios I (1081–1118), presents Eustratios as an extremely erudite scholar both of religious and of secular literature as well as a master of dialectic.

### Thought

What we have of his work as a commentator are his comments on the first and sixth book of the *Nicomachean Ethics* and his commentary on the second book of the *Posterior Analytics*, all of which are in the tradition of the large exegetical commentaries of Late Antiquity. It may be that in the case of the *Nicomachean Ethics* the reason why he chose to comment on these particular books was that the rest of Aristotle's ethical treatise had been commented on or was commissioned to be commented on by Michael of Ephesus and other anonymous commentators. It is not clear, however, why Eustratios chose to comment only on the second book of the *Posterior Analytics*, especially since it seems that the

whole of Alexander of Aphrodisias' commentary was still accessible. The comments on the *Nicomachean Ethics* were translated in the thirteenth century by Robert Grosseteste and became very influential in the West through the agency of Albert the Great.

In interpreting Aristotle's works, Eustratios followed the Neoplatonic philosophers, though at certain places he advocated theses which slightly deviated from those of all ancient philosophers and tried to be more in close agreement with his Christian beliefs. For instance, concerning the issue of the knowledge of first principles, Eustratios' view differs both from what Plato and the Platonists standardly held about the knowledge of the Ideas as well as from what Aristotle said about the understanding of first principles. Commenting on *Posterior Analytics* 2.19, Eustratios started his account in a clearly Neoplatonic manner, by claiming that, since in the hierarchy of beings the soul comes right after the intellect, it participates more than anything else in what the intellect grasps, and thus the common and self-evident notions which it possesses, are nothing but resonances of what the intellect grasps. But in what follows he did not defend the view that the human soul regains pieces of knowledge which it possessed at some former time nor that it has only potential knowledge which then becomes actual. On the contrary, he argued that the human soul has full knowledge of the principles, the common, self-evident concepts, already when we are born, but that this knowledge is obscured by our bodily impulses. It is only when our soul is guided either by our sense perceptions or by appropriate teaching that the common and self-evident notions come forth, so that we, as it were, wake up and can immediately assent to the first principles. There should be no doubt that Eustratios is influenced here by Neoplatonic views, which he tried to integrate into his Christian outlook. For the human soul, according to the Christian doctrine, when created by God, is created with all the knowledge it needs. If human beings lose sight of the knowledge and understanding which their soul possesses, it is only because they are susceptible to and overwhelmed by the impulses generated by their body. On the

other hand, if human beings manage to purify themselves from the bodily passions, they can come to have knowledge of the ultimate truth.

Concerning the problem of universals, Eustratios, just like his teacher Italos and many other Byzantine philosophers, defended the Neoplatonists' theory according to which universals exist in three modes; namely, they exist as universals "before the many (particulars)" in God's mind, as universals "in the particulars" within perceptible individuals, and finally as universals "after the particulars" in the form of concepts acquired by our mind by abstraction of the common characteristics of perceptible individuals. Joannou and more recently Lloyd have presented Eustratios as following Italos in being a nominalist, i.e., in adhering to the position that universals are mere names stripped of all reality and existing only in the human mind. However, on Giocarinis' view Eustratios should not be regarded as a nominalist, since he follows the Platonic tradition which treats the universals before the particulars as the thoughts of Intelligence, and thus they enjoy actual existence; as to the other types of universals, they are solely *in intellectu* as bare concepts or thoughts, which are not acquired by abstraction but the human mind possesses them right from the beginning. Finally, Benakis has labeled Eustratios' position on universals conceptual or moderate realism and stressed that it is not a nominalist position, since even the a posteriori status of the universals after the particulars does not alter the fact that they do exist.

In this context, Eustratios' account of the distinction between *gene* and *eide* is pertinent. According to Eustratios, *gene* do not subsist (*anupostata*), whereas *eide* can be said to subsist; for since *eide* come right after the particulars while *gene* come after *eide*, *gene* are mere concepts or thoughts (*ennoemata*), and have only a faint resemblance to perceptible individuals, whereas *eide*, as soon as matter is added to them, actually subsist in perceptible individuals. In fact, Eustratios recognized three different senses of *eidōs*: it can be understood either as a species, as a form common to many perceptible individuals, or finally as the form in a specific

individual. Hence, when Eustratios draws a distinction between *gene* and *eide* as having different ontological status, he thought of *eide* not as species, because *eide* as species are, just like *gene*, mere concepts or thoughts which do not subsist; he rather thought of an *eidōs* understood either as a form common to many perceptible individuals or as the form in a specific individual, and it is in these two senses that *eide* are said to subsist insofar as they subsist in the perceptible individuals. Against Plato, therefore, he would object that *eide* do not have separate existence outside the divine mind, while against Aristotle, he would object that *gene* and *eide*, understood as species, are not even secondary substances. In fact, Eustratios uses every chance to stress, in his commentaries as well as in his theological treatises, that God's thoughts and the particulars are substances (*hupostaseis*) and exist per se, whereas what the human mind acquires by abstraction from the common characteristics of perceptible individuals either merely subsists or does not even subsist.

## Cross-References

- ▶ [Epistemology, Byzantine](#)
- ▶ [John Italos](#)
- ▶ [Logic, Byzantine](#)
- ▶ [Michael of Ephesus](#)
- ▶ [Universals](#)

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## al-Fārābī, Abū Naṣr

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### Abstract

Abū Naṣr al-Fārābī, known in the Latin West as Alfarabius or Avenasar, is one of the most influential thinkers in the history of Arabic philosophy. Most of his preserved works are introductions to, and abridged or lemmatic commentaries on, Aristotle's logics. The interpretation of the *Organon*, from the *Categories* to the *Posterior Analytics* and from the latter to the *Poetics*, forms in his view a curriculum consisting of a twofold system of science, each part of which he respectively assimilates to the climbing out of Plato's Cave and to the return. Philosophy is the Whole in which Aristotelian science is ordained toward the political end assigned to philosophy by Plato.

### Biographical Information

One biographer, Ibn Khallikān (d. 1282) tells us that Abū Naṣr al-Fārābī lived 80 years. There is no other information to confirm his date of birth. Based on his *nisba*, the most likely place of origin of his family is in the district of Fārāb in Transoxiana (Turkestan), in the small town of Vaṣṭj, as

Ibn Ḥawqal (d. after 967) claims, or in the town of Fārāb which gave its name to the district. Judging by his *Political Regime* 103, and *Grand Book on Music* 57–58, he was neither of Turkish nor of Arab descent, but most probably Persian.

The date and place of his death are better known. According to Mas'ūdī (d. 956), he died in Damascus, in Rajab 339 (December 950–January 951). Šā'id al-Andalusī (d. 1070) adds that he died there under the protection (*kanaf*) of Sayf al-Dawla (r. 945–967), although *kanaf* means a form of tutelary authority which Sayf al-Dawla, the Hamdanid Emir of northern Syria (Aleppo, Diyar Mudar, Diyar Bakr), never had upon Damascus. Nonetheless, some notes in the manuscripts of al-Fārābī's *Perfect State* inform us that he left Baghdad and went to Syria in 942, possibly to Aleppo, his presence there being recorded by an undated dedication of a commentary to one of his students. According to the same notes, he was already in Damascus in 943 and there completed the *Perfect State*, before going to Egypt (between July 948 and June 949) and returning to Damascus, hardly leaving any time for an acquaintance with the Emir.

From the semiautobiographical relation of his curriculum preserved by Ibn Abī Uṣaybi'a (d. c. 1269), we can infer: first, that al-Fārābī was taught logic in Baghdad by the Christian Abū Bishr Mattā ibn Yūnus (d. 940) from Porphyry's *Isagoge* to the *Prior Analytics*, I, 7; second, that al-Fārābī broke away from him, apparently accusing him and Christians in general

of observing a clerical ban on teaching beyond *Prior An.*, I, 7, that is, from I, 8 to the end of the *Posterior Analytics*, although Mattā is known to have translated it. Al-Fārābī's account of his curriculum seems to echo a rivalry between the two men, later to be interpreted ideologically, like other related texts, as a religious quarrel between Christian and Muslim scholars. Indeed, al-Fārābī says he was taught logic till the end of *Posterior Analytics* by another Christian, Yūḥannā b. Ḥaylān. This apparent inconsistency might be explained if al-Fārābī applied to himself what he says about the rest of the curriculum, beyond *Prior Analytics*, I, 7, that is, that, despite the ban, it was still studied among Christians albeit covertly. In his view, Ibn Ḥaylān may have been a representative of this tradition. In any case, this supposition is in accordance with Fārābī's main intention in this text, to present himself as the heir of an unbroken chain of teaching from Alexandria to Baghdad. In this regard, J. Watt has shown that there were two trends within the Syriac commentary tradition: one which indeed restricted the logical training to the first part of the *Organon*, terminating at *Prior Analytics*, I, 7, but which had deep roots in the ancient world; and the other represented by the "Syriac writers who were proficient in Greek" and who "adhered throughout to the other strand of this two-strand tradition, that of the full *Organon*." In al-Fārābī's view, Ibn Ḥaylān probably belonged to the latter.

We cannot know for certain where and when he studied with Ibn Ḥaylān, or where he taught his foremost pupil, the Christian Yaḥyā ibn 'Adī (d. 974). Similarly, it is hard to determine if al-Fārābī succeeded Mattā at the head of a school in Baghdad, before moving to Syria and whether he taught in a *scholē* or in one or more private schools.

In his *Grand Book on Music*, 58, dedicated to Vizier Abū Ja'far al-Karkhī (June–August 936), al-Fārābī states that he was in relation with Greeks who were not Byzantine Christians, but "pure" or "faithful" Greeks whose musical practice he refers to as being akin to the one systematized by "the Ancient Greeks" in their books on musical theory. They lived in a "land" "in the vicinity" of the Empire of the Arabs to which many were

emigrating. Whatever the bearing of this information on the history of Hellenism, al-Fārābī claims he was acquainted with some "faithful Greeks" living somewhere along a border region where pagan culture was still alive. In northern Mesopotamia, Ḥarrān, which enjoyed some autonomy in the first half of the tenth century, seems a likely candidate. Apart from al-Mas'ūdī's (d. 956) other accounts of the traces of pagan intellectual life in Ḥarrān, this is further evidence of the relationship between *falsafa* and a persistent form of pagan culture.

His *Grand Book on Music* being a well-known work of maturity composed in Baghdad, the general absence of information concerning al-Fārābī's teaching activities during his time there is puzzling.

## Works and Influence

Al-Fārābī, who did not have any Greek, worked as a commentator and teacher. As such, he was indebted to Alexander of Aphrodisias, Themistius, and the members of the Neoplatonic School of Alexandria (sixth century) and probably to Simplicius, that is, to the commentators of Aristotle known in Arabic. He claimed to be heir to the Alexandrian scientific curriculum, the Aristotelian part of which he, along with his Christian colleagues from the "School of Baghdad" (tenth to eleventh century), contributed to reestablish, before the tradition of commentaries on Aristotle was revived in Andalusia by Avempace (Ibn Bājja, d. 1139) and Averroes (Ibn Rushd, 1126–1198), followed by Jewish and Latin philosophers. In fact, the religiously indifferent Saracen philosopher staged by Peter Abelard in his *Dialogue of a Philosopher with a Jew and a Christian* may have been Avempace whose sole declared master was al-Fārābī.

Though he wrote commentaries on Plato's *Laws*, Euclid's *Elements*, and Ptolemy's *Almagest*, al-Fārābī mainly devoted himself to the interpretation of the Aristotelian treatises on logic and physics. According to the known lists of his works, he composed long or lemmatic, as well as brief or paraphrastic, commentaries on all

the treatises of the *Organon*, most of the longer ones being lost. As for the physical treatises, he commented upon the *Physics*, *On the Heavens and the Universe*, *On Generation and Corruption*, *Meteorology*, and perhaps upon the *De anima*. All of them are apparently lost. He also wrote on specific themes from the *Physics*: *On the Void*, *On the Divisible and the Indivisible*, *On Finite and Infinite Power*, *That the Movement of the Spheres Is Eternal* and *On Changing Beings* – of which only the first has been preserved. The titles of these works and what we learn from those that were preserved show that he never departed from the Greek view that the world is eternal. He was opposed to the philosophical and theological trend of thought originating in John Philoponus' *Against Aristotle* and *Against Proclus on the Eternity of the World*. His refutation of the former has been preserved. His commentary on *Physics VIII* also seems to have been preserved, albeit in a Latin translation, that remains to be edited and studied. Apart from the previously known Latin translations of a few treatises, that is, *De intellectu*, *De scientiis*, *Liber exercitationis ad viam felicitatis* – the first two having significantly influenced Latin Scholasticism – other works may have been translated and therefore made available to Albert the Great, such as the paraphrase of, and possibly also the long commentary on Aristotle's *Posterior Analytics*. In the same way, excerpts from al-Fārābī's masterpieces, the *Political Regime* and the *Perfect State*, may have been known in Latin. A long sentence common to these works is often quoted by Latin authors.

Al-Fārābī's allegedly deeper influence on Arabic-speaking philosophers is paradoxically difficult to assess. Although Avicenna (Ibn Sīnā: 980–1037), Avempace, Averroes, Maimonides (1135–1204), and a few others knew his works and held him in high esteem, the fact remains that most of his writings rapidly failed to be copied, and therefore read. That some texts were ultimately preserved can most probably be attributed to Avicenna's deference to him and the respect paid to Avicenna's philosophical achievements by numerous philosophers, especially in the East of the Islamic world. Apart from the philosophers mentioned above, al-Fārābī's writings were

attacked and emended early on. Avempace's urge to defend him against allegations of being a heretic is what informs us of the widespread accusations started by the Persian theologian al-Ġazālī (1058–1111).

Furthermore, there is proof of the emendation of al-Fārābī's thought. A few decades only after his death, Miskawayh (936–1030), a Muslim polymath directly acquainted with some of his genuine works, ascribed to him a sort of social climber's guide to life at Court. The text, a pastiche of al-Fārābī's style, predicates the prevailing community opinion as a criterion of truth, when compliance with popular opinion is what al-Fārābī's philosophy emphatically denies. This bowdlerization of his thought did not stop at Miskawayh.

## Thought

### The Hierarchical Structure of Being

From the Ptolemaic geocentric cosmology, al-Fārābī elaborated a standard onto-cosmology which was later adopted to varying degrees. Here are its tenets.

Being eternally emanates from the First Principle. In the same way that a productive act necessarily follows from any immaterial substance in actuality, this emanation process is inherent to its substance, therefore does not proceed from deliberation nor is aimed at an extrinsic end. Each of the ten secondary Intellects emanates from the First through the one immediately superior to it. They are self-subsistent substances, coeternal with the First. The tenth Intellect is the Active Intellect which constitutes the formal, efficient, final and exemplar separated cause of human intellects and the agent of their preservation in being if they succeed in becoming free of matter.

The being of each of the celestial spheres emanates from each Intellect independently. Their soul is not enmattered. Each one has a specific substrate. There is no fifth element common to all of them. The upper sphere impresses on them a common movement from which the *prima materia* proceeds eternally. Through their differentiated movements with regard to one another



and to *materia*, the four elements and qualities of the sublunary world are brought forth, set in motion, and combined to make up sensible substances. The paradigm of this combination is provided by the Active Intellect which aims, as a final cause, to foreordain the physical influences exerted by the celestial bodies so that the sublunary species can emerge from these influences. Thus, the spheres themselves do not take part in a plan, but through their influence are ordained to bring about a goal which they ignore. Given that each one acts autonomously, regardless of others and of the providence exercised by the Active Intellect toward human intellects, their respective physical influence may come into conflict with each other and with the Active Intellect's activity. As a result, various contingencies affect the sublunary world.

### The System of Science

According to al-Fārābī, philosophy is a concordant reading of Plato and Aristotle. In his system, the Neoplatonized Aristotle weighs heavier than Plato. However, the type of Neoplatonism he elaborates from the translated material at his disposal is unique. Though he declares Aristotle to be his Master, which he undeniably was, the claim needs to be refined.

With Aristotle, he shares the conviction that philosophy is what man can know through his own natural ability and an uncompromisingly rational method presented in the *Posterior Analytics*. "Philosophy" even comes to specifically signify the demonstrative science obtained through this method, that is, primarily the first philosophy or metaphysics. For, strictly speaking, and in conformity with the Neoplatonic understanding of "metaphysics," only that which is *beyond* nature and is free from matter can demonstratively be known. With Alexander of Aphrodisias, he shares the view that the human soul is a mixture of the four elements and as such is corruptible. Though given by the Active Intellect, human reason is at first merely an enmattered disposition. But he concurs with the Greek Neoplatonists on the possibility of a transmutation of human condition attained through the progressive acquisition of knowledge up to the *theoria* of the

divine principles. Finally, with Plato he shares the conviction that philosophy is the only hope of salvation for humanity and therefore must achieve a concrete political end, the establishment of a philosophical regime or civic religion, failing which philosophy cannot accomplish its true end.

This conviction makes particular practical ends and universal theoretical sciences dependent upon each other for the realization of philosophy's end. This is not conceivable within the framework of Aristotle's thought, since knowledge, being universal, cannot be prescriptive regarding particular actions. Aristotle's ontology, epistemology, and ethics are then redefined so that virtues can be seen as particular instances of universal transcendental norms, and not only as relative and immanent middle grounds between excess and defect. This requirement gives birth to a remarkable theory wherein Being and knowledge are divided up according to the statistical degrees of actuality of their respective forms: (1) always or necessarily existent → divine Intellects; (2) necessarily existent for an indefinite period of time → celestial spheres; (3) possibly occurring most of the time → most natural phenomena and rules of virtuous human actions; (4) equally occurring and not occurring → association and dissociation of homeomeric substances; (5) occurring most rarely → indefinable events and phenomena. While (1–5) encompass all the degrees of Being except *materia*, (1–3) gather all knowable forms, (1) being metaphysics, including the definition of human felicity, (2) astronomy, and (3) physics and ethics, including politics. Not only does he thus interpret the doctrine of the threefold modes of being of the universals, he also presents this statistical scale as a redefinition of Plato's Line in *Republic*, 509d–511e. In effect, sound opinion, seen as the type of knowledge possible in the case of (3), is the likeness of science found in (1) and (2). Bearing in mind the metaphysical end of human life, that is, felicity, the philosopher-king must define the principles of sound theological opinions, institute pedagogic religious symbols accordingly, and establish legal forms which will prove possible in most cases and as long-lasting as possible given the contingency of human affairs and natural

phenomena. In turn, these opinions, symbols, and legal forms, along with the affects which they induce in the souls, are regarded as a likeness of, and a preparation to, eudemonic contemplation.

### Philosophy as Pedagogy

The gap between universality and particularity being filled, the virtuous city becomes an achievable program, its goal being to remove evitable contingencies, alleviate those that are inevitable, and supply the pedagogical conditions for the Active Intellect to act upon people's minds and set them free from matter. The philosopher's main task is to relay the plan of the Active Intellect by means of the appropriate education. Becoming human implies acquiring knowledge. Education is the substitute *pro tempore* of the Active Intellect whose activity is mainly that of a final cause. And since this activity concerns all human beings of sound constitution, the city-state can in theory encompass all the temperate climates on earth where sound human beings live.

In brief, man, however corruptible like other generated and composed substances, can become a perpetual reality thanks to the philosophical knowledge dispensed within the virtuous city. Only a philosopher-legislator can shape the civic religion capable of dispensing this knowledge in the appropriate fashion and of preparing nonphilosophers' souls for immortality. The philosophical religion contains in an analogical form the same salvific knowledge as the one in theoretical teaching. This implies that all the city's institutions, whether cultic, legal, or cultural, are pedagogically oriented to fit the philosopher's aim.

The systematic nature of al-Fārābī's thought lies in the link established between (a) the physical definition of human nature; (b) the metaphysical definition of its ultimate end, immortal felicity; and (c) politics, which is the primary means of realizing this end: to enable each citizen to partake of immortality when he/she does not possess it by nature. Consequently, politics deals with worldly goods in so far as the allocation of goods within the city is the material condition for supreme felicity to be attained, their just allocation being possible only if felicity remains the Law's goal. Felicity represents the common good.

Starting from the working hypothesis that what man desires the most is to satisfy his bodily needs, al-Fārābī comes to the conclusion that one other desire more specifically characterizes humanity: the desire to ascertain the ultimate causes of phenomena and human experience. Philosophy's role is to provide this knowledge and philosophy is therefore the most desirable thing. In turn, philosophy teaches that its own acquirement is what allows human beings to escape their fate and become immortal souls. Thus, each individual should be given the opportunity to assimilate philosophy in a way possible to him- or herself (*Philosophy of Aristotle*). To make this teaching possible is the very purpose of the virtuous regime.

Nowhere does Aristotle put forward the idea that everyone needs to assimilate philosophy, especially if "philosophy" is taken to mean "first philosophy" and if this knowledge is seen as the condition of becoming immortal. The epistemological pattern and general architecture of Fārābī's thought are in fact a new elaboration of the Alexandrian philosophers' pedagogical doctrine and a generalization of the ideal of contemplative life as put forward in the tenth book of the *Nicomachean Ethics* – a generalization which al-Fārābī conceives as the true purpose of the philosopher's return into the Cave and as a form of reconciliation between leisure and active life, theory and practice, scientific and political activities.

Al-Fārābī genuinely hoped for this program to be applied by sovereigns-philosophers. The main evidence for this is the repeated claim that a philosopher incapable of accomplishing the political end of philosophy is an impostor who demotes philosophy to a trifling endeavor. Moreover, his writings mention the constitution of armies attended by pedagogues and, as mentioned in the quotation below (see p. 350), the fight to the death which will inescapably occur between philosophy and historical religions for the control of people's souls. In order to bring in the new political order, he advises the Prince to convince people of the corrupt form of the existing Law and of the need to restore it to its original true version. Stratagems, persuasion, and compulsion must combine for the philosopher's political plan to materialize. Such

concrete proposals suggest that he may have wanted to suit his actions to his words. Ultimately, he views suicide as preferable to living in a world where the philosophical way of life cannot become a reality.

### How al-Fārābī Composed His Political Works and How to Read Them

On the basis of all the principles mentioned above, al-Fārābī proceeds with several corollaries scattered all over his works. The First Cause is only the proximate cause of the being of the secondary Intellects (*Political Regime* 31:12–13). Therefore, it cannot be viewed as the cause of what comes to be and passes away within the sublunary world. No divinity rules over the world (*Perfect State* 304:3–4). The doctrine of God’s knowledge of particulars is vehemently repelled (*Political Aphorisms* §86; cf. *On De interpretatione* 98:11–19). Those who claim some political authority received directly from God are impostors (*Perfect State* 258:4–9; 304–308:§12). One shall note here that the “Ancients” to whom R. Walzer’s translation attributes the doctrines stigmatized in *Perfect State* ch. 18–19 do not appear in the Arabic text. There is no inspiration (*ilhām*) which could supposedly precede knowledge acquired through teaching (*On Demonstration* 82:1–8). About the philosopher-prophet of the *Perfect State*, al-Fārābī explicitly states in the same work that he needs no prophetic insight, *indhār*. Philosophers are the only ones who can govern with knowledge of the true purpose of human existence, which is obtained through physical and metaphysical investigation (*Political Aphorisms* §94: 95, 14–96, 11; *Attainment of Felicity* §57: 186, 13–187, 5; *Book of Religion* 66:8–10). With regard to this knowledge, a “prophet” or enthusiast, *mūhā ilayhi*, cannot be said to be more knowledgeable than a soothsayer, *kāhin* (*Political Aphorisms* §94: 98, 4–99, 2). “Revelation” (*waḥiy*) is a word employed by the ancient philosophers to refer to the “conjunction” of the perfected human intellect with the Active Intellect (*Political Regime* 79, 3–80, 1). A true religion can

only rely on a true, demonstrative philosophy (*Book of Particles* §147; cf. *Attainment of Felicity* §56: 184, 14–16), meaning that its founder must have been perfectly trained in demonstrative syllogisms. To sum up *Political Regime* 85, 12–87, 4 and 104, 17–105, 6: the symbols chosen and used by the philosopher-king in order to institute a true religion necessarily contain hidden contestable *topoi*, *mawāḍiʿ al-ʿinād* (cf. *Book of Dialectics*: 361) – an allusion to Aristotle’s *Topics* VIII and *Categories* X. These *topoi* serve as a test. Those in the perfect city who succeed in detecting these dialectical *topoi* are apt to be instructed. Among those men, some are philosophers by nature and hence deserve to be elevated to demonstrative truth – a direct reference to Plato’s *Republic* and to the prisoner who has been untied and is given the chance to ascend out of the Cave (515c ss.). The men who, on the contrary, come short of perceiving the *topoi* embodied in the symbols are believers for whom philosophically chosen symbols are sufficient, meaning that these symbols incorporate all the truth needed for their mental capacity to be truly perfected.

Al-Fārābī envisaged two possibilities: (a) a religion built on a perfect demonstrative philosophy, the perfect or virtuous religion whose dialectical or rhetorical premises (or tenets) have been defined by the philosopher who at the same time has the capacity to ascertain the truth and what truly is in the likeness of it – see Aristotle, *Rhetoric* 1355a 14–18 and cf. *Book of Religion* §4:46; *Attainment of Felicity* §53–54: 178–181; (b) religions built on various types of defective philosophy – *Book of Particles* §§108–158. Al-Fārābī regarded all religious communities and political regimes in his day as depraved (*fujūr*), ignorant (i.e., of philosophy: *jāhiliyya*) and in disarray (*dālla*), compare: *Book of Religion* 45:18–19; *Summary of the Perfect State* 86:10–12; *Political Aphorisms* §90: 92, 16–17; cf. *Enumeration of the Sciences* 107–113. Put together, these statements unambiguously mean that the perfect religion was still to be founded.

As for the relations between demonstrative philosophy and existent religions built on

defective kinds of philosophy, he describes them as destructive of each other (cf. Aristotle, *Physics*, I 9, 192a21–22) He says:

If the religion transferred to them [*sc.* a certain people] is a religion which stems in its very beginning from an ancient and corrupt philosophy, either rhetorical or dialectical or sophistical, and if the sound and demonstrative philosophy is then transferred to them after that, the latter will contradict that religion in all respects and this religion will totally contradict that philosophy. And then each of them will tend to annihilate the other. Whichever prevails in establishing itself firmly in the souls will annihilate (*abṭalat*) the other and whichever takes over (*qaharat*) this nation will eradicate (*abṭalat*) the other from it (*Book of Particles* §150, translated from M. Mahdi's unpublished and improved edition; cf. *Book of Letters* §150:155–156).

Above are some of the data which show why, in the *Perfect State*, al-Fārābī purposely elaborates doctrines which seem at variance with his own thought. These doctrines are in fact symbols and contain *mawāḍiʿ al-ʿinād*, contestable *topoi*. The doctrine of prophecy, which cannot be philosophically conceptualized since God knows nothing but himself and hence cannot reveal anything about human affairs, is nonetheless tactically necessary to fulfill the purpose of the treatise. This means that the *Perfect State* is not a theory or description of the perfect city, but is, rigorously speaking, performative in the sense that it actually founds the city. The possible intelligent reader of the *Perfect State* is in fact the potential philosopher apprentice to whom al-Fārābī alludes in the abovementioned crucial passage of *Political Regime*. The latter work represents the key to understanding what al-Fārābī had in mind when composing the former: in order to be recognized as a philosopher apprentice, the reader of the *Perfect State* must be able to detect its *mawāḍiʿ al-ʿinād* or internal contradictions. This is why the *Perfect State* is performative: it brings together the fundamental conditions for the institution of the perfect state to take place. In other terms, the *Perfect State* was meant to bring to al-Fārābī's and his possible successors' attention the individuals firstly capable of receiving a complete philosophical training and subsequently apt to become

the rulers of the future perfect city. Such is the concrete historical meaning of the training of young philosopher-apprentices which is also briefly described in the *Attainment of Felicity*. In short, al-Fārābī never departed from the view that the philosopher's role is to teach and to rule.

The fact that the unity of composition of the *Perfect State* and the *Political Regime* has escaped interpreters' attention can be explained by the prevailing approach which analyzes each treatise separately. In fact, al-Fārābī's work or at least his three main political treatises, the *Perfect State*, the *Political Regime*, and the so-called *Political Aphorisms*, first need to be envisioned and examined as an organic whole in order to then be understood individually. Al-Fārābī alludes to the connection between these three works in his *Summary of the Perfect State* where he refers to seemingly unknown "Addenda" (*ziyādāt*), the description of which coincides with the content of *Political Regime* and *Political Aphorisms*. M. Mahdi, who edited *Summary of the Perfect State*, was the first to suggest that the *Political Aphorisms* might be a part of the Addenda in question.

## Cross-References

- ▶ 'Abd al-Laṭīf al-Baġdādī
- ▶ Abū Bishr Mattā ibn Yūnus
- ▶ Aristotelianism in the Greek, Latin, Syriac, Arabic, and Hebrew Traditions
- ▶ Aristotle, Arabic
- ▶ Contemplative Happiness and Civic Virtue
- ▶ Ethics, Arabic
- ▶ Ibn Bājja, Abū Bakr ibn al-Sā'ig (Avempace)
- ▶ Ibn Rushd, Muḥammad ibn Aḥmad al-Ḥafīd (Averroes)
- ▶ Ibn Sīnā, Abū 'Alī (Avicenna)
- ▶ Logic in the Arabic and Islamic World
- ▶ Modal Theories and Modal Logic
- ▶ Moses Maimonides
- ▶ Natural Philosophy, Arabic
- ▶ Philoponus, Arabic
- ▶ Philosophy, Arabic

- ▶ Plato, Arabic
- ▶ Translations from Greek into Arabic
- ▶ Yaḥyā ibn ‘Adī

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## al-Fārābī, Latin Translations of

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### Abstract

Some of al-Fārābī's philosophical works were translated into Latin during the Middle Ages. Two of them were translated literally from Arabic by Gerard of Cremona around 1175: the *Enumeration of the Sciences*, and a summary of books V–VIII of Aristotle's *Physics*. Other Farabian works were translated into Latin in a less literal way: the *Enumeration of the Sciences* was "re-written" by Dominicus Gundissalinus in his *De scientiis* (c. 1154–1166). There are Latin translations, probably by Gundissalinus, also of the treatise *On the Intellect*, of the *Book of Exhortation to the Way of Happiness*, as well as of part of *The Sources of Questions*; the introduction and the beginning of the *Long Commentary* on Aristotle's *Rhetoric* was translated by Hermann the German, in 1243–1244. Al-Fārābī's *Summaries* and *Long Commentaries* on Aristotle's *Organon*, as well as his *Commentaries* on the *Physics* and the *Nicomachean Ethics*, might have been translated into Latin, since they are apparently one of the sources of Albert the Great. Moreover, some short works ascribed to al-Fārābī were translated into Latin, but their Farabian authorship is not sure.

Al-Fārābī was well-known as an interpreter of Aristotle, but the medieval Latin translations of only a few works by him have come to us (Salman 1939). Probably, medieval Latin philosophers were more interested in Averroes, who replaced al-Fārābī for them as a faithful representative of the Arabic interpretation of Aristotle's works; most quotations from al-Fārābī's commentaries on Aristotle come from Averroes' own commentaries (Steinschneider 1869: 39). A number of Latin translations of Averroes' works were based upon the already existing Hebrew translations,



which covered almost all of them, while only a limited number of al-Fārābī's works had been translated into Hebrew. It should also be noted that al-Fārābī had been active in Iraq, while Averroes was active in Andalusia, nearer to the main centers of medieval Latin philosophy.

Probably, the main philosophical work by al-Fārābī translated into Latin and read during the Middle Ages was his *Enumeration of the Sciences* (Arabic: *Iḥṣā' al-'ulūm*). There were two different translations of it, both of which written in Toledo in the second half of the twelfth century. Dominicus Gundissalinus (or Dominic Gundisalvi) translated, or better "re-wrote," al-Fārābī's work into Latin, under the title *De scientiis*, probably between 1154 and 1166, while he was active as a translator of Arabic texts at the court of the Archbishop of Toledo, John of Castelmoron-sur-Lot. This translation was first published by William Chalmers in 1638; a first critical edition of it, by Manuel Alonso Alonso, appeared in 1954 (Gundisalvo 1954), and a second one, together with a German translation, has been published by Jakob H. Schneider (al-Fārābī 2006). In reality, this work was a sort of adaptation of the contents of al-Fārābī's work on the demand of its Latin readers; it was employed by Gundissalinus as a source of his *De divisione philosophiae* (Steinschneider 1869: 83; Gundissalinus 1903), as well as by other medieval Latin philosophers, like Vincent de Beauvais (Gundisalvo 1954: 143–167). A more faithful, literal translation of al-Fārābī's original Arabic text of the *Enumeration of the Sciences* into Latin was made in Toledo around 1175 by the Italian scholar Gerard of Cremona. This translation was probably based upon the same Arabic manuscript used by Gundissalinus for his own translation, and might have been influenced by the latter; after a first noncritical edition of it by Ángel González Palencia (al-Fārābī 1932: 117–176), a critical edition and a German translation by Franz Schupp appeared (al-Fārābī 2005). The musical section of this work has been studied in detail by Henry Farmer (Farmer 1934): he compared the Arabic original text of it with both Latin translations. A tentative reconstruction of the relationship between these two versions and the other witnesses of the textual tradition (the Arabic manuscripts of the original text, its quotations among other medieval authors, and two Hebrew translations of it), leads

to the conclusion that both versions were based upon an "occidental" version of the text, which came to Spain before 1150, and was partially different from the "oriental" version of it, known in the Middle East (Zonta 1990).

Other philosophical works by al-Fārābī or ascribed to him were translated from Arabic into Latin during the Middle Ages, probably by Gundissalinus (Alonso Alonso 1947). The treatise *On the Intellect* (Arabic: *Fī l-'aql*) was translated into Latin under the title *De intellectu*: this translation was first published together with some works by Avicenna in 1508, another time together with the *De scientiis* in 1638, and finally in a very good, although noncritical edition, with a French translation, by Étienne Gilson (Gilson 1929: 108–141). A medieval Latin translation of al-Fārābī's *Book of Exhortation to the Way of Happiness* (Arabic: *Kitāb fī l-tanbīh ilā sabīl al-sa'āda*), bearing the title *Liber ex(er)citationis ad viam felicitatis* and extant in a unique manuscript, has been published by Dominique H. Salman (Salman 1940). Part of a philosophical work commonly ascribed to al-Fārābī, *The Sources of Questions* (Arabic: *'Uyūn al-masā'il*), was translated into Latin. This translation, bearing the title *Fontes quaestionum*, covers paragraphs 1–6 of the whole work, and was published in critical edition (Cruz Hernandez 1950–1951: 316–318).

A different case is that of al-Fārābī's *Summaries* and *Long Commentaries* on the whole Aristotelian *Organon* (including Porphyry's *Eisagoge*), as well as his *Commentaries* on Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics* and *Physics*. In this case, it is not yet sure if medieval Latin translations of them were really made (Salman 1939: 247–248, 253–256), apart from that of some short passages of the *Summaries* (Salman 1939: 260–261, 1948; Grignaschi 1972: 44–45). As for the *Organon*, the existence of such translations was discussed in detail by Mario Grignaschi (Grignaschi 1972). According to Grignaschi, these texts were translated into Latin before 1250 c., since Albert the Great quoted or at least read some passages of them. In any case, al-Fārābī might have influenced Albert the Great's philosophical thought (Cortabarría Beitia 1954).

There are two other philosophical works by al-Fārābī, whose original Arabic text is now lost

but was partially translated into Latin during the Middle Ages. The whole introduction and the first passage of al-Fārābī's *Long Commentary* on Aristotle's *Rhetoric* (about *Rhet.* 1354a1–2), lost in their original Arabic text, were translated into Latin by Hermann the German (Hermannus Alemannus) at Burgos in 1243–1244 under the title *Didascalía in rhetoricam Aristotelis ex glossa Alfarabii*; they are found in a unique manuscript, and were first published according to a partial and revised version (as *Declaratio compendiosa Alfarabii super rhetoricorum libros Aristotelis*) in 1481; then they were critically edited by Grignaschi (al-Farabi 1971: 125–252). A short summary of books V–VIII of Aristotle's *Physics*, *Distinctio Alfarabii super librum Aristotelis de naturali auditu*, possibly a fragment of a wider commentary on the *Physics*, was translated into Latin by Gerard of Cremona. It is still extant in at least five manuscripts, and has been published according to three of them (Birkenmajer 1935). The authorship of other works ascribed to al-Fārābī and transmitted by the Latin tradition only is not yet sure. A very short, otherwise unknown *Liber Alfarabii* about some points of botany, still unpublished, has been found in a unique manuscript (Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale de France, *lat.* 7156, folio 82v: Hoefler 1842: 326; Steinschneider 1869: 77). A short treatise *De ortu scientiarum*, or *Epistula de assignanda causa ex qua ortae sunt scientiae philosophiae et ordo earum in disciplina*, ascribed to al-Fārābī and preserved in five manuscripts, has been published in a critical edition (Alfarabi 1916); however, its Farabian authorship is still in doubt, since its contents appear to be partially different from those of the *Enumeration of the Sciences* (but see Alonso Alonso 1946).

## Cross-References

- ▶ [Albert the Great](#)
- ▶ [Arabic Texts: Philosophy, Latin Translations of](#)
- ▶ [Dominicus Gundissalinus](#)
- ▶ [al-Fārābī, Abū Naṣr](#)
- ▶ [Logic, Arabic, in the Latin Middle Ages](#)

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## Feudal Law

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### Abstract

There is no consensus among historians on the subject of feudal law, and the notion of “feudalism” is contested. The traditional approaches, the broader one treating feudal society, the narrower focussing on the contract between lord and vassal, have been questioned as being constructs of modern historians. The *Libri feudorum* was the main text of medieval feudal law and was the subject of *ius commune* jurisprudence. The core notion in feudal relations was the bond of fidelity or fealty. Feudal bonds limited the ruler. They were found in a range of relationships in secular and ecclesiastical society. Both the parties benefited in a feudal relationship. With the development of forms of state from the twelfth century, the feudal aspect of rulership was by no means purely personal. Feudal notions persisted beyond the Middle Ages. Feudal custom was perceived as part of natural law.

The subject of feudal law is one of the most contentious among historians. There is no general agreement about the nature of feudal relations and, indeed, whether the term “feudalism” has any real meaning. What is at stake is a fundamental organizing principle for understanding the Middle Ages.

The debate in the middle of the twentieth century featured two approaches. The first saw feudal relations as so pervasive as to justify the concept

of feudal society. The classic exposition of this view was Marc Bloch's masterpiece, *La société féodale* (1940, English trans., 1961). The other, while accepting the larger vision, chose to focus on the contract between lord and vassal – this would be represented by F.L. Ganshof's magisterial work, *Qu'est-ce que la féodalité?* (1944, English trans., 1952). The first approach would include the peasantry and issues of serfdom, the second would not. This comfortable arrangement was shattered by Elizabeth Brown (1974) who argued that feudalism was a construct produced by modern historians and projected back onto the Middle Ages, a construct, which did not conform to the multifarious reality of medieval life. Susan Reynolds (1994) deepened the elaboration of this thesis by seeking to demonstrate that the feudal models with which most historians had been working derived ultimately from the theories of sixteenth-century lawyers themselves drawing on the works of late medieval jurists: that the whole edifice of feudal law, let alone the concept of “feudalism,” was built on the unsound foundations of lawyers' theories distanced from the infinitely complicated real world of medieval society. The legal historian, Kenneth Pennington (2004), arguing from a detailed knowledge of feudal, Roman, and canon law, responded critically to Reynolds.

Feudal law was essentially customary, but it came to some degree to be written down. The most important text was the *Libri feudorum*. This was mainly based on Lombard feudal law. Its first recension dated back from the mid-twelfth century and was created by Obertus de Octo, a judge at Milan. Almost all the manuscripts of the first two recensions vary; some include eleventh- and twelfth-century statutes of the Emperors Conrad II, Lothar II, and Frederick I. The first commentary on the *Libri feudorum* was written (on the second recension) by the Roman law jurist, Pilius in c. 1200. The final, vulgate recension added constitutions of Emperor Frederick II. It also included the famous letter of Bishop Fulbert of Chartres, written in c. 1020, and which had become the *locus classicus* for the obligations and duties incurred by a vassal through the feudal oath of fealty. This had been included in Gratian's handbook of canon law, the *Decretum*. The letter's inclusion in the *Libri feudorum*, together with the

fact that Pilius was a civilian, neatly demonstrated that the jurisprudence of the feudal law was a product of the *ius commune* – the combined Roman and canon law approach to legal scholarship. The canonist, Huguccio, had already treated the principles enshrined in the letter of Fulbert as applying to relationships within the ecclesiastical hierarchy and to those between the emperor and ecclesiastics – such principles did not just apply to the feudal bond between lord and vassals (Pennington 2004).

The consolidation of the place of the *Libri feudorum* in the scholarship of the *ius commune* came with the commentary of Accursius in the 1220s (based on Pilius' commentary). From the 1230s, the *Libri feudorum* were treated as part of the Roman law, the *Corpus iuris civilis*. They were added as a tenth collation to the *Authenticum*, the form in which Justinian's *Novels* were transmitted to the Middle Ages. This meant that the *Libri feudorum* became a standard part of civilian jurisprudence through the medium of Accursius' *Glossa ordinaria*, the culmination of the work of the school of the Roman law Glossators. Further commentaries were written on the *Libri feudorum*, notably that of Baldus de Ubaldis (1393). Indeed, feudal law continued as an integral part of the jurisprudence of the *ius commune* into the early seventeenth century.

Feudal matters were also treated in many secular, legal codifications after the early thirteenth century. For example, Frederick II's *Constitutions of Melfi* (1231), for Sicily, included the succession and bestowing of fiefs and was commented on by jurists. Similarly, in Castile and Leon, the *Siete partidas* (1256/1258) of Alphonso X, and, in France, the *Etablissements de S. Louis* (1272/1273) treated feudal customs.

Feudal relations varied at different times and places, but there persisted the core notion of the personal bond of fidelity, or fealty. This established a contract with rights and duties on both sides. It was a mutual bond which either party could treat as broken by the other's perceived violation of feudal law. At the political level this marked the beginnings of a right of resistance to the ruler. Feudal law, in short imposed limits on the ruler – as Baldus famously said of grants of fiefs by the emperor, "God has subjected the laws to him, but has not

subjected to him contracts by which he is bound" (*deus subiecit ei leges, sed non subiecit ei contractus ex quibus obligatus est*) (Commentary on *Libri feudorum*, 1.7). Whereas in Roman law there was no inheritance of obligations entered into by contract, a ruler's successor did inherit a feudal contract.

The feudal bond could be found in a range of relationships within both secular and ecclesiastical society. It was a bond which applied far more widely than just to the relationship between the lord and his vassal: according to this, a lord received an oath of fealty, following the act of self-surrender known as homage, from a man who thereby became his vassal and received a benefice or fief (*feudum* – hence "feudal") in land or rents in return, to enable him to perform the required services (primarily military) for his lord. Feudal notions became so entrenched that, by the late Middle Ages, relationships which originally had not been seen as feudal at all became feudalized: a prime case would be the way in which the fourteenth-century popes claimed that at his coronation the Roman emperor swore to the pope an oath of fidelity, which was feudal in nature, a contention rejected by the imperial side because it suggested that the Empire was a papal fief. Earlier in the Middle Ages, the papacy had not seen the emperor's oath in terms of feudal fidelity but of subordination.

Feudal bonds created an enduring relationship in a way that was useful to both sides. A major example is provided by late medieval Italy. The lords (*signori*) who increasingly supplanted republican forms of government from the mid-thirteenth century onward were in part legitimized by grants of imperial or papal vicariates, which were feudal in form. This arrangement aided the emperor or the pope, who did not lose ultimate sovereignty over the fief, and gave the *signori* rights of public jurisdiction. It was particularly helpful in the case of Giangaleazzo Visconti, when the emperor-elect, Wenceslas, took the further step of creating him duke of Milan in 1395. The feudal nature of this grant meant that Wenceslas, Giangaleazzo, and lawyers supporting them could argue that this was not the alienation of imperial rights forbidden by Roman law. (This did not prevent Wenceslas' fall from power in 1400 on these grounds.)

The general problem for historians is how much they should privilege feudal notions in interpreting medieval society. To overemphasise them would indeed be to mislead. At the level of rulership and government, from at least the twelfth century, apparatuses of power and nascent bureaucracy indicated the emergence of forms of state. This meant that the feudal aspect of rulership was by no means purely personal, because fiefs came to be seen as grants of the royal or imperial office. Papal fiefs fitted in with this view: those receiving them became vassals not of the individual pope but of St. Peter. The notion of office further explained why feudal contracts were inherited by subsequent rulers.

Feudal notions were peculiarly persistent. Snobbery and the desire to consolidate upward social mobility partly explained the pursuit of feudal titles in the late Middle Ages – the preeminent civilian jurist, Bartolus of Sassoferrato (d. 1357), for example, was immensely proud when Emperor Charles IV gave him a coat of arms. But far more was involved. Feudal ideas became part of the intellectual web for understanding the world. This is best summed up by the contention put forward by jurists from the thirteenth century onward that feudal custom formed part of natural law, a perception deriving ultimately from the Aristotelian and Ciceronian notions of custom as second nature (Canning 1987: 82–83; Ullmann 1967: 83).

## Cross-References

- ▶ Canon Law
- ▶ Civil (Roman) Law
- ▶ Natural Law
- ▶ Roman Empire

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## Form and Matter

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### Abstract

The notions of form and matter are treated in very different contexts before and after the Latin translations of the Aristotelian physical and metaphysical texts. Up to the second half of the twelfth century, the Platonic tradition



(directly, through the *Timaeus*, and indirectly) and Augustine of Hippo presented matter as a formless receptacle that precedes the reception of forms. The problem lies in forms coming to be in matter. A parallel tradition begun by Boethius engages in an ontologizing reading of Aristotle's *Categories* that leaves matter in the margins of formal ontology. Starting from the thirteenth century, the new context of Aristotelian epistemology reoriented the debate considering the ontology of compound things. Form and matter are then conceived as metaphysical principles that account for change (Thomas Aquinas), or as the constituent parts of things (the Franciscan tradition). In fourteenth-century England, several theories arose that, while very different among themselves, presented matter and form as absolute things. In Germany, a new metaphysics of forms arises that excludes matter from philosophical discussion.

In medieval ontology, the notions of form and matter most often serve to describe the condition of individual things. According to some authors, only things belonging to the sensible world and subject to change are composed of matter and form. For others, such a composition also extends to beings beyond the sphere of fire (from the moon outwards): although they are not subject to generation and corruption, they are material insofar as they are multiplied and individuated within the same species. Form (*morphē/forma*) is the principle of determination that makes a thing what it is in actuality. Matter (*hylē/materia*) is the receptive principle or the potential "substrate," which signifies of what a thing is made or in which it is. The notion of matter allows one to account for change, and for the differentiation and multiplication of individual forms.

Nevertheless, this conceptual pair has very different meanings according to era and author. The Middle Ages can be divided into two philosophical periods: before and after the Latin translations of the Aristotelian physical and metaphysical texts.

1. The first period runs from the end of Antiquity and Augustine of Hippo (354–430) to the second half of the twelfth century. During these

eight centuries, the Latin Middle Ages did not have access to Aristotelian physical and metaphysical works. The (direct and indirect) Platonic tradition set the terms of discourse on physics. The first part of Plato's *Timaeus* (to 53c) is transmitted in the Latin translation made by Calcidius (c. 321). There, Plato distinguishes three primordial genera (48d–52c): (a) immutable and intelligible forms, which are the eternal models of mutable things; (b) sensible and mutable forms, which are the copies of these forms in matter; (c) the matter, in which these copies come to be. Plato describes matter as the universal receptacle or mother. It constitutes the form's alterity: it is outside all forms so that it may be that in which the forms come to be. As opposed to the form, which is in itself intelligible, matter is not intelligible – one only perceives it in "dream." Plotinus (c. 205–270) would add that matter is nonbeing and evil, insofar as it is the opposite of the one (*Enneads* II, 4).

Following this Platonic line, Augustine of Hippo gives an interpretation of matter that would have much success during the Middle Ages. Commenting on the beginning of *Genesis*, he compares matter to the shadowy abyss from which God separates things and organizes the world. In the *Confessions* (*Confessiones* XII, 6) and in *De Genesi ad litteram* (I), he describes matter as an absence of form (*informitas*) and an almost-nothing (*prope nihil*), but which is something. Created *ex nihilo*, this formless material is gradually formed thanks to dispositions that are present in it from its creation: *seminal reasons* (*semina, rationes seminales*), which Augustine borrows from Stoic physics (*De Genesi ad litteram* III.12; IV.33; V.7). Such a reading of *Genesis* allows Augustine to affirm the ontological priority of nothing to the world, and of matter to forms. Terrestrial things, forms engaged in matter, are essentially transitory, mutable, and corruptible.

Medieval commentaries on the *Timaeus* only appear by the middle of the twelfth century. The most Platonic moment of the Latin Middle Ages occurs at the time of the so-called "School of Chartres." William of Conches and Bernard of



Chartres composed glosses on the *Timaeus*. With respect to the issue of form and matter, the most important work from this time is perhaps Bernard Silvestre's *Cosmography*, a poem mixed with prose commentaries, which, modeled on the beginning of Ovid's *Metamorphosis*, tells the origin of the world. As with Augustine, matter (*Ylē*) precedes the formation of the world. Bernard names this shadowy material *Silva* (forest). Matter is wild, but it is also halfway between good and evil. The intellect (*Nous*) must organize it, that is, give it form. In this Platonic tradition, the pair matter/form also constitutes the projection into nature of the Fall and the turning away from the Good.

Alongside Augustine, the other great philosophical authority of the High Middle Ages was Boethius (c. 480–524/525), the Latin translator and commentator of Aristotle's logical treatises. Among other texts, Aristotle's *Categories* and Boethius' *Commentary on Porphyry's Isagoge* played the role of ontological treatises during this period. In this context, the question of substance is not posed in terms of matter and form, but in terms of a Platonized Aristotelian logic: how a genus descends into its species and how the species is individuated. Boethius explains the individuality of substances without recourse to matter, relying on a unique bundle of accidents in each thing. The hylemorphic composition of things does not appear among the problems addressed in the Boethian tradition.

In the ninth century, John Scotus Eriugena retranslated the works of the Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite and adopted Proclus' system of formal emanation. The ontological reading of the Porphyrian tree, begun by Boethius, receives a strong Proclian flavor: the genus is the most formal entity, that is, both the most universal and the most essential, and it descends into its species and their individuals by emanation (see, in particular, the *Annotationes in Marcianum*). Such a formal ontology leaves little room for matter.

2. The second period is that of the reception of the Aristotelian physical and metaphysical corpus. Starting in the second half of the twelfth century, almost the entirety of Aristotle's texts, as

well as numerous Arabic and Byzantine commentaries and treatises, are translated into Latin from Greek and Arabic. In the *Physics* (II, 1–3) and the *Metaphysics* (VII, 3, 7–8, 10–11), Aristotle considers matter and form as intrinsic and constituent principles of mutable things or “composites.” In physics, matter explains the continuity of change: in transformation, what was wood becomes ash. In the material thing, matter expresses potentiality, the possibilities of becoming. It is also the principle that allows one to say in what a thing is and of what it is constituted. The Aristotelian vision is the opposite of Augustine's: according to Aristotle, act and form are always prior to potency and matter, otherwise it would be necessary to posit an absurd nonbeing – chaos – that existed before being (*Metaphysics* XII, 7, 1072a7–19).

During this Aristotelian period, three works from the Arabic-speaking world, translated into Latin, played a major role: the “*Metaphysics*” of the *Shifā'* by Avicenna (Ibn Sīnā), the *Fountain of Life* (*Fons vitae*) of Avicbron (Ibn Gabirol), and the commentaries on Aristotle's works by Averroes (Ibn Rushd).

Avicenna (980–1037) bequeathed to the Latin world a Neoplatonic cosmology and a metaphysics of forms. The cosmos is ordered by a procession of ten intelligences, purely formal substances that cause the world by their essential activity (*Metaphysics* IX, 4). Material things come about by means of the cosmos' emanationist dynamics: they are the exterior traces of the activity of intelligences that are always in act. All the bodies of the cosmos, terrestrial and celestial, are composed of a receptive matter and a form or soul infused in it by an intelligence. With respect to terrestrial matter, it constitutes the stuff that receives the forms emanating from the last of the ten intelligences, the “agent intelligence,” understood as “giver of forms” (*dator formarum*).

Written in the middle of the eleventh century, the *Fountain of Life* of Ibn Gabirol provided the model for “universal hylemorphism.” Ibn Gabirol also adopted a Neoplatonic cosmology, but he gave the matter/form pair a universal, ontological

scope: matter is the original material of the whole cosmos. All created substances are composed of matter and form, from the most perfect and universal celestial intelligences down to natural and corporeal beings, characterized by their particularity. In this system, particularity, and not materiality, is the indicator of a degraded state, as in the ontological readings of Porphyry's tree. On the joint authority of Ibn Gabirol and Augustine, the majority of Latin scholastics associated with the angelic intelligences and with the human intellect a proper matter, independent of any bond to a body.

In his commentaries on the *Physics*, the *Metaphysics*, and *On the Heavens*, Averroes (1126–1198) returns matter and form to their Aristotelian epistemic context: these principles are only discovered in the course of an investigation of physical changes. Against Avicenna, Averroes specifies that only natural things of the sublunary world are composed of matter and form. The celestial bodies are incorruptible; therefore, they are not composed of matter (*In De caelo* I, c. 20). Matter is the potential principle that explains sublunary change: generation, corruption, and accidental changes. According to Averroes, matter is endowed with "indeterminate dimensions" (three-dimensionality), which assure the possibility of being immediately divided into as many individual substances as there are forms in act to determine it.

Aristotle's philosophical texts were read and commented at the University of Paris and in England from the beginning of the thirteenth century. In the middle of the century, the lectures of Albert the Great provide a first glimpse of the points of scholastic debate. Albert rejects Ibn Gabirol's universal hylemorphism and adopts Averroes' approach: only natural (sublunary) beings are composed of matter and form (*Summa theologiae* II, tr. 1, q. 3–4). Commenting on the *Metaphysics* (*Metaph.* II, tr. 3, c. 10), he describes matter and form as correlative principles, intrinsic to the thing. Matter as such is the desire for form. It is therefore necessary that the form be present in it in an inchoative manner, as in an embryonic state. Albert calls this inclination and this desire on the part of matter for a form *inchoatio formae*

(*Metaph.* I, tr. 5, c. 8; XI, tr. 1, c. 8). He places Aristotelian nature in a Neoplatonic cosmological frame: these embryos of forms, which evoke Augustine's seminal reasons, are infused in prime matter by the celestial intelligences. The action of natural agents still must realize in act the forms that in an inchoate state preexisted in matter.

From approximately 1260, the interests of university theology carried over into ontology and physics. Three particularly important questions arose concerning matter and form: (a) Can God create some matter without form? (b) Do a plurality of substantial forms cohabit the same substance, in particular, that of a human? (c) Is there matter in spiritual and separate substances (i.e., in angels, in the pure intelligences of Peripatetic cosmology, or in human intellects considered separately from the body)?

Thomas Aquinas (1224/1225–1274) decides the three questions in a distinctly Aristotelian fashion:

- (a) God cannot make matter exist without form, since prime matter is pure potentiality. The entire being in act of a substance proceeds from its form, to which the matter is essentially relative. According to this view, matter is deprived of any ontological weight. Considered in itself, matter is a metaphysical principle diametrically opposed to form. It accounts for the potentialities of natural substances. At the level of physical reality, however, it does not enjoy any proper substantiality or actuality. On this basis, Thomas criticizes the theory of seminal reasons (*Sentences* II, dist. 12, q. 1; *De potentia*, q. 4; *Quodlibet* III, q. 1; *Sententia libri Metaphysicae* VII; *De principiis naturae*, c. 4; *In libros Physicorum* II).
- (b) Consequently, Thomas rejects the coexistence of a plurality of substantial forms in one same individual. If matter is pure potency, then the actuality of the first form provides complete being for the substance. In the case of man, the rational soul realizes the whole man in substance. It is impossible to suppose a partition of prime matter that would be prior to the

reception of the substantial form, or that remains under a plurality of substantial forms, because such a division can only come about by an act of information, to which matter, pure potency, is repugnant by definition. In the substantial composite, however, matter remains the principle that allows the explanation of accidental change (man can grow, acquire knowledge, etc.) and then corruption (death) (*Quaestio de anima; Summa theologiae* I, q. 75–76).

- (c) Thomas limits the composition of matter and form to the world of generation and corruption. He refuses to explain individuation and the mutability of angels and intelligences by means of a certain type of matter, a spiritual matter. According to Thomas, angels are pure forms, although imperfect ones; they are not therefore individuated under an angelic species, but there are as many angelic species as angels (*De spiritualibus creaturis; De ente et essentia*).

These doctrines constitute the points of contention during the debates that took place in the last quarter of the thirteenth century. Some authors (such as Giles of Rome, Godfrey of Fontaines, Richard Knapwell, and Giles of Lessines) defended Thomas' theses, with adaptations and modifications. But the majority of doctors and almost all Franciscans attacked them. In 1277, Giles of Rome is condemned for having maintained Thomas' solution to the first problem (a). Thomas' solutions to the other two questions (b and c) were condemned in 1277 at Oxford, and in 1286 at London.

- (a) The majority of the Franciscans grant that matter has some ontological weight proper to it and a minimal actuality. John Pecham affirms very clearly that God could make matter exist without form (*Quodlibet IV*, q. 1). The secular master Henry of Ghent holds the same thesis, invoking divine omnipotence. If matter is essentially something, it is also possible that God could bring it about in isolation, in an order different than the one actually realized (*Quodlibet I*, q. 10; X, q. 8). To grant matter its

own substantiality, and to justify its minimal actuality, Bonaventure reworked the theory of seminal reasons (*Sentences* II, dist. 7, pars 2, art. 2, q. 1; II, dist. 15, art. 1, q. 1). Only some of the Franciscans would follow him down this path (e.g., Roger Marston, *Quodlibet II*, q. 22).

- (b) The plurality of substantial forms is a doctrine shared by almost all Franciscans (with the notable exception of Peter John Olivi's doctrine: *Sentences* II, q. 50–51). The Franciscan approach is more empiric and less metaphysical than that of Thomas. Man is a microcosm that contains in act the divisions observed in the larger world. His body, his nutritive soul, his sensitive soul, his intellectual soul, and each of the intermediate degrees is endowed with a proper substantiality. The matter/form pair becomes the means of graduating the scale of being and the parts of a being, from the less perfect (the more material) to the more perfect (the more formal). The same entity can be conceived as matter or form, according to the perspective one takes; for example, the sensitive soul is the matter of the intellectual soul, but the form of the nutritive soul (see, e.g., Matthew of Aquasparta, *Quaestiones de anima XIII*; Richard of Middleton, *De gradu formarum*; John Pecham, *Quodlibet IV*, q. 11; and also Roger Bacon, *Libri communium naturalium* I, pars 2, dist. 1–2, who superimposes the distinction between matter and form on that between genus and species).
- (c) Consequently, Ibn Gabirol's universal hylemorphism is largely adopted by Franciscan theologians, following Bonaventure (*Sentences* II, dist. 3, pars 1, art. 1). Matter is not confined to the physical world, nor is it conceived of as a principle opposed to any actuality. On the contrary, it is endowed with a minimal actuality and coexists with form in every created substance, including the angels. It accounts for their condition as creatures: limitation, mutability, potentiality, individuality, and receptivity.

In the fourteenth century, two new traditions appear, one English, the other German.

In England, John Duns Scotus (c. 1265–1308) places the problem of matter and form in a global metaphysical context. In this metaphysics, everything that is possible is also real, intelligible, and endowed with a certain formal characteristic, prior to any concrete and created existence. If matter is not nothing – if it is legitimate to speak of matter – it is therefore something in itself possible. Scotus grants to the matter a certain reality and a formal entity at metaphysical level, a more foundational level than that of its physical existence. In a concrete substance, matter and form remain two distinct absolutes, joined by a relation of connection. Composition becomes therefore the distinguishing mark of the world and of created substances (*Lectura* II, dist. 12, q. unica).

Among Scotus' numerous critics, William of Ockham (1285–1347) rejects the Scotist metaphysics of the real possible, and proposes a physics of existence and an ontology of the singular. If discourse is extramentally relevant, its terms must supposit for singulars. This logicolinguistic critique likewise leads to a rejection of Thomas' solution, where matter is a metaphysical principle. According to Ockham, matter and form are two absolute singulars and are in act in each compound substance. Prime matter is immediately divided into as many substances as actually exist in the world. With an epistemology radically opposed to that of Scotus, Ockham also makes matter absolute; thus he insists on substance being compound (*Summula philosophiae naturalis* I, c. 9–11; *Expositio in librum Physicorum* I, c. 16–18; III, c. 14).

The German tradition, with such representatives as Dietrich of Freiberg (c. 1250–1320) and Berthold of Moosburg (d. after 1361), develops a metaphysics of forms that excludes matter, relegating it to the world of the contingent and the corruptible. In his treatise *De quiditatibus entium*, Dietrich gives a new reading of Aristotelian ontology. Scientific discourse describes only the necessary and per se relations of which Aristotle speaks in the *Posterior Analytics* I, 4. Only forms and the formal properties of things can be the object of such discourse. Matter is not intelligible, because it is contingent and potential; it is

able not to be and to be otherwise than how it is. If one considers the compound substance, matter is posterior to the form and does not enter into the quiddity or the definition of the thing. It no longer has a place in the necessary discourse of metaphysics. In commenting on Proclus, Berthold of Moosburg arrives at the same sort of conclusions by a different path.

## Cross-References

- ▶ [Aristotelianism in the Greek, Latin, Syriac, Arabic, and Hebrew Traditions](#)
- ▶ [Augustine](#)
- ▶ [Boethius](#)
- ▶ [Divine Power](#)
- ▶ [Essence and Existence](#)
- ▶ [Ibn Sīnā, Abū 'Alī \(Avicenna\)](#)
- ▶ [John Duns Scotus](#)
- ▶ [John Scottus Eriugena](#)
- ▶ [Metaphysics](#)
- ▶ [Natural Philosophy](#)
- ▶ [Platonism](#)
- ▶ [Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite](#)
- ▶ [Thomas Aquinas](#)
- ▶ [William of Ockham](#)

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## Francesc Marbres

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### Abstract

Francesc Marbres, wrongly known as “John the Canon” since the fifteenth century, was a Catalan from Barcelona, an Austin Canon at Tortosa Cathedral in today’s Spain, and a Master of Arts at Toulouse. He composed an influential set of unfinished questions on the *Physics* around 1330 and died and was buried in Paris, where he was studying theology. His work on the *Physics* did not circulate widely until the mid-fifteenth century, when it was copied frequently and then printed several times by 1520. Marbres explicitly employed mainly theological works in his *Physics*

questions, especially those of the early fourteenth-century Franciscans John Duns Scotus, Peter Auriol, Francis of Marchia, Landolfo Caracciolo, Gerald Odonis, and Francis of Meyronnes, but also the secular Thomas Wylton. Tacitly he used the writings of some Catalan contemporaries. Thus Marbres was perhaps the main path via which the exciting physical ideas of several Parisian theologians reached the sixteenth century.

A set of questions on the *Physics* survives partially or wholly in almost 40 known manuscripts and was printed eight times between 1475 and 1520. Usually attributed to “Johannes Canonicus” (sometimes identified as a Franciscan) in the witnesses and in the scholarly literature, in some colophons the questions are also assigned to Johannes Marbres or Franciscus Marbres, who is further identified as a Catalan and a canon of Tortosa. The text on the *Physics* has been variously dated to the first half of the fourteenth century and to the mid-fifteenth century. A letter of Pope John XXII dated 1321, however, informs us that he granted Franciscus Marbres, a cleric from Barcelona, a canonry in Tortosa, farther south on the Mediterranean coast, where the cathedral chapter consisted of canons regular of the Augustinian Order. The only other documentary sources located so far record that Francesc Marbres (his name in Catalan) borrowed the *Sentences* from the cathedral library in 1330, arranged to be away from Tortosa at the same time, died as Master of Arts, and was buried in Paris while studying theology. Internal evidence in his *Physics* questions and colophons specify that Francesc had studied arts at Toulouse.

“John the Canon” has played an important role in the historiography of fourteenth-century natural philosophy at least since the fundamental works of Pierre Duhem, with Anneliese Maier, Marshall Clagett, Edward Grant, and many others devoting attention to his questions on the *Physics*. Because many of the author’s sources had never been printed, however, and sometimes were not even available in accessible manuscripts, the nature of Francesc Marbres’ work and the extent of his debt



to Francis of Marchia, Gerald Odonis, Landolfo Caracciolo, and others were unknown. Studies and editions of the texts of those Franciscans, together with some careful detective work (starting with Duhem himself) on the writings of scholastics whom Marbres does not cite, have allowed historians to conclude that Marbres' questions on the *Physics* are fundamentally a work of compilation, although with additions of his own. Marbres thus took the salient doctrines of recent and contemporary scholastics and presented them in his questions, accepting or critiquing them according to his own views. In this way, Marbres' *Physics* questions provide a window into early fourteenth-century physics while participating in the debates.

Active just before John Buridan at a time when the Oxford Calculators were just getting started, Francesc Marbres considered the most important natural philosophers, either positively or negatively, to be recent theologians: the Franciscan John Duns Scotus and the Friars Minor active in the two decades after the Subtle Doctor's death, especially those who read the *Sentences* at Paris from 1317 to 1321, namely, Peter Auriol, Landolfo Caracciolo, Francis of Marchia, and Francis of Meyronnes. Gerald Odonis, another important source, did not lecture on the *Sentences* at Paris until 1327–28, but he was already active at Toulouse a decade earlier, and Marbres may have encountered him there. Marbres also engaged explicitly with the physical theories of the English secular Thomas Wylton and, to a lesser extent, his colleague Walter Burley, the English Franciscans William of Ockham and William of Alnwick, as well as the Italian Minorite Alexander of Alexandria and the Italian Carmelite Gerard of Bologna. Interestingly, Marbres also borrowed from and was influenced by at least three contemporaries from, or teaching in, his native land. Garrett Smith has shown that Marbres employed the works of the Franciscan Peter Thomae, active at the Barcelona convent in the 1310s and 1320s, and Duhem, Edward Mahoney, Marek Gensler, and Smith have demonstrated the connection between Marbres and his Aragonese Franciscan contemporary Antonius Andreas. Finally, a Catalan bachelor whom Marbres cites in his first question has

turned out to be the Augustinian Hermit Bernat Oliver, who lectured on the *Sentences* at Paris in the 1320s.

Only two manuscripts date to the fourteenth century. The overwhelming majority of the witnesses, both in manuscript and in print, date from the period 1450–1520. Thus the historical impact of Marbres' questions on the *Physics* lies in the fact that they transmit, explicitly or tacitly, the physical theories of the abovementioned early fourteenth-century theologians to the scholastics active on the eve of the "Scientific Revolution." Marbres was primarily a Scotist follower of Francis of Marchia, but he dealt with the often innovative un-Aristotelian physical views of other early fourteenth-century authors. The fact that Marbres' sources were mainly theological works, as opposed to commentaries on the Philosopher's writings, certainly facilitated Marbres' presentation of so many new theories.

By 1520, many of the works of Scotus, Meyronnes, Burley, and Ockham were readily available in print. This is not true for most of the other authors whom Francesc Marbres employed in his questions on the *Physics*. Marbres was particularly interested in metaphysical questions about the ontological status of number, time, place, motion, form, matter, privation, *genus* and *differentia*, and wholes and parts, and he usually presented differing Franciscan positions on these issues. Among the hot topics of the day for which Marbres' text offers the most exciting new theories, one finds questions on the univocity of the concept of being (the current subject of a study by Garrett Smith), the principle of individuation, divine foreknowledge of future contingents, the infinite, the vacuum, the intension and remission of forms, atomism, and change in general.

Gerald Odonis was an indivisibilist regarding the continuum. He treated the subject in several places, but for the early modern natural philosopher, Francesc Marbres' presentation of Odonis' position in the first question of book VI would have been the most accessible. Francis of Marchia's portrayal of Peter Auriol's radical theory of divine foreknowledge, together with Marchia's own popular refutation, was never printed, but Marbres incorporated most of it into

question 4 of book II, ostensibly on fortune. At times revisions to Marbres' questions and the confusion of later scribes and printers resulted in a garbled text, such that Odonis was seemingly deprived of the credit for his application of the theory of *virtus derelicta* of projectile motion (which he and Marchia developed, influencing Buridan's later *impetus* theory) to assert the possibility of finite motion in a vacuum. Regardless, Marbres' readers had access to this anti-Aristotelian view in his question 4 of book IV. In contrast, Odonis was made into a proponent of the notorious succession or replacement theory of the intension and remission of forms in book V, question 3, when "Godfrey" (of Fontaines)'s name was rendered "Gerald" and then even "Gerald Odonis" in the later witnesses. Nevertheless, the readers obtained an overview of the ideas in the debate between Godfrey, Antonius Andreas, Marchia, and Walter Burley. In book IV, question 1, Marbres offered Auriol's reductionist doctrine of place, but the readers would not have known that it was through the lens of Landolfo Caracciolo, who went on to reject Auriol's opinion. When asking whether God could produce an actual infinite in book III, question 3, Marbres centered his response around the disagreement between Thomas Wylton, Auriol, Marchia, and Francis of Meyronnes in ca. 1320. Marbres did not finish his questions, breaking off in the middle of the first question of book VIII, before he was able to give his version of the innovation that has made his champion, Francis of Marchia, most famous, the *virtus derelicta* itself.

Francesc Marbres' questions on the *Physics* described the *status quaestionis* of physical theories on the eve of Buridan, Oresme, and the Oxford Calculators and transmitted those theories to the early modern period. A critical edition is needed in order for us to determine how exactly Marbres compiled his work, to view that *status quaestionis* more clearly, and to help trace if and how Marbres' transmission of these ideas influenced sixteenth-century developments. Garrett Smith's findings for book I, question 3, on univocity give an idea of the interest of such an endeavor: Thomas Aquinas, James of Viterbo, John Duns Scotus, Gerard of Bologna, Thomas

Wylton, Peter Auriol, Francis of Marchia, Francis of Meyronnes, William of Alnwick, Peter Thomae, Antonius Andreas, and Gerald Odonis make their appearances, along with Scotists in general, since Marbres is one of the first to employ terms like *scotizantes* to characterize the developing doctrinal school within the Franciscan Order.

## Cross-References

- ▶ [Francis of Marchia](#)
- ▶ [Francis of Meyronnes](#)
- ▶ [Gerald Odonis](#)
- ▶ [John Duns Scotus](#)
- ▶ [Landolfo Caracciolo](#)
- ▶ [Parisian Condemnation of 1277](#)
- ▶ [Thomas Wylton](#)
- ▶ [Walter Burley](#)

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## Francis of Marchia

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### Abstract

Francis of Marchia (also known as Franciscus de Esculo, de Apponiano, or de Pignano, called sometimes Franciscus Rubeus, either a nickname or a family name) was a Franciscan theologian, who became *doctor theologiae* in Paris and taught also in other Franciscan *studia*, such as that located in Avignon. Little is known about his life. His biography is however marked by his rebellion against the Pope John XXII, when in 1328 he decided to side with Michael of Cesena and fled Avignon. After

escaping from Avignon, he spent many years at the Franciscan Convent in Munich, under the protection of the excommunicated German emperor Lewis IV of Bavaria. In 1343 he recanted. After this date, he disappears from the extant records.

Although an important part of his works still awaits an edition in print, Francis of Marchia has already emerged as an interesting and innovative thinker in many fields. Scholars are still discussing the actual significance of his criticism of Aristotle's theory of motion and of his rejection of a substantial difference among terrestrial and celestial bodies. His position concerning the relationship between God's foreknowledge and human freedom proved to be very influential, so that specialists speak of a "Marchist school" in this field. Francis' treatise *Improbatio*, aiming at a radical refutation of John XXII's bull *Quia vir reprobus*, deeply influenced the formation of Ockham's political thought.

Francis was born in the small village of Appignano, not far from Ascoli Piceno, in central Italy. The only reliable information we possess concerning his career as a theologian in the Franciscan Order derives from his writings. Combining what it is known about other Franciscan masters who were active in the same years with evidence contained in his commentary on the *Sentences*, it is possible to date his lectures as bachelor of the *Sentences* to the academic year 1319–1320. Francis' commentary has come down to us in different versions, which numerous scholars have studied and (partially) edited in recent decades. The editorial enterprise is still in progress, but it is already clear that Marchia read the *Sentences* not only in Paris, but also elsewhere, as was the case for many theologians from the Mendicant Orders, although it is not yet known exactly where and when. After his Paris lectures Francis revised his commentary into a *scriptum* that may have been completed, according to a colophon, in 1323.

Some historians have maintained that Francis was acting as *lector* at the Franciscan convent in Avignon in 1324. This is quite possible, but the

earliest explicit mention of him in this position, bearing the title of *doctor in sacra theologia*, dates to 1328, in the first document related to his rebellion against Pope John XXII. While in Avignon, Francis had come into contact with the minister general of his Order, Michael of Cesena, who had been summoned by the pope in 1327 and later forbidden to leave the city without permission. In the difficult months of tension between the pope and the leadership of the Franciscan Order, stemming from the controversy over the doctrine of absolute poverty, but worsened by the dispute with the excommunicated German Emperor Louis of Bavaria, Francis moved over to the side of his minister general. In 1328 Francis fled Avignon along with Michael of Cesena, Bonagratia of Bergamo, and William of Ockham, signed the appeals in which they accused John XXII of heresy, and, with Bonagratia, Ockham, and Henry of Thalhheim, coauthored the *Allegationes religiosorum virorum*, defending Michael of Cesena. Francis was probably the first to respond to the papal bull *Quia vir reprobus*, penning a long treatise entitled *Improbatio*. In 1331 he signed the letter sent by Michael of Cesena to the general chapter of the Friars Minor in Perpignan. From a vitriolic letter of Gerald Odonis to Michael of Cesena, we learn that Francis had been robbed of a rather large sum of money while heading to Munich, probably in Como. Newly discovered documents confirm this passage through Como.

Fragments of a trial record inform us that at one point (most probably in 1341) Francis was in the hands of the Roman Church. At first he tried to defend his position, claiming that his statements were compatible with the doctrine held by Pope John XXII. In the end he recanted, on December 1, 1343. He then disappears from our records, although a late-fourteenth-century source (the Franciscan Andrea Richi) reports that Francis wrote a treatise in which he argued in favor of the compatibility of Nicholas III's *Exiit qui seminavit* with John XXII's *Cum inter nonnullos* (that is, the contrary of what he had maintained while siding with Michael of Cesena). This work does not seem to have survived.

Francis of Marchia's thought is far from having been investigated in full, so the present entry is

limited to certain aspects. For several decades Francis' writings have been the object of interest for historians of science, because in his commentary on book IV of the *Sentences* he puts forth an account of projectile motion that is different from that of Aristotle. It centers on the idea that a projectile can continue to move when no longer in contact with the source of its motion, because this source has impressed a certain *virtus* on the projectile. Since this *virtus* is, so to speak, "left" in the projectile by the mover, it is called *virtus derelicta*. Such a *virtus* diminishes gradually during motion, and this progressive diminution explains why projectile motion comes to an end. It is easy to see why Francis could have been considered a sort of "forerunner" of Galileo Galilei. Nevertheless, on the one hand, most recent studies have shown that Francis did not invent the basis for his account of projectile motion, but it had been circulating for decades in European arts faculties among commentators on Aristotle's *Physics*, although few authors supported it at length or with Francis' arguments; on the other, the link between *virtus derelicta* and the modern theory of inertia has been fundamentally reassessed. While scholars debate the true relationship between the *virtus derelicta* approach to a theory of motion and seventeenth-century mechanics, it is beyond doubt that Francis' theory exerted an important influence, even on authors who only partially accepted his suggestions or who rejected them. Something similar holds for Francis' rejection of Aristotle's distinction between celestial and terrestrial matter. However "revolutionary" such a claim may appear at first glance, Francis did not draw the consequences as a "modern" reader would expect, so the connection between his position and the "Scientific Revolution" is not as close as some historians of thought claimed in the past.

More recently, scholars have investigated Marchia's ideas concerning necessity and contingency with respect to divine foreknowledge. Like many Franciscan authors of his era, Francis is acquainted with the innovative theories Peter Auriol formulated in his lectures on the *Sentences*, reacting to them. In particular, Francis opposes Auriol's opinion that propositions concerning

future contingents are neutral, in the sense that they are neither true nor false. Francis of Marchia develops a solution to the problem that, while avoiding the existence of indeterminate future contingents, still maintains that contingency exists, and not only in an accidental way, that is, because of the shortcomings of our limited human knowledge, but also in itself, grounded in God's freedom. Francis therefore supports a kind of "determinism" that does not rule out the possibility of human freedom. On this point, Francis found many followers in the fourteenth century, so that Chris Schabel speaks of a "Marchist" school.

Generally speaking, as our knowledge of the theological debates of the first decades of the fourteenth century increases, the influence that the thinker from Appignano actually exerted is turning out to be much greater than expected. This also holds true in the field of political theory. In his almost word-for-word refutation of John XXII's *Quia vir reprobus* (which in turn resembles more a scholastic treatise than a papal bull), the lengthy *Improbatio*, Francis discusses some issues that connect the defense of the Franciscan theory of poverty to political theory. In particular he develops John Duns Scotus' account of the origins of ownership and *dominium* in general into a refutation of Pope John's claim that the division of property among men is a divine institution. According to Francis, on the contrary, the institution of ownership is nothing but an ad hoc solution to the problems caused by Original Sin. God's plan and human nature privilege the community of goods. To some extent this influences the postlapsarian state as well, since humans can still renounce property by taking a religious vow that allows them to live in a state closer to perfection. Moreover, in cases of extreme necessity, the rule of property ceases to be valid and the person in need can use what she/he requires to survive. Like ownership, political power is also solely of human and not of divine origin. This claim implies that, in order for temporal power to be legitimate, it need not be authorized by the spiritual power, because it belongs to the sphere of autonomous human initiative, which tries to adjust to the negative consequences of the Fall. As Hilary S. Offler and Jürgen Miethke have

shown, such ideas deeply influenced William of Ockham in the early stages of his involvement in the debate on Franciscan poverty and also paved the way for his political theory.

## Cross-References

- ▶ [Future Contingents](#)
- ▶ [John Duns Scotus](#)
- ▶ [Nicholas Oresme](#)
- ▶ [Peter Auriol](#)
- ▶ [William of Ockham](#)

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## Francis of Meyronnes

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### Abstract

Francis of Meyronnes, O.F.M. (c. 1288–c. 1328), was a Provençal Franciscan theologian and sermonist. Francis studied with John Duns Scotus at the University of Paris and came to prominence in the early 1320s as a bachelor and then master of theology at Paris. His works were extremely influential from the years immediately following his teaching into the modern era, but only a small fraction is edited. Heavily influenced by John Duns Scotus, he does not hesitate to modify or abandon Scotus' thought. His metaphysics is heavily realist: he explicitly declares his allegiance to Platonic ideas, which he understands as identical with quiddities and beings of essence, and he holds that propositions have real existence. Francis' doctrine of divine knowledge largely derives from Scotus; his notion of intuitive and abstractive cognition, on the other hand, differs by positing that intuitive cognition is the mental seizing of an

object with all its merely formally distinct modes, and can occur through species. Francis defines place as the located object's presentiality as related to God, and time as the flux of place to God. His sermons have been praised for their mystical and ascetic quality, but his treatises on the mystical and ascetic topics have been characterized as impersonal. In his political writings, Francis favored the subjection of secular authority to the pope.

Born in the village of Meyronnes in Provence, Francis of Meyronnes joined the Franciscan convent of Digne and entered the Franciscan educational system. Between 1304 and 1307, he was sent to the University of Paris, where he attended the lectures of his confrere John Duns Scotus. After teaching in the provincial *studia* of the Franciscan Order, Francis returned to Paris as a Bachelor of Theology and lectured on the *Sentences* of Peter Lombard in 1320–1321, notably engaging in debate with the Benedictine Pierre Roger (later Pope Clement VI) and the Dominican John of Prato. In 1323, Francis was promoted to master of theology, and elected provincial minister of Aquitaine. In 1324, he appears at the Papal Curia in Avignon, giving sermons and holding theological debates, and served on a diplomatic mission to Gascony. He died in Piacenza.

Francis of Meyronnes benefited from the patronage of the Angevin dynasty, to which his family was related. On May 24, 1323, in a letter instructing the chancellor of the University of Paris to award Francis the title Master of Theology, Pope John XXII notes that Robert of Anjou, King of Naples, requested this promotion. In autumn of the same year, Francis was present at the death of St. Elzéar de Sabran, who had come to Paris to negotiate Charles of Anjou's marriage. Francis also pronounced Elzéar's funeral oration. Francis dedicated to Robert of Anjou his commentary on the works of Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite.

Referred to by later generations as the *doctor illuminatus* or *acutus*, the *magister abstractionum* and even the *princeps scotistarum*, Francis of Meyronnes had immediate and lasting impact



through his writings, above all his commentary on the *Sentences* of Peter Lombard, which exists in over 100 medieval manuscripts. Subsequent Franciscan theologians, such as Himbert of Garda (1320s), Aufredo Gonteri Brito (1325), and Pastor of Serrescudio (1332–1333), summarized or copied Meyronnes' works in their own commentaries on the *Sentences*. Fifteenth-century thinkers cite not only Francis' thought, but also refer to *mayronistae* and *via mayronis*. Many of Meyronnes' works exist in numerous early modern printings. Yet this very breadth and diversity in Meyronnes' writings has proved a hindrance to modern scholarship. A handful of select passages and minor treatises are available in modern critical edition, and nearly half of Meyronnes' writings are accessible only in manuscript. Contemporary studies on particular subjects reveal Meyronnes' originality and philosophical interest, but not even the fundamental study of Roth (1936) achieves a comprehensive overview of his thought.

Francis of Meyronnes is a reputed Scotist, referring frequently to John Duns Scotus as *doctor noster*, and is perhaps the earliest author to speak of opposing schools of thought at Paris, which some scholars interpret as indicating the existence of a Scotist and a Thomist school. He defends many doctrines characteristic of Scotus, such as the Immaculate Conception and the univocity of being, and he uses Scotistic notions, such as the formal distinction, *haecitas* as principle of individuation, and the division of being into being-in-actuality and being-in-objective-potency. In outlining his specific opinions, however, Francis does not hesitate to oppose the mature position of Scotus. Meyronnes criticizes Scotus' doctrine of formal nonidentity *ex natura rei*, and instead defines the formal distinction as founded on really different intrinsic modes inhering in the same thing.

Among ancient authorities, Francis of Meyronnes favors Augustine and the Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite, and even compiled selected texts with commentary for each of these authors. His use of the Pseudo-Dionysius is idiosyncratic, perhaps deriving from his stated belief that Dionysius received from Paul formal instruction in the content of the Beatific Vision.

Meyronnes treats the Pseudo-Dionysius' works as a guide to positive knowledge about God in this life, interpreting these treatises of Greek negative theology in terms of fourteenth-century western scholasticism.

Augustine likewise exerted a powerful influence on Francis' realism. While rejecting all arguments from reason for the necessary existence of divine ideas, Francis claims on the authority of Augustine that they do exist. He distinguishes these infinite and exemplary "theological ideas" from "metaphysical ideas." Ideas in the theological sense are foundational relations, distinct from formal relations in that foundational relations require only the foundation to exist, and not the term, whereas both must exist in the case of a formal relation. Francis identifies ideas in the metaphysical sense as the ideas of Plato, properly understood, and not as Aristotle presents them; indeed, Francis calls Aristotle the "worst metaphysician" for having misunderstood Platonic ideas. Presumably, Meyronnes interprets Platonic ideas through Augustine, for the only work Meyronnes cites as being written by Plato is Porphyry's *Isagoge* to the *Categories*. For Meyronnes, "idea" in the metaphysical sense, "quiddity," and the "being of essence" (*esse essentiae*) all refer to the same thing: the formal nature of a reality, abstracted from all intrinsic modes, including existence, actuality, reality, and contingency. As such, the quiddities are independent of any rational or real relation of production and contemplation. With respect to the being of essence, creatures are said to be in (objective) potency prior to being in actuality and having the mode of existence (*esse existentiae*).

Francis of Meyronnes argues for the priority of the will over the intellect in the divine determination and knowledge of contingent propositions. Following Scotus, Francis divides God's determination into four logically ordered instants (instants of nature), corresponding to the divine essence's presentation of the terms of all possible propositions to the intellect, said intellect's generation of necessary and contingent propositions, the determination of contingent propositions through the action of the will, and, finally, the knowledge of these propositions by the divine intellect.

Propositions, as complexes of things existing together or divided, have real (subjective) existence, and on them is founded the proposition as it exists objectively in the mind. Francis bases this subjective existence on the real identity and formal distinction of extramental beings, such as “man” and “white.” For as these beings are really the same thing, a formal relation holds between them, and a formal relation requires the existence of both term and foundation. Objective mental existence comes about through intuitive cognition, in this life, based on infallible human sensation; intuitive cognition can occur through *species*. In intuitive cognition, the mind grasps the entire thing, including all its really identical (and formally distinct) modes, including existence. In contrast, abstractive cognition occurs when the mind considers merely the essence, “quidditatively in quidditative being,” which Francis identifies as a concept of first intention. Francis develops two other types of cognition, namely discursive and inferential (*illative*) cognition, the latter being the means by which the rational soul is self-aware. Cognition itself is really identical with a relation to the cognized being, and so not even God could cause an intuitive cognition of a nonexistent.

Francis’ doctrine of relations also plays a major role in his natural philosophy. Place is the presentiality (*praesentialitas*) of the thing to God, that is, the relation of the located thing to the eternal and ubiquitous unmoved mover; motion involves changing presentiality, and hence is a *fluxus formae* rather than a *forma fluens*. Time is a foundational relation of the succession of places, and therefore is, in Meyronnes’ words, “the flux of presentiality to God” (*In II Sent.* 2.14). As a consequence, all created reality is mobile, at least metaphorically: God has the power to make the Earth revolve (but does not).

Francis of Meyronnes was a prolific sermonist; Roßmann praises the ascetic and mystical quality of his sermons and declares them closer to the *devotio moderna* than those by Meister Eckhart (Roßmann 1972). Yet studies of Meyronnes’ other works touching on ascetic and mystical topics have revealed that he focuses on detached, rational analysis. Speaking of his commentary on the

writings of Pseudo-Dionysius, one scholar observed “Meyronnes seems to hide his own religious experience behind the objectivity of the discussion” (Alliney 2002).

Francis authored a treatise on apostolic poverty, arguing for the radical poverty of Christ and the Apostles. In his political writings, Francis was a papal hierocrat, and in a quodlibetal question, he managed to align his political philosophy with his biggest patrons, maintaining that the Kingdom of Naples was all the more noble because it was subordinate to the Church. Francis remained an ally of John XXII and produced pro-Papal consultations on ongoing theological and philosophical controversies, including the 1324 proceedings against William of Ockham and the *Lectura in Apocalypsim* of Peter John Olivi.

## Cross-References

- ▶ [Augustine](#)
- ▶ [Dante Alighieri](#)
- ▶ [Divine Power](#)
- ▶ [John Duns Scotus](#)
- ▶ [Meister Eckhart](#)
- ▶ [Peter Lombard](#)
- ▶ [Peter John Olivi](#)
- ▶ [Platonism](#)
- ▶ [Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite](#)
- ▶ [William of Ockham](#)

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## Francisco de Vitoria

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### Abstract

Francisco de Vitoria (1485–1546) was a Spanish theologian and philosopher known in the history of philosophy as a major figure in the revival of the study of Thomism in the sixteenth century. He used Thomism to formulate influential responses to the spiritual and political issues of his time, such as the Reformation, the nature of sovereignty and the notion of the sovereign state, imperial expansion, and the rights of conquered peoples. As a Counter-Reformation theologian, he asserted the goodness and rationality of man's nature, which were manifested in his natural inclinations, irrespective of man's reception of grace or spiritual status. His doctrine of natural inclinations had political consequences, and made him an opponent not only of Lutheranism but also of republicanism, as political authority – and particularly monarchy – was natural to man, not a result of his sinfulness, and its purpose was to enable man to fulfill his God-given human nature. The source of political authority was God, and God was therefore the source of human law, which men must see as binding in conscience. Yet, Vitoria contributed not only to the idea of a God-given mandate for the exercise of political power, but also to the idea of the limits of political power, as it must be constrained by the fulfillment of man's humanity.

Francisco de Vitoria (1485–1546) was a Spanish theologian and philosopher who was a leading figure in the sixteenth-century revival of Thomism, a movement which was central to early modern ideas about natural law, individual rights, and the state. This revival of Thomism is associated most closely with the “School of Salamanca”

or, the “Second Scholastic”, a group of Spanish theologians and jurists spanning two generations who wrote immensely influential works on moral and political philosophy. Vitoria is known as the “father” of this school, as nearly all of these scholars were either his students, or students of his students.

Vitoria was born around 1485. He entered the Dominican Order in Burgos in 1506. In 1509 he went to study in Paris at the Collège de Saint Jacques, where he eventually studied under the Thomist Peter Crockaert, who, in a pivotal move for the history of ideas, changed the set text in his lectures from Lombard's *Sentences* to Aquinas' *Summa theologiae*. Vitoria continued this tradition when he himself became a professor. Vitoria returned to Spain in 1523, and was elected Prime Chair of Theology at the University of Salamanca in 1526.

Vitoria published nothing of his own during his lifetime; what we have of his works are notes taken by his students during his lectures. Vitoria lectured on the *Summa theologiae* as well as on the *Sentences*, and he also gave several *relectiones*, which were longer and more formal lectures given at a certain time during the year on a particular academic problem. Since they have a distinct focus, these “relectiones” are, therefore, an especially good source for becoming familiar with Vitoria's thought on a variety of different subjects.

Vitoria's fame comes not because of his role in the revival of Thomism, but rather because of his role in employing Thomism to develop a political philosophy which was responsive to the challenges of sixteenth-century Europe, such as the notion of the sovereign state, the Reformation and the questions which it raised about the nature of the power of the church as well as the power of the state, and the conquest of America and imperial expansion. He is known in the history of political thought, perhaps most famously, for his writings on “international relations,” by which is meant his theory of the just war, the legitimation of the Spanish conquest of America, and his theory of the rights of the American Indians as the indigenous people of a conquered territory. His Thomist

approach enabled him to formulate a theory of rights in which all human beings had rights because of their inborn rational nature, rights not dependent upon God's grace or the righteousness of the individual. He could, therefore, assert that the Indians had rights over themselves and their property although they were non-Christians. Because much scholarly work on Vitoria has been done on his treatment of these subjects of human rights and imperial expansion (Fernandez-Santamaria 2005: 58–59; Pagden and Lawrance 1991: xxxi–xxxii and 383–387; Tierney 1997: 255–256), I will focus on his responses to other challenges of his time, specifically the sovereignty of the state and some of the theological and political problems posed by the Reformation. Addressing these issues will allow us to look at some of the more basic elements of his political thought, namely, his theory of natural law, natural inclinations, naturalness of the state, and the location of sovereignty. I regret that for reasons of space it will not be possible to treat his theory of the church in this article.

Vitoria's most systematic treatment of political questions is the *De potestate civili*, which is one of his earliest *relectiones*, delivered in 1528. The political theory that Vitoria lays out here was formed in the shadow of two major rebellions: the *comuneros* revolt of 1521–1522 and the Peasants' War of 1525. The first was republican in inspiration, the second, Catholics saw as a direct result of Lutheranism (Cargill Thompson 1984: 99–100). Despite the differences between republicanism and Lutheranism, both led to what Vitoria perceived as disrespect for political authority. Neither saw the state as natural to man in his present condition, and therefore both portrayed political authority in a way that could lead to discontent and unrest.

Vitoria's thinking on political issues throughout his career was of course not limited to countering republicanism and Lutheranism. However, these movements set the agenda for Vitoria in two ways. First, the fact that they "dissuade . . . simple men from due obedience to their princes . . ." was to make the preservation of the civil order a central theme in Vitoria's political thought; anarchy was to be avoided through political obedience and

a strong monarchy. Second, the way in which he tries to counter these issues in *De potestate civili* – by proving the necessity and legitimacy of political authority through showing that political society is the arrangement best suited to man because it fulfills his rational, human nature – sets the framework of his theory which was to endure throughout his work. I will first briefly set out some republican and Lutheran arguments and their political consequences, and then look at the way Vitoria used elements in his theory to directly or indirectly counter these arguments.

In 1520, the cities of Castile rebelled against Charles I in what is now known as the *Comunero* movement. Due to various grievances committed by the king, the members of these cities grouped together to form a body of representatives (*procuradores*) which saw itself as a parliamentary institution, which could convene itself and legislate without regard to the king's will (Fernandez-Santamaria 1977: 55). Although the movement was crushed by royal forces in 1522, the fundamental questions which it raised about the nature of sovereignty were kept alive through the publication of the *Tractado de republica* in 1521, written by Trinitarian friar Alonso de Castrillo, who was sympathetic to the movement (Fernandez-Santamaria 2005: 292).

In his treatise, Castrillo had tried to discredit the idea of royal power, arguing that the political servitude which it represented was far from natural. According to Vitoria, the republican cause "denied that kingly power or any kind of rule by a single person comes from God" and affirmed "that all sovereigns, generals, and princes are tyrants and robbers of human liberty" (*De potestate civili*, 1.5, trans. in Pagden and Lawrance 1991). Instead, they argue that "man was born free," since in the state of innocence "no man was master and no man was slave." God has never decreed that men "should suffer the dominion of some other man who had violently arrogated sovereignty to himself," which is the way in which they portray the relationship of a king to his subjects. The result of these arguments is that they "stir up sedition against our rulers."

In Vitoria's view, Lutheranism, too, led to political disobedience, but for different reasons.

Luther's main political work, *Secular Authority: To What Extent It Should Be Obeyed*, appeared in March, 1523, and argued that there were limits to political authority, which should not be overstepped by the ruler. These limits were a result of Luther's view of the purpose of government, which in turn resulted from his view of the nature of man. Man in his human nature is sinful and naturally inclined to act against the law which God has given to him; political authority, which is ordained of God, is founded solely to restrain these natural inclinations for evil and malice. Its purpose is to "punish the wicked and protect the just." It is, therefore, a purely temporal authority; that is, it's laws "extend no further than the body, goods and outward, earthly matters," such as maintaining order and peace (*Von Weltlicher Oberkeit*, in *Luther and Calvin on Secular Authority*, ed. Höpfl). Thus, if secular rulers "command anything that is contrary to God's word or which involves disobedience to God, they must not be obeyed (Cargill Thompson 1984: 97)."

Vitoria's basis for refuting both of these positions is his view of the origin and purpose of political society and, therefore, of political authority. This, in turn, is founded on his theory of natural law and man's natural inclinations, so I will turn to this aspect of his theory first.

Following Aquinas, Vitoria maintains that there are four varieties of law: eternal law, natural law, human law, and divine law. Eternal law is God's dictate of practical reason which governs all of his creation, and natural law is the participation of rational creatures in this *summa ratio*. It was accessible to man in two ways; the first way was through a set of "first" principles self-evident (*per se nota*) to man's understanding. *Per se nota* principles were known to man through a habit called *synderesis*. They consisted of principles such as "good is to be done and evil avoided" and "do unto others as you would have others do unto you," and could be recognized as true by everyone. These were regarded among scholastics as implanted by God in man, and were proof of man's inherent rationality and sense of justice, which could be developed through good education and experience.

The second way in which natural law was recognizable to man was through divinely implanted natural inclinations towards certain ends. Just as in speculative reasoning there are principles which are *per se nota*, so too there are principles which are *per se nota* in practical reasoning. Yet, the process by which these principles are known is different for each. In the case of practical reasoning, man knows the *per se nota* principles through *natural inclinations* which he has; these natural inclinations thus indicate the way in which God has ordered man to live, and therefore indicate precepts of the natural law. Vitoria explains: "if a thing is against natural inclination it is prohibited, if it is according to natural inclination it is a precept" (*Comentario al tratado de la ley*, trans. in Pagden and Lawrance 1991).

It was through his theory of natural inclinations that Vitoria was able to offer some of his strongest refutations of Luther – both of Luther's concept of man, as well as of his concept of political society. Although Vitoria discusses his notion of natural inclinations in his commentary on qu. 94 of the *Summa* without mentioning theories which may be opposed to it, in his *De homicidio* he offers a sustained defense of natural inclinations, specifically directing his arguments against current ideologies in which "nature and grace, law and natural inclination" are opposed to one another (*Relecciones*, ed. Gatino, 3:26).

Vitoria recognizes here that there is a diverse group of scholars and theologians arguing for the opposition of man's nature and the law of God: some are Aristotelians, who argue that although man by nature is inclined to seek what is good, the "good" which man naturally seeks is really the "pleasurable," which is most often sinful and against the law of God; others note that man is naturally inclined against what is demanded by virtue and the law of God, such as the commandment to have charity toward others and love God more than himself, as man is naturally inclined to preserve himself before others. Still others show through Scripture that the natural inclination of man is to sin and seek out what is bad. Yet, the conclusion drawn through all these arguments is the Lutheran contention that "all the works of



every human being are sinful,' and man is able to do nothing good of himself without the grace of God.

Vitoria asserts that he cannot believe that "human nature, which an all powerful and most wise God formed in his image," could have been created with bad inclinations and a depraved character, such that he would be inclined "to his own destruction and condemnation." Rather, "the inclination of human nature is immediately from God Himself," and it is therefore impossible for that inclination to be toward what is bad. God is the author of human nature, and Vitoria invokes Aristotle to explain how this authorship is to be understood: God created man with his particular form, by which is dictated man's end, and whatever gives form, also determines the consequences of that form. Thus, only God can be the cause of human inclinations, which are toward the end which God has established for man.

If we say therefore, that "man is naturally inclined to the bad," that inclination, along with the motions toward sin which follow from that inclination, must be imputed to God. Since God would not give a particular end to man, and a nature completely repugnant to it, Vitoria argues that nature inclines us only toward the good, and "thus everything that is contrary to natural inclination is bad."

Vitoria's theory of the origin of the state – and therefore of civil power – follows directly from this notion of natural inclinations. Man is naturally inclined toward political society, first because he lacks certain physical qualities which would enable him to live alone; and second, man's "rational soul itself makes man need partnership" (*De potestate civili*, 1.2). Both man's reason and his will can only be perfected by interacting with others. So, God "was responsible for endowing men with the necessity and inclination which ensure that they cannot live except in partnership." The city is the partnership which best fulfills these needs, and is therefore the most natural arrangement for men to establish. In this way, the city is God-given, since God has given man his form, and man's form dictates that he live in partnership with others. Furthermore, since God made man "part of the republic," he also gave man

a natural inclination toward the social virtues, such as to love the common good more than his own proper good (*De homicidio*:31).

Vitoria uses this notion of political society fulfilling man's God-given human nature as the foundation of his arguments for political obedience, and even (against the republicans) for the divine right of kings. First, since political society is God-given, and the city cannot exist without some ruling power, civil power is also God-given. Throughout his work, Vitoria cites many times the Pauline phrase "whosoever resisteth the power, resisteth the ordinance of God."

In order to counter republican arguments, it is essential to identify the location of this power. Vitoria attempts this in *De potestate civili*. He maintains that "first and *per se*" civil power resides in the commonwealth itself, for "there is no convincing reason why one man should have more power than another" (1.4). Thus, the commonwealth has this power as a whole body, and it has this power collectively "over the individual members of the commonwealth" (1.5).

However, it is impossible for the whole commonwealth to exercise this power over itself. It is therefore "necessary that the government and administration of affairs be entrusted to certain men who take upon themselves the responsibilities of the commonwealth and look after the common good . . ." Although republicans declare that there cannot be liberty in any system other than government "by the whole commonwealth," Vitoria dismisses this idea, arguing that there is no more liberty in rule by the multitude than there is in a monarchy or aristocracy (1.8). Yet, Vitoria is interested in justifying royal power in particular. The establishment of rulers – indeed, of a king – does not represent political servitude; for, not only does the naturalness of political society show that the relationship between king and subject is not one of unnatural dominion, but also, the commonwealth, as possessor of civil power over itself, sets up its own sovereign to administer its affairs.

Initially, Vitoria held that even though sovereignty resides in the body of the people, the ruler does not have his power from the people: "sovereigns are set up by the commonwealth, [but] royal power derives immediately from God . . . therefore

we must say about royal power exactly what we have asserted about the power of the commonwealth, namely that it is set up by God and by natural law” (1.5). Vitoria then used this idea of the divine right of kings to argue for political obedience. Because God is the source of political authority, he is also, therefore, the source of human law, for “a work of God is not only one which He performs Himself, but also one which He produces through intermediate causes” (3.1). For Vitoria, this means, *contra* Luther, that human laws are binding in conscience. It is incorrect to say that “secular power is solely temporal,” and therefore “has nothing to do with conscience.” Although he maintains a distinction between temporal and spiritual authority, Vitoria’s notion of man and the divine origins of the ruler’s power allows him to dismiss the limits which Luther had placed on secular power. Rather, Christ has decreed obedience to rulers, and their laws therefore are binding in conscience, just as divine laws are.

These ideas of the ruler’s power and his laws coming directly from God are conservative to be sure; the most likely explanation for them is Vitoria’s fear of anarchy and desire for political order. In Vitoria’s later writings, he seemed to drop the idea of the ruler’s power coming directly from God, and asserted instead that the ruler’s power came wholly from the people; however, he continued to maintain the importance of a strong monarchy, as well as the fact that human law was ordained of God and was therefore binding in conscience (Tierney 1997: 294–295).

Yet, Vitoria’s conservative conclusions were based on Thomist principles of the rationality and goodness of man. These principles allowed him to set out two essential political doctrines. First, political power, although ordained of God, was separate from spiritual power – an idea that was to become crucial with the rise of the monarch as head of state and of church, as with Henry VIII. Second, the individual as political subject was a rational being who had certain natural inclinations, pointing toward his end as a human being. The fulfillment of these inclinations gave political power its purpose, but also its limitations. The agenda of political authority was written according to man’s God-given needs and rights,

not according to his unworthiness, or the ruler’s desire for power. From these foundations, Vitoria would contribute to the idea of a just and limited secular power in a way that Lutheranism never could. Although his successors of the “second scholastic” were to come to different conclusions than Vitoria as they faced their own problems and fought their own ideological battles, they owed to him the beginnings of a crucial project to reinsert man’s inherent rationality and goodness into the heart of sixteenth-century political thought.

## Cross-References

- ▶ [Natural Law](#)
- ▶ [Natural Rights](#)
- ▶ [Thomas Aquinas](#)
- ▶ [Thomas Aquinas, Political Thought](#)
- ▶ [Thomism](#)

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## Future Contingents

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### Abstract

The philosophical debate concerning the truth-value of singular statements about future contingents derives from Chap. 9 of Aristotle's treatise *De Interpretatione*. In his influential commentary, Boethius assumed that Aristotle qualified the validity of the principle of bivalence with respect to singular future contingent propositions – they only have the disjunctive truth-value “true or false.” Abelard believed that Aristotle assumed that future contingent statements were true or false, though not determinately true or false before the actuality of the things to which they refer. He retained the principle of bivalence for all assertoric statements but rejected the universal application of the stronger principle that every assertoric statement is determinately true or determinately false in the sense of having determinate truth-makers. As for interpreting Aristotle, later medieval thinkers were inclined to follow Boethius rather than Abelard. However, since theologians usually thought that

divine omniscience presupposed bivalence, the discussion of future contingents was divided into historical constructions of Aristotle's view and the systematic discussions in theology which usually followed the Abelardian lines. An influential formulation of this approach was put forward by William of Ockham. Boethius, Thomas Aquinas, and many others thought that God could know future contingents only because the flux of time was present to divine atemporal eternity. Peter Auriol argued that from God's atemporal knowledge one could not conclude that future contingent propositions were true or false at all. This view found some supporters until it was damned by Pope Sixtus IV in 1474. Many late medieval thinkers defended God's ability to foreknow free acts. This led to the famous middle knowledge theory of the counterfactuals of freedom which was put forward by Luis de Molina in the sixteenth century.

The philosophical debate concerning the truth-value of future contingent propositions derives from Chap. 9 of Aristotle's treatise *De Interpretatione*, where it is asked whether predictions such as “There will be a sea battle tomorrow” are true or false, whether they are necessarily true if true, and whether their truth entails that future things are inevitable. Some Stoics took Aristotle to deny that future contingent propositions are true or false, as Boethius reports in his longer commentary on Aristotle's *De Interpretatione*. Future contingent propositions were regarded as true or false in Stoic logic, and the universally valid principle of bivalence was taken to imply the predetermination of all future events. Boethius regarded the Stoic view of future contingent propositions as well as the Stoic characterization of Aristotle's position as false, his interpretation being based on the distinction between definite and indefinite division of truth and falsity in the contradictory pairs of propositions. According to Boethius, Aristotle argues that if all pairs of contradictory propositions definitely divide truth and falsity and all propositions are definitely true or definitely false, then everything necessarily occurs as it does. The fact that contingent future

things, events, and states of affairs are not determined refutes the thesis that all affirmations or negations are definitely true or definitely false. The disjunctive pairs of contradictory future contingent propositions can be said to divide truth and falsity only in an undifferentiated and indefinite way. Most contemporary commentators believe that in Boethius' view these propositions are neither definitely true nor definitely false and therefore neither true nor false. In answering the Stoic criticism, Boethius might have thought that future contingent propositions have the disjunctive property of being true or false, which would mean something other than simply lacking a truth-value. The same view is ascribed to Ammonius and some other late ancient thinkers. Another contemporary interpretation of Boethius holds that future contingents are not definitely true or false, because their truth-makers are not yet determined, but are true or false in an indeterminate way. No qualification of the principle of bivalence is involved. True statements are either determinately true or simply (indeterminately) true. Boethius' formulations often suggest that future contingent propositions are true or false without being true or false, but perhaps he was not quite sure about this.

The past and the present are necessary in Boethius. Prospective contingent alternatives with respect to a future event remain open until the relevant causes are settled or the event takes place and the alternative options vanish. Even though Boethius developed an elaborated conception of diachronic future alternatives with respect to a given future time, he did not associate this with the idea of simultaneous alternatives at that time. In his opinion the actuality of a state of affairs excludes its possible alternatives. Correspondingly, he seems to think that the truth of future propositions would mean that things cannot be otherwise, for the antecedently assumed actuality of future truth-makers implies that alternative prospective possibilities refer to things that are rendered temporally impossible by the actualized alternatives.

In his logical works, Peter Abelard argues that future contingent propositions are true or false, although not determinately or necessarily so, and

takes this to be Aristotle's view as well. The difference between future contingent propositions and other propositions has nothing to do with a difference with respect to bivalence; it concerns the determinateness or indeterminateness of the truth and truth-makers of propositions. The central thesis of Chap. 9 of Aristotle's *De Interpretatione* is that of all contradictory pairs of propositions necessarily one part is true and the other false. This does not imply that one is necessarily true and the other necessarily false, although one is true and the other false.

Abelard pays attention to some propositions about past and present states of affairs the truth and falsity of which depend on future contingents, such as "Socrates is the name of a man going to eat tomorrow" or "He has spoken falsely," when this is said of a man who said yesterday that Socrates will eat tomorrow. The truth and falsity of propositions of this kind are not knowable without knowledge of future contingent states of affairs which are indeterminate and epistemically inaccessible to human beings. Hence, the propositions have an indeterminate truth and falsity and do not differ from future contingent propositions in this respect. Propositions are indeterminately true or false if their truth depends on indeterminate future contingent states of affairs. Abelard also remarks that God knows whether any proposition is true and false, but this supernatural knowability does not make things necessary.

In discussing the necessity of the present, Abelard follows Boethius in stating that what is actual at a certain point of time is necessary in the sense that it can no longer be avoided, but he also argues that unrealized alternatives may be possible at the same time in the sense that they could have happened at that time. The actuality of a contingent state of affairs at a specified future time does not exclude the nontemporal possibility of simultaneous alternatives, nor does the truth of a proposition about this state of affairs make it necessary. This is the background of Abelard's deviation from Boethius' view of the truth and falsity of future contingent propositions.

According to Albert the Great and Thomas Aquinas, Aristotle argues in *De Interpretatione* 9 that future contingent propositions differ from

other assertoric propositions in not being determinately true or determinately false. Their general view of the structure of Chap. 9 is similar to that of Boethius. Instead of the Boethian definite-indefinite distinction, Albert and Aquinas employed the terms “determinate” and “indeterminate,” as Abelard and many other medieval commentators did. Assertoric propositions are related to truth or falsity in the same way as their correlates are related to being or nonbeing. When future things are indeterminate with respect to being and nonbeing, the contradictory propositions about them must also be indeterminate with respect to truth and falsity. A future contingent proposition and its denial form a disjunction which is necessarily true. The members of this disjunction are disjunctively true or false. The indeterminate truth or falsity of a member of the disjunction does not imply that it is true or that it is false. It is merely true or false. Because of the prospective indeterminateness of a sea battle, the propositions pertaining to it must be true or false under disjunction, being related to either, not to this or that determinately. Following Boethius, Aquinas thinks that contingency pertains to the future. Past and present things are necessary. The absence of the idea of synchronic alternatives in Boethius’ approach makes a true proposition about a future contingent event determinately and necessarily true. In his commentary on *De Interpretatione*, Aquinas describes this assumption by stating that if something concerning the future is posited to be true, it is not possible that this not be in the future (I.13).

The interpretation of Aristotle which restricted the bivalence with respect to future contingent propositions was also defended by the Arabic commentators al-Fārābī and Averroes. Among Latin authors, it was put forward by many later commentators, such as Walter Burley and William of Ockham. John Buridan read Aristotle in the same way as Abelard. All assertoric statements are true or false though those about future contingents are not determinately true.

Since theologians usually thought that divine omniscience presupposes bivalence, the discussion of future contingents was divided into

historical constructions of Aristotle’s view and the systematic discussions in theology that usually followed the Abelardian lines. Boethius argues that God is atemporal and has timeless knowledge of everything. God’s timelessness involves his having the whole history present to him simultaneously. God’s knowledge is not foreknowledge, since it is not temporally located, but the predictions of future contingents are true or false from the point of view of God’s eternal knowledge of the things referred to. This approach was very influential and was further developed in Aquinas’ theory of God who grasps all combinations of things at particular times by one eternal vision. God has an immediate knowledge of all things and their relative temporal order, though none of them is past or future with respect to His cognition. The objects of divine omniscience are necessary by supposition (i.e., with respect to God’s knowledge and providential plan), but many of them are contingent with respect to their proximate causes. God can supranaturally inform lower intellects about these things – otherwise there could not be true prophetic predictions. This is how Aquinas tries to combine the doctrine of divine omniscience and the lack of definite truth and falsity in future contingent propositions.

Medieval critics found the idea of the non-temporal presence of each instant of time to God’s eternal vision problematic. Ockham believed, like Scotus, that future contingent propositions are true or false, that created wills are nondetermined free causes the acts of which are contingent, and that God knows these without their being eternally present to God. Scotus and Ockham argued that only God and the present things are actual. While Scotus preferred to distinguish God’s eternal knowledge and choice from the temporal order sharply, Ockham thought that they could be treated as temporally past. This led him to ask how God’s foreknowledge as something past and fixed is compatible with the contingency of the future things. Ockham’s answer was that even though God’s foreknowledge is past, its content is future, and as far as it is about future contingents, it is itself contingent. This is the hallmark of what is called the Ockhamist view

of divine foreknowledge – it shows similarities to Abelard’s analysis.

Many early fourteenth-century authors were interested in the distinctions between determinate and indeterminate truth and falsity. Ockham characterized all prospective truths, whether necessary or contingent, as temporally unchanging and therefore determinate, but there were other suggestions as well. Some authors who associated the notions of indeterminate truth and falsity with the denial of bivalence for future contingent propositions held that these should not be treated as true or false in theology. One of these was Peter Auriol, who argued that even God is aware of the future in a way which does not imply that future contingent propositions are true or false. This view found some supporters until it was damned by Pope Sixtus IV in 1474.

Giving up the Boethian-Thomistic view of the atemporal presence of the flux of time to God, many authors wondered how God can foreknow the free decisions of people. This question was dealt in the theory of middle knowledge by Luis de Molina (1535–1600). In addition to the general knowledge of metaphysical possibilities and historical actualizations in the chosen world, God has a third kind of knowledge (*scientia media*) which comprises the hypothetical truths about possible beings. In creating the world, God knows of possible free creatures and what they would do in various possible situations. Molina’s “middle knowledge” theory about counterfactuals of freedom was actively debated in the sixteenth and seventeenth century, and it has remained a living theme in the philosophy of religion.

## Cross-References

- ▶ [Boethius](#)
- ▶ [Peter Abelard](#)
- ▶ [Peter Auriol](#)
- ▶ [Thomas Aquinas](#)
- ▶ [Truth, Theories of](#)
- ▶ [William of Ockham](#)

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# G

## Gabriel Biel

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### Abstract

Gabriel Biel (c. 1410–1495) was a theologian in Tübingen and a leader among the Brethren of Common Life. He was the most widely known representative of the late medieval *via moderna*, which was greatly influenced by fourteenth-century thought. He was the first professor of theology to teach the *via moderna* at the University of Tübingen, and he also had a remarkable impact on the Brethren of Common Life. Biel studied in Heidelberg, Erfurt, and Cologne. After graduation, he was a cathedral preacher in Mainz and joined the Brethren of Common Life before receiving a professorship of theology in Tübingen. Biel's main works consist of a commentary on the mass, *Canonis missae expositio*, and a *Sentences* commentary, *Collectorium in quattuor libros Sententiarum*. Both in philosophy and in theology, he was a close but not unoriginal follower of William of Ockham. Biel's *Sentences* commentary is formally an abridgement of Ockham's commentaries, but several other authorities, including Thomas Aquinas, Bonaventure, John Duns Scotus, Gregory of Rimini, Peter of Ailly, and John Gerson, are cited

extensively. In metaphysical and epistemological views, Biel closely followed Ockham, adopting his criticism of intelligible and sensory species, but rejecting his notion of multiplicity of substantial forms. Biel's ethics was mostly inspired by Ockham but also by Scotus and Gregory of Rimini.

Gabriel Biel was born in Speyer in about 1410. He was already an ordained minister when, in 1432, he matriculated in the faculty of arts at the University of Heidelberg. There he received the baccalaureate degree in 1435 and the master's degree in 1438. Thereafter, he served as a master in Heidelberg; but in 1451 he took up with study of theology in Erfurt, where he matriculated in the faculty of arts. In 1453, Biel matriculated in the faculty of theology at the University of Cologne, but in 1457, he received a licentiate of theology in Erfurt, although he never earned a master's degree.

Soon after receiving the licentiate degree, Biel moved to Mainz, where he served as a cathedral preacher and vicar for several years. In the struggle over the see of Mainz, Biel sided with Adolf of Nassau, who was appointed as archbishop by the pope. In the course of the controversy, Biel even had to flee Mainz and subsequently wrote a treatise entitled *Defense of the Apostolic Obedience*. During his years as a cathedral preacher, Biel joined the order of the Brethren of Common Life and subsequently stayed in Brethren Houses at

Marienthal, Butzbach, and Urach. During that time, he became an influential leader among the Brethren. In 1484, Biel was appointed as professor of theology at the University of Tübingen and became the first professor to represent the *via moderna* on the theological faculty. In 1485 and 1489, Biel was elected Rector of the university. During his last years, Biel retired from academic life and served as provost of the Brethren House of St. Peter's at Einsiedeln in Schönbuch, where he died in 1495.

The main corpus of Biel's philosophical writings, most of which date back to his early years as a master in Heidelberg, has not been thoroughly studied. The focus of research has been on his mature theology, although the philosophical views of his major theological works have also attracted some attention. In his philosophical views, Biel seems to have been a close follower of Ockham. This impression may partly be due to the fact that in the first book of his *Sentences* commentary, which is the main source for Biel's philosophical views, he mainly abbreviated Ockham's more elaborate discussions. In his discussion of theological issues, Biel also utilized extensively the views of other authorities, such as John Duns Scotus, Gregory of Rimini, Peter of Ailly, John Gerson, and even Thomas Aquinas and Bonaventure.

Biel based his metaphysical and epistemological views on Ockhamist conceptualism and ontological principle of parsimony. These included the views that all entities in the world are either singular substances or accidents and that there are no universal entities, but rather universals are merely accidents in the human mind. In Biel's theory of knowledge, the starting point is found in the intuitive cognition of present singular entities based on sense perception, which are a presupposition for further cognitions. According to Biel, the mind forms universal concepts out of similarities between the concepts of singular entities, and therefore the universal concepts are not conventional, but rather natural mental signs of the extramental similarities (*convenientia rerum*), insofar as the mind apprehends such similarities. In accordance with Ockham, Biel rejected the notions of

intelligible and sensory species as unnecessary. He also discussed the *factum* theory of universal concepts adopted by early Ockham but clearly opted for Ockham's mature theory of universal concepts as acts of thinking about many things at once.

In his psychology, Biel did not slavishly follow Ockham, although it is noteworthy that, unlike most of the contemporary proponents of the *via moderna*, he shared Ockham's criticism of the species theory of cognition and even defended it with the help of a detailed analysis of the sensory process. However, following the common view of the *via moderna*, Biel rejected the view, shared by Ockham, of multiplicity of substantial forms in a human being. According to Biel, intellectual and sensitive souls are not really distinct entities but merely names of faculties of one, undivided intellectual soul, which is the substantial form of the human body.

Biel's ethics is largely based on Ockham's views. Moral qualities of the external actions are primarily judged according to their underlying intentions, which should be consonant with the will of God. While sharing much of Ockham's ethics of divine command, Biel placed more emphasis on natural reason in agreement with Scotus and Gregory of Rimini. Therefore, Biel rejected the possibility that God would let human beings have the intention to hate God. The main undertone of Biel's ethics still remains voluntarist and consonant with ethical positivism. According to Biel, God does not will anything because it is good or right. Furthermore, God can do something that he himself has declared to be unjust, yet whatever it is becomes morally right whenever it is done by God. While aware of the shortcomings of this position, Biel often argued for the immutability of moral order as an actually established order of creation.

According to Biel, the moral reasoning takes place through inborn faculties dedicated to this purpose: *synderesis*, conscience, and right reason. These faculties rely on different kinds of laws, which are hierarchically ordered under the supreme and eternal law, which is identical with God's will. Knowledge of the eternal law is

gained through three kinds of inferior laws: natural, biblical, and positive human laws. Among these, natural law has precedence, since it is directly derived from the eternal law, and its commands are known to all men through the dictates of right reason. Biel also acknowledged the possibility of an error in conscience, which delivers the final recommendation for particular actions to be done, and he tried to solve the related problem of conflicting moral precepts.

## Cross-References

- ▶ [Species: Sensible and Intelligible](#)
- ▶ [William of Ockham](#)

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## Galen, Arabic

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### Abstract

Galen of Pergamum (c. 129–c. 216) is one of the main authors of the Imperial period and the most influential medical writer in the medieval Greek, Latin, and Arabic worlds, as well as in the Renaissance. The translations of almost the whole of his work that were made into Arabic had an enormous impact on the Mediterranean civilization. These Arabic translations were in turn translated into Latin and had a huge influence on the Latin world up to the sixteenth century, to say the least. Moreover, the Arabic (or Arabo-Latin) translations are of great importance for establishing the text of the Greek Galen, even when the Greek text is extant, since these were made from Greek models much older than our manuscripts.

While recent literature has well explored the immense fortune of Galen in the Arabic world, both as a physician and as a philosopher (Pormann and Smith, *Medieval Islamic medicine*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2008), here I will limit myself to review the perspective that follows the history of Galen's tradition. I will address the Arabic and Arabo-Latin translations of Galenic works, namely, of the translations of the *Compendia*, of "Ioannes" Synopsis, of the Arabic commentaries of Alexandrian origin (Ibn Riḏwān, Abū l-Faraj ibn al-Ṭayyib, 'Alī 'Abbās al-Mājūsī, etc.), and, only selectively, the indirect tradition of the translations (Ḥunayn, al-Rāzī, al-Ruhawī, al-Kaskarī, al-Birūnī, etc.). Excellent repertoires are available for this analysis: Sezgin (*Medizin-Pharmazie-Zoologie-Tierheilkunde bis ca 430 H. Gesch Arab Schr 3*. Leiden: Brill, 1970), Ullmann (*Die Medizin im Islam*. Leiden: Brill, 1970), Strohmaier (1994, *Antike Naturwissenschaft in orientalischem Gewand/Lettre*

AKAN-Einzelschriften; Bd 6. Antike Naturwissenschaft und ihre Rezeption. Wissenschaftlicher, Trier, 2007), and Boudon-Millot (see editions *Ars medica*, *Protrepticus*, *Quod optimus medicus*, 2007).

## Biography

The Arabic sources go back to the late-Alexandrian scholarship (“Ioannes Grammatikos, also author of commentaries on Galenic works”). As for their reliability or unreliability, they preserve genuine information along with a sometimes bizarrely incorrect chronology. These sources transmit a longer life span for Galen than the *Suda*, which grants him 70 years (129–199/200). This extension of Galen’s life allows to better distribute the great number of Galen’s elderly works. According to Nutton (2005), who argued the best for the new date (now generally accepted), Galen lived up to 216/217. This is also accepted by Schlange-Schöningh (2003).

The following is a list of editions (full or partial) of Galen’s works translated into Arabic. The first part includes those of the Alexandrian Canon, while in the second part the editions are grouped per genera.

*De sectis*: edition of the Arabic translation by Selim Selim, Cairo 1977; the MS Princeton Garrett 1075 has been used by Garofalo (2007).

*Ars medica* (Selim): Arabic translation used by V. Boudon-Millot in her edition, Paris 2000a.

*De pulsibus* (Selim): Arabic translation used by Garofalo (2009b).

*Ad Glauconem*: Arabic translation by Selim (1972).

*Minor Anatomy* (*De oss. De musc. diss., De ven. art. diss.*): critical edition of *De nerv. diss.* by Dubayān (2000) (and of the *compendium*: v. infra), Arabic translations used by Garofalo in Galien, tome VII and tome VIII, Paris 2005 and 2008.

*De temperamentis* (also *De inaequali intemperie, De bono habitu*): study by Garofalo (2006).

*De elementis*: Arabic translation used for the edition of De Lacy (1996).

*De nat. fac.*: see the *compendium*, infra.

*De febr. diff.*: two editions online, De Stefani (2004) and Wernhard (2005).

*De pulsibus*, major work (*De diff. puls., De caus. puls., De dignot. ex puls.*): see *compendia*.

*De crisibus*: the Arabic translation has been used by Alexanderson for his edition of the Greek text.

*De diebus decretoriis*: Garofalo (2003b).

*De locis affectis*: Garofalo (1995).

*De sanitate tuenda*: the *compendium* and the *Synopsis* of “Ioannes Grammatikos” have been studied, v. infra.

*De methodo medendi*: Arabic translation and Arabo-Latin translation used by V. Lorusso for the edition of books I–II (thesis, Pisa, Scuola Normale Superiore 2010). Excerpts in Rāzī: Weisser (1997). Garofalo (2016).

*Synopsis of De methodo medendi*: Arabic translation of the second book discovered by I. Garofalo in ms. Princeton Garrett 1075, containing the Arabic translation of some *compendia* of the Alexandrians (v. infra), Garofalo (2000a).

## Noncanonical Works

### Biography

*De libris suis, De ordine librorum suorum*: Arabic translations used by V. Boudon-Millot, Galien tome I, Paris 2007 (with bibliography).

### Philosophy

*De propriis placitis*: Known until Boudon-Millot-Pietrobelli’s edition (2007), only in the Arabo-Latin translation edited by Nutton (1999), now available in Greek (from MS Vlatadon 14). A comparison with the Arabo-Latin translation allows a better evaluation of the (poor) method used by the translator in rendering the Arabic.

*De placitis Hippocratis et Platonis*: Strohmaier in De Lacy’s edition 1996. The Arabs knew a tenth book in addition to the nine known to the Greek tradition.

## Logic

*De demonstratione*: The great work (15 books) that was lacunary in Ḥunayn's times is known through scanty fragments in Greek and quotations in Arabic authors that have not yet been fully collected. The edition promised by Pines (1986) never appeared.

## Ethics

*De indolentia*: the edition by Boudon-Millot and Jouanna (2010) allows to place the fragments of the Arabic indirect tradition. More use can be made from it to constitute the Greek text.

*Quod optimus medicus sit quoque philosophus*: the edition of the Arabic translation (lege Bauchmann 1965) has been used by Boudon-Millot (2007).

*Protrepticus*: excerpts of the Arabic indirect tradition (also Arabic-Hebrew) used by Boudon-Millot (2000b).

## Anatomy

*Anatomicae administrationes*: edition of the Greek text (I–IX) and of the Arabic translation by Garofalo (1996, 2000a) (Italian translation of the whole work by Garofalo 2001).

## Physiology

*De motibus dubiis*: Arabic translation with the Arabic-Latin one, edited by V. Nutton and G. Bos (2011).

## Diagnostics

*De symptomatum diff.*, *De sympt. causis* (*Liber de causis*): O. Overwien examines the Arabic tradition of *De symp. diff.* in CMG V 5, 1 ed. by B. Gundert (2009), pp. 103–152.

## Medicine

*De methodo medendi*: Ursula Weisser (1997) studied Rāzī's excerpts of this work.

## Pharmacology

Most of Galen's pharmacological works, *De comp. med. per locos* and *per genera*, have been excerpted by al-Rāzī, Ibn al-Bayṭar, and many others.

## Hippocratic Commentaries

All the Arabic translations of the Hippocratic Commentaries should be reexamined, in particular,

Commentary on *Nat. hom.* used in German translation by Mewaldt. The lemmata have been edited by Mattock and used by Jouanna in his edition of *De nat. hom.*, CMG 1 1.3. The hypothesis may be advanced that Ḥunayn did not dispose of a commentary with lemmata and has inserted the lemmata from a manuscript of Hippocrates akin to our manuscript (see Jouanna introd. p. 99 ff.).

The commentary on *De frac.* is lost; excerpts in al-Rāzī.

Commentary on *Acute Diseases*: A. Pietrobelli used the Arabo-Latin translation (thèse Paris 2008).

Commentary on *Ar. aq. loc.*: Sezgin (2001) published a facsimile of the Cairo manuscript, critically edited by Strohmaier.

Commentary on *Aph.* The lemmata, edited by Tytler (1832) form a (quasi) continuous text used by Caroline Magdelaine (in collaboration with I. Garofalo), for her edition, thèse Paris 1994.

Commentaries on *Epidemics* I, II, III, VI: The pioneer work of Pfaff on the translations of the commentaries on *Epid.* needs to be updated; Vagelpohl and Hallum are preparing the edition of the Arabic translations of *Epid.* I and *Epid.* II. Project of Swain-Pormann (2008), <http://www2.warwick.ac.uk/fac/arts/history/chm/activities/galen/> (with bibliography). The mistakes, omissions, and arbitrary interpolations by Pfaff are innumerable; see Garofalo (2009a) (*Epidemics* I and II) and Garofalo (2010) (*Epid.* III and VI).

Commentary on *Hum.* Garofalo (2005b, 2009b). Collection of the fragments in preparation.

Commentary on *Off.* Partially preserved in Arabic, edited by Mattock, now used by Raiola-Garofalo for critical edition (see Raiola 2005).

## Pseudo-Galen

Many pseudo-Galenic books produced in late-Alexandrian age enjoyed great appreciation in



the Arabic world and were translated first into Arabic and then partially into Latin, therefore greatly influencing western medicine. A few examples follow: *De dissolutione continua*, Bos and Garofalo (2005), Arabic-Hebrew, and Arabic-Latin translations. The pseudo-Galenic commentary on *De septimanis*, edited by Bergsträsser (1914), of some utility for the Greek text, seems of non-Greek origin. *On Iusiurandum*: Overwien (2009). *On De nat. pueri*: Giorgianni (2010) in view of the edition in CMG; a compilation of non-Greek origin.

### Compendia and Synopses, Arabic Commentaries

A great influence on the Arabic world was exercised by the Alexandrian *Compendia* of the 16 groups of the works of Galen, also through ‘Alī Abbās and the excerpts in al-Rāzī: Garofalo (2000a, 2003a), Pormann (2003) (with Bibliography).

Compendium of *Ad Glauconem*: Garofalo (1995).  
Compendium of *De diebus decretoriis*, with Italian translation of the compendium of the III book: Garofalo (2000a).

Compendium of *Nat. fac.*: Paola Annese, Thesis, Siena, 2005.

The Synopsis of “Ioannes Grammaticus,” a compendium of the 16 groups of books, with an introduction explaining the Canon: Garofalo (2001).

The Commentary of Ibn al-Ṭayyib on the *Ars medica*: lege Garofalo (2008b).

The Commentary of Ibn al-Ṭayyib on *De temperamentis* and *De elementis*: Garofalo (2006).

The Commentary of Ibn Riḍwan: Boudon (2000a).

### Indirect Tradition

The indirect tradition of the Arabic Galen is immense. To mention just a few names: ‘Alī Abbās, who depends also on the *Compendia*;

al-Rāzī, whose *Hāwī* is a treasure of excerpts from the Arabic Galen; the translations and the *Compendia*, and many works by Ḥunayn (Garofalo 2009b), Maimonides (Bos 2004; Bos and Garofalo 2007), al-Kaskarī (Pormann 2009), and al-Ruhawī (Overwien 2009; Muggittu 2010). Alī ‘Abbās’ *Liber regius* and Rāzī’s *Hāwī* were translated into Latin. A great part of Galen was virtually known to the medieval West, in addition to the pre-Salernitan translations (Palmieri 2005; Garofalo 2009d).

### The Translators

The most recent study after the basic works by Bergsträsser (1913) and Meyerhof (1926) is Micheau (1997), who also gives information on Ḥunayn and his school’s patrons and commissioners. For the Arabic-Latin translators Constantinus the African, Gerard of Cremona, Marc of Toledo, etc., see Jacquart and Micheau (1990).

### Galen and Hippocrates

Galen has been the most important intermediary for the knowledge of Hippocrates in the late-Alexandrian period and in the Arabic medicine. The direct translations of Hippocratic works are not numerous, while many more were created by collecting the lemmata of the Galenic commentaries (Overwien 2008).

### Language

The language of the translators Ḥunayn, Ḥubaysh, ‘Īsā, and others, first studied by Bergsträsser, has been often examined. Now we have the fundamental instrument, the *Wörterbuch* (2002–) with two supplements 2006 and 2007, by M. Ullmann, who discusses problems of attribution of the translations (in part. *De loc. aff.* attributed to Ḥunayn (contra Garofalo 2000a)). In general, Ḥunayn has a freer style, Ḥubaysh and ‘Īsā are more literal. The more frequent stylistic features are

hendiadys, parataxis, and change of rhetorical interrogations into statements. Misinterpretations are rare.

## Cross-References

- ▶ [Abū Bakr al-Rāzī, Muḥammad ibn Zakarīyāʾ \(Rhazes\)](#)
- ▶ [Alexandrian Tradition into Arabic: Medicine](#)
- ▶ [Medicine and Philosophy](#)
- ▶ [Medicine in the Arab World](#)

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## Garlandus the Computist

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### Abstract

Garlandus is the author of a *Dialectica*, probably written late in the eleventh century or at the turn of the twelfth. The treatise covers the whole of the Aristotelian–Boethian curriculum. It is remarkable for its consistency in treating logic as a discipline concerned with language, rather than things in the world. In this respect, it has strong affinities with what appear to have been the views of Roscelin of Compiègne.

MS Orléans Bib. mun. 260 contains a logical treatise which is named, in the *incipit*, as “the rules of Master Gerlandus about dialectic”; the same treatise also exists, anonymously, in MS Paris BNF lat. 6438. The identity of its author (Gerlandus, Garlandus, Iarlandus) is disputed. There is a reason to believe that he was one of three scholars of this name who were connected with Besançon. The work's editor, De Rijk (Garlandus Compotista 1959: xvii–xxvi) attributed it to the earliest of the three, St Garlandus, who taught at Besançon in the 1080s and died in 1100 as Bishop of Agrigento, on the ground that the Paris MS dates from the late eleventh century and so the other two candidates would have been too young to write the treatise. Yukio Iwakuma, however, on the basis of expert advice, redated the Paris MS to the early twelfth century and

proceeded to argue that the treatise was written by a Garlandus who taught in Besançon in 1118 and lived at least until 1149. He dates the *Dialectica* to the first years of the twelfth century (Iwakuma 1992: 47–54). In fact, however, there is no decisive reason to choose between these two Garlandusses, or indeed a third, who was a schoolmaster at Metz in 1111–1128. And the time of composition of the work could be anything from the 1070s to the 1120s, although a date early in this range seems more likely (cf. Marenbon forthcoming: 194–195).

The parts of the *Dialectica* correspond to the main logical textbooks in use at the time. It begins with a treatment of the five predicables (*Isagoge*) and it goes on to discuss the Ten Categories (*Categorias*) and then how propositions are built up from words, and their logical relations to one another (*On Interpretation*), before considering topical arguments (*De topicis differentiis*) and categorical and then hypothetical syllogisms (*De syllogismo categorico*, *De syllogismo hypothetico*). At times, Garlandus refers to “the book,” which seems to be a text, perhaps adapted, of Boethius’ logical treatises (Garlandus Computista 1959: xlvii–xlix).

Garlandus seems to be one of a group of logicians, mostly identified from the second-hand accounts, who in the late eleventh century, and perhaps later, expounded the logical textbooks of Aristotle and Boethius *in voce* rather than *in re*: that is to say, they took the logical terms discussed by Porphyry and Aristotle, such as “genus,” “accident,” “substance,” “quality,” as words which, in the context of logic, signify other words, rather than things (cf. Iwakuma 1992; Marenbon 2004: 27–34; Marenbon 2011; Cameron 2011 – for a critique). “Genus,” for instance, signifies genus words, such as “animal,” or “substance,” substance words, such as “man” or “horse.” Garlandus sticks to this way of interpreting even where the authoritative ancient texts would be much more easily read as discussions about words that signify things. For example, when Porphyry defines an accident as that which comes to and is absent from a subject without the subject’s being corrupted, he seems to have in mind, as what is signified by “accident,” some

sort of thing, such as Socrates’ whiteness, which he loses when he acquires a suntan. Garlandus (1959: 10, l. 25–11, l. 6), however, gives a contorted exegesis that makes the statement apply to substance words and accident words. Recent work by C.J. Martin, still in progress, suggests that this strategy might derive from a quite sophisticated and consistent view about the constituents of reality, which is close to that developed by Roscelin at the end of the eleventh century.

Another striking feature of the *Dialectica* is the frequent presence of sophisms – what Garlandus calls *sophisticae cavillationes*. These are arguments in which a contradiction – usually that “man is not man” – is shown to follow from a certain proposition by an (often overelaborate) logical deduction. The solution to such sophisms often involves the clarification of the proposition in question or its context.

## Cross-References

- ▶ [Boethius](#)
- ▶ [Roscelin of Compiègne](#)

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## al-Ġazālī, Abū Ḥāmid Muḥammad

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### Abstract

There have long been two contending narratives when it comes to situating Abū Ḥāmid Muḥammad al-Ġazālī (Algazel/Algazali) (1056–1111), Islam’s most renowned theologian, within the history of philosophy. According to one, Ġazālī proved the scourge of the Arabic philosophers when he pointed out their various pretensions and self-contradictions and when he advocated a retreat to fideism as well as a practically oriented mysticism. On this view, Ġazālī’s philosophical explorations were of a uniformly dialectical character, aiming solely at defending the faith, in keeping with the tradition of Islamic speculative theology (*kalām*). The competing story has it that Ġazālī became so enamored of philosophy that, against his protestations, he became a crypto-Avicennian himself. On this reading, Ġazālī either salvaged philosophy for the uses of Muslim theology and mysticism, or else fatally corrupted the two with its taint. Both views have it right, and wrong. Ġazālī’s criticisms of the Arabic Aristotelians are piecemeal and local, and he certainly appropriates from the philosophers far more than he rejects. At the same time, Ġazālī’s commitments do not lie with the Peripatetics any more than with the Ash‘arite school of theology, a tradition which he also criticizes. Rather, Ġazālī is involved in developing a fresh synthesis that would reflect the insights he sees as crucial to authentic wisdom: the world’s profound contingency, the role played by the divine attributes in shaping this world, the rational soul’s ultimate destiny in the next, and the need for constant spiritual striving and prophetic guidance in purifying the soul to the point where it can attain its destiny.

### Life and Works

A fair amount is known about Ġazālī’s life and career. This has less to do with his purported autobiography, *The Deliverer from Error* – which, aside from being an intellectual treatise rather than an actual biography, is also very much a literary construct – and more with Ġazālī’s fame and notoriety already during his lifetime. Many came to accept Ġazālī’s immodest self-evaluation according to which he was the sixth Islamic century’s appointed “renewer” of the Muslim faith; those who did not suggested less elevated motives for his various activities (see Griffel 2009).

Ġazālī was born in Ṭūs, Iran. His studies in the Islamic sciences took him first to Jurjān, then to Nīshāpūr, where he studied under the famed Ash‘arite theologian al-Juwaynī (1028–1085). Ġazālī’s early reputation was built as a lawyer in the moderate tradition of al-Shāfi‘ī. In 1091 the powerful vizier to the Seljuq sultan, Nizām al-Mulk, invited Ġazālī to teach at the Caliphate’s flagship college in Baghdad. The appointment effectively thrust Ġazālī into the spotlight as a rising star within the Sunni learned community. Ġazālī proceeded to write expositions of speculative theology, among them *The Mean in Belief*, and tracts defending Sunni orthodoxy against the Ismā‘īlī sect, then in control of Fātimid Egypt, as well as “the philosophers” – in actuality, al-Fārābī and Avicenna. In the *Incoherence of the Philosophers* (4.3–5.4), Ġazālī justifies this procedure by postulating that these two most accurately convey the thought of Aristotle, who in turn is by common consent the “absolute philosopher” and “first teacher.” It is, then, with a Platonically tinged Aristotelianism that Ġazālī had to grapple; and it is notable that the philosophical notions most attractive to him – the immaterial nature and otherworldly orientation of the rational soul, the creative role of the ideas in the divine mind – carry a Platonic stamp.

In 1095, Ġazālī experienced a spiritual crisis which resulted in him resigning from his post at the Nizāmiyya. Ġazālī came to regard his own pugnacious academic persona as displaying disdainful intellectual pride; he also found it



impossible to accept anymore the patronage of worldly rulers, given that he would then also be expected to serve their worldly aims and become complicit in their corrupt rule. After an initial bout of seclusion and pilgrimage, Ġazālī taught privately for a period of 10 years, during which time he completed his masterwork, *The Revivification of the Religious Sciences*, a practically oriented guide to disclosing the spiritual significance of prescribed Muslim practices.

Ġazālī eventually resumed teaching at a state school, though, as he himself insisted, this was not a return to what once was (*Deliverer*, 49.23–24). No longer dogmatic or dialectic, Ġazālī's late works all urgently preach the need for salvation and a virtuous life. These works, hortative and allusive in character, advance a series of provocative stances seen from the standpoint of traditional Muslim theology, stances that in places are closely aligned with the Arabic Peripatetic tradition.

Ġazālī died in Ṭūs in 1111, his reputation as both Avicennian and anti-Avicennian already firmly established. His works quickly gained currency in the Islamic world, which they have since enjoyed uninterrupted.

## Thought

Although Ġazālī did not call himself a philosopher, his writings contain much philosophically interesting material. Ġazālī's observations regarding the philosophers' theoretical edifice are illuminating, and his assaults on its weak spots incisive. (Because of the pithiness of his summaries, Ġazālī's *Intentions of the Philosophers* became a widely used textbook in Latin and Hebrew circles. The scholastics only learned of Ġazālī's anti-Avicennian polemics with the 1328 translation of Averroes' response, *The Incoherence of the Incoherence*.) Because of his asserted independence from the various schools and refusal to accept anything on authority or *taqlīd* (e.g., *Deliverer*, 10.21–11.7, 15.9–14; Frank 1991–1992), Ġazālī is also free to take his thoughts in striking new directions.

But for all the inherent interest in the notions he puts forward, Ġazālī has proved a notoriously slippery thinker. Ideas often remain underdeveloped, alluded to more than fleshed out, and it is sometimes unclear whether their implications have been worked out at all. Part of the problem lies in Ġazālī's adaptable attitude toward terminology, which led to Averroes' memorable complaint that "with the Ash'arites he was an Ash'arite, with the Sufis a Sufi, and with the philosophers a philosopher" (*Faṣl*, 22.6–7; cp. Ġazālī, *Deliverer*, 10.10–20; on Ġazālī's vocabulary see Lazarus-Yafeh 1975). Part of it stems from the 1095 rupture in Ġazālī's career. Though Ġazālī never disowned his earlier work, there are discrepancies between the early legal and dogmatic works and the later spiritual ones that are not easily explained away. For instance, Ġazālī early on subscribes to a divine commandment theory of ethics, which sits uneasily with the more naturalistic view of the good that the later works assume. Still, certain basic tenets carry throughout Ġazālī's career.

## Demonstration and Doubt

It is useful to start with Ġazālī's legal condemnation of the philosophers. On three counts, the Arabic Aristotelians are to be regarded as unbelievers: because (1) the philosophers subscribe to the pre-eternity of the world, (2) deny that God knows particulars, and (3) reject bodily resurrection, the *falāsifa* fall foul of the creedal confession of the Muslims. (On an additional 17 charges, the philosophers are to be deemed heretics). These positions are offensive not so much because they contradict the apparent meaning of Scripture – Ġazālī is prepared to reinterpret revelation where reason demands – but because of the necessitarian line of reasoning that has brought the philosophers to them. In Ġazālī's mind, the philosophers presume to dictate the terms on which God's encounter with creation must take place, a procedure that unduly restricts God's absolute power (*qudra*). Because the conclusion is unacceptable, the philosophers' reasoning must be faulty.

Because Ġazālī accepts the demonstrative scientific ideal endorsed by the Muslim philosophers from al-Fārābī onward, he needs to find fault

either with the philosophers' formal inferences or with their premises. Typically he concentrates on the latter, claiming that what the philosophers regard as the necessary and self-evident starting points for knowledge are in fact anything but that. For instance, the common conviction that certain things are causes for others is ultimately indemonstrable, since all we ever perceive are things happening concurrently (*Incoherence*, 166.1–168.10). The philosophers' rejection of a first moment of time at which God created the world from nothing is likewise untenable. They may claim that this is a necessary truth of reason, but the simple fact that not all people share the same intuition shows that it cannot be a primary, axiomatic truth, nor can the philosophers demonstrate their thesis inferentially (*Incoherence*, 17.6–15). The same approach is employed time and again both in the *Incoherence* and in other polemical works: Ġazālī cleverly exploits the distinction between conceivability and imaginability, maintaining that many things that do not fall within the parameters of our everyday experience may nevertheless be possible to a transcendent agent (see Kukkonen 2006).

Ġazālī's methodological skepticism in the *Deliverer* is to be viewed in this light. To accept straightforwardly Ġazālī's description of a self-induced skeptical crisis is to ignore the profoundly literary character of the work. Stephen Menn has situated Ġazālī's autobiography in a line of philosophical self-assertion that stretches from Galen to Descartes (Menn 2003). The narrative is similarly filtered through Ġazālī's later association with the "sober" Sufism of al-Junayd (Ormsby 1991). The *Deliverer's* passages on doubt and certainty ultimately aim at pointing the way toward an epistemology whereby God acts as the guarantor of all veridical perceptions, whether sensory, intellectual, or supraintellectual. Even so, there are important self-imposed limits to Ġazālī's radicalism, starting with his willingness to defer to reason as a yardstick for determining which beliefs are warranted. This differentiates his position from the thoroughgoing fideism of the Ismā'īlīs, whose irrationalism Ġazālī opposed (see Kukkonen 2010).

### Contingency and Necessity

As already noted, Ġazālī advocates the adoption of Peripatetic logic as a tool for Muslim theology. He grounds his endorsement in the assertion that Muḥammad himself employed logic when arguing with the heathens (see *The Just Balance*, *passim*). The claim serves two purposes, since in addition to justifying the teaching of logic among Muslims it can be made to substantiate the claim that logical reasoning is by no means exclusive to the Aristotelians, but instead reflects a universal human capacity, one that which all are equally well equipped to exercise (*Deliverer*, 9.16–18; *Incoherence*, 22.10–23.3).

The philosophers' necessitarianism, however, meant that their logic needed to be conceptualized along new lines if it was to be domesticated for the uses of a voluntarist theology. The single most valuable tool in this realignment is Ġazālī's fresh consideration of the modal notions. Building on Aristotle's definition of the potential as that which may or may not be (*Metaphysics*, 9.3–4) and Avicenna's rephrasing of the same in terms of "contingency of existence" (*mumkin al-wujūd*), Ġazālī forcefully emphasizes the contingency of the entire created order. Against the Arabic Aristotelians, whose analysis of the modal terms standardly proceeded along temporal and statistical lines (the necessary is that which is true always, the possible sometimes, the impossible never), Ġazālī maintains that possibilities are not to be judged in relation to the actual world at all. Instead, "the possibility to which they have alluded reduces to an intellectual judgement" (*qaḍā' al-'aql*: *Incoherence*, 42.2), where the judgment in question has to do with whether two propositions are mutually compatible. A single thing cannot be at once temporal and eternal, for instance, nor can something be human without being an animal; by contrast, there is nothing to preclude one from saying that God was (first alone) and that He then was with the world (31.13–20, 32.14–33.18).

On Ġazālī's view, impossibilities do not constitute objects of God's power (*Incoherence*, 175.5). Because all impossibilities ultimately reduce to explicit contradictions, this in no way threatens divine omnipotence (38.17–18). This

also means that several questions of a broadly metaphysical nature – e.g., whether secondary causality is real, whether the soul is ultimately material or immaterial – do not require a definitive resolution, since both possibilities are real for God and because either solution will yield a sufficient understanding of the world’s contingency in relation to God, who is the only true necessary existent. Ġazālī’s noncommittal stance on such issues signals neither obfuscation nor confusion, but instead a carefully weighted attitude to what is demonstrable and what is not (also important, from the salvific point of view). This we can see from the one thesis to which strict adherence is required, namely that the world has a temporal beginning (*Incoherence*, 40.15): for here, to believe with the philosophers that the world is eternal is to fall into the temporal-frequency trap when interpreting the modalities. (An eternal world would include all possibilities, just as the Neoplatonic philosophers had suggested, but leaving nothing out implies that God had no choice but to include everything). Instead, the world’s very createdness ensures its contingency, and hence the role of the divine will in making a difference between alternatives that are in themselves indifferent with respect to existence or nonexistence.

Taken together, Ġazālī’s suggestions amount to the view that possibilities are to be judged in terms of compossibility. This prefigures John Duns Scotus’ pioneering work in possible-worlds semantics, although Ġazālī nowhere draws out the systematic implications of his innovations the way Scotus does (see Kukkonen 2000). Ġazālī’s interest does not lie in modal metaphysics as such, but in developing a modal theory that would produce theologically acceptable results. Nevertheless, Ġazālī’s further theologically motivated remarks to the effect that this is the best of all possible worlds generated a lively debate among Muslim theologians, one whose theoretical dimensions are as yet inadequately researched (see Ormsby 1984).

### The Divine Attributes, God-Talk, and Creation

One of the most fertile problems in early Muslim theology concerned the reality of the divine

attributes. By introducing Aristotelian predication and semantics as a framework for tackling the problem, Ġazālī was able to shift the terms of the debate. In so doing, he prepared the ground for further Platonically influenced thinkers in the mould of Ibn al-‘Arabī (1165–1240), though in the process, some of the finesse of the earlier Islamic discussions was lost.

Ġazālī’s position is that the unity of the divine attributes is a case of Aristotelian accidental unity or identity (*Met.* 5.6.1015b18–20, 5.9.1017b26–27). The *idem quod* of the sentence “The First is the same as the Last” is one and the same, namely, God, but distinct from either the ostensible subject or the predicate term (*Beautiful Names*, 29–31). This resembles the identity theory of predication advanced concurrently by Peter Abelard, although again by comparison Ġazālī’s remarks appear undercooked. At any rate, for Ġazālī the further fact that the meaning of each term (“God,” “first,” “last”) is distinct from the others signals that each refers to a distinct quiddity and reality, whose meaning we can begin to uncover through observing its manifestations on the material plane. Notwithstanding his intentional reading of the divine names, then, Ġazālī regards the attributes not only as real but as the blueprint according to which creation proceeds. They are given to the world first in the very act of God granting existence to things, second in the teleologically oriented imitation in which each thing is allowed to become what it most truly is (*Beautiful Names*, 79–82). The two phases correspond to Avicennian efficient and final causality, and more generally to the Neoplatonic motions of procession and return (Gr. *próodos*, *epistrophē*). They also make possible the human act of cognizing and thereby the specifically human mode of perfection, which consists in knowing the realities of things (*ḥaqā’iq al-ashyā’*: *Beautiful Names*, 82–84, 146–147).

Ġazālī’s insistence on understanding the revealed names first and foremost in the context of divine perfection allows him to sidestep the thorny issue of analogical versus equivocal predication when it comes to divine and worldly properties. Though we have no recourse but to use words in the light of their mundane reference, a

believer will take it on faith that each of the revealed names of God refers primarily and absolutely to a transcendent form of perfection. A full disclosure of the real semantic range of such perfection terms remains conclusively out of our reach, while an imperfect understanding of them will depend on the dual process of abstraction from worldly particulars and illumination from above (*Beautiful Names*, 50–58, 162–171). The latter constitutes our primary task and vocation, as per Muḥammad’s exhortation for us to meditate on the divine names. Ġazālī’s cosmology thus becomes intimately intertwined with his psychology.

### Psychology

As in many respects, so in psychology it is difficult to gauge the actual distance between Ġazālī’s views and those of the philosophers whom he criticizes. In some places, Ġazālī speaks of the soul as if it were a bodily accident in the *kalām* sense, while in others he advances the Avicennian picture of soul as separate substance and hylomorphic form. He also insists on the reality of bodily resurrection in the *Incoherence*, yet describes the pleasures and pains of the afterlife in imaginative and incorporeal terms in the final section of the *Revivification*. Ġazālī even declares the reality of the heart (his preferred term for soul) a mystery on a par with the divine essence.

Such vacillations notwithstanding, Ġazālī in his mature work clearly adapts the explanatory framework of Peripatetic teaching, with the five outer senses feeding the five inner senses, which in turn are in charge of unifying the perceptual field and providing information for the purposes of action and contemplation – the provinces of the practical and theoretical intellects, respectively. Ġazālī also appropriates Platonic moral psychology, in which the appetitive and irascible impulses are unruly elements to be brought under the rational soul’s control, and the Avicennian understanding of the soul’s executive powers (see, e.g., *Revivification*, bk. 21 and the *Jerusalem Ascent*, *passim*).

The central problem that Ġazālī encountered in his philosophical sources had to do with how the vaunted “true realities,” that is, essences of things are grasped. In true Aristotelian fashion, al-Fārābī

had emphasized the role of abstraction (*tajrīd*) in the acquisition of knowledge, while the school of al-Kindī (d. c. 870), extending at least as far as al-‘Āmirī, contended that the eye of the intellect opens up to a world all its own, in a process from which the senses are excluded. Avicenna appears to have wanted to split the difference, with an elaborate process of abstraction leading up to an emanation of the intelligibles from the Agent Intellect (see Gutas’ and Hasse’s contributions to Wisnovsky 2001). Ġazālī more or less follows Avicenna, with two important differences: (1) the highest intelligibles are the divine attributes themselves, for which no true likeness exists in the created world and whose emanation therefore cannot be a matter of necessity, (2) the preparatory work required for the reception of these exalted principles need not be exclusively the province of the scientist or Sufi, instead, the purificatory virtues available to all are sufficient for such a diffusion of divine grace to take place. Ġazālī sees an allusion to this doctrine in the Prophetic tradition citing God’s “gusts of beneficence,” and also in the famous “light verse” of the Qur’ān (24:35). The latter gave rise to a whole elaborate exegesis in Ġazālī’s *Niche of Lights*, the most notorious of his mystical treatises.

### Ethics

Ġazālī enthusiastically embraces the Platonic simile of the soul as a mirror in need of polishing. His ethics, therefore, essentially form a propaedeutic to the realization of the contemplative ideal. Still, by emphasizing the particular nature of the various ailments which afflict individual human souls, Ġazālī gets to add a distinctive Islamic flourish to an otherwise Hellenic system. Since few can aspire to be scientists or hermits, and because the active life puts all kinds of obstacles in the aspirant’s way, as does basic human weakness, philosophy with its universal prescriptions cannot hope to aid effectively each and every individual. In the face of this quandary, the Law handed down by the Prophet shows its truly miraculous character; whosoever follows its prescriptions, finds his or her soul improved, and discovers that there are limitless depths to its application. The marvelous character of the divine Law is shown precisely in

its applicability to each and every human situation. Muḥammadan prophecy effectively performs the same function as theurgy did for the late ancient Platonists, allowing for divinity to reach directly to the individual level, past the restrictions associated with the general Platonic perfecting mechanism of soul-approximating reason.

On a practical level, Ġazālī's ethics owe much to Abū Tālib al-Makkī's (d. 996) *Nourishment of the Hearts* as well as to the "reformation of character" literature exemplified by Miskawayh's (d. 1030) treatise of the same name (see Sherif 1975; Gramlich 1992–1995). Some of the salient features include Ġazālī's choice of *metriopatheia* both as an ideal and as a practically attainable goal against an apathetic intellectualism; an emphasis on constant vigilance and merciless scrutiny in examining one's own motivations, which often are shown to be more venal than one would like (Ġazālī attributes these systemic moral failings to the whisperings of the devil mentioned in the Qur'ān, which appear to constitute an active principle counteracting the divine purpose); and an overall two-tier system, whereby a small elite is given the rarefied task of pursuing a truly contemplative happiness, while the majority of believers are left to lead a more rounded, if also mundane, life in accordance with the outward prescriptions of Muḥammad's religion (Kukkonen 2008).

## Cross-References

- ▶ al-Fārābī, Abū Naṣr
- ▶ Ibn Rushd, Muḥammad ibn Aḥmad al-Ḥafīd (Averroes)
- ▶ Ibn Sīnā, Abū 'Alī (Avicenna)
- ▶ Miskawayh, Abū 'Alī
- ▶ Philosophy, Arabic

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## George of Trebizond

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### Abstract

The Renaissance rhetorician and translator George of Trebizond (1396c.–1474) transferred the Byzantine Plato-Aristotle controversy to the Latin West in 1458 with the

publication of his *Comparatio Philosophorum Platonis et Aristotelis*, which is a vigorous demonstration of Aristotle's agreement with Christian doctrine and an equally vigorous condemnation not only of Plato but of the whole Platonic tradition up to his time as represented by the Neoplatonic philosopher George Gemistus Pletho (d. 1454). George's *Comparatio* provoked Cardinal Bessarion to publish in 1469 in defense of Plato his *In Calumniatorem Platonis*, the next major milestone in the Renaissance controversy.

## Biographical Information

George of Trebizond (5/6 April 1396c.–1474) earned his daily bread as a teacher and practitioner of Latin eloquence and rhetoric, as a papal secretary, and as a translator of a wide array of Greek classical and patristic texts into Latin, just as you would expect from one of the most prominent of the Quattrocento humanists. But he passionately pursued other interests besides: astrology and astronomy, theological issues dividing the Greek and Latin churches, conversion of Mehmed the Conqueror to Christianity to save the world from apocalyptic catastrophe, and, most pertinently for our purposes here, the defense of medieval Aristotelianism against the growing moral and intellectual threat posed by Platonism. Indeed, it was George who triggered the Renaissance Plato-Aristotle controversy by domesticating in the Latin West what had previously been a Byzantine quarrel.

Born the son of a priest in Crete, most probably in the city of Candia, George came to Venice in 1416 ostensibly to serve as a Greek scribe. His linguistic brilliance allowed him to start teaching Latin by 1420 and by 1434 to produce the first major textbook of rhetoric in the Renaissance, the *Rhetoricorum Libri V*. In 1426, he had become a Roman Catholic, a move which facilitated his entrance in 1439 into the papal court in Florence, where it was resident at the time. In 1444, after the papacy had returned to Rome, George became a papal secretary and remained connected to the papal court and Rome in one way or another until his death. The last notice we have of him is



a document of 28 November 1473, recording his donation of three manuscripts to the Dominican church of *S. Maria sopra Minerva* near his home in Rome.

Three factors propelled George's entrance into the Plato-Aristotle controversy. The first was his belief in the coming apocalyptic disaster pre-figured by Mehmed II's capture of Constantinople. The second was his admiration of medieval scholasticism and Aristotle, more than half of whose corpus of writings he translated into Latin in the 1440s and 1450s, including the zoological works and the pseudo-Aristotelian *Problemata*. Finally, there was the personal element as the Platonist, Cardinal Bessarion (d. 1472), in the 1450s turned his support to a rival Greek translator, Theodore Gaza (d. 1475), who had made a new translation of the *Problemata* and embarked on a new translation of Aristotle's zoological works. George had long been suspicious of Platonism because he believed that the contemporary Byzantine Platonist and Bessarion's teacher, George Gemistus Pletho (d. 1454), was a neopagan. But now he understood that Platonism, whose moral principles undergirded Islam, was threatening to destroy the moral and intellectual integrity of the Latin West and lead to its destruction, just as it had to the destruction of Byzantium.

The result was first George's *Protectio Aristotelis Problemata* of 1456 in criticism of Gaza's translation and the nefarious Platonic conspiracy of the Bessarion circle, though the cardinal remained unnamed. Then, in 1458, he published in Latin his *Comparatio Philosophorum Platonis et Aristotelis*. In bk. 1, George showed that Aristotle was the father of learning and Plato a silly dilettante. Bk. 2 proved how Aristotle agreed with Christianity on creation, the immortality of the created soul, divine providence, and a trinitarian God, while Plato had none of this, starting with the preexistence of eternal souls. George conflated Plato and Neoplatonism to prove that Plato believed in a sequence of gods resulting in a lower god as the creator of the material universe. The *Comparison* culminates in bk. 3's demonstration of Plato's moral turpitude, whose philosophy of pleasure was taken up by Epicurus and then by Mohammed ("the third Plato"). Now, the minions of the pagan Pletho want to transfer this corruption

to the Latin West. George ends by warning of the coming of the "fourth Plato" who will undermine the West.

Bessarion answered almost immediately, in 1459, with a Greek work, which of course was ineffective in what was now a Latin controversy, but which he eventually arranged to have printed in Latin in expanded form as the *In Calumniatorem Platonis* of 1469. George responded in turn with a now lost set of *Annotationes*. So the *Comparatio* remains our sole substantial source for George's philosophical thought apart from the slight opusculum that he wrote in Greek in late 1457/early 1458 defending against the Platonists Aristotle's statement in *Physics* 2.199a8–b33 that Nature, like art, is purposeful but does not deliberate. George did not fare well in his confrontation with Bessarion. His *Comparatio* did not appear in print until 1523, 50 years after his death, when Bessarion's *In Calumniatorem* had already been printed three times, and in a horribly faulty edition marred not only by a legion of mistaken variants but also by textual dislocations that made comprehension impossible in sections.

## Thought

George of Trebizond considered himself a faithful Aristotelian and Aristotle an inspired forerunner of much Christian truth. Since he put his philosophical thoughts to paper in a polemical work intended to condemn Plato and glorify Aristotle, George needed a standard of truth by which to measure both philosophers. That standard, he stated, was Christian dogma. But in applying this standard, he revealed an interesting mix of philosophical positions. George was also an admirer of Thomas Aquinas, but, as we shall see, he actually opposed Thomas on multiple points.

Psychology: In bk. 2 of the *Comparatio*, which was the philosophical core of the book, George vigorously argued for hylomorphism and the multiplicity of substantial forms against Thomas Aquinas' assertion of the unity of substantial form. Based on the principle that everything other than God must be a composite and on his reading of Aristotle, George insisted that in

humans, as the vegetative soul is succeeded by the sensible soul and then the intellective, the prior soul is not erased but becomes the matter of the superior soul. In accord with this logic, he goes on to argue for the reality of spiritual matter as the explanation of the composite nature of the human soul after death, remarking that he really cannot understand how Thomas could posit such a thing as the soul's inclination to body after death. George seems to have taken Thomas' position as an explanation of the composite nature of the soul post mortem rather than as the philosophical justification for the Christian belief in the resurrection of the body. Making capital of Aristotle's statement in *On the Generation of Animals*, 2.736b27–29, that the rational soul enters from the outside, George argued that Aristotle believed with Christians that each human soul was a special divine creation infused into the fetus at a certain stage of its development and that it was immortal surviving the death of the body. George was thus able to contrast Aristotle's agreement with Christianity with Plato's notorious doctrine of the pre-existence of souls and metempsychosis. If Aristotle seems not to have discussed life after death, as he should if he believed in the immortality of the soul, it is because the relevant books have been lost. George developed a somewhat fanciful proof to demonstrate what books have been lost, but the important aspect of his discussion is that he was the first in the Renaissance to try seriously to identify what parts of the Aristotelian corpus have been lost and how this happened.

God and Creation: Concerning God, George pursued two lines of argument: what God is and what He does. Much exercised by Pletho's charge, in his 1438 treatise on the points of divergence of Aristotle from Plato (the correct title, as Börje Bydén has shown, rather than the "differences" between the two philosophers) that triggered the fifteenth-century controversy that Aristotle's God is merely the first in a coordinated series of gods, George argued that to Aristotle God is absolutely the First, not in any coordinated series, and is separated from all else by the infinite divide between creator and creatures. Moreover, creation was an act of divine will rather merely a

spontaneous product of the divine nature since "the creator intellect thinks what it wants and what it wants it thinks." And since Aristotle in bk. 2 of *On Generation and Corruption* (2.338b3–5) makes the sun the cause of generation and corruption by its oblique passage through the zodiac, Aristotle's God created the sun as his instrument, and therefore Aristotle's God is the efficient cause and not simply the final cause of the universe. Assimilating Plato to his Neoplatonic successors, he further charged Plato with idolatry because Plato really did have a series of a first god, a second god, and a third god, proving once again the harmony of Aristotle with Christianity and Plato's contradiction. Moreover, relying especially on Aristotle's statement in *On the Heavens* 1.268a12–20 that "the last, the middle, and the beginning have the number of the whole universe . . . this is in fact the number of trinity itself," and that this is the reason why we naturally resort to trinity in worship of the gods, George argued that according to Aristotle, all of nature is suffused with trinity and that consequently Aristotle had an inkling of the trinitarian nature of God. He understood that trinitarian *vestigia dei* ("footprints of God") are stamped throughout nature. George thus embraced medieval exemplarism as an expression of sound Aristotelian doctrine.

Platonism, on the other hand, George tells us, pointing to dialogues such as the *Phaedrus* and the *Symposium*, preached hedonistic pederasty. Furthermore, Plato's political philosophy, as seen in the *Republic* and *Laws*, the latter of which George had translated, leads to a city that is oppressive, morally obtuse, and both demographically and economically impossible. As an immigrant himself, George attacked Plato's rules on the treatment of resident aliens as well as his system of eugenics as immoral and destructive of a prosperous, functioning society. Indeed, Plato's coercive marriage policy in the *Laws* will inevitably lead to military as well as demographic disaster, quite apart from the perverse moral and psychological effects they will have on the citizens. He viewed Plato's recommendation in the *Laws* to have boys and girls exercise naked together as leading to the opposite of the moral regime Plato said he was proposing, as was true, of course, for the communal sharing of

women in the *Republic*. Plato's disparagement of Greece's Four Heroes (Pericles, Cimon, Miltiades, and Themistocles) while putting himself forward as the supreme law giver shows how jealous and tyrannical was his nature. Probably no one until Karl Popper in our time offered as a severe and sustained critique of Plato's political philosophy as did George in bk. 3 of the *Comparatio*. The one discordant note in this jeremiad against Plato was George's praise of the philosopher for anticipating Venice's brilliant mixed constitution. George was trapped here because he had earlier cooked up this dubious discovery when seeking Venetian patronage for his translation of the *Laws*. Be that as it may, George became one of the earliest and most important writers to sound the theme of Venice as the perfect republic because of its mixed constitution.

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## George Pachymeres

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### Abstract

George Pachymeres (1242–c. 1310) was a Byzantine philosopher and teacher, learned in many fields (*polyhistor*), and the leading historian and scholar of his time. A prolific writer and copyist of Greek philosophical texts, he was one of the most productive Byzantine commentators. He contributed significantly to the understanding of Aristotle's philosophy by presenting in an abridged accessible form the entire Aristotelian corpus (*Philosophia*). He also played an important role in the revival of Platonic studies in Late Byzantium by teaching Plato and reading the Neoplatonists. His commentary on Pseudo-Dionysius shows his Christian approach to issues raised within the Platonic tradition. Pachymeres is one of the most representative scholars of the Early Palaiologan Renaissance.

## Biographical Information

Born in Nicaea 1242 – died in Constantinople c. 1310. Byzantine philosopher and scholar, prolific miscellaneous writer, teacher and ecclesiastical man, representative of the intellectual movement in the Early Palaiologan Renaissance (middle thirteenth to middle fourteenth century), and perhaps the most important historian of his age. Pachymeres was member of a Constantinopolitan family that after the Latin occupation moved to Nicaea; there he received his encyclical education and returned to Constantinople after its recovery (1261). Until 1267, he studied rhetoric, the *quadrivium*, and philosophy with Gregory of Cyprus at the School of George Akropolites.

In Constantinople, the new dynasty of Palaiologans could not reestablish Byzantium as a powerful Empire but the Emperors encouraged

the intense study and re-appreciation of the Greek past that the Byzantines had inherited. Well-educated high officials formed a learned elite that, besides its occupation with state affairs, found scholarly interest, intellectual excitement, and sometimes relief in the world of ancient Greek literary, philosophical, and artistic culture. The Fourth Crusade and the looting of Constantinople heavily affected higher education, since the texts that used to be easily available in the capital's libraries were destroyed or scattered. Thus, the rediscovery and reproduction of these texts were one of the main preoccupations of Early Palaiologan scholars.

In this milieu, Pachymeres began his clerical and teaching career. He was only a deacon (1265), but his acknowledged abilities and his knowledge of civil and canon law helped him to ascend to the high office of *protekdikos* (a member of an ecclesiastical tribunal, 1285) and of *dikaiophylax* (judge, 1277) by imperial appointment. He had involvement in state and ecclesiastical affairs that he describes in his *History*. Before 1275, Pachymeres held a chair as *oikoumenikos didaskalos* (high degree teacher) in the so-called Patriarchal School, where he taught philosophy, the *quadrivium*, and perhaps rhetoric. He earned great reputation through his teaching activity, and his role as a teacher was strongly emphasized by his contemporaries.

Pachymeres, besides his philosophical work, wrote an extensive history, a paraphrase of the *Coprus dionysiacum*, a treatise *On the Holy Spirit* (PG 144, 923–930), manuals on the four sciences of the *quadrivium*, many rhetorical exercises, a commentary on the *Iliad* (1275–1276), and few poems. For this reason, he has been called an “early humanist.”

## Thought

Pachymeres' extensive work came out from his long teaching activity, and his didactic style is present in his scientific works. His acquaintance with many aspects of Greek culture, including sciences, is evident throughout his work; for example, in his *History* Pachymeres refers to

Plato's *Laws* and to Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics* when he exposes his own views on the right government. One of his main concerns was to read, teach, and interpret philosophical texts. For this reason, he copied philosophical texts by Plato and Aristotle as well as commentaries by the Neoplatonists or earlier Byzantine scholars.

His philosophical activity went together with his teaching of the sciences. The *Quadrivium* (c. 1300) written perhaps as notes for Pachymeres' teaching served as a textbook. It contains sections on mathematics (based on Diophantus and Nicomachus of Gerasa), astronomy (based on many writers from Aratus to Theon), music (based on Claudius Ptolemy), and geometry (based on Euclid). This manual, although not original, was much used (as the number of its manuscripts suggests), contributed to the revival of the study of physics and mathematics, and reflected the interests of the philosophers and scholars of the Early Palaiologan period.

Pachymeres, especially, while commenting on Pseudo-Dionysius, is careful not to adopt Platonic or Aristotelian views that contradict Christian doctrine, like, for instance, the existence of the Platonic ideas or the pre-existence of matter. For him “philosophy is like a divine gift such that has never been given and will never be given to humans by God” (*Philosophia*, Book 1, f.2r). And it is the occupation with philosophy that permits someone to detach himself from the uncertainty of human life (a reality too familiar to a historian as Pachymeres) and to achieve assimilation to God.

Until recently, Pachymeres has been known as an Aristotelian, in virtue of his *Philosophia* (last decades of thirteenth century). This much-read work is preserved in 35 manuscripts and consists of 12 books that epitomize the Aristotelian writings with the exception of *Poetics*, *Rhetoric*, and *History of Animals*. As later titles indicate, *Philosophia* is an *Epitome of the entire philosophy of Aristotle*. Pachymeres' concern about Aristotle can also be attested in his running commentaries on the *Organon*, *Physics*, *Metaphysics*, and *Nicomachean Ethics* and in his codices that contain works such as *Physics* and *On the Parts of Animals* with Michael of Ephesus' *Commentary*.

Pachymeres was familiar with the Platonic Corpus and the Neoplatonists. Two of his codices are important for Late Byzantine Platonic studies, containing many Platonic dialogues and commentaries. The Platonic dialogues that he copied are not identical with the ones that were usually commented on by the Neoplatonists nor their order is the same with the order that was established from fifth century onward. This fact and the references to the Platonic corpus indicate that perhaps he systematically taught Plato's works. He has also been proved not a mere copyist but he has made critical remarks to certain Platonic texts (*Republic*, *Symposium*). He copied three Platonic commentaries that first reappeared in the thirteenth century, namely Proclus' on *Parmenides* and on the *First Alcibiades* and Hermias' on *Phaedrus* (we owe to him its first extant manuscript). After copying Proclus' unfinished *Commentary on Parmenides* he copied also as a sequel a *Commentary* that is now attributed to him because of its similarity to his exegetical method. This text is the only extant late Byzantine commentary on Plato.

All these show that Pachymeres was not another Byzantine Aristotelian or interested only in Aristotelian philosophy. Actually, he was one of the main pioneers in reviving the study of the Platonic tradition. Even his commentary on the *Corpus areopagiticum* cannot be seen separately from his preoccupation with Proclus. Pachymeres, studying an unquestionable Christian authority, concludes accurately that there are affinities, even in the vocabulary, between Pseudo-Dionysius and Proclus (PG 3, 116A); but – as he believes that the writer of *Corpus* was Paul's pupil – he assured that “the Athenian philosophers appropriated Dionysius' treatises and concealed this fact, in order to be considered as the fathers of his divine discourse.” Nevertheless, the commentary on Pseudo-Dionysius shows an objective link between the long Platonic tradition and Byzantine, theological and philosophical, thought.

At his introductory letter to the *Paraphrase of Corpus dionysiacum* Pachymeres defines himself neither as an “interpreter” (*exêgêtês*) nor as a “paraphrastis” (*paraphrastês*) but as a simple

“listener” (*akroatês*) to Dionysius' text (PG 3, 112B), that is, a reader. His extensive paraphrases of the *Corpus* seem more an adaption of the earlier commentary of Maximus Confessor (seventh century). Pachymeres does not simply paraphrase but he analyzes the obscure points. He makes references to the Bible, to earlier Byzantine writers (mostly Dionysius' commentators) and to Greek literature, and he adds his personal thoughts.

In *Philosophia*, Pachymeres does not always use the same method. He selects and copies passages to interpret them, he simplifies the text, he is paraphrasing it, or he interpolates his own statements. Thus, his text is a condensed introductory interpretation of the whole Aristotelian philosophy. In his (mostly unedited) running commentaries, Pachymeres returned to the Late Antiquity tradition of extent commentaries, dividing the text into lemmas and commenting on the entire text.

In his *History* (about the years 1255–1308) Pachymeres, although involved in public life, succeeds in offering a moderate narration of events that he knew from first hand, adding only few personal comments. The reference to unexplained phenomena that he attributes to divine intervention does not change his rather pessimistic outlook on human and especially Byzantine affairs. His ideas about the proper conduct of rulers are based on *Nicomachean Ethics* and they are dispersed in the *History*. For Pachymeres, “truth is the soul of history and he who prefers lies to the truth is sacrilegious. It is better to be silent than to repeat facts inaccurately” (*Histories*, I.23).

His rhetorical works were not intended as public orations nor they have to do with his involvement in public affairs. They are connected to rhetorical theory and have their models in Late Antiquity and particularly in the Second Sophistic. Pachymeres went beyond the preparatory phase of *progymnasmata* and wrote also more demanding rhetorical studies. Few of them, taking Antiquity as their subject, have theoretical/political interest. In the first, Pachymeres makes an encomium of democracy putting it in the mouth of the Athenian statesman Pericles. In the second, the philosopher has persuaded the tyrant to resign and claims for himself the title of

“tyrannicide.” The philosopher (and philosophy) proves to be useful to the city, when he uses against political power his own weapons, namely the knowledge of the beings and science!

Pachymeres gained his reputation as a philosopher in virtue of his *Philosophia*, a work that was imitated by later thinkers as Joseph Rhakendytes or Philosopher in his *Encyclopedia* (a compilation of Pachymeres’ *Philosophia* and Nikephoros Blemmydes’ *Epitome*), and Theodoros Metochites. *Philosophia*’s rich manuscript tradition shows that it was read and copied until the eighteenth century. The part on music of the *Quadrivium* influenced Manuel Bryennios in his *Harmonica*. Pachymeres’ teaching and writings played a significant role during the Early Palaiologan Renaissance and his manuals were used for a long time and, translated into Latin, by Italian humanists.

## Cross-References

- ▶ [Logic, Byzantine](#)
- ▶ [Maximos Planoudes](#)
- ▶ [Natural Philosophy, Byzantine](#)
- ▶ [Nikephoros Blemmydes](#)
- ▶ [Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite](#)

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## George Scholarios (Gennadios II)

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### Abstract

George Scholarios (Gennadios II) was the first patriarch of Constantinople (1454–1456) after the capture of Constantinople by the Turks. His principal interests were theological; still, he proved one of the most versatile and prolific Byzantine authors and the most fervent Byzantine Thomist and Aristotelian. An opponent to the religiously colored Platonic philosophy of the only non-Christian thinker of the Byzantine era, George Gemistos (Plethon), he combated him by means of the Christian Aristotelianism of Thomas Aquinas, whom he regarded as one of the best Christian authors that had ever existed. He also regarded Aristotle as the best philosopher and his philosophy as fully compatible with Christianity. A huge part of his literary work consists of translations, adaptations, and abridgments of scholastic writings (such as by Aquinas, Radulphus Brito, Peter of Spain, and Armandus of Bellovisu). He tried to create a synthesis of Aristotle and Aquinas and the Patristic and Byzantine theological thought.

### Life

Scholarios (c. 1400–1472), born in a rich family, studied the traditional philosophical curriculum. His teachers implanted into him a love for Orthodoxy but also for the Latin theological tradition and especially Thomas Aquinas, the greatest – according to Scholarios – Latin theologian and one of the greatest Christian thinkers of all times. In the context of the pro-union politics of emperor John VIII Palaiologos (1425–1448) and of patriarch Metrophanes II (1440–1443), he participated in the council of Florence (1438–1439)

by promoting an “economical union” with the Roman see “for the nation’s sake.” From 1443 onward, he adopted an extremely antiunionist attitude. In 1450, removed from court by the new emperor (1448–1453) Constantine XI Palaiologos, he became a monk, taking the name “Gennadios.” After the fall of Constantinople, Mehmed II the Conqueror, who knew of his strong anti-Latin stand, made him a patriarch (Gennadios II; early 1454). Soon he resigned and retired on Mount Athos and in a monastery near Serrhai (northern Greece), where he devoted himself to writing and discussions with Muslims on the true religion up to his death.

### Thought

Scholarios was primarily interested in theology. Yet, he had a wide knowledge of the ancient Greek philosophical literature and had studied the Greek translations of some major Latin Christian works (such as Augustine’s *De Trinitate* and Aquinas’ two *Summae*) produced in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries. In combination with his own knowledge of Latin, this made him interested in philosophy, especially Aristotle, and in the question of the relationship of this philosophy to Christian thought.

He mainly developed his views on it in the context of his polemics (1443 onward) against the religious philosophy of George Gemistos (Plethon). Scholarios wrote a refutation of Plethon’s short but bitter anti-Aristotelian lecture in Florence (1439) *On the Issues on Which Aristotle Contentiously Disagrees with Plato*, labeled *Against the Impasses Ignorantly Imputed by Plethon to Aristotle* (1443/1445). The topics treated there are God and his relation with the world; Aristotle’s doctrine of the homonymy of “being”; his doctrine of “primary substance”; his conception of the “universal” as “matter” and the “particular” as “form”; his view on the simultaneity of the “relatives”; his principle of contradiction and its implications on determinism; various matters of human psychology; the Aristotelian conception of virtue as “meanness”; the ultimate end of human being; the famous cosmological ether

problem; whether the source of sun's heat is its nature or, as Aristotle said, its rapid motion; the question of the cause of the motion of stars; teleology in nature and its relation with Providence; Aristotle's rupture of the universal law of causality by construing human deliberation as ultimate principle of many things; his conception of "movement" or "change" in general; and Aristotle's rejection of Plato's Forms.

The central discrepancy between Scholarios and Plethon stems from Plethon's rejection of Aristotle's doctrine of "entelechy" as immanent in everything and cause of the transition from "potentiality" to "actuality"; Plethon's Neoplatonic metaphysics postulated a hierarchy of beings, each of them responsible for the existence and the qualities of its inferior. Scholarios objected in a clearly Thomist spirit that God is the *causa remota* of whatever goes on in the world and governs the world by having implanted to each sort of creature a power to directly produce some concrete effects, this power being Aristotle's self-"actualization."

Scholarios was so filled with indignation at reading Plethon's major work, the *Laws*, where a highly elaborated pagan, anti-Christian utopia was described, that he threatened the author to burn him alive (in fact, he finally burnt Plethon's writing). He regarded Aquinas' Christian Aristotelianism as a perfect tool to combat Plethon. Radicalizing some arguments of Aquinas and based on Simplicius' *Commentary* on the *De Caelo*, he claimed that Aristotle did not believe in the eternity of the world and that God, to Aristotle, is the cause not only of the movement in the world but also of the very existence of the universe. Scholarios also compiled a *Florilegium Thomisticum*, both from the *Summa contra Gentiles* and the *Summa theologiae*, which he intended to use as a source of arguments for producing a refutation of Plethon's *Laws*, as well as another *Florilegium Thomisticum*, from the *Summa contra Gentiles* (III, 84–106), in order to refute especially Ch. II, 6 of Plethon's masterpiece, which circulated as an independent treatise *On Fate*. Scholarios, taken up with his anti-Catholic struggle, did not find time to write these refutations; still, the Thomistic arsenal of the

intended refutation and his systematic treatises *On the Divine Providence and Predestination* stand as a mark of what he had in mind when saying that Plethon's philosophy is insane. Instead of Plethon's Platonic doctrine of the incorruptibility of the human intellect, which postulates the eternal preexistence of the human soul, Scholarios deemed the Thomistic doctrine of the simultaneity of coming into existence of body and soul as more consistent. Instead of Plethon's Neoplatonic-Averroist doctrine of the faculty of "phantastikon" as the "medium" between intellect and body, Scholarios adopted the Aristotle-based Thomistic doctrine of how a created soul forms a "direct" union with body. Against Plethon's doctrine of fate, Scholarios adopted Thomas' doctrine of the way and the degree the superlunar world affects humans in the context of God's providence as well as of Predestination and free will.

Scholarios also produced a Thomistico-Scotistic interpretation (Thomas Aquinas, Duns Scotus, Francis of Meyronnes et al.) of Gregory Palamas' distinction between God's 'essence' and 'energies,' based also on Radulphus Brito's doctrine of logical and metaphysical 'distinctions'. God's *energeiai* are *intentiones/epinoiai*, whose mode of existence is partly objective and partly subjective; God's simplicity is grasped multifariously through the results of His creative and gratifying activity. Scholarios also suggests that Palamas' solution to the problem of God's simplicity and multiplicity is close to John Duns Scotus' application of the *distinctio formalis* to God.

Scholarios also produced an *Ars vetus*, which was almost fully and verbatim based on Radulphus Brito (regarding Porphyry's *Isagoge* and Aristotle's *Categories*), Thomas Aquinas (regarding Aristotle's *De interpretatione*), and some other scholastic sources, many of which included a lot of material from the Late Antique Greek commentators on Aristotle's logic. His paraphrases of Aristotle's natural works (*Physica*, *De caelo et mundo*, *De anima*, *Parva naturalia*, *Meteorologica*) seem to be an abridgment of Theodore Metochites' paraphrases, enriched with certain sporadic notes by means of which he repelled some anti-Aristotelian arguments by

the Platonist George Pachymeres. Of Aquinas' *œuvre*, besides his selective translation/abridgment of Aquinas' Commentary on the *De interpretatione*, he translated the *De ente et essentia* along with Armandus de Bellovisu's Commentary on it (into which he inserted an interesting discussion of the problem of the divine simplicity in Thomistic, Scotist, and Palamite terms), the Commentary on Aristotle's *De anima* and a part of the Commentary on *Physics*, and the pseudo-Thomistic *De fallaciis*. Besides, he elaborated an abridgment of Demetrios Kydones' translations of Thomas' *Summa contra Gentiles* and of the I<sup>a</sup>, I<sup>a</sup> II<sup>ac</sup>, and the II<sup>a</sup> II<sup>ac</sup> of the *Summa theologiae*. His versions of Aquinas' Commentary on the *Posterior Analytics* and on *Metaphysics* are not extant. He also translated the greater part of Petrus Hispanus' *Summulae logicales* and Gilbertus Porretanus' *De sex principiis* and a part of Radulphus Brito's *Ars vetus* (on *intention/epinoia*). He also wrote a short treatise *On the Compatibility of Aristotle's and Plotinus' Definitions of Human Happiness* as well as an *Encomium of Aristotle*.

## Cross-References

- ▶ [Aristotelianism in the Greek, Latin, Syriac, Arabic, and Hebrew Traditions](#)
- ▶ [Gregory Palamas](#)
- ▶ [John Duns Scotus](#)
- ▶ [Plethon, George Gemistos](#)
- ▶ [Thomism, Byzantine](#)

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## Gerald Odonis

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### Abstract

Gerald Odonis (c. 1285/90–1349) was a Franciscan from the south of France who taught theology at Toulouse in the 1310s and lectured on the *Sentences* at Paris in 1327–1328. He

was elected minister general of his order in 1329 and, after a controversial reign in which he supported Pope John XXII on the issue of apostolic poverty, was named patriarch of Antioch and administrator of Catania in 1342. Gerald wrote an influential *Ethics* commentary, an important set of questions on the *Sentences*, a *Quodlibet*, an economics treatise, and numerous tracts on topics in logic, metaphysics, and natural philosophy. Although his thought can be characterized as Platonist in many ways, he is most conspicuous for being intrepid. As a natural philosopher, Gerald is best known as an atomist, but he also held innovative views on projectile motion, the plurality of worlds, and the cessation of celestial motion after the Last Judgment. As a theologian, Gerald defended unpopular positions on a number of issues, most famously the beatific vision. In metaphysics, he was a strong realist. In ethics, where his impact was most pronounced, Gerald espoused opinions that furthered the voluntarist tendencies of his order. Even as an economic theorist, Gerald's defense of the legitimacy of what were considered usurious practices put him outside the mainstream of his time.

Gerald Odonis – also known as Geraldus/Gerardus/Giraldus Otto/Oddo/Odon/Hodonis and, in the vernacular, Guiral Ot – was born c. 1285–1290 in Camboulit, a village in southern France near Figeac, where he joined the Friars Minor. Rising in the Franciscan educational system, by early 1316 he was bachelor of theology at Toulouse, where he composed a short tract on signs of the Last Judgment and the economics treatise *De contractibus*. He also read the *Sentences* at Toulouse, making a name for himself with the *reportationes* that circulated from these lectures, although only a few questions from book II survive, incorporated into Gerald's later Parisian questions from the late 1320s. Between these lecture series, Gerald probably penned at least a portion of the philosophical treatises preserved primarily in a Madrid manuscript, some of which may stem from his Toulouse

*Sentences* questions. The logical works and the *De intentionibus* have been published, while those on metaphysics and natural philosophy are in preparation. Also presumably during this phase, Gerald wrote his most influential work, the first Franciscan *Ethics* commentary, which survives in 18 codices, received two incunabula editions, and earned Gerald the nickname *Doctor moralis*. With these writings and his pastoral works, sermons, and biblical commentaries, Gerald was thus already well known when the Franciscans assigned him to lecture on the *Sentences* at Paris, which he did during the 1327–1328 academic year. Although the popularity of Gerald’s written version suffered because of the ensuing decades of decline in Franciscan theology, nevertheless 11 manuscripts preserve one or more books of this almost completely unpublished work, which incorporates material from his earlier philosophical questions and his *Ethics* commentary.

Gerald was promoted soon afterward, since as master of theology, with the backing of Pope John XXII, Gerald was elected Franciscan minister general on June 10, 1329, replacing the deposed Michael of Cesena. During his turbulent reign, Gerald sided with Pope John against rebellious Franciscans on the issue of apostolic poverty, and he even defended John’s controversial views on the beatific vision, writing a treatise – now published – based on a quodlibetal disputation he held in Paris in Advent 1333. Afterward Gerald devoted himself to the administration of his order and acted as papal nuncio in Central Europe fighting the Bogomile heresy, before stepping down as minister general in late 1342 when the new Pope Clement VI appointed him Latin patriarch of Antioch. Since Antioch was in Muslim hands, Gerald received the see of Catania in Sicily, where he died in 1349 during the Black Death.

As a thinker and author, Gerald was remarkably bold, clear, succinct, independent, often original, and sometimes brilliant. Some of the pioneers of the study of medieval science – Pierre Duhem, Anneliese Maier, and John Murdoch – recognized this, even though they usually had access to mere fragments of Gerald’s oeuvre. Since Gerald’s Toulouse *Sentences* questions

have not been identified, his precise relationship with such contemporaries as Henry of Harclay and Francis of Marchia is unclear. For example, in *De motu* and later in distinction 14 of his Parisian questions on II *Sentences*, Gerald discussed the old problem of how projectiles continue in motion after contact with the mover has ceased, defending the following conclusions: “First, a projectile separated from the thrower is not moved by the containing medium. Second, it is not moved by a *virtus impressa* impressed on the containing medium. Third, it is moved by a *virtus derelicta* left in it by the thrower.” Gerald thus rejected the prevailing Aristotelian view and endorsed what his Franciscan confrère Marchia defended at much greater length. The two extant versions of Gerald’s text appear to postdate Marchia’s, but what had Gerald taught at Toulouse? Whatever the relationship between Marchia and Gerald, their idea of a *virtus derelicta* – a force left behind – in the projectile was later adopted and developed by John Buridan in his theory of impetus.

In natural philosophy, Gerald is most famous for his atomism. Henry of Harclay (d. 1317), chancellor of the University of Oxford, was the first important atomist in medieval western Christendom – unless Gerald proposed an indivisibilist theory at Toulouse, in which case they came up with their opinions simultaneously. By the early 1320s, Gerald and the Oxford theologian Walter Chatton were espousing the theory, which Nicholas of Autrecourt would later adopt, against fierce opposition from many scholars. Gerald presented his anti-Aristotelian theory in two separate but related treatises *De continuo*, preserved in one manuscript each (plus a fragment for one of them). Gerald was at pains to make his opinion known, for versions of the two treatises were incorporated into his Parisian *Sentences* questions, in book I, distinction 37, and book II, distinction 44, so that ten witnesses carry all or part of the work: this was a medieval best-seller, known to Francesco Marbres (a.k.a. John the Canon), Nicholas Bonet, Nicholas of Autrecourt, and, directly or indirectly, early modern authors.

Nicholas Bonet called Gerald a “Platonist” with regard to his brand of atomism, and

Platonism does run through Gerald's works, even his *Ethics* commentary. On the subject of a possible plurality of worlds, treated in distinction 44 of his questions on II *Sentences*, Gerald went beyond his scholastic predecessors and contemporaries, explicitly arguing in favor of Plato over Aristotle in defending God's power to make more than one world. Rather than just state this as fact, as required after the Condemnation of 1277, Gerald gave analogies to show by example how different worlds of the same type would each have different centers to which and from which heavy and light objects would fall or rise, without the different worlds interfering with each other, contrary to what Aristotle had maintained. Gerald reasoned that the circulation of the blood in different humans works this way, and he surmised that similar phenomena are observed in the northern and southern hemispheres with respect to opposite poles. In his discussion, Gerald hints that there is a mutual attraction between a heavy body and the center of the world. To Aristotle's claim that beyond the heavens of this world there is neither place nor body, Gerald asserts not only that the contrary is possible, but "I would not even consider it very untoward if in reality, right now, *de facto*, one said that beyond the heavens there is a place and an infinite space, although an empty vacuum." If in expressing similar views later, Nicholas Oresme drew inspiration from any scholastic, the best candidate is Gerald Odonis.

If Gerald Odonis' opinions on the continuum and projectile motion in some ways parallel the theories of contemporaries such as Francis of Marchia and Henry of Harclay, his audacious ideas about some other aspects of natural philosophy have no precedent. Gerald's discussion of nature after the Last Judgment in book IV of his *Sentences* questions illustrates his originality. In keeping with an exegetical tradition, Gerald states that the celestial bodies would miraculously become immobile after the Apocalypse. Unlike the other authors, however, he emphasizes that it would not be a definitive cessation of celestial motion but just an interruption. While other theologians strive to prove that celestial immobility is compatible with Aristotelian cosmology, Gerald is of the opposite opinion, recalling that according

to the Philosopher, the existence of celestial movers is pointless without the motion of the spheres and rest is unnatural for superior bodies. Gerald also asserts that the permanent cessation of celestial motion would damage the terrestrial world, because the influence of the celestial bodies would be distributed unequally in the different terrestrial zones, thus destroying all species of animals, which is unacceptable, because all that God has created, including animals, is good. Gerald's argument expressly contradicts the common theological opinion of the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries that animals are useless in the post-apocalyptic world and should thus disappear after the Last Judgment. The resumption of celestial motion after a short interruption changes the vision of post-apocalyptic nature. In the new universe imagined by Gerald, the relationship between celestial bodies and the terrestrial world remains the same, and the laws of ordinary (Aristotelian) physics are still relevant.

As a theologian also, Gerald Odonis put forth radical views. In his *Quodlibet*, he defended Pope John XXII's very unpopular assertion that the saints in heaven do not experience the beatific vision until after the Last Judgment. One need not maintain that Gerald did this solely to score points with the pope, for Gerald espoused many unpopular opinions on matters unrelated to papal proclamations. For example, except for Matthew of Aquasparta, Latin theologians since 1054 agreed that the Last Supper took place as a Passover meal, when unleavened bread was in use. In distinction 12 of book IV of his *Sentences* questions, Gerald rejects the consensus and interprets the Gospels as the Greeks did: the meal happened before Passover, when leavened bread was eaten – although Gerald claims that Jesus instituted a new rite, employing unleavened bread.

One could maintain that Gerald's "Platonic" proclivities show up in his brand of Augustinian theology. In the contexts of divine foreknowledge and predestination, he proposed radical interpretations of two Augustinian *dicta*: for foreknowledge, "God does not know what is to happen differently from what has happened," and for



predestination, “This will of God cannot be unjust, for it springs from deeply hidden merits.” For Gerald, the first passage entails that God knows the future as past, while the second leads Gerald in the direction of semi-Pelagianism, abandoning the prevailing view that the predestination (of the elect) stems solely from God’s will. This is in line with what Gerald emphasizes in his *Ethics* commentary: humans can do good by themselves through free will; although humans need God’s help, God cannot do it alone, without human consent. For Gerald, ethics is none other than the study of human free will, because without the will’s free ability to choose and determine itself, there is no basis for morality. Gerald’s discussion is squarely Franciscan, exhibiting much of the fascinating Franciscan analysis of human free will in the 1320s, but Gerald seems to have worried less than most of his confrères about the burden of theological tradition. Gerald’s *Ethics* commentary heavily influenced John Buridan and European thought in general.

In metaphysics, in his *Sentences* questions and separate treatises Gerald Odonis opposed the prevailing denial of extramental existence to universals. He also supported the univocity of the concept of being, holding that there is a nature common to God and creatures in extramental reality, and common to particular and universal nature. It has been said that Gerald’s rather strong realism has a “Platonic flavor.” Thus in distinction 1 of his questions on II *Sentences*, Gerald enumerates and defines nine different kinds of being that a creature has before it receives “posited being” with creation: producible being, ideal being, intelligible being, intellectuated being, willable being, willed being, possible being, positive being, and quiddative being.

Gerald Odonis’ realism also influenced his logic. In his *De principiis scientiarum*, the most original of his logical treatises, Gerald is particularly interested in the ontology of logical principles: the law of noncontradiction (*De nullo simul esse et non esse*) and the law of the excluded middle (*De quolibet esse vel non esse*). For Gerald, these principles, which are necessarily

true and basic for all sorts of knowledge, concern something mind-independent, existing in extramental reality. The subject of these principles is neither something existing in the mind (*entia rationis*) nor real being (*esse reale*). According to Gerald, the law of noncontradiction and the law of the excluded middle refer to *esse tertio adjacens* (or “statemental being,” to use De Rijk’s term). By this Gerald means a specific kind of extramental being, expressed in propositions with the copula *est* (*S est P*, the subject is the predicate). In elaborating this concept, Gerald has some predecessors, since, on the one hand, the theory of *esse tertio adjacens* develops the notion of composition put forward by Peter of Spain while, on the other, it is close to John Duns Scotus’ ideas about the verb *est*.

Finally, even Gerald’s economic thought is remarkable. In his economics treatise, in essence, Gerald justifies what was called usury, providing a theory for acceptable banking practices in which interest is justly charged as compensation for the loss of utility of the money lent to the borrower. These are only a few of the topics on which Gerald expressed opinions that deserve our attention for their intrinsic interest and their impact on the history of ideas.

## Cross-References

- ▶ [Atomism](#)
- ▶ [Augustine](#)
- ▶ [Economic Thought in the Middle Ages](#)
- ▶ [Ethics](#)
- ▶ [Francesc Marbres](#)
- ▶ [Francis of Marchia](#)
- ▶ [Henry Harclay](#)
- ▶ [Impetus](#)
- ▶ [John Buridan](#)
- ▶ [Natural Philosophy](#)
- ▶ [Nicholas of Autrecourt](#)
- ▶ [Nicholas Oresme](#)
- ▶ [Realism](#)
- ▶ [Universals](#)
- ▶ [Walter Chatton](#)

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## Gersonides

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Gersonides (Levi ben Gershom [acronym RaLbAG], 1288–1344), one of the most important figures in the history of Jewish philosophy, was a fourteenth-century rabbi, philosopher, scientist, and Bible commentator who flourished within the Jewish community in the tolerant environment of Provence. The primary influences on his thought are Aristotle (through the commentaries of Averroës) and Maimonides. His most important philosophical work, *The Wars of the Lord*, is a wide-ranging treatise in the tradition of Maimonidean rationalism. Its five books cover such topics as the immortality of the soul; dreams, divination, and prophecy; divine knowledge and providence; free will; and creation and cosmology. He is also the author of treatises of biblical exegeses, including influential commentaries on the Pentateuch, Job, and Song of Songs, as well as work in astronomy, mathematics, and *halakhah*.

## Biography

Little is known about Gersonides' life. He was born in Provence in 1288 and was probably the son of the Talmudic scholar Gershom of Bésiers. Under the rule of the Duke of Anjou and, later, the Pope (then based in Avignon during the Papal schism), Jews in Provence enjoyed a relatively high degree of toleration, even support, and a rich intellectual tradition was able to flourish in

this hospitable environment. While Gersonides, unlike Maimonides, was not a major religious leader in the community, his stature in Provence and beyond was high, both during his lifetime and after. He died in 1344.

The primary influences on Gersonides' philosophy are Aristotle (through the commentaries of Averroës) and Maimonides. He wrote all of his works in Hebrew, and it is uncertain whether he knew Latin, Arabic, or even Provençal. His Bible commentaries include works on the Pentateuch, Job, Song of Songs, Daniel, Esther, and Ruth, and several of these serve as useful supplements to his philosophical writings; they often provide an accessible discussion, through Biblical texts, of philosophical matters treated more technically in his supercommentaries on Averroës and, especially, in his own original philosophical masterpiece, *The Wars of the Lord* (*Sefer Milchamot ha-Shem*, completed around 1329).

In many respects, Gersonides was a more radical thinker than Maimonides, less deferential to either Aristotle or rabbinic tradition and willing to depart from traditional views when philosophical reasoning demanded it. Thus, while he agreed with Maimonides in rejecting Aristotle's views on the eternity of the world, he also rejected creation *ex nihilo* and favored the Platonic position of divine creation operating on a preexisting material substrate.

## Philosophy

Gersonides' most important, systematic, and influential treatment of philosophical matters is *The Wars of the Lord*. The monumental treatise is divided thematically into six books: *Immortality of the Soul*; *Dreams, Divination, and Prophecy*; *Divine Knowledge*; *Divine Providence*; *Heavenly Bodies and Their Movers, the Relationships Among These Movers, and the Relationship Between Them and God*; and *Creation of the World*. His discussions are often characterized by scholastic style, first explaining and refuting the views of others and then presenting his own opinions, supported by both logical argument and biblical citation.

Nowhere is Gersonides' philosophical originality and technical virtuosity on greater display than in his treatment of three issues of major concern to medieval philosophers: the immortality of the soul, theodicy and the nature of divine providence, and the problem of reconciling divine foreknowledge and human freedom.

### Immortality of the Soul

Gersonides offers a thoroughly Aristotelian conception of the human soul and of its capacity for immortality, but one that also stands in stark contrast to the views of other latter-day Aristotelians, such as Alexander of Aphrodisias and Averroës. The topic of the immortality of the soul is of supreme importance for Gersonides, for upon it depends not just the metaphysical fate of the soul, but also human happiness and well-being – and not only in the afterlife, but in this life as well.

Gersonides begins his discussion by singling out that part of the soul that is the prime candidate for immortality. The soul is composed both of parts that use the body in their functioning (such as sensibility and imagination) and pure intellect. That part of the soul that does depend on the body – and, in particular, the senses and the imaginative faculty – for its operations is called the material intellect. The material intellect is pure potentiality, the bare capacity for thought. Like all potentialities, it must reside in a subject; it cannot be a substance in its own right. Gersonides argues at length against the view that the subject of this disposition is a soul understood as an incorporeal substance distinct from the body. If such were the case, the disposition would belong to an actual intellect – a form – and would not have any potentialities. In fact, the material intellect is a disposition of the body (with “body” understood in Aristotelian terms as a substance composed of both matter and form). It is a capacity or potentiality that the animated human body has, because it is informed by the soul and its faculty of imagination, to contribute to the acquisition of knowledge through the mediation of sensation. It is basically the living human organism's capacity to transform sensory input into knowledge.

The material intellect is also, therefore, along with the body, corruptible and mortal – it comes to an end with a person's physical death.

Left to its own devices, the material intellect will not generate knowledge. True knowledge is the intellectual grasp of abstract, universal truths – it is conceptual in nature, not sensory – and the unaided material intellect can receive only the images of particular things. The senses and the imagination give us only limited access to individual objects in the world around us. What supplements the material intellect and makes it possible for a knower to transcend this acquaintance with particulars and apprehend more general things – such as essences, mathematical truths, and natural laws – is what Gersonides calls the Agent Intellect. Understanding just how this higher intellect functions requires a brief excursion into the cosmos itself.

In the medieval Aristotelian cosmology that Gersonides inherits, the universe is a series of concentric material spheres. On most accounts, there is, first, an outermost sphere encompassing the universe as a whole; its turning initiates the motions of the inner spheres. Gersonides himself, however, rejects such a starless sphere undergoing diurnal motion. For him, the outermost sphere of the universe is the sphere holding the fixed stars. Within this sphere lie the other spheres that, in their perpetual circular motion, each carry around either one of the five known planets, the sun or the moon. At the center of the universe, within the innermost sphere of the moon, stands the earth itself. The spheres are animate beings. Like all substances, they are constituted out of matter and form. They are also, therefore, intelligent, ensouled beings, and their motion is explained in part by their desire and volition.

Associated with each sphere, but distinct from it, is a separate intellect. This is the immaterial spirit or incorporeal intelligence that governs that sphere. It needs to be distinguished from the indwelling soul that animates each sphere. In fact, the separate intellect is that whose perfection each sphere's indwelling soul desires to emulate. Each separate intellect explains (again, only in part) the motion of its corresponding sphere (as the desire to emulate a perfect being gives rise to circular –

that is, perfect – motion) and the arrangement of its contents. All of the separate intellects flow from God and serve as God's intermediaries for the spheres they govern.

The separate intellect governing the sublunary realm – that is, the earth and the phenomena that lie between the earth and the moon – is called the Agent (or Active) Intellect. This eternal and incorporeal soul plays two roles in the world. First, it is causally responsible for all of the physical phenomena in nature: their natures, their arrangements and sequences, their interactions, and especially the laws that govern these. While God is the remote and ultimate cause of everything in the sublunary realm, the more proximate agent (and working on God's behalf) is the Agent Intellect. It is the agent responsible for the existence of things in the sublunary world: primarily by being the generative source of all the forms constituting natural things, but also by being the cause of the order and hierarchy of things, as well as of the general course of nature. The Agent Intellect actively governs the dynamics of the natural world.

Because the Agent Intellect is an intelligent cause, it possesses full knowledge – the maker's knowledge – of the order it imposes on things in the world. The Agent Intellect contains the concepts of all beings, organized comprehensively and systematically, such that the totality of what the Agent Intellect knows constitutes an exhaustive body of science. Its knowledge is a kind of complete and archetypal blueprint for the world it governs. Gersonides, in fact, calls it "the rational order of the terrestrial world," although its science also includes knowledge of all celestial phenomena as well. It is an eternal and incorruptible order, in contrast to the changing, corruptible, and temporal ordering of things and events that instantiates and dynamically exemplifies it. This knowledge in the Agent Intellect exists in "a perfect and unified manner."

The second role played by the Agent Intellect is epistemological, related to human knowledge. It is a role made possible, in fact, by its first role as intelligent cause. The Agent Intellect is responsible for illuminating human minds and generating human cognition of the general concepts of things

and of universal truths, that is, true science. Because of the intellectual union between the human intellect and this higher, separate intellect, the potential of the material intellect can be actualized, and the human being can acquire a knowledge of things that goes beyond mere sensory acquaintance through particular images. The world, in effect, becomes intelligible to the human intellect via the Agent Intellect. If knowledge is the apprehension of the forms of things, the grasp of their essential and general features, then what the Agent Intellect does, through its own knowledge of the forms, causes the human intellect's understanding of them.

The forms of things are just their general natures. The general nature of horse is in every horse. Through repeated sensory perception, through the reception of particular images in the imaginative faculty of the material intellect, the intellect (moved by the Agent Intellect) can abstract from the particularities that distinguish one specific sensible encounter with an object of a certain kind from another of the same kind and reach an understanding of that common nature. After seeing a number of horses, one comes to understand what a horse is essentially. The Agent Intellect makes this process possible by illuminating the human intellect with that eternal order it contains; it informs the human intellect with the general knowledge required for it to make intelligible sense of sensible particulars.

What we are ultimately after is, in fact, not just the essence of this or that particular kind of being. Part of what is contained in a nature is a set of functions that will allow one to see a thing in all of its intrinsic and relational characters. What we truly seek is a complete and unified system of such truths. The real object of knowledge for a human being is the intelligible order of things as contained within the Agent Intellect. Because this order is eternal, universal, and immutable, it exclusively possesses the characteristic features of true knowledge. This, then, is how the human mind – initially limited by its union with a material body – moves past sensible cognition via images to the apprehension of the intelligibles, of the forms of things without their matter. Through this process, aided by the intelligent

cause of the world's order, the human mind comes to an understanding of the true order of the world. Its knowledge grows, in fact, to mirror (as much as possible for human beings) the knowledge that is in the Agent Intellect itself.

The result of all of this in the knower – the cognition of the very order inherent in the Agent Intellect – is what Gersonides calls the acquired intellect. Gersonides notes that “it is clear that the acquired intellect is the perfection of the material intellect brought about by the Agent Intellect.” The acquired intellect is a body of conceptual knowledge. It is an intellectual attainment on the part of the knower; it just *is* that person's knowledge of eternal truths. Because it is only a partial grasp of a larger whole, and a not entirely systematic one at that, the acquired intellect is not identical with the knowledge in the Agent Intellect itself. But the content of the acquired intellect reflects to some degree the knowledge in that higher spirit.

What is immortal in a human being, for Gersonides, is nothing beyond the acquired intellect. Despite the fact that the acquired intellect is generated in us, it does not follow that it is corruptible; Gersonides rejects Aristotle's claim that everything generated is corruptible. Because the rational order of the world in the Agent Intellect is eternal and incorruptible, our knowledge of that order (once it is acquired) must likewise be eternal and incorruptible, since knowledge takes its character from the object known. Moreover, he argues, the acquired intellect (unlike the material intellect) is both immaterial and separable from the body and thus not subject to the forces that destroy the body. Hence, he concludes, the acquired intellect is immortal. When a person dies, the soul understood as the material intellect ceases along with the body. As a result, all further acquisition of knowledge necessarily comes to an end as well. But the acquired intellect remains. The immortality available to any human being consists only in this persistence, after the death of the body, of the knowledge that he or she has acquired in this lifetime.

To his contemporaries, Gersonides must have seemed to be treading perilously close to – if not right into to the eye of – the Averroist storm.

Among the Arabic Aristotelian's greatest sins, at least in the eyes of his Christian critics, was the denial of an individual, personal immortality. Averroës had argued that the material intellect in a human being is not a particular product of the union of a body (matter) and an individual soul (form), but rather simply the manifestation in that person of the single, all-embracing Agent Intellect. Thus, a person's soul – the form animating his body – is nothing but the Agent Intellect itself, and his cognitive powers and achievements are simply the direct activity in him of that higher intellect, which actualizes certain potentialities in his body. All human beings, that is, literally share the same form – the Agent Intellect is common to them all. And a person thinks only because of his union or conjunction with the Agent Intellect and the intelligibles it contains. Although in itself general, the Agent Intellect undergoes a temporary process of individuation when it is attached to and embodied in an individual human being in a lifetime. But since the Agent Intellect is, in truth, one, and thus the same in and for all individuals, when a person dies, all such individuation acquired through the body disappears and his soul reverts back to its transcendent, separate, impersonal existence as the pure Agent Intellect. There is no *personal* immortality for Averroës.

Gersonides is aware of the philosophical problems here. For example, if all human beings literally share the same intellect, he argues, then how can we account for the different intellectual attainments of different people? But of even greater importance, it seems, are the religious and theological objections he has in mind. As Gersonides goes to great lengths to distinguish his own view of the soul from that of Averroës, he concentrates especially on the issue of personal immortality. If the human intellect is really nothing but the Agent Intellect, then immortality is of no practical value or moral consequence. For, he suggests, it would follow that *all* human beings, whatever their character or virtue – “be he fool or sage,” good, or evil – will, because they literally share the same eternal soul, obtain this alleged immortality. Moreover, if immortality is indeed a totally impersonal affair, as Averroës



claims, then it can have no relevance for our very particular lives.

Gersonides believes that his doctrine of personal immortality avoids these problems. Each person's acquired intellect is, he argues, a unity, numerically one, and thus can be distinguished – without any reference to the body at all – from other acquired intellects, even if those intellects have some knowledge in common. “One piece of knowledge can be common to Reuben and Simon yet differ in them insofar as the kind of unity differs in them; so that, for example, the unity in the acquired intellect of Reuben differs from the unity in the acquired intellect of Simon.” What gives each acquired intellect its unity and identity is both the amount of knowledge it involves and the content or character of that knowledge – not just its items but also the way they are connected or synthesized. Different people acquire different, and different amounts of, intellectual knowledge. This will presumably allow one disembodied acquired intellect to be distinguished from another. And Gersonides seems to think that a sense of selfhood will accompany this unity. He speaks of the happiness and pleasure that the immortal soul will feel when, having been released from the body, it will contemplate the knowledge it acquired during its temporal, embodied existence.

### **Divine Knowledge and Future Contingents**

The problem of divine knowledge for Gersonides is centered on two basic questions: Does God have knowledge of particulars, especially the particular actions of individual human beings? And how can an omniscient God's knowledge of future contingent events leave the contingency of those events unaffected? If God knows from eternity that a person will commit a certain action, then it would seem impossible for that person not to commit that action; thus, the problem runs, the act would not really be free, and the person could not be held morally responsible for performing it. This is the classic problem of how to reconcile divine foreknowledge with human freedom.

With regard to God's knowledge of particulars, Gersonides tries to steer a middle course between the Aristotelian view that God does not know particulars at all, but only universals (including the species of things), and Maimonides' view (which Maimonides claims is the only one consistent with Torah) that God knows every particular in all its particularity. Gersonides says that God does have knowledge of particulars, but not in their particularity. God lacks the right kind of cognitive faculties, such as sense organs, to grasp the temporal, mutable features that distinguish different individuals of the same kind. What God does know of particulars is all of those aspects of them that are determined by the species to which they belong and the more general laws of nature that govern them. Just as God knows of every molecule of water that it will contain two hydrogen atoms and one oxygen atom, and of every grain of salt that it is soluble in water, so He knows of every single human being that he will have reason and certain instincts. God has knowledge of particular events only to the extent to which they are “ordered in a determinate and certain way” by the laws of nature; He knows how things in general behave according to their kinds. And this knowledge covers most of what happens in nature.

But for Gersonides, there is a certain domain of events in the world of which God has no particularized knowledge, namely, the free choices of human beings. These are not determined by the species or laws – otherwise they would not be free – and so they escape the eternal knowledge of regularities that God has. God may know the general patterns of things, but these patterns can be disrupted by human volitions. For this reason, Gersonides denies that “God knows this affair with respect to this particular man as a definite individual.” God may know what a human being of a certain kind would, in general, do in certain circumstances, but there is always the possibility that in such circumstances, a free agent will not do what a member of the species will ordinarily do. Thus, God does not know for certain how such an agent will act.

This account of God's knowledge of particulars provides Gersonides with an easy (although

highly controversial) answer to the problem of reconciling divine foreknowledge and human freedom. Essentially, Gersonides says that God does not in fact have foreknowledge of free human actions before they occur. God may know that human beings, given their native endowments, will sin, but He does not know whether or not a particular human being will sin in certain circumstances.

Gersonides is not concerned that this position undermines divine omniscience. For him, omniscience does not mean knowing everything; rather, it means knowing everything that is in principle knowable. And, he insists, future contingents are simply not knowable. Unlike events in the past, the particularities of contingent events that have not yet taken place have no determinate truth value and therefore cannot be known.

## Divine Providence

Gersonides' account of providence is, as he himself explicitly notes, much like that of Maimonides. He begins with the question of whether divine providence extends to individuals or is (as Aristotle claims) limited only to eternal and unchanging things. The phenomenon of prophecy, evidence of God's communication with particular individuals, rules out the Aristotelian option (a position that, he insists in his *Commentary on the Book of Job*, also represents Job's despondent view). So now the question is simply whether providence extends to all individuals (and at all times) or only to some individuals. Gersonides argues against providence being connected to all the actions of all individuals – the view he attributes to Job's friends Eliphaz, Bildad, and Zophar – on the grounds that (a) this would involve God in actively causing evils, for we frequently see people suffer, and (b) it is clearly falsified by experience, which seems to present a good deal of disorder and a lack of justice in the distribution of the world's goods. The challenge for Gersonides, then, is to explain how divine providence extends to some but not all individuals (the view he attributes to Elihu) even

though God has no knowledge of particulars as particulars, and to do so in a way that accounts for the suffering of the righteous and the prospering of the wicked in this world. His solution is to place immediate responsibility for human flourishing upon individual human beings themselves. "God has endowed man with reason so that he can avoid these evils as far as possible."

Gersonides, again like Maimonides, is concerned with two species of providence, both of which are explained in naturalistic terms within an Aristotelian framework. First, there is a general providence that extends across all of nature and, thereby, to all human beings. Second, there is what he calls special or individual providence. This is the protection that, as on Maimonides's account, comes only to a certain class of human beings, namely, those who, through the use of their intellects, achieve a union with the Agent Intellect and a consequent insight into the ways of nature.

The source of evil, Gersonides says, is never God. Nor does it come from the forms of things. Rather, evil has its origins either in matter or in chance. By "matter," he means the mixture of elements in material nature (including human bodies) and the human choices that may be influenced by this. By "chance," Gersonides understands the unfortunate effects upon human beings of occurrences of nature. These occurrences are as causally ordered as anything else in the sublunar realm: they are "the evils that befall man from the patterns determined by the arrangements of the heavenly bodies." What is accidental and a matter of chance is the evilness of their results relative to human beings and their ends; it is an evil that is unforeseen and unintended by the natural causes of such things and bears no relationship to peoples' deserts. As Gersonides notes, it is the "evil resulting from these events [for human beings] that is due to chance."

Now nature has provided in a general way for all creatures through the endowments of the species. Each type of animal has been given the appropriate means necessary for its survival. And the more noble the creature, the greater its capacities for self-preservation. General providence, then, derives, like all the determined aspects of

nature, from the ordinary causal course of nature as this is driven by celestial bodies and through the Agent Intellect. All individual human beings are thus endowed by nature with the faculties and instincts that they need for survival in a world governed by laws which themselves derive from the same celestial influences. The heavenly spheres provide us with desires, thoughts, and intentions for action that are to our benefit. The general celestial providence thus takes care of all individuals *qua* members of the human species, but not *qua* particulars. It extends to all humans as humans in their interactions both with material nature and with each other, without taking any account of their particularities, especially their moral differences, their virtues, and vices. Naturally, although this general ordering of nature aims for the best, and generally results in good, sometimes it brings about evil or accidental misfortunes. Although we have, by general providence, the wherewithal to deal for the most part with what fortune brings our way, we are not, by nature alone, prepared to deal with all the threats to our well-being. Nature is still a risky environment, full of potential harm and obstacles to our flourishing.

This is where special providence comes in. Although God has not ordered the patterns of the heavens such that no evil is to occur, nonetheless “he has given man an instrument whereby these evils can be avoided – reason.” Thus, in addition to the astral-based (general) providence, there is also an intellect-based providence available to human beings, through the achievement of which they can escape (or at least limit) the occasional unfortunate effects of general providence. Through the proper use of his intellect, an individual human being perfects himself and becomes closer to the Agent Intellect, discerns that Intellect’s maker’s knowledge of the essences of things and of the patterns and laws of nature, and thereby attains a higher degree of protection from nature’s vicissitudes. The person enjoying special providence is a person who, through the actualization of his intellect and the acquisition of higher knowledge, is better equipped to obtain what is good and avoid any evils impending from the ordinary course of nature. As the human mind

comes to an understanding of the true order of the world and its knowledge grows, in fact, to mirror (as much as possible for human beings) the knowledge that is in the Agent Intellect itself, one becomes enlightened. Unlike the general run of people, “who are not within the scope of divine providence except in a general way as members of the human species,” this person knows how nature operates; he can predict what, according to nature’s laws, the future will bring and generally be able to put nature’s ways to his own use. “His providence with respect to individual men consists [precisely] in informing them of the good or evil that is to come upon them, so that they will avoid the evil and pursue the good.”

This kind of communication between the Agent Intellect (and, ultimately, God, from whom its knowledge derives) and a particular human being does not require any knowledge of or action upon particulars *as* particulars on God’s or the Agent Intellect’s part. The knowledge acquired by the person who has developed his intellect is neither itself particular nor aimed at anyone in particular. It is general information – perhaps best captured by a system of conditional propositions (if *x* occurs, then *y* occurs) – that is there for anyone to pursue and tap into. Still, as a matter of fact, only the truly righteous – those who are guided by reason – will attain it. If virtue is the pursuit of intellectual perfection – as Gersonides believes – then this special providence is the natural product and reward of virtue. The truly righteous person will, for the most part and just *because* of his intellectual achievements, obtain the goods that this world has to offer and avoid its evils. Sinners, on the other hand, will in general be punished – not directly, through some particular directive from God (since God cannot be the cause of evil, nor can he know particulars *as* particulars), but by being left out in the cold. Those who do not pursue virtue, who do not perfect their intellects, will be subject to the vicissitudes of nature. Without the knowledge possessed by the virtuous, sinners cannot properly navigate their way through nature and guard themselves accordingly.

Why, then, is it the case that evil things *do* sometimes happen to righteous people and good

things to sinners? Why do we see the virtuous suffer while the wicked prosper? In Gersonides' own words, a righteous person occasionally *does* "become the target of the arrows of fortune," as these are ordered by the heavenly bodies, that is, by nature. Is this not a counterexample to Gersonides' theory of providence?

Gersonides offers a two-pronged response to this objection. First, he focuses on the impersonal universal and deterministic forces that bring the goods and evils in question to individuals independently of their deserts. He notes that just because the wicked person is abandoned to chance, to whatever nature may bring his way, there should be little wonder that sometimes nature will bring along things that benefit him. What is important is that his acquisition of these benefits is due entirely to accident and not to any judgment about what he is due in terms of reward and punishment. Similarly, Gersonides concedes that in this life no one, not even the most virtuous, can completely escape nature's inconveniences. Reason does indeed afford the righteous a relatively high degree of well-being in this world, but the protection is not complete.

Gersonides then downgrades the importance of those alleged goods that sinners seem to enjoy and the alleged evils that afflict the righteous. When we examine the nature of the goods and afflictions in question, we should realize that these are almost always material benefits and evils, affections of one's body and one's material well-being. And in the ultimate scheme of things, these are not the true goods for a human being; when it comes to our proper happiness, they are of little consequence when compared to the true good, knowledge. The righteous, through their virtue – their intellectual perfection – *do* in fact succeed in obtaining the true good; the wicked, on the other hand, never fail to fall short of proper human happiness (although they may not realize this). The celestially determined distribution of material benefits in this world is not necessarily governed by justice in all of its details; that is why sometimes the righteous suffer and the wicked prosper with respect to these "goods." But the distribution of the true good necessarily is just and right.

Ultimately, Gersonides grants, even this supreme spiritual condition is achieved only imperfectly in this world, given the persistent demands of the body. True happiness, an undisturbed state of perfection, is attained only in the world to come, the afterlife wherein the intellect experiences pure spiritual joy unencumbered by the inconveniences of the body.

Gersonides's second approach to the objection is to go beyond the generalities of nature and explain why, in fact, the virtuous are sometimes afflicted with even these lesser evils. He offers three specific reasons for this phenomenon. First, and most important, not even righteous individuals are immune to the pleasures of the senses, and thus sometimes, the union between a person's intellect and God through which providence is conveyed is loosened, even broken. In this case, the individual, although generally virtuous, enjoys no more protection than the wicked. They, of course, are responsible for their own misfortunes. Second, God may dispense evils to a person in order to prevent greater evils that would come by the ordinary course of nature. Finally, God sometimes brings evils upon a good person for the purpose of edification, to save him from some minor sin he is about to commit.

Still, there will be many cases that cannot be so rationalized, and one can then ask why God does not act directly to prevent all such injustices, to keep evil things from happening to righteous people and good things from happening to wicked people, especially the ones that occur simply by the ordinary course of nature? Or, since Gersonides' God does not really act at all once the moment of creation has passed, why did not God institute a different plan, one that does not result in any natural but accidental and undeserved evils (or fewer evils) for righteous individuals nor any benefits for sinners? Does not this situation serve to undermine God's justice?

Gersonides argues that although there are indeed "infrequently occurring evils" as a result of the celestial patterns – general providence – nonetheless the ordering imposed by these patterns and directed by the Agent Intellect is, on the whole, for the best. The ordinary course of

events, as embedded in the general and providential laws of nature, represents the best of all possible worlds (to use a somewhat later phrase). Yes, sometimes these laws do have unfortunate consequences. But it is important to realize that whatever goods accrue to sinners does not come to them *because* they are sinners (that is, as an intended reward for their sin). Lacking the special providence belonging to the virtuous, sinners are abandoned to the “accidents that are ordered by the heavenly bodies”; they are left to their own rather meager devices. Sometimes what that order brings along to them is, in fact, bad fortune, but sometimes what it brings happens to contribute to their worldly prosperity. Such are the (ordered) accidents of nature. But these consequences do not represent an intended evil in nature, since its arrangements are, on the whole, the best possible. The generality of the course of nature will sometimes have unfortunate but unintended consequences in individual cases. But if the general order is truly the best, then it must not be changed or contravened for the sake of achieving or avoiding some particular effects. In this regard, Gersonides’ theodicy resembles that of later philosophers such as Leibniz and Malebranche.

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## al-Ghazālī’s Maqāṣid al-Falāsifa, Latin Translation of

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### Abstract

al-Ghazālī’s *Maqāṣid* was translated at the end of the twelfth century into Latin in Toledo and in all likelihood without the introduction (which in the Arabic tradition might well have been added at a later time). The Latin Scholastics were not completely wrong in considering it a philosophical compendium largely inspired by Avicennian ideas, insofar as the text is indeed largely based on Avicenna’s *Dānesh-Nāmeḥ*. In this sense, it is understandable that they used it only as a secondary rather than as a primary source.

## Translation

In Toledo, toward the end of the twelfth century, Dominicus Gundissalinus, together with the still enigmatic “Magister John (of Spain)” (Burnett 2002), translated al-Ghazālī’s work known as *Maqāṣid al-falāsifa* (*The Intentions of the Philosophers*). However, the title of the work given by the Latin translators was not *Intentiones philosophorum*, but *Summa theoreticae philosophiae* – the former title only appearing in the translation of the prologue, which is absent in all manuscripts except for Paris, BN, lat. 16096, which dates to the last quarter of the thirteenth century (Salman 1936: 118). On the basis of the *stemma codicum*, Lohr (1965: 229) inclines to believe that the prologue was not included in the original translation. Important differences in terminology, but, above all, the articulation of al-Ghazālī’s name in the nominative as “Abuhamedin Algazelin” and the use of *De philosophorum intentionibus* as the (new) title of the work (Salman 1936: 125), make it even less probable that the prologue was translated together with the main text and rather point to an anonymous later translator. Furthermore, the almost complete ignorance of the prologue by the vast majority of the thirteenth (and even fourteenth)-century authors undoubtedly corroborates this view. Roger Bacon seems to constitute the one notable exception, and even then only in one of his later works, that is, the *Communium naturalium*. Bacon is to be contrasted with the mature Raimundus Marti (d. 1285 c.) a Spanish missionary. When writing his early work *Explanatio symboli apostolorum* (where he quotes the *Maqāṣid* under the title “*Intentiones physicarum*”), Marti considers, in line with the common opinion among the Scholastics, al-Ghazālī as a “philosopher”, but in his major work *Pugio fidei* (where he quotes passages of several works of al-Ghazālī among which are the *Tahāfut*, but not the *Maqāṣid*), he presents the latter as a defender of the faith against the (all too) rational philosophy (Janssens 2015). Bacon in contrast continues to detect in al-Ghazālī a genuine philosopher, and hence he clearly ignored the true nature of the *Tahāfut*, whose title is

translated in the prologue as *Liber controversiae philosophorum*, not as *Ruina philosophorum* as Marti had done. For Bacon the prologue, like the introduction to Avicenna’s *Shifā’*, intends to make clear that the present work does not offer a full exposé of the most profound philosophical insights; nevertheless, beautiful philosophical secrets have been hidden in it (Bacon, III, 250). Finally, the prologue may have already been absent from the Arabic manuscript at the disposal of Dominicus Gundisalvi and Magister John. Indeed, the prologue, in which the title of the work is indicated as *Maqāṣid al-falāsifa*, in all likelihood was added at a later time (Hana 1972: 892–895), although it might also stem from a will to decontextualize the book (Shihadeh 2011: 88). Moreover, the work reveals itself to be a slightly interpretative translation into Arabic of Avicenna’s Persian encyclopedia *Dānesh-Nāmeḥ* and thus shows up as a kind of student’s thesis, commonly designated at the time as *ta’liq* (Janssens 2006a: VII, XI). Ultimately, the commonly accepted intimate link between the *Maqāṣid* and the *Tahāfut* – the former work being a neutral presentation of the doctrines of the philosophers so that the reader could better understand the *refutation* of these doctrines in the latter – is, even if one places its redaction after that of the *Tahāfut* (Griffel 2006: 10), highly questionable, especially in view of important terminological differences as well as the use in the *Maqāṣid* of only Avicennian texts (Reynolds 2002; Janssens 2006a: X). Hence, the absence of the prologue is not necessarily the result of a historical misfortune in the transmission of the text, whether in the Arabic or in the Latin tradition, or of any deliberate omission. It might simply reflect the oldest state of the text. Also the very title of the work as given by the Latin translation, again, *Summa theoreticae philosophiae*, offers perhaps an indication of a reliance on a primitive version, insofar as it presents itself almost as a possible, although not very literal, translation of the Persian *Dānesh-Nāmeḥ* (*Book of Knowledge* or *Book of Science*). Whatever the case may be, the Latin translation was not always transmitted in its original unity. Its various parts were often copied separately, and especially the treatise on logic



seems to have been regarded as a more or less independent unit (Lohr 1965: 232). The other two parts – metaphysics and physics (in that order in full accordance with Avicenna's *Dānesh-Nāmeḥ*) – were sometimes designated as *Philosophia Algazelis*. This helps explaining why in 1506 P. Liechtenstein published the work in Venice under the title *Logica et philosophia Algazelis arabis*, of which a second edition appeared in 1532 (Daiber 1990: 232). It might also be worthwhile to note that Ramón Llull made a compendium of Arabic logic in Latin, titled *Compendium logicae Algazelis*, which he based mainly, although not exclusively, on the logical part of al-Ghazālī's *Maqāṣid* Llull set it moreover into Catalan verses as *Logica de Gatzell* (d'Alverny 1994: VII, 7).

## Reception

The work was well known among most thirteenth-century Scholastic thinkers. The earliest quotations are probably those found in one of the independent works of one of the translators, that is, Gundissalinus' *De divisione philosophiae*, although without any explicit reference to the *Maqāṣid* (Gundissalinus 2007, *passim*; Janssens 2014: 566). Also the anonymous treatise from around 1225, *De anima et de potentiis eius*, uses al-Ġazālī's work without mentioning it (Hasse 2000: 192). This was not an uncommon practice, as can be shown by the case of Godfrey of Fontaines (Wippel 1981: 72, n. 88). Therefore, one may suspect that many other writings of this time include such implicit quotations. Whatever be the case, one also finds a large number of explicit references to it in a wide variety of authors. Many times the reference is simply to "Algazel," and frequently in direct combination with Avicenna, that is, as *Avicenna et Algazel*. In this latter form, it appears *inter alia* in Roland of Cremona (Hasse 2000: 41–42) and John Quidort (Quidort 1964 33: 131), as well as in such major Scholastic thinkers as Albert the Great, Thomas Aquinas, and Siger of Brabant. The very intimate link between Algazel and Avicenna is particularly stressed by Albert the Great, who in his *De homine*, states that al-Ghazālī's positions are a

summary, *abbreviatio*, of those of Avicenna and that the former follows the latter's footsteps (*sequens eius vestigia*) (Hasse 2000: 63). In the same vein, Dietrich of Freiburg calls al-Ghazālī an *abbreviator* of Avicenna (Dietrich 1977: 144). Henry of Ghent, in his turn, presents al-Ghazālī as *expositor Avicennae*, someone who explains Avicenna (Henry of Ghent 1984: 117). As for William of Auvergne, he sees al-Ghazālī, together with Avicenna and al-Fārābī, as a follower of Aristotle, *sequax Aristotelis* (William of Auvergne 1674: 112b). Finally Robert Grosseteste refers to him as *Algazel philosophus* (Grosseteste 1995: 73), and as such he is also considered in the (Pseudo-?)-Giles of Rome's *Errores philosophorum*, where in Chapter 9 mention is made of 18 philosophical errors related to his thought (Giles of Rome 1944: 44–47). In 1376, this list of errors was included in the *Directorium inquisitorum* of Nicholas Eymerich (Lohr 1965: 231). Concerning the work itself, it never seems to have been referred to by a general title, but always by its parts, designated most of the time as *Logica* and *Metaphysica*, as especially attested by Roger Bacon. In the latter's commentary on the *Secret of Secrets*, one also finds mentioned the part on *Naturalibus* (Bacon, V, 11), but this does not seem to have been a very common designation. Matthew of Aquasparta preferred the designation *Philosophia* when referring to an item related to the physical part (Matthew of Aquasparta 1959: 158) and, thus, in all likelihood, considered both parts of metaphysics and physics as constituting one unity, as seems to be frequently the case with the title *Metaphysica*. It should also be noted that when John Blund calls al-Ghazālī's metaphysics *commentum primae philosophiae*, he is not necessarily referring to a title but may simply be offering a description of the work as written in the tradition of a specific Aristotelian book (Hasse 2000: 20).

On the doctrinal level, in view of the very nature of the work, that is, as a slightly interpretative translation of Avicenna's *Dānesh-Nāmeḥ* that is complemented now and then with variations from other Avicennian writings, it is not surprising that the vast majority of the central ideas have their counterparts in Avicenna as

well. This is the case, for example, for the logical thesis that the unknown can only be known by something already known, for the psychological doctrine of the two faces of the soul, and for the metaphysical distinction between essence and existence. The notion of “Giver of forms,” *Dator formarum*, is one of the rare cases where al-Ghazālī presented a new idea, at least for his Latin readers (since they had no access to Avicenna's *Ta'liqāt*, which constituted most probably al-Ghazālī's source (Janssens 2006b)). Otherwise one looks in vain for any systematic use of new – at least, compared to the Avicenna Latinus – philosophical ideas in the *Maqāṣid*, and when they do occur, it is only by minor additions, for example, al-Ghazālī's introduction of the example of the camel in order to illustrate the theory of the evil eye, mentioned by Robert Grosseteste, Roland of Cremona, and Peter of Spain (Hasse 2000: 168–169 and 290). Hence, one easily understands why for Thomas Aquinas, and almost all Scholastics in agreement with him, al-Ghazālī was neither a very important nor an original thinker (Hanley 1982). In the fourteenth century, explicit references to the *Maqāṣid* became rare, except perhaps in Spain where one finds an anonymous Castilian manuscript offering many quotations (Lohr 1965: 231). However, al-Ghazālī's name did not disappear totally in fourteenth-century Scholastic thought, and, in fact, it appears many times in a list of several philosophers, as is the case in John of Jandun (Brenet 2003: 246, n. 1) and John of Ripa (Combes 1956: 166, n. 2). All in all though, the influence of the Latin translation of the *Maqāṣid* remained rather limited.

## Cross-References

- ▶ [Albert the Great](#)
- ▶ [Arabic Texts: Natural Philosophy, Latin Translations of](#)
- ▶ [Arabic Texts: Philosophy, Latin Translations of](#)
- ▶ [Dietrich of Freiberg](#)
- ▶ [Dominicus Gundissalinus](#)
- ▶ [Godfrey of Fontaines](#)
- ▶ [Henry of Ghent](#)
- ▶ [Ibn Sīnā \(Avicenna\), Latin Translations of](#)

- ▶ [Ibn Sīnā, Abū 'Alī \(Avicenna\)](#)
- ▶ [John of Jandun](#)
- ▶ [Matthew of Aquasparta](#)
- ▶ [Peter of Spain](#)
- ▶ [Ramon Llull](#)
- ▶ [Robert Grosseteste](#)
- ▶ [Roger Bacon](#)
- ▶ [Siger of Brabant](#)
- ▶ [Thomas Aquinas](#)
- ▶ [William of Auvergne](#)

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## Gilbert of Poitiers

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### Abstract

Born, Poitiers after 1085; died, Poitiers 1154. According to Gilson, Gilbert was the greatest metaphysician of the twelfth century. He was a profound thinker, original and coherent, famous in his time for the complexity and boldness of his philosophical theology. He provoked both violent disapproval and great enthusiasm. Brought to trial for heresy in 1148, he came out of it without being condemned; rather, his thought had a considerable number of followers in the so-called Porretan School. Through his followers, he exercised a significant influence on the theology of the second half of the twelfth century. In his mature thinking, he went far beyond what he had learned during his apprenticeship: at Chartres, philosophy of a Platonic stamp based on the *Timaeus* and on the *Consolation of Philosophy* and *Opuscula sacra* of Boethius; at Laon, theology founded on Biblical exegesis and the Fathers. In his *Commentary* on Boethius' *Opuscula sacra*, his fundamental work, he developed a profoundly innovative “rational” theology and an autonomous and broadly coherent philosophical reflection. It combines the Platonic doctrine of the preeminence of form with a keen sense of the primacy of the concrete and the singular. It consists of,

principally, an ontology, a philosophy of language, and an epistemology, all closely interconnected. Only the principles (God, prime matter, ideas) are simple, and only in God is being everything that he is. Created entities, by contrast, receive their being from something other than themselves (from God), and they are composed of an ordered aggregation of forms. Forms are always inherent in a substrate. Common natures do not exist; everything, compounds and forms, is singular: the humanity of every man is similar to but different from that of any other man. But not everything that is singular is an individual – only concrete entities and the compounds of forms that constitute the complete form of every concrete entity are individuals: their individuality consists in the fact that, if they are considered as wholes, they are dissimilar from any other compound thing. Universals are collections of singular forms gathered together by the intellect on the basis of the resemblance that is found between the singular entities. When we speak about natural objects, a name signifies a concrete entity and one of its properties or forms; the subject of the proposition represents the concrete entity, and the predicate represents a form inherent in it. The language of the philosophy of nature reflects what it investigates: the compound constitution of creation. It lends its own terms and its own formal structures to the other two speculative sciences, mathematics and theology. The correct understanding of a text is attained when, by distinguishing the appropriate discipline to which it belongs, the interpreter gathers, beneath the surface of the words the “meaning in the author’s mind.”

### **Biography, Apprenticeship, and General Characteristics of His Philosophy**

Gilbert was born in Poitiers shortly after 1085 and began his studies there under Hilary of Poitiers. Later he moved to Chartres where he was one of the students of Bernard. At Poitiers and Chartres, he studied the liberal arts, in particular grammar,

dialectic, and rhetoric – in which his knowledge was legendary – and Platonic philosophy. He studied Plato’s *Timaeus* with Calcidius’ commentary and Boethius’ *Opuscula sacra* and *Consolation of Philosophy*. From Chartres he moved to Laon, where under Anselm and Ralph he was educated in the understanding of the Fathers and Scripture. He was a master at Chartres from 1124 at the latest (at least according to most scholars, but see Gross-Diaz 1996) and, starting sometime between 1137 and 1141, at the cathedral school of Paris, where he had John of Salisbury among his students. John remarked that his teaching appeared obscure and arcane to the beginners but that the experts, used to his original terminology and complex style, found it to be of great profundity. His teaching at Paris was cut short in 1142 when he was named Bishop of Poitiers, where he died in 1154. The rational and philosophical style of doing theology earned Gilbert, among others, an accusation of heresy by Bernard of Clairvaux (who also persecuted Abelard), from which he had to defend himself in front of the Pope in 1147 and, later, in 1148 (Maioli 1979: XVI–XXI; Nielsen 1982: 30–38). He was accused, in particular, of holding that the divine nature was identical, not with God but with a form, just as in the case of humanity, which is not identical to man but with the form thanks to which a man is a man, and of holding that the properties (*generatio, filiatio, processio*) through which the three persons of the Trinity are distinguished are distinct from the persons themselves (*Pater, Filius, Spiritus Sanctus*). Although Gilbert emerged from the trial without being formally condemned, there remained an aura of suspicion about him and his work. Nonetheless, his thought and his special terminology were appropriated and reworked to various degrees, by a certain number of thinkers working in the second half of the twelfth century, who are usually known collectively as the “Porretan School” (Marenbon 1988, 2002; Catalani 2009). These masters in turn, and in particular Alain of Lille, exerted an influence on other teachers of the period, above all with regard to the semantics and the logic of theological language (Valente 2008a). Among the works of Gilbert, the fundamental one is his Commentary on

the *Opuscula sacra* of Boethius (except for *De fide catholica*), edited by N.M. Häring. Other certainly authentic works, unedited except for some fragments, are a commentary on the Psalms (studied by Gross-Diaz 1996) and one on the epistles of St. Paul (some passages are edited and discussed in Nielsen 1982). Various other writings attributed to Gilbert by editors are found to be inauthentic (Nielsen 1982: 40–46); in particular, the so-called *Liber sex principiorum*, already attributed to him by Albert the Great (Lewry 1987), is not Gilbert's.

## Ontology

### Forms and Substances

The ontology of Gilbert (general accounts in Jolivet 1992b: 141–146; Marenbon 1998: 168–171; Jacobi 1996: 12–14; Jacobi 2002: 74–76; Valente 2013: 100–122), which has pertinently been called a “metaphysics of the concrete” (Maioli 1979), is a combination of doctrines, broadly coherent, but not without indeterminate elements. It is distinguished by, above all, its theory of forms, of individuals, and of universals. It also adopts an original vocabulary, whose basic elements are the terms *subsistens*, *subsistentia*, *concretio*, and *tota forma*.

*Subsistens* (which will be translated below as “subsistent”) corresponds to Boethius' *id quod est* (*De hebdomadibus*), that is, “the <thing> which is” (cf. de Rijk 1988: 75), the determinate entity, which is such from the inherence of a multiplicity of forms. As a synonym for *subsistens*, Gilbert uses the term *substantia*, in virtue of the fact that it “is under” (*sub-stat*) the accidents; *substantia*, however, is ambiguous, because it is also able to refer to forms.

*Subsistentia* (“subsistence”) corresponds to the *esse* or *id quo* of Boethius, i.e. “that through which the <thing> which is is,” the formal principle which makes the subsistent exist and which confers on it its substantial properties. The *subsistentia* is referred to also as *natura*, *nativorum forma*, and *esse*. The *subsistentiae* can be simple or composed of other *subsistentiae*: *humanitas* is composed of *animalitas*, *rationalitas*, etc. Of the

subsistent Gilbert says that “it has” (*habet*) the *subsistentiae* or “participates” (*participat*) in them. To include under one general name both subsistents and subsistences, Gilbert uses the neutral plural (e.g., *singularia*) or the term *substantiae*. In the constitution of the subsistent, the accidental forms are added to the subsistence: they confer on the subsistent its accidental characteristics of quality and extension (quantity).

*Concretio* (“concretion”) is a term that refers to the ordered aggregation of the many subsistences and accidental forms that constitute the subsistent. These forms support (*con-crescere*) one another, beginning from the more generic and descending gradually in ever-increasing determinateness: they are related to one another as *generales* and *differentiales*; in this way, the formal structure of the subsistent follows the order of Porphyry's tree. The more general forms are the causes of the increasingly less general forms that adhere (*adsunt*, *adhaerent*; e.g., *albedo* to *corporeitas*) to them, in a relation of consequence (*complexionis consequentia*). The first subsistence, the most general, is preceded only by the primary cause and constitutes the basis of the process of ordered aggregation of forms that constitutes the subsistent (*Comm. De hebdomadibus*, p. 209, ll. 67–85). It is not clear, however, if this first subsistence is a maximally indeterminate substantial form, which “precedes” the *corporeitas* and the *spiritualitas*, the two most general forms that distinguish the corporeal from incorporeal things, or if it is one of these two.

*Tota forma* (“complete form”): the forms of a single subsistent taken together and in their totality constitute the *tota* or *propria forma* or *proprietas* (in the case of Socrates, it can be called *socrateitas*), which confers to the subsistent at a time that it is something and its unity. The *tota forma* is made up of all the subsistences and all the accidental forms of quality and extensive quantity, which the subsistent actually (*actu*) has had, has, and will have in the future, and even those which it will never have, but could possibly have according to the potentiality of its own nature (*naturâ* or *potestate*: *Comm. De trinitate* p. 144, ll. 75–77; cf. *Comm. Contra Euticen* p. 274, ll. 81–82). In



one passage, Gilbert says that the forms that constitute a complete form are infinite (*Comm. De trinitate* p. 90, l. 50). The numerousness of the forms that make up the complete form, which extends to the future and the possible, makes impossible an adequate understanding of this by man: finite reason cannot but proceed through partial representations of things (Maioli 1979: 46; Jacobi 1995a: 80s., 1996: 14; Valente 2013: 112). The unifying principle that holds together in an individual and organic whole the totality of the substantial and accidental forms that constitute the *tota forma* is God as *simplex auctor* or *qui est solum bonum* (*Comm. De hebdomadibus*, p. 219, ll. 42–57), from which every subsistent “flows” (*fluxit*: p. 220, l. 81). Yet Gilbert also speaks of the *unitas* of the subsistent as deriving from the “coaccidental unity” (*unitas coaccidens*) that accompanies every form, substantial or accidental (*Comm. Utrum Pater*, p. 176, ll. 15–22). The accidental determinations of non-extensive quantity and the other seven categories do not make up a part of the total form; these seven categories do not correspond to forms but only indicate extrinsic relations that the subsistent maintains with other subsistents (*extrinsecus affixa, status*).

As can be seen, concepts of simplicity and composition are fundamental to Gilbert’s ontology. Entities are either simple or composite. Above all, the principles, also called *genuina*, that constitute the object of theology – God, prime matter (*yle, silva*), the archetypal ideas – are simple entities because they do not derive their being from a multiplicity of other entities. In the Commentary on Boethius, Gilbert does not dwell on the contrast between the theory of the plurality of principles and Christian doctrine, while in the biblical commentaries he adopts Augustine’s view of the creation of matter (Jolivet 1992a). The forms or *subsistentiae*, which go on to constitute subsistents, originate as images or copies or reflections (the manner of this derivation is not better specified) of the exemplary idea (*exemplar, ydea*). Of these forms, those are simple which are not in turn composed of other forms, like *corporeitas* or *albedo*; but they are not simple in the same respect as the principles, as the forms do not exist if they are not within a compound. Most

entities are compound, that is to say, created subsistents (*nativa*) and the greater part of their forms. Subsistents are compound both in the sense that, in order to constitute them, their *esse* or formal principle must inhere in something (this type of compound is called *coniunctio*) and in the sense that their complete form is constituted of a multiplicity of forms (*concretio*). Moreover, some subsistents are made up by putting together a number of subsistents as their parts, such as man, constituted of his body and his soul, which constitute his parts, each with their own forms (*compositio*). The forms of the subsistent parts are at the same time forms of the whole subsistent: the rationality of the soul of Socrates and the whiteness of his body are the rationality and whiteness of Socrates.

The moment of origin of the constitution of a subsistent through the *coniunctio* of *esse* in it is the divine act, which makes the forms inhere in the subsistent. It is called *generatio* or *creatio*. With respect to this original moment, the theory of Gilbert seems to present a serious problem: “what the *quo est* makes into the *quod est* cannot be the *quod est* itself – so what is it?” (Marenbon 1998: 169). A possible response is that there is no substrate, in which the forms inhere to constitute the subsistents, except for a subset of the forms that constitute the whole; so that, supposing we were mentally to abstract all the forms from the subsistent, nothing would remain: ultimately, the subsistent would be identical with the total form. But this solution is a speculation that goes beyond Gilbert’s text (Jacobi 1996: 16). Another possible reply, closer to Gilbert’s text, is that the original substrate in which the forms inhere is the “primordial cause,” which is spoken of in *Comm. De hebdomadibus* (p. 209, ll. 67–85), that “precedes,” in the process of the *concretio*, the most general form. But the problem remains, what is this primary cause: prime matter, God, the ideas? In any case, how is the most general subsistence related to the primordial cause? The response that Gilbert would probably have made is that man cannot give an answer to this question, as his knowledge, discursive and distinct, is limited to the world of compounds (philosophy of nature) and the forms abstracted from these (mathematics) and cannot raise itself so as to grasp their



relation with the absolute simplicity of the principle from which they originate.

### Singularity and Modal Theory of Individuality

Gilbert's theory of individuality is clearly distinct from a long tradition, in which Boethius, Eriugena, Anselm of Canterbury, William of Champeaux, Thierry of Chartres, but not Abelard concur (called STI: "standard individuation theory" by Gracia 1988; cfr. Maioli 1974: LI–LII). According to STI it is the accidents alone, which make individuals of the same species being numerically one and the same unique "communal quality" (*qualitas communicata*) is found complete (*tota*) in every individual of the same species: Cato and Cicero are one identical entity – *idem* – in that, belonging to the same species man, they share the same *humanitas*, while they are numerically different from one another – *plures* – only because of the diversity of their accidents. For Gilbert, rather, the numerical diversity of subsistents is due, not only to the accidents but to all of the forms, accidental and substantial, which come together to constitute them: there exist as many diverse *humanitates* as men. The differences in the accidents do not provide the basis for the numerical diversity of subsistents but merely indicate it. Singularity, that is, being numerically one, is an intrinsic characteristic of every entity, whether it is a subsistent or a form, and is presented in Gilbert's ontology as a primary, non-deducible given. Moreover, unlike his predecessors, Gilbert in consequence considers the concepts of singularity and individuality to be different. The set of individuals is a subset of the set of singulars: everything that exists is singular, but not all that exists is both singular and individual. Only subsistents and complete forms of subsistents are singular and individual. The subsistent (e.g., Socrates) and the *tota forma* of each subsistent (*socrateitas*) are singulars and individuals that is to say not individuals, because they are not similar to any other entity either in act or just in potency (*Comm. Contra Euticen*, p. 272, l. 45–274, l. 93). By contrast, a form is individual which, whether simple (rationality) or compound (humanity), turns out to be, judging from its effects, similar to other forms, if not in act then

at least in potency. On the basis of this similarity, these forms are said to be *conformes* to each other (the humanity of Socrates and that of Plato are similar in potential and in act; the being-the-sun of the sun is similar not in act but at least in potential to the being-the-sun of another sun, which does not exist, did not exist, and will never exist, but could exist: *Comm. Contra Euticen*, p. 273, ll. 68–74). Finally, those entities which, though dissimilar from every other entity, are nonetheless part of another individual are not themselves individuals, for they share their own formal characteristics with the compound whole. The soul is not therefore an individual since it shares its formal characteristics with man, of which, with the body, it is a part. Since it is not an individual, the soul is not a person either, according to the Boethian definition of the person as "*naturae rationabilis individua substantia*" (*Comm. Contra Euticen*, p. 271, l. 14–274, l. 95). It should be observed, however, that Gilbert gives this definition with an important clarification and modification: the clarification is that no person can be part of a person; the modification is that for him the characterization of person as rational is purely conventional, due to the usage of philosophers. Strictly speaking, even plants and animals are persons: for they are individual substances, which are each dissimilar to every other entity and are not parts of any further compound entity (*Comm. De trinitate*, p. 146, ll. 14–23). In this sense, it would seem that Gilbert does not make a real distinction between person and individual (Elswijk 1966: 192; Maioli 1979: 339; but the interpreters disagree over Gilbert's characterization of the concept of person; cf. Nielsen 1982: 62–64; Marenbon 1988: 346; Jacobi 1996: 17–19; Valente 2013: 115–122).

It has been observed (Knuutila 1987, 1993: 75–82; recalling Nielsen 1982: 62–64, 180, 184) that, since he considers that the properties the subsistent does not ever effectively possess but could possess according to the potency of its own nature are parts of the total form, he is proposing a "modal" theory of individuality. This conception presupposes the idea of possible worlds and possible alternative histories of the world and the conviction, not really argued for, of the stability of individual identity across various possible

worlds and various possible histories (Knuuttila 1993: 81). But Gilbert's modal definition of individuality seems to have the undesirable consequence of dissolving the very individuality he wishes to define: indeed, if taken literally, Gilbert's definition seems to imply that the complete form of every individual of a species includes all the possible determinations of every other individual of that species. It follows that the complete forms of individuals of the same species would all be similar to each other and so *dividuae* (Marenbon 1998: 171). Gilbert's appeal to a modal definition of individuality, and thus to the idea of different worlds and histories, can be traced to a keenly felt need to conserve as far as possible God's omnipotence, which is not subject to any necessity whatsoever except in that of certain basic rules of logic set out in the theory of topical argumentation. Of which parts the various subsistents are composed and of which general, differential, and accidental subsistences the complete forms of the subsistents of different species are composed also depend on God's omnipotence and will and are not necessary in an absolute sense. Such compositions are governed by the merely relative necessity of the habitual course of things (*consuetudo rerum*) and of the usual condition of natural beings (*usus nascentium, qui vocatur natura: Comm. De trinitate*, p. 164, ll. 34–41; *Comm. Contra Euticen*, p. 304, ll. 83–91).

### Universals and the Realism of Forms

According to Gracia (1988: 164), the bases of Gilbert's doctrine of universals are constituted by two postulates: the singularity of everything, whether forms or subsistents, and the individuality of the complete forms of subsistents and of subsistents themselves (if they are not in turn parts of a composite subsistent). In addition to these, there is the similarity (*similitudo*) or conformity (*conformitas*) between singular entities, whether both subsistences and subsistents. Indeed, even though the latter are individuals and thus different from every other being, they are, nevertheless, similar to different groups of other individuals if their formal determinations are considered separately (Socrates is similar to Plato and to Cicero if

one considers their respective whiteness, rationality, etc.). According to Van Elswijk (1966: 200), the similarity between groups of beings seems to be a third postulate of Gilbert's ontology. But Maioli (1974: 326–328, 1979: 344–347) maintains that, for Gilbert, the *conformitas* is to be explained by the derivation of native forms from exemplary ideas. Whatever the case, the universal (genus or species) is a collection (*collectio*) of a multiplicity of forms that are, in themselves, singular. It is constituted by the intellect on the basis of similarities apprehended between groups of singular entities. According to Gilbert – who in this respect can be placed beside Abelard – the unity of a species, like that of a genus, does not correspond to any common nature but is the product of abstraction (“*humana ratio abstrahit*”) and language (“*dicuntur unum et idem*”). At the level of reality, only singular beings exist, some of which are also individuals, which are grouped into those similar to each other (Maioli 1979: 341–364; Valente 2008b, 2013: 122). Inasmuch as subsistences are formal constituents of particular subsistents, one can speak of a “realism of forms” in Gilbert (Jolivet 1992b). However, one certainly cannot speak of a realism of universals, even though his theory seems to postulate a foundation in re of the universal, consisting in the *similitudo* or *conformitas* of individuals belonging to a group according to the *consuetudo rerum*.

### Philosophy of Language

#### Hermeneutics

Gilbert's philosophy of language takes as its starting point the Boethian–Aristotelian triad *vox-intellectus-res* (*De interpretatione* 16a4) and the grammatical conception of names as signifying substances and qualities (Priscian, *Institutiones grammaticae* II, 18 and 19). But what distinguishes it above all is its “pragmatic” and “hermeneutic” approach: language is perceived principally as an instrument for communicating meaningful contents between human beings. Gilbert very often refers to the speaker (*locutor*), the author of a written text (*auctor*), the hearer (*auditor*), the reader (*lector*), and the

interpreter (*interpres*); he speaks of the sense or concept in the mind of the one who speaks (*sensus/conceptus/intellectus mentis eius, qui loquitur*) and of the vigilance (*vigilantia*), attention (*attentio*), and intelligence (*intelligentia*) of the addressee. In *Comm. De trinitate*, prol., 21–24, he brings to light an intrinsic and inevitable discrepancy between the three levels of language, thought, and reality, both from the speaker's point of view (from the *res* through the concept to the word) and from that of the interpreter (from the word through the concept to the *res*). Although things can be thought thanks to concepts and signified through words, the range of the real is much vaster than that which can be conceived in thought. The sphere of thought is, in turn, much broader than the sphere of what can be expressed in words.

This is true both for discourse about God and for that about creatures. There cannot be a concept of God nor a proper way for him to be expressed, because of his simplicity, which does not allow any particular aspect to be isolated in a concept or word. Analogically but inversely, an adequate concept of a creature cannot be formed due to the inexhaustible complexity of its formal structure. Language is even weaker than thought because of the frequent lack of appropriate words (*inopia verborum*), the improper use of language (*translatio, usus*), and the inevitable ambiguity of many terms (*multiplicitas, ambiguitas*). As a consequence (Jolivet 1998; Valente 2004: 168–171; Marenbon 2013), the correct interpretation of a text requires taking this discrepancy into account: it would be misleading to believe that one could pass directly from the intellection of spoken or written words (*intellectus quem scripta faciunt*) to the truth of things. One should be constantly aware that these two instances are mediated by the thought of the author of the text (*intellectus ex quo <scripta> facta sunt*) – a thought that corresponds only to a certain degree to the letter of the text as it has been written, on the one hand, and to the reality of things, on the other.

Starting from taking into consideration in this way the mediating role of the concept in the mind of the author, the process of interpretation unfolds.

From the letter of the text (*significatio*), the interpreter seeks, above all, to reach the thought of the author (*conceptus* – or *intellectus* – *auctoris*) in order to judge the written text in relation to it.

Second, the interpreter seeks to specify in what measure the author's thought grasps the truth of things, in the constant awareness that this measure is necessarily limited, and to evaluate the discourse that has been made in relation to the things themselves that have been conceived. It is particularly important to take into account the *conceptus auctoris* when analyzing theological discourse, which is always improper in its literal meaning and is to be interpreted taking into account that it is inevitably based on an (albeit nonarbitrary) transposition of terms and linguistic forms taken from natural philosophy (*proportionalis transumptio*). Besides the *conceptus auctoris*, another aspect to be taken account of in the interpretation of a text, in every discipline, is usage (*usus, auctorum usus*), which does not always respect lexical proprieties or syntactic rules and which, in time, can also modify the meaning of terms from that of their original institution (*vis/natura nominis*). Moreover, according to Gilbert, a fundamental requirement for reaching a true understanding of a text and avoiding misunderstandings is to pay great attention to the propositional context (*ratio propositi*). Gilbert refers particularly to the *vigilantia lectoris* and the *ratio propositi*, because it is well known that propositions with the same name as subject, but placed on different disciplinary levels – those of the philosophy of nature, of logic, and of mathematics (see below) – speak of different things. The determination of the level of discourse to which a passage in fact belongs is not attributed by Gilbert, as in the logic of terms, to the distinction between different forms of *suppositio* (a concept Gilbert himself often uses, almost always in the sense of a reference to subsistents by the author of the text by way of the subject term of a proposition: Valente 2011) or, as is the case in certain logical and theological texts of the twelfth century, to the identification of a particular improper rhetorical use of language (*transumptio, translatio*; cfr. Kneepkens 2000: 257). Rather, Gilbert proposes a reconstruction and general

contextualization of whatever is being considered in order to arrive at a correct *intelligentia* of a text in each of the different sciences: besides the grammatical and logical rules and the improper use of language studied in rhetoric, one should consider the nature of things, as taught by the philosophers, as well as the intention of the author. Whoever remains attached to words and their functions, and does not seek to understand beyond and above them the “meaning in the mind of the one who speaks,” understands neither others nor himself and is a source of great danger (*Comm. Contra Eutichen*, p. 296, l. 31–298, l. 97).

### The Meaning of Nouns and the Theory of Predication in the Philosophy of Nature

Gilbert’s theories of the meaning of names and of predication are intrinsically connected not only to the grammatical conceptions of his time which derived from a Platonic reading of Priscian’s grammar, and to the foundations of the *logica vetus*, but also to his own personal ontology (Maioli 1979: 79–99; Marenbon 2013; Valente 2013: 127–131). Ordinary language, to which the language of natural philosophy is led back, reflects the ontological structure of created reality, albeit in the limited manner already discussed (Jacobi 1995a: 96–100). If Priscian affirms that the noun signifies substance and quality, this is to be understood in the sense that it signifies both the subsistent and the subsistence or form. *Homo* signifies as much the particular man (*substantia nominis, id quod est*) as the form *humanitas* (*qualitas nominis, id quo est*). It is for the context (*ratio propositi*) to suggest which of the two meanings is actually intended by the author in different propositions: in “*Homo est risibilis*” the singular man, in “*Homo est individuorum forma*” the form *humanitas* (*Comm. Contra Eutichen*, p. 296, l. 31–297, l. 66). Like the significate of the noun, predication also reflects the duality of subsistents and forms that dominates the created world. In natural non-metaphorical discourse, the author refers to (*supponit*) – by means of a noun in the subject position – the subsistent or *id quod est* as that of which is being spoken; through the predicate the author expresses the inherence of the form or the *id quo est*, which the predicate

signifies in the subsistent referred to by the subject term: in “*Socrates est homo*,” “*est homo*” expresses the inherence of the form *humanitas* in the individual represented by the name “Socrates.”

Every subsistent has many names according to which of the forms it is being considered under: Socrates is called “Socrates” if his proper form *socrateitas* is being considered, “white” if his accidental form of whiteness is being considered, “man” if his substantial form of humanity is being considered, and so on. When a proposition is formulated to affirm something about the subsistent, first of all one of its possible names is chosen in order to indicate it as the object of discourse. But such names are chosen in view of what one wishes to predicate: “we do not predicate in order to supposit so much as supposit in order to predicate” (*Comm. Contra Eutichen* p. 349, l. 50 s.). Among the predications of natural philosophy, which are true in a proper sense, in some, the form signified by the predicate stands in a relation of consequence to that signified by the subject, which is its cause according to the internal order of the agglomeration of generic and specific forms that constitutes the subsistent (*complexionis consequentia*). For example, “*corporeum est album*” – given that the form of whiteness is an effect of corporeity; corporeity cannot exist without some color-form. Such propositions are called *consequentes*. But there are also cases of propositions which, although they have the external form of subject + predicate and are true in a proper sense and not the result of metaphorical discourse, nevertheless do not respect the *complexionis consequentia*. An example is “*corporeum est rationale*”: although Socrates really is corporeal and rational, there is no relation of consequence between his form rationality and his form corporeity. For rationality is caused by the spirituality of Socrates’ soul and not by the corporeity of his body, signified by the term *corporeum*. Such propositions are called *accidentales tamen verae conexiones* and provide a model for interpreting various theological propositions. For example, the proposition “God has died” is true since Christ is God and Christ has died, even though he died inasmuch as he was a man, and not inasmuch as

he is God (*Comm. Contra Euticen*, p. 345, l. 29–348, l. 8; de Rijk 1987: 164–170).

The predications of natural philosophy are also further distinguished in relation to the substantial or accidental function within the ontological structure of the subsistent of the form signified by the predicate, as well as in relation to Aristotle's classification of the ten categories (Maioli 1979: 83–101; *Comm. De Hebdomadibus*, p. 198, ll. 76–90). Substantial predications express the irreplaceable elements which cause a subsistent to be and to be this particular subsistent – its *subsistentiae*, the forms that make up its substantial being (*esse aliquid in eo quod est*). Accidental predications express characteristics of a subsistent which may or may not be found in it without producing or destroying its being or its being this or that particular subsistent. They express only its accidental being (*tantum esse aliquid*). A further, different distinction is made between predications *secundum rem* or *inhaerentium* and those that are *extrinsecus comparatae* or *non inhaerentium* (*De trinitate*, p. 134, l. 77–138, l. 78). Independently of their being accidental or substantial to a given subsistent, the forms signified by predications of substance, quality, and extensive quantity are always inherent in the subsistent, and the predications which express them are thus “according to the thing.” On the other hand, predications of non-extensive quantity as well as of the remaining seven categories express, despite their subject–predicate form, not true inherence but external circumstances or relations of various types between subsistents and things other than themselves (*status*). Gilbert therefore calls them “extrinsically compared.”

### The Three Speculative Sciences

Gilbert mentions a broad range of branches of human knowledge. In *Comm. De trinitate* (p. 115, ll. 3 s.), he lists the following *facultates*: *naturalis*, *mathematica*, *theologica*, *civilis*, and *rationalis*, which differ on the basis of the different genera of their respective objects of study. In *Comm. De hebdomadibus* (p. 189, ll. 52–60), he considers mathematics, “a discipline of the highest rank,” which consists of the four arts of

the quadrivium, arithmetic, geometry, music, and astronomy, as well as the “other disciplines such as those of the categories and the analytics.” In all these disciplines, one proceeds by way of demonstration, beginning from terms or rules that constitute the starting points for deduction and induction. Central to Gilbert's system, however, is the triad of speculative sciences that consists of physics or philosophy of nature, mathematics, and theology, which is set out by Boethius in his *Commentary to Porphyry's Isagoge*, second edition, and in the *De trinitate* II, but goes back to Aristotle (Haas 1987; Jolivet 1990; Jacobi 1995b; Marenbon 2002; Valente 2013: 131–134). According to Gilbert, natural philosophy studies concrete subsistents and their inherent forms. It is the fundamental science in the sense that it is the basis for the transfer (*transumptio*) of terms and forms to all the other sciences. In Gilbert's sense of the term (which is not the usual one), mathematics considers forms, which in reality can only exist in subsistents, as abstracted from them. Thus, in mathematics, predications (e.g., “*homo est individuorum forma*”) express only an apparent inherence. The case of theological predication is analogous, because in God there is no difference between form and subsistent, so that in theology predication does not express any inherence and is therefore not predication in the strict sense. Due to the lack of adequate expressions for speaking about God, the patristic *auctoritates* and the theologians transfer and apply improperly names and categories proper to natural *scientia* and, thus, to natural language. But they do so, on the basis of rational proportion (*rationis proportio*). And so when, for example, somebody states that God is a substance or a certain substance, this should not be understood in the same sense as when somebody states that a man is a substance in non-theological discourse. The *ratio* for which something can be said to be a *substantia* is its *substare*; subsistences as well as subsistents are called “substances” inasmuch as they serve as substrates – *substare* – for accidents. But in God there is no distinction between substance and accident. Therefore, when the category of substance is predicated of God, it is done improperly, on the basis of the *ratio* according to which God



“sustains” all things (“*substat omnibus*”; *Comm. Contra Euticen*, p. 284, ll. 74–90) as cause and principle. At the same time, however, it is God alone who properly is in the fullest sense, just as it is of God alone that one can say in a full sense that he is good. All other things that are not God are and are good in a lesser and derived sense, that is, through a *denominativa transumptio* or *transumptiva denominatio* (Jolivet 1987; Valente 2008a: 123–149). As can be seen, in philosophy of nature and in theology, a chiasmic relation between language and being is established: on the level of language, discourse about nature founds the discourse about God, whereas on the ontological level, divine being is the foundation and source of created being (which derives from it through *fluxus*). Moreover, given that names in natural discourse denote objects on the basis of their forms, discourse about nature could not be constituted if there were not, thanks to mathematics, a way of considering separately forms, which in reality are inseparable from subsistents. Yet natural discourse not only lends the terms and formal structures to theology but also to mathematics itself, in the discourse of which they are used differently from their original definition and from the valid norms of natural discourse. The three speculative discourses are thus interrelated in a complex way, by reciprocal foundational relations and transfer of terms and formal structures. The role of mathematics as a discipline, however, was not well defined by Gilbert and would be given closer attention by some of his followers (Marenbon 2002). In any event, Gilbert considered philosophy of nature, mathematics, and theology – the three branches of speculative philosophy – also as being each a step in a hierarchical, ascendant order. Human knowledge starts from what is more “external” (*exterior*: physics), goes through what is “internal” (*interior*: mathematics), and ends up with what is most “intimate” (*intima*: theology). Theology is the most perfect and secret science, which is correspondingly reserved to a very exclusive elite among the philosophers: that of the “theological philosophers” (*Comm. De trinitate*, p. 66, l. 24–67, l. 54; *Comm. De hebdomadibus*, pp. 183, l. 1–185, l. 5; 193, l. 47–194, l. 88).

## Cross-References

- ▶ [Alan of Lille](#)
- ▶ [Being](#)
- ▶ [Boethius](#)
- ▶ [Categories](#)
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- ▶ [Trinity](#)
- ▶ [Universals](#)

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## Giles of Rome, Political Thought

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### Abstract

Giles of Rome (c. 1243/7–1316) was the first member of the order of Augustinian Hermits to be appointed regent master of theology at the University of Paris and later became archbishop of Bourges. By 1282, he had composed *On the Rule of Princes*, a manual of instruction for secular rulers dedicated to the future French king Philip IV. The work, which

proved immensely popular throughout the later Middle Ages, drew heavily upon Aristotelian ideas to offer a portrait of the ideal ruler. Giles considered a well-educated hereditary king free from any form of limitation to be best able to obtain the common good for those he ruled. During the 1290s and first years of the fourteenth century, Giles became closely associated with Pope Boniface VIII and subsequently involved in his struggle with Philip IV over issues of ecclesiastical jurisdiction. In the course of one of these Franco-papal disputes, Giles composed *On Ecclesiastical Power*, a work which drew on Aristotelian language to establish and defend an influential vision of society’s structure in which temporal power was entirely subordinated to spiritual power. Giles argued not only that all legitimate secular rule, but even all legitimate right to property, was ultimately derived from the church. His model equated the power vested in the church with the power vested in the papal office and thereby established the pope as the ultimate authority in both spiritual and temporal affairs. The pope possessed an authority free from any effective limitations, although Giles argued he should, in imitation of God’s governance of the universe, seek to restrain himself from interfering in temporal affairs in all but exceptional circumstances. The two phases of Giles’ political thought have sometimes been considered contradictory although they share a similar view of hierarchical structures and the nature of rulership.

## Biographical Information

Giles of Rome (c. 1243/7–1316) is known as “Blessed Doctor” (*Doctor beatus*), “Most Fundamental Doctor” (*Doctor fundatissimus*), and, less respectfully, “Verbose Doctor” (*Doctor verbosus*). The occasional attribution of the surname Colonna to Giles is probably due to his origins in a specific district of the city of Rome, rather than to any association with the powerful family of that name (Boase 1933). At

approximately the age of fifteen, Giles joined the newly established Augustinian Hermits, entering the order's Roman convent. Moving to study in Paris, he completed the arts course sometime in the 1260s and became a bachelor of theology around 1270, after which he lectured on the *Sentences* of Peter Lombard and wrote commentaries on several of Aristotle's works. It is probable that he attended the lectures of Thomas Aquinas between 1269 and 1272. The first period of Giles' Parisian career was brought to an abrupt end in 1277 when he was censured as part of a more general condemnation of Aristotelian ideas by the bishop of Paris, Etienne Tempier.

Giles' activities and location between the end of March 1277 and his appearance at his order's Chapter General held in Padua in 1281 remain unclear. Traditional assertions that he served as a tutor to the future French king, Philip IV the Fair, in the years after he was censured are not supported by any extant evidence. After a period spent in Italy, Giles was able to resume his academic career in Paris in 1285 becoming the first regent master in theology to be appointed from the Augustinian Hermits. In 1287, his opinions were declared to be the official position of his order. This was followed by a rapid series of promotions, including his election as prior general of the order in 1292 and his appointment as archbishop of Bourges in 1295.

From mid-1296, Giles spent much of his time in Italy in the service of Pope Boniface VIII. Following the latter's conflict with the Colonna cardinals, Giles returned to Bourges in August 1299. As the Pope's second confrontation with Philip IV worsened, Giles travelled to Rome in 1301 not returning to his see until after Boniface's death in 1304. In 1305, he took part in the enquiry that censured the Eucharistic views of John of Paris. In the following years, Giles dedicated works to Philip IV's uncle, Robert, count of Clermont-en-Beauvaisis, and the Angevin king of Naples, Robert I. He adopted a position favorable to Philip IV in the process that led to the condemnation of the Templars at the Council of Vienne in 1311–12. Giles died at the papal curia at Avignon on December 22, 1316.

## Overview

According to one contemporary source – possibly written by a fellow Parisian scholar, Godfrey of Fontaines – by the mid-1280s, Giles enjoyed a greater reputation in Paris than any other inhabitant. This reputation was primarily built upon his philosophical and theological works. Giles' philosophical ideas were expressed in a series of commentaries, six quodlibetal disputations held between 1286 and 1292/3, and in a number of collections of disputed questions (*Quaestiones disputatae*). Much of his theological thought was summarized and developed in the 76 sermons he preached in the course of his career. In the theological and metaphysical positions he adopted, Giles was highly influenced by the thought of Thomas Aquinas. Despite an association with Thomist ideas that contributed, at least in part, to his censure in 1277, Giles was not, however, unwilling to criticize and modify Aquinas' thought on numerous points. In the period following his censure, he developed a new interest in the thought of Augustine of Hippo, whose works he appears to have revisited (Briggs 2016). With regard to metaphysics, Giles was a particular exponent of the doctrine of the unity of substantial form and argued strongly in favor of a “real distinction” between essence and existence in opposition to the contemporary position of Henry of Ghent.

Giles' exploration of what may be considered “political” topics represents a mere fraction his literary output. The essence of his political thought appears in two works, although elements of it are also reflected in an oration – if a sixteenth-century tradition is to be given credence – that he preached at Philip IV's coronation in January 1286 (Del Punta et al. 1993), in his tract *On the Abdication of the Pope* (*De renunciatione pape*, c. 1297), in at least one of his sermons (Luna 1992), and in his later commentaries on the *Sentences* (c. 1309) (McAleer 1999). His thought may be divided into two distinct phases. In the 1270s and early 1280s, Giles considered the ideal organization of temporal power and the process by which a secular ruler capable of achieving the common good could be fashioned. From the

late 1290s, he turned his attention to the nature of spiritual power and questions of the proper relationship that ought to exist between the temporal and spiritual powers and the nature – and limitations – of the keystone of the spiritual power, the pope.

## On the Rule of Princes

### Context

The earliest traces of Giles' political ideas are found in his commentary on Aristotle's *Rhetoric* (c. 1271–74) and in his *De differentia Ethicae, Politicae et Rethoricae* (Lambertini 2016). The first phase of Giles' political thought, his exploration of the organization of the temporal power and the ideal ruler, appears developed fully, however, in his treatise *On the Rule of Princes (De regimine principum)*. Probably written at the request of the French king Philip III, the work was intended as an educational tool for the instruction of Philip's son, the future Philip IV. That this treatise was complete by 1282 is confirmed by the existence of a dated French translation commanded by the king. Traditionally, the treatise has been seen as a product of the years after Giles' university career ended abruptly in 1277, although it could date from as early as 1270, the year of Philip III's accession. Despite his royal dedicatee, the treatise was written, according to its author, with a much broader audience in mind: it was Giles' intention to instruct not only the future king in rulership, but also his subjects (1.1.1).

### Structure

*On the Rule of Princes'* 209 chapters are distributed between three books, themselves subdivided into ten parts. The first of these books concerns the ruler's governance of himself. Its four parts begin by explaining that a ruler will achieve the greatest happiness by loving God and acting prudently. The book continues with an exploration of the nature of the virtues, the passions, and the behavior of men in varied circumstances. In his second book, Giles' focus shifts to the governance of the family. Here, in three parts, he explores marriage and the conduct of women, the education of

children, and the management of a ruler's household. In the work's final book, the scope broadens to consider the manner in which a political unit is to be governed. Giles begins by considering – and often refuting – the views of philosophers concerning the nature and organization of states. In the final two parts, he explores how government is to be conducted in times of peace and ends with a treatise on warfare.

### Key Concepts

For Giles, the ideal model for political units is the kingdom. At the core of his conception of the ruler of such a kingdom is the belief that the ideal king should be unshackled by any limitations. It is preferable that kingship be "regal," in which the ruler makes the law, as opposed to "political," in which those governed make the law (for the distinction: 2.1.14). Government by a regal ruler, who is distinguished from a despotic ruler by his focus on the common good, is the most perfect form of government because the position of such a ruler is a more perfect reflection of the natural ordering and hierarchy of the universe. Such a king should accept counsel and will wish to do so, but Giles makes clear that nothing obliges him to do so.

In considering the various forms in which secular power may be exercised, Giles displays an unreserved preference for hereditary kingship. While he recognizes, in theory, that elective kingship would be a preferable method of selection, all practical experience indicates that hereditary kingship offers greater stability. This is, in part, because the people will more easily accept the sons of previous rulers and, in part, because the knowledge that his progeny will succeed him will ensure the quality of a king's rule (3.2.5).

Giles assumes that, if properly educated, a ruler will always seek to uphold the common good (Renna 1978). He makes no provision for the possibility that such a ruler will seek his own good and, in so doing, become a tyrant. Nor, in this first phase of his political thought, does Giles seek to address two issues in particular. In common with Peter of Auvergne, he offers no analysis of the relationship that will exist between his regal king and the spiritual power (Renna

1978). Nor does his assessment take any account of the existing feudal structures of contemporary society (Krynen 1993).

### Foundations

In its purpose, the instruction of the ruler, Giles' treatise can be categorized as part of the "mirrors for princes" genre. More specifically, it can be considered part of a uniquely Capetian tradition that began with the instruction manual offered by the Dominican Vincent of Beauvais to Philip III. Giles' portrait of secular rule is differentiated from the majority of contemporary mirrors for princes by the fact that many of its key concepts originate in the Aristotelian corpus. Engelbert of Admont was one of very few authors who attempted a similar cross-pollination (Blythe 1992). Alongside Aristotle's works, Giles employed Vegetius' *De re militari* in the final part of his third book as a source for military matters. He also used Aquinas' *De regno* (Lambertini 2016).

Giles was keen to present his treatise as a simple vulgarization of Aristotle. While this is true to a certain extent – the work draws heavily upon the *Politics* and the *Nicomachean Ethics*, conspicuously avoiding the use of Scripture and the Fathers more common in mirrors for princes – Giles' self-assessment is slightly misleading. Giles is, firstly, heavily reliant on Aquinas for his interpretation, particularly the latter's commentaries on the *Politics* and the *Summa Theologiae* (Lambertini 1995). At the same time, Giles moves beyond both Aquinas and Aristotle, drawing conclusions neither would have been likely to find acceptable. Aristotle, and following him Aquinas, for example, drew a distinction between civil and domestic government; Giles' belief in a natural universal hierarchy tends to break down the Aristotelian distinction, and he is inclined to use the family as a model for the discussion of modes of rulership (Blythe 1992). More striking still, while basing his arguments on material drawn from Aristotle, Giles will often draw conclusions diametrically opposed to those originally intended. In the most significant case, he adapts Aristotle's criticism of kingship to present an argument which purports to demonstrate the Greek philosopher's preference for regal

rule over all other forms of government and employs a similar approach to demonstrate Aristotle's alleged support for hereditary kingship (Lambertini 1995, 2016).

Giles had been the earliest Parisian scholar to prepare a commentary on Aristotle's *Rhetoric*. As he employed Aristotelian concepts drawn from the *Politics* and the *Ethics* to construct his model of regal kingship, so too did he draw upon the *Rhetoric* in his general structuring of *On the Rule of Princes* and to imbue his ideal ruler with one of his key characteristics: Giles' king, above all, needed to know what an orator needed to know, that is, how to persuade those under his rule so that they might act in the interest of the common good (Coleman 1998).

It may be the case that for Giles, as for other contemporary Parisian authors writing in the mirrors for princes genre, the model of the ideal king that lay behind his abstract figure is the French king Louis IX (Genet 2003). Giles' marked preference for hereditary kingship may also find its origins in contemporary circumstances, in particular in the chaos that had erupted in the contemporary Empire – in which an elective system operated – after the death of the Emperor Frederick II in 1250. The imperial experience stood in stark contrast alongside the relative peace of contemporary France where an hereditary system prevailed.

### Influence

With the exception of the pseudo-Aristotelian *Secret of Secrets* (*Secretum secretorum*), *On the Rule of Princes* proved to be the most successful product of the mirrors for princes genre and enjoyed considerable longevity, with approximately 300 Latin manuscripts surviving and 11 printings between 1473 and 1617. To the 36 surviving manuscripts of the earliest – simplified – French translation by Henri de Gauchy (1282) can be added six alternative French translations and versions in German, Italian, Swedish, English, Castilian, Catalan, Portuguese, and Hebrew. This popularity probably arose from Giles' presentation of his treatise as a systematic exposition of Aristotle. The work was one of a limited number to cross the boundaries between the lecture

theater – where it was employed from the fourteenth century as part of the University of Paris’ arts curriculum (Briggs 1999, 2016) – and the rest of society. Multiple copies, in both Latin and French, resided in the royal library of the French king Charles V, while translations were commissioned by men such as the lieutenant of the bailiff of Orléans (Merisalo 1998; Briggs 1999). The work was referenced by, among others, Chaucer, Dante, and Bartolus of Sassoferrato, while the French version was employed by Christine de Pizan (Krynen 1993; Briggs 1999, 2016).

## On Ecclesiastical Power

### Context

The second phase of Giles’ political thought developed as he became enmeshed in the controversies that marked the pontificate of Boniface VIII (r. 1294–1303), the man responsible for his promotion to the archbishopric of Bourges. Giles’ initial exploration of the nature of the papal office came in his *On the Abdication of the Pope* where he set out to defend Boniface against the claims of the Colonna cardinals that he had unjustly usurped the position of his predecessor, Celestine V. Giles sought to establish both the legitimacy of papal resignation, and also that the nature of the papal office, whose incumbent was responsible to God alone, meant that a pope could not be removed except of his own free will (Eastman 1990). John of Paris later adapted and reinterpreted elements of this work in his *On Royal and Papal Power* (*De potestate regia et papali*). In the opening years of the fourteenth century, Giles was led to develop his concept of the papal office more fully and to incorporate it into a much broader study of the relationship between spiritual and temporal power in the treatise *On Ecclesiastical Power* (*De ecclesiastica potestate*).

Although Giles’ authorship of *On Ecclesiastical Power* was questioned in the early-twentieth century, it has been since established convincingly (Kuiters 1958). The precise date of the treatise is unknown, but it was certainly written before November 1302 and probably composed either

in the first half of that year or in the latter part of 1301. The argument, however, that it must predate John of Paris’ *On Royal and Papal Power* has been refuted comprehensively (Ubl and Vinx 2000). It is probable that in composing the treatise Giles drew on ideas he had originally expressed in a sermon, although it cannot be proved conclusively that the sermon preceded the tract (Lambertini 2016). It is generally accepted that *On Ecclesiastical Power* was produced as a defense of papal authority in the wake of the conflict that arose between Philip IV and Boniface VIII after Philip’s officers arrested the bishop of Pamiers in July 1301. While Giles’ assertion that he was writing because of the hostility of much of the laity towards the church’s exercise of authority in temporal matters (1.1) tends to support this, one alternative theory suggests that the treatise was part of a broader papal response to Thomist-Aristotelian trends that were considered threatening to the traditional cosmology (Ullmann 1976).

### Structure

*On Ecclesiastical Power* is formally divided into three parts. It is loosely organized and includes a great deal of repetition, features which suggest the work may have been composed in haste (Dyson 2003). Nominally, the first part concerns the relationship between the temporal and the ecclesiastical powers and the second the relationship between the ecclesiastical power and property. The first three chapters of the latter may have originated as a separate treatise in defense of the right of the church to own property against the extreme claims of the Spiritual Franciscans (Dyson 2003). In the third part Giles foresees and seeks to address possible objections to parts one and two based, primarily, on the decretals of Popes Alexander III and Innocent III.

### Key Concepts

The second phase of Giles’ political thought is marked by three key ideas, which when combined offer the ultimate hierocratic theory embodying the most extensive claims on behalf of papal authority to emerge in the Middle Ages. Firstly, Giles argues that the exercise of temporal authority is only legitimate when it is sanctioned by



the ecclesiastical power and, indeed, such authority is ultimately derived from the church. The temporal and spiritual powers remain separate – there remain, in Bernard of Clairvaux’s terms, two swords as Giles is keen to emphasize (1.7–9; 2.13–15) – but the temporal is completely subordinate to the spiritual power, just as the body is, of right, subordinate to the soul (1.7). Secondly, it is not only possible for the church to own property, but legitimate ownership of *all* property, even lay property, is ultimately dependent upon the church. The man who inherits property from his father possesses it only imperfectly; to possess it justly his possession must be perfected by the church via baptism and penance (2.7). Finally, all the power that exists in the church is vested in the person of the pope as Peter’s successor.

The pope possesses a fullness of power (*plenitudo potestatis*) that effectively makes him the spiritual equivalent of the regal king described in *On the Rule of Princes*. In common with that king, the pope is unshackled by the requirement that he obey the law but, again in common with his portrait of the ideal secular ruler, Giles does not expect the pope to exercise his power in an arbitrary manner. While God possesses the power to suspend the rules governing the natural operation of the universe, He chooses to do so only in exceptional circumstances. Giles contends that the pope should act similarly with regard to temporal affairs. The pope, while possessing a “superior and primary” lordship (*dominium*), will normally impose a bridle and halter on himself and refrain from its exercise (3.7). He will only suspend the “immediate and executory” power of the temporal ruler in exceptional cases. While in theory such cases may encompass virtually anything (3.5–8), Giles believes it is those which threaten peace that should be the pope’s particular concern (2.10).

While Giles is not concerned with relations between temporal powers in either phase of his political thought, he does express a clear preference for the ultimate subordination of all temporal power to that of the Roman emperor in *On Ecclesiastical Power* (2.13). At the same time, somewhat paradoxically, the treatise does, at certain points, appear to accept the existence

of multiple independent temporal rulers as of right (e.g., 1.5).

### Foundations

Giles’ theory of the relationship between ecclesiastical and temporal power is rooted in his acceptance of a thoroughly Augustinian analysis of man, one that implicitly rejects Aristotelian arguments in favor of the naturalness of political organization and property. Lordship for Giles, either over people or over property, is essentially unnatural to man and a consequence of the Fall. In order for either rulership or property to be legitimized, man must be reconciled to God and such reconciliation is only possible through grace administered via the church. The total subordination of the temporal to the spiritual is reinforced by Giles’ view that, following principles drawn from Aristotle’s natural philosophy, in a properly ordered universe inferiors must be subject to superiors. The order, hierarchy, and relationships that underpin Giles’ model are reminiscent of the feudal structures of contemporary society (Dyson 2003).

The arguments of *On Ecclesiastical Power* are drawn primarily from scriptural sources and the Fathers. Giles is particularly keen to find historical precedents in Scripture that support the preeminence of the spiritual power both in terms of dignity and in terms of precedence. He relies heavily on Aristotelian reasoning to argue his case, but few of the points he makes could be considered novel. The argument that the spiritual precedes the temporal in time and dignity, for example, is drawn from Hugh of Saint-Victor, while his case for the subordination of the temporal to the spiritual originates in Bernard of Clairvaux and his argument in favor of the pope as the pinnacle of society is ultimately derived from the canonists. Giles’ theory of property is rooted in Augustinian thought (Dyson 2003), although it is possible that this, and his broader conception of papal power, have more specific origins in ideas developed by John Pecham (Coleman 1987). While Giles is not entirely in agreement with his sources – he departs, for example, from the position of both Pope Innocent IV and Aquinas when he declares that infidels

can never legitimately own property (McIlwain 1932) – the novelty of Giles’ position is founded primarily upon his ability to synthesize a consistent theory of ecclesiastical and papal power from his sources.

### Influence

Giles’ claim that his work was intended for the education of all Christian people (2.12) is reminiscent of the approach he adopted in *On the Rule of Princes*. The treatise’s style and complexity, however, appear to have resulted in a much more restricted audience, and only six manuscripts remain extant from the period before 1500. While the limited diffusion of Giles’ text is particularly striking when compared to contemporary works on a similar theme (Miethke 2000), the treatise provided a source for those who drafted the papal bull *Unam sanctam* (November 18, 1302) (Rivière 1926). It was also employed in future defenses of papal power written by the Augustinian Hermits James of Viterbo and Augustine of Ancona and the Franciscan Alvarus Pelagius, although James, Giles’ former student, deviated from his master’s position on several points (Boase 1933; Dyson 2003).

### Consistency

It has been sometimes suggested that Giles’ thought underwent a profound change between its first and second phase and that, in effect, he chose to abandon a novel Aristotelian perspective inspired by the recently rediscovered *Politics* in favor of a more traditional Augustinian perspective (Scholz 1903). It is more probable that each phase represents Giles’ thought on a different conceptual level (McCready 1974). *On the Rule of Princes* considers a microcosm: the best means of organizing the secular state and the formation of its ideal ruler. *On Ecclesiastical Power* is strikingly different in tone but only because the author’s perspective has altered to consider a larger structure within which the secular state appears as simply a component part. In fact, two features of Giles’ thought offer striking examples of consistency: he subscribed to a conception of hierarchy that led him to favor models of unrestrained regal rule and – echoing

ideas found in Aquinas and most Thomists (Wilks 1963) – he also suggested that such rulers, whether kings or popes, should and will impose limitations on themselves.

### Cross-References

- ▶ [Henry of Ghent](#)
- ▶ [James of Viterbo](#)
- ▶ [John of Paris](#)
- ▶ [John Pecham](#)
- ▶ [Mirrors for Princes](#)
- ▶ [Parisian Condemnation of 1277](#)
- ▶ [Peter of Auvergne](#)
- ▶ [Thomas Aquinas, Political Thought](#)
- ▶ [Thomism](#)

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## Giovanni Pico della Mirandola

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### Abstract

Giovanni Pico della Mirandola (1463–1494) was an Italian Renaissance polymath. Although best known for his *Oration on Human Dignity* (*Oratio de dignitate hominis*), which is regarded by some historians as a manifesto of Renaissance humanism, Pico composed other philosophical, theological, and literary works. A constant throughout his philosophical writings was his attempt to synthesize competing philosophical views. Pico resurrected the ancient proposal that Plato and Aristotle were not opposed on major philosophical principles. His outlook sought to bring about a *concordia* or resolution among philosophical schools, and his most dramatic effort in this regard was a planned public disputation of 900 theses drawn from philosophical, theological, and esoteric sources. Because of his concordist tendencies, he cannot be identified as a strict Aristotelian, Platonist, Thomist, or adherent of any particular philosophical school. One of the first Christians to explore the Kabbalah, he examined Hebrew texts for confirmations of Christian theological tenets with the hope that such connections could be of service in apologetics. Pico's bibliophilic passion, joined with his facility with languages, placed him in a position unrivaled in his time to gather views from a wide variety of sources. His famous library

was replete with texts of major as well as obscure figures, and his studies of Arabic, Greek, and Hebrew gave him a range of source materials unparalleled in his day. Pico inhabited in the highest literary circles of his time, and counted among his contacts were the Florentine Platonist and translator Marsilio Ficino, the powerful ruler Lorenzo de' Medici, the humanist Angelo Poliziano, and the Dominican Girolamo Savonarola. His later works included a metaphysical treatise *On Being and Unity* (*De ente et uno*), a massive anti-astrological diatribe called the *Disputations against divinatory astrology* (*Disputationes adversus astrologiam divinatricem*), and biblical commentaries.

### Biographical Information

Giovanni Pico was born in his family's castle in Mirandola. Heir to the Counts of Mirandola and Concordia, Pico was in a privileged situation to follow academic interests free from financial concerns. In his early years, he pursued a wide-ranging education at many major centers of learning. Among the many subjects of his interest, he studied canon law in Bologna, classics in Ferrara, Aristotelian and Averroistic philosophy in Padua, and medieval scholasticism in Pavia and Paris. He learned to read and write Greek, Arabic, and Hebrew, in addition to possessing a powerful command of the humanist Latin of his day. Our knowledge of the elements of Pico's short life is aided by the *Vita* or *Life* penned by his nephew, Gianfrancesco Pico della Mirandola, who was a philosopher in his own right and served as the literary executor of Giovanni's works, posthumously editing and publishing his uncle's *Opera omnia* in 1496.

Pico's significant literary contacts for the transmission of Arabic and Hebrew ideas included the Averroist philosopher Elijah del Medigo; the unsavory Flavius Mithridates, who at Pico's request translated a large body of Hebraic writings into Latin, which largely served as Pico's introduction to Kabbalah; and Yohanan Alemanno, a

friend of Pico's who served as an important conduit for Jewish philosophical ideas.

The year 1486 was a significant one for Pico. It marked a period of intense literary productivity and included unusual public events that required the interventions of Lorenzo de' Medici. On the way to Rome to dispute his 900 theses, Pico abducted the wife of a tax official of the Medici family. It is possible that she was complicit in this plan. Nevertheless, Pico was imprisoned and only released by the influence of Lorenzo de' Medici. When Pico's Roman plans for a disputation failed and he had to flee church authorities, again Lorenzo stepped in, and his offer to the pope to keep Pico under his watchful eye extricated the young philosopher from a difficult position. It should be noted that Pico played a minor role in shaping the Florentine political scene; Pico was responsible for persuading Lorenzo to bring Savonarola to Florence.

From 1488 onward, Pico spent most of his time in Florence under the protection of Lorenzo de' Medici. Pico's interests during his later period appear theological, since he worked on biblical commentaries and short spiritual works, of which two letters to Gianfrancesco stand out as exemplary. In 1494, Pico was rehabilitated when Pope Alexander VI rescinded all condemnations of Pico's works. Clothed in the Dominican habit, Pico died in Florence in November 1494. At his side was Savonarola, who later gave Pico's funeral oration. Pico was buried in the Dominican church of San Marco in Florence. In 2007, his remains were examined forensically for evidence of the cause of his death. There are hints that Pico may have been poisoned, but the evidence is likely to remain inconclusive.

After Gianfrancesco's publication of Giovanni's *Opera omnia*, anglophone readers were first introduced to Pico by the translations by Sir Thomas More of some of Pico's letters, religious opuscula, and Gianfrancesco's *Vita* in the early sixteenth century.

## Thought

From Pico's epistolary corpus, the June 3, 1485, missive to the Venetian humanist Hermolao

Barbaro stands out for its fame as well as its philosophical content. In this piece, which he later titled *On the Mode of Discourse Appropriate for Philosophers* (*De genere dicendi philosophorum*), Pico revived the ancient debate on the relation of philosophy and the discipline of rhetoric. Pico champions the superiority of scholastic Latinity over its classical counterpart, yet does so while employing a wide range of rhetorical techniques. The apparent contrast between the style and substance of the letter has puzzled generations of interpreters. A reply to Pico, until recently attributed to Philip Melanchthon, continued the ancient debate among later literary figures. Pico's first philosophical work of substantive length, however, is his *Commentary on a Canzone of Love of Girolamo Benivieni* (*Commento sopra una canzone d'amore di Girolamo Benivieni*) of 1486. Using the pretext of a commentary, Pico explores issues in Neoplatonic metaphysics and in some passages implicitly critiques the views of Marsilio Ficino.

Without doubt, Pico's best-known work is the *Oratio de dignitate hominis*. The *Oratio* was never published in Pico's lifetime, though in a preface, Gianfrancesco implied the work's early circulation in manuscript form when he published it in the 1496 *Opera omnia*. In the first part of the *Oratio*, Pico famously sets forth the view that human beings have no nature or form, and by choice humans are free to become the higher and lower natures in the hierarchy of being, where ultimate unity with God is championed as the highest option. The work can be read as a philosophical exploration of the traditional doctrine of human deification found in the Neoplatonic and Christian traditions. Pico employs the literary device of a conversation between God and the first man to expound his view, and he implies that moral choices determine an individual's acquired form or nature. In addition to these remarks on the human condition, the *Oratio* also defends other views. The middle portion of the work can be read as either a protreptic or an apology for the discipline of philosophy, and the latter part of the work examines Pico's proposal for a public debate.

Pico's remarks on the human condition in the *Oratio* have been subject to a wide variety of

interpretations. While the claim that human beings lack a nature or form may appear to some to anticipate elements of twentieth-century existentialist philosophy, some commentators have questioned whether a myth presented in the context of an oration can be a reliable source for metaphysical views. At least, the style of the *Oratio* is far removed from the traditional genres of philosophical writing, even though Pico uses scholastic terminology. Nevertheless, the *Oratio* is arguably the most famous philosophical text of the Renaissance period. In presenting the view that human beings lack a fixed nature, Pico is perhaps anticipated by some Patristic and medieval texts. The views of Origen and Boethius may have been direct influences on him in this respect, and judging from the extant lists of the contents of his library and the references he gives to their works throughout his writings, Pico was familiar with both thinkers.

The *Oratio* was intended merely to serve as the opening preface to Pico's planned disputation of his *900 Theses* (*Conclusiones DCCCC*), which he published in Rome in 1486. The *900 Theses* consisted of a collection of authoritative views garnered from well-known as well as obscure authorities from philosophy, theology, and other disciplines, to which Pico appended theses he personally proposed "according to his own opinion." Pico's collection of theses for the Roman debate was not his first attempt to compile authoritative opinions; in the *Vita*, Gianfrancesco reported that as a young student of canon law, Pico anthologized a digest of decretals. At the end of the published *900 Theses*, Pico appended an advertisement offering to pay the traveling expenses of any philosopher or theologian willing to join him for the disputation. Pico envisioned that the pope would preside over the event with the College of Cardinals in attendance. The public event, however, never occurred; Pope Innocent VIII convened a group of theologians and canonists to investigate the orthodoxy of the theses. Of the 900, 13 theses were identified as either being outright heretical or exhibiting a propensity to heresy.

Pico's response to the condemnation was a quickly penned defense called the *Apologia* (*Apologia*) published the following year. In it, Pico

criticized the commission's findings severely and defended the orthodoxy of his suspect theses. He argued that his theses were set forth as proposals to be disputed and should not be approached in the way one approaches ordinary academic writing. Pico's *Apologia* exhibited no contrition, and it spectacularly failed to secure exoneration. Pico fled Rome to France, only to return safely to Italy with the protection and favor of Lorenzo de' Medici.

Pico's next major work, *Heptaplus, On the Sevenfold Exposition of the Six Days of Genesis* (*Heptaplus de septiformi sex dierum Geneseos enarratione*), dates from 1489. In this biblical commentary on the early part of Genesis, Pico explicitly rejected the traditional fourfold medieval modes of exegesis that examined biblical texts in terms of the literal, allegorical, moral, and anagogical senses. Instead, Pico approached Genesis as an esoteric work containing latent philosophical doctrines. Pico argued that Moses was a philosopher of the first order who placed philosophical truths under guise of images and figures in the work. The *Heptaplus* presupposes a complex hermeneutical theory that seeks to unpack a latent Neoplatonic emanationist metaphysical scheme from the beginning of the Hebrew scriptures.

Another metaphysical treatise, the short *On Being and the One* (*De ente et uno*), was completed by Pico in the early 1490s but not published in his lifetime. It was intended to be part of a larger planned work reconciling the metaphysical principles of Plato and Aristotle, to be titled *Concordia Platonis Aristotelisque*. In the short completed treatise, Pico contended that Plato and Aristotle were not in disagreement on the relationship of being and unity, and Pico examined texts from Plato's *Parmenides* and *Sophist* and Aristotle's *Metaphysics* in his attempt to bring the two philosophers together. In attempting such a reconciliation, Pico places himself in an ancient tradition that sought a harmony between Platonism and Aristotelianism. Pico knew he was not the first to seek a general compatibility between Academic and Peripatetic thought, and even in the early *Oratio* and in the *Apologia*, he explicitly identifies Boethius, Simplicius, and John Philoponus as predecessors who tried, but



ultimately failed, to secure a lasting reconciliation of Greek metaphysical thought. Strikingly, Thomas More removed every mention of Pico's interests in *concordia* in his English iteration of Gianfrancesco Pico's *Vita*.

Pico's longest work is his posthumously published diatribe against astrology, the *Disputationes against Divinatory Astrology* (*Disputationes adversus astrologiam divinatricem*). In 12 books, Pico engaged in a multipronged polemic against adherents of astrology. Pico was careful to distinguish between natural causes and occult ones, and he condemned the latter. He separated human causes from celestial ones and ridiculed the presuppositions of ancient and contemporary astrological views. Finally, in the last book of the work, Pico presented a striking history of astrological theory and practice. Numbered among Pico's works are also short religious opuscula including an unfinished commentary on the Psalms.

The works of 1486–1487 as well as the later *De ente et uno* exhibit Pico's commitment to finding *concordia* or harmony among seemingly opposed philosophical views. For this reason, he has been regarded by some historians as a syncretist. While the designation of syncretism is in many ways a fitting characterization of his thought from the period, it should be noted that Pico did not espouse the view that all philosophers were defending the same position using different terms and expressions; Pico privileges the claims of Christianity and sought external confirmations of them. Similarly, he finds in ancient poetry veiled references to Neoplatonic metaphysics, and the writings of Kabbalah are used to confirm some tenets of Christianity. The hermeneutical tools used by Pico in his project of *concordia* involve allegorical and figurative readings of ancient texts. Pico occasionally gave very general characterizations of his method, indicating that what appears opposed at the level of words (*verba*) may turn out to be in concord at the level of substance (*res*); the true interpreter must distinguish the kernel (*medulla*) from the mere outer shell (*cortex*) of words. Insofar as Pico is willing to apply his interpretive techniques to classical poetry, again in search of finding confirmation of

metaphysical and theological tenets, he can be viewed as a sophisticated Renaissance exponent of *prisca theologia*.

## Cross-References

- ▶ [Aristotelianism in the Greek, Latin, Syriac, Arabic, and Hebrew Traditions](#)
- ▶ [Mathematics and Philosophy in the Arab World](#)
- ▶ [Metaphysics](#)
- ▶ [Platonism, Renaissance](#)

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## Godfrey of Fontaines

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### Abstract

Godfrey of Fontaines was one of the most influential masters of the University of Paris from the last quarter of the thirteenth century. Against Henry of Ghent, for whom theology is endowed with reason that is eminent, universal, and all-encompassing, Godfrey defends the autonomy of philosophical reason within

its own domain. In interdisciplinary fields, where theology and philosophy come into contact, he advocates a perspectivist epistemology, and he defends a probabilistic conception of scientific truth. Among the theologians after the Condemnation of 1277, he was one of the most fervent defenders of philosophy. He further develops the theories of masters of the Arts Faculty in the 1270s and employs them against the theologies of contingency that flourished in the interim.

Godfrey of Fontaines was born in the principality of Liège (modern Belgium) shortly before 1250. We know nearly nothing about his life outside the university (Wippel, *The metaphysical thought of Godfrey of Fontaines. A study in late thirteenth-century philosophy*. Catholic University of American Press, Washington, 1981, pp. xv–xxi). At the University of Paris, however, we know that this secular priest was one of the most famous masters of theology during the last quarter of the thirteenth century. He died c. 1306–1309.

Godfrey studied at the Arts Faculty of Paris probably from 1270 onward. There, he would have been able to hear the lectures of the “Averroist” masters who defended the autonomy of philosophical research, notably Boethius of Dacia, Siger of Brabant, and later, Jacques of Douai. He would have also attended the debates that provided the grounds for the condemnation of Aristotelianism issued on March 7, 1277. He could also have gone to the lectures of Thomas Aquinas, who had a second regency as master in the Faculty of Theology of Paris between 1268 and 1272.

From this first period dates a precious student’s notebook, started by Godfrey in 1271 and finished around 1277 (Glorieux 1931). This collection witnesses the author’s taste for philosophical works: among other texts, it contains the treatise *On the Eternity of the World (De aeternitate mundi)* by Siger of Brabant, and that by Thomas Aquinas, abbreviations of some works by Boethius of Dacia, and a *reportatio* of Siger of Brabant’s *Questions on the Metaphysics*

(*Quaestiones in Metaphysicam*). Moreover, it also carries transcriptions of theological texts from a little later, such as the *Theoremata on the Body of Christ* (*Theoremata de corpore Christi*) composed by Giles of Rome between 1274 and 1276, and some notes taken during Henry of Ghent's first quodlibetal disputation (Christmas 1276).

From 1274, Godfrey was a student in theology at the University of Paris. He studied under Henry of Ghent and Servais of Mont Saint Elias. He was promoted to master in 1285 and served as regent master until 1298/1299. In the Faculty of Theology, his main colleagues were Henry of Ghent and Giles of Rome, with whom he held running debates that lasted for years. Fourteen *Quodlibets* (*Quodlibeta*) stand as witness to his intellectual activity during these 14 years of teaching. In 1298, he left the university to fulfill ecclesiastical missions. Then he held a second regency in the Faculty of Theology around 1303/1304; his 15th *Quodlibet* comes from this period (Table 1). Godfrey's literary production also includes *Ordinary Questions*, of which some have been preserved (notably the *Disputed Questions on the Virtues*).

Godfrey had an important personal library that included numerous contemporary works, which he left to the College of the Sorbonne. The 37 surviving manuscripts comprise one of the major sources for the documentation of the debates on the eternity of the world and the distinction between being and essence in the period between 1272 and 1300 (Duin 1959).

In the controversies that engulfed the Faculty of Theology during the years 1280–1300, Godfrey frequently opposed his fellow theologians and revived solutions defended in the

1270s by the arts masters condemned in 1277. He repeatedly protested the continuation of this condemnation (*Quodl. VII*, q. 18, 404; *Quodl. XII*, q. 5, 102), which also touched upon some of Thomas Aquinas' positions. Godfrey's influence is particularly clear on James of Viterbo, who succeeded Giles of Rome as Augustinian master of theology in 1293. His influence is also very important on the German master Dietrich of Freiberg, for whom Godfrey served as a conduit: Godfrey provides at least partially the means for Dietrich's awareness of the Parisian theological controversies and transmits to Dietrich the elements of the philosophy of the arts masters of the 1270s.

1. Godfrey's work is remarkable for its reflections on methodology. From the middle of the century, the University of Paris was the battleground for a war between the faculties (and maybe also between disciplines). Before 1275, some arts masters (like Siger of Brabant) had defended the autonomy of philosophical research against the attacks of theologians who wanted to reduce its scope and pretensions. At the same time, the theologians felt obliged to specify the status of their discipline. In spite of being a master of theology, Godfrey did not make all other disciplines a unified field over which theology alone reigned supreme.

Against Henry of Ghent, he challenged the notion that theology was a science properly speaking (*Quodl. IX*, q. 20). Theological knowledge is a form of wisdom (*sapientia*), while the philosophical disciplines, first of all metaphysics, are sciences (*scientiae*). Theology necessarily presupposes faith. The truths that are most certain are not thereby also evident (*Quodl. IX*, q. 20), such as the trinity (*Quodl. VII*, q. 2). Clearly,

**Godfrey of Fontaines,**  
**Table 1** Dating of the  
*Quodlibets* according to  
Wippel (1981, pp. xxvii–  
xxviii)

<i>Quodlibet I</i>	Christmas 1285	Quodlibet VIII	1292/1293
<i>Quodlibet II</i>	Easter 1286	Quodlibet IX	1293/1294
<i>Quodlibet III</i>	Christmas 1286	Quodlibet X	1294/1295
<i>Quodlibet IV</i>	1287	Quodlibet XI	1295/1296
<i>Quodlibet V</i>	1288	Quodlibet XII	1296/1297
<i>Quodlibet VI</i>	Christmas 1289	Quodlibet XIII	1297/1298
<i>Quodlibet VII</i>	1290/1291 or 1291/1292	Quodlibet XIV	1298/1299
		Quodlibet XV	1303/1304

theology provides understanding of what is believed, and it facilitates the interpretation of sacred texts, but biblical exegesis only produces probable knowledge (*Quodl. VIII*, q. 7). On the other hand, metaphysics, the highest of the sciences, knows the truths that are evident to natural reason. This is why propositions about God, known evidently, belong to metaphysics and not to theology, as is the case concerning the propositions that affirm that God is the first being, that He is simple, in act, pure intellect, and so on (*Quodl. IX*, q. 20).

In so doing, Godfrey challenges Henry of Ghent's understanding of theology, in particular its epistemic nature. According to Henry, theology is the most universal and the most certain science, and the certitudes of the other forms of scientific knowledge proceed from it. Godfrey, on the other hand, holds that theology furnishes a less certain knowledge than that provided by other sciences with respect to their proper objects. Godfrey defends an epistemological perspectivism that grants each discipline its object and certitude.

On Godfrey's reading, Aristotle's metaphysical science is autonomous, absolutely speculative, and it concerns human happiness insofar as it is attainable on Earth. On the other hand, theology is a composite discipline, both speculative and practical. It must provide speculative knowledge of what is the ultimate goal, but this goal – the beatific vision of God – is only attained in the afterlife. Theology is therefore also a practical science, concerned with the life of the faithful and with the preparations for obtaining future beatitude (*Quodl. XIII*, q. 1).

From his first *Quodlibet* (q. 5) on, Godfrey criticizes the superficial and irrational (“*irrationabilitas*”) attacks on philosophy by some theologians. He condemns the vanity (“*curiositas*”) of his fellow theologians who construct complicated theoretical edifices to explain the status of the dead body of Christ and the possibility that it was or was not burned (*Quodl. III*, q. 6). Godfrey's approach becomes particularly evident in his positions on interdisciplinary questions, that is, in considering issues at the border of theology and philosophy. Here, Godfrey establishes a probabilistic epistemology.

Anthropology is one of these frontier zones. Theological truth – christology in this case – touches upon natural philosophy, because Christ is both God and man. Some theologians, such as John Pecham, the author of the London condemnation of April 30, 1286, reconfigured anthropology to meet the requirements of dogma. To guarantee the identity of the living and dead body of Christ, they believed they had to impose a pluralist anthropology. Accordingly (and against what Thomas Aquinas believed), man is not substantially informed by the rational soul alone but by a succession of natural forms: the forms of the elements, of mixtures, the body, the nutritive soul, the sensitive soul, and, finally, the form of the rational soul. At death, the soul is separated from the body, but the latter remains univocally body in virtue of the permanence of the form of corporeity. Henry of Ghent developed a simpler solution, positing a dimorphism that makes the form of the body and the rational soul cohabit the same being.

According to Godfrey, John of Pecham was out of line (*Quodl. III*, q. 5, 207: “*graviter excessisse*”) in censuring the unicist anthropology of Thomas Aquinas as propounded by Richard Knapwell. In 1286, the same year as the London condemnation, Godfrey broached the question twice (*Quodl. II*, q. 7 and *Quodl. III*, 5). His treatment has two goals: (a) to protect philosophy from theological incursions (b) to relativize the certitude obtained in interdisciplinary fields.

(a) Godfrey insists that Christ is a man like any other, if one considers his humanity in the light of human reason. The body of Christ after death need not be substantially the same as that before death. That it is identical is neither evident by faith proceeding from authority nor is it evident to natural reason. Therefore, one should not infer anthropological consequences from it. According to Thomist anthropology, the body of the living Christ and his cadaver could be different substances, as it is the case for Peter's body (when alive), and his cadaver.

(b) Godfrey likewise shows that the unicist thesis of Thomas Aquinas is the most reasonable and philosophically the most coherent. It explains the unity of man without injury to major

ontological principles, such as matter's pure potentiality. Nevertheless, Godfrey counsels prudence when treating questions that touch on theology. Examining the theses of others, he establishes a hierarchy of levels of certitude: the unicist thesis is the most probable, followed by Henry of Ghent's dimorphism (see also *Quodl. X*, q. 10), and in last place is the pluralist position that was dominant at the time, which, from a philosophical point of view is weak and thus the least probable. Even when theological and philosophical interests collide, Godfrey claims that each has its own specific objects and methods.

2. In metaphysics, Godfrey begins by distinguishing four "terms" he describes as "the most general" (*Quodl. XIII*, q. 3, 193): being and nonbeing, act and potency. These four terms form two analogous pairs of opposite and exclusive principles. Potency is related to act as nonbeing to being. From 1285 (*Quodl. I*, q. 7) until the end of his career, Godfrey incessantly insists on this bipolarity. In this sense, Godfrey's metaphysics is a metaphysics of the excluded middle. There is no intermediate way of being, such as relational being, between being and nonbeing. Likewise, potency is opposed to act in an absolutely primary sense, such that there is no intermediary. Potency designates a thing that absolutely does not exist and it designates such a thing insofar as it is still in its cause (e.g., the artifact in the mind of the artisan or the fruit in the seed). The copula potency/act is a copy of the pair nonbeing/being and explains the dynamics of contingent beings (i.e., every being except God). *A fortiori*, starting from the experience of beings existing in act, the notion of potency permits the postulation of a nonbeing capable of coming to be.

In 1286, Godfrey took part in an important debate on essence (*essentia*) and existence (*esse*) where Giles of Rome opposed Henry of Ghent. Giles took the real distinction between existence and essence sketched by Thomas a generation earlier to an extreme. Henry of Ghent defended a moderate thesis: existence does not differ really from essence. Nevertheless, the distinction between existence (*esse existentiae*) and essence (*esse essentiae*) is not solely one of reason; it is "intentional," since the essence of something can

be conceived as nonexistent. Following Avicenna, Henry posited a sort of intermediate state for essence, independent of or "indifferent" to its being conceived in the mind and to its being brought to be in extramental reality. Each in their own way, Giles and Henry wanted to explain the contingent character of created essences: they were able not to have been. Godfrey rejects Giles' real distinction and Henry's intermediate solution, which postulates an absurd third way of being between being and nonbeing (*Quodl. II*, q. 2). He repeats the "Averroist" solution defended by Siger of Brabant c. 1273; like Siger, Godfrey places the question in a semantic context (*Quodl. III*, q. 1). Being (*esse*) and essence (*essentia*) differ as two ways of signifying. The word "being" signifies the being concretely, as the word "to run" signifies the action of the person who runs; the word "essence" signifies the abstract being, as the noun "running" signifies the activity of running in an abstract manner. On an ontological level, one should not postulate any other way of being than that of the being itself: concrete, individual, and determinate. The creator's omnipotence sufficiently explains the contingency of the world.

3. In ontology, the primary distinction is that between substance and accident (*Quodl. I*, q. 20; *Quodl. VI*, q. 4). Since substances are what exist absolutely, accidents only exist by attribution to a substance. Like Albert the Great and Dietrich of Freiberg, Godfrey follows the Averroist interpretation of Aristotle according to which an accident is only a disposition (*dispositio*) of a substance. This dependence on substance excludes any rational explanation for an accident persisting without substance, as happens in the sacrament of the Eucharist. Any philosophical justification of the per se subsistence of accidents would amount to denying the distinction between substance and accident, that is, the primary distinction in ontology (*Quodl. VI*, q. 5).

This distinction grounds a theory of the analogy of being (*Quodl. III*, q. 1). The concept of being is ontologically (*in essendo*) and semantically (*in significando*) analogous. The notion of being is predicated of all subjects. Neither equivocal (homonymous) nor univocal in the sense of



a genus, being is diversified by itself and not by a *differentia*. It does not have the unity of a genus or a species but rather it accompanies confusedly every conception of something real. The notion of “being” is predicated of all subjects in the same sense, but to greater or lesser degrees, according to prior and posterior; substance is more primarily being than accident, which is only called being by attribution to substance. The unity of the concept of being is a unity of order that relates diverse elements according to a common characteristic shared by each of them to different degrees. Although Socrates is an animal just as a dog is an animal, Socrates *is* not in the way a dog is, nor like the white that is in him is, nor like God is. “Being” signifies all beings, supposing their reciprocal relations and the order established between them according to their degrees of perfection with relation to the first being (substance from an ontological point of view, God from a metaphysical point of view).

4. In natural philosophy, Godfrey applies his vision of exclusive opposition between act and potency. Matter is pure potency; only form is act (*Quodl. X*, q. 9). Therefore, matter cannot be created without form. In 1285 (*Quodl. I*, q. 4), Godfrey tries to rehabilitate this position, associated with Thomas Aquinas and condemned in 1277 by Etienne Tempier. In 1297/1298 (*Quodl. XIII*, q. 3), he defends the same principles in order to refute the Augustinian theory according to which the seminal reasons of things are already present in prime matter. He challenges the theory of Henry of Ghent, for whom matter has something essential proper to it, the Franciscan theories that grant matter a minimal actuality, as well as Peter John Olivi’s description of matter – Godfrey does not even admit that matter joins with an “aptitude” before its union to form.

5. In psychology, Godfrey agrees with Thomas’ interpretation of *De anima III* (*Quodl. VI*, 15). The possible intellect and the agent intellect are two faculties of the same individual soul. Human cognition necessarily proceeds from the sensible thing. Godfrey explains intellectual cognition without positing illumination of the soul (Henry of Ghent) or innate ideas. The agent intellect’s work of abstracting from sensations

suffices to bring about cognition in the soul (*Quodl. V*, q. 9–10; *Quodl. VII*, q. 9). Cognition of the object comes about when the possible intellect receives the species (*species*) of the thing known, a species stripped of its individuating and material conditions. Godfrey insists on the receptive phase of the process: the intellect alone cannot cause efficiently and formally the cognition, because a created power cannot reduce itself from potency to act (*Quodl. I*, q. 7; *Quodl. IX*, q. 19; *Quodl. XII*, q. 1). The received species, however, does not coincide with the object known: it is not what is known but that by which the mind knows the extramental object (*Quodl. I*, q. 9; *Quodl. VI*, q. 6).

In the important debate on the relative functions and nobility of the intellect and the will, Godfrey takes a strong intellectualist position. Against the Franciscan positions and the Condemnation of 1277, he defends the unconditional superiority of the intellect over the will (*Quodl. VI*, q. 10). The intellect takes pride of place, both because its object is specific and because it plays a causal role with respect to the will; the will only desires something if the speculative intellect first apprehends that thing and if the practical intellect brings about the voluntary act. Against Henry of Ghent, Godfrey states again the first principle of his metaphysics: a power cannot move itself (*Quodl. VI*, q. 7). The will, a power of the soul, cannot be cause of its own act. The intellect causes the voluntary act not only in terms of formal causality (in making present to the will a desirable object) but also in terms of efficient causality (insofar as the will follows the judgment of the intellect).

When he treats the moral question of free choice (*Quodl. VIII*, q. 16), Godfrey criticizes the Giles of Rome’s compromise solution, and through it, the position of Thomas Aquinas. Free choice is not formally situated in the will alone, even if the apprehended object is present in it. The action of the intellect is at least as free as that of the will. The intellect is eminently free and sovereign in determining the will’s choice. To defend such a thesis, once again, Godfrey brings back elements of the philosophy of the arts masters in the 1270s, particularly the discussions of Siger of Brabant on necessity.



Alongside these philosophical themes, Godfrey's work has a great many discussions pertaining to ecclesiology, canon law, religious practices, and pastoral care.

## Cross-References

- ▶ [Albert the Great](#)
- ▶ [Boethius of Dacia](#)
- ▶ [Dietrich of Freiberg](#)
- ▶ [Essence and Existence](#)
- ▶ [Form and Matter](#)
- ▶ [Giles of Rome, Political Thought](#)
- ▶ [Henry of Ghent](#)
- ▶ [Intuitive and Abstractive Cognition](#)
- ▶ [John Pecham](#)
- ▶ [Metaphysics](#)
- ▶ [Parisian Condemnation of 1277](#)
- ▶ [Siger of Brabant](#)
- ▶ [Thomas Aquinas](#)
- ▶ [Will](#)

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## Gottschalk of Nepomuk

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### Abstract

Gottschalk of Nepomuk was a Bohemian Cistercian monk, trained as a theologian at St. Bernard's College in Paris in the 1370s. He died shortly after completing his *Quaestiones super Libros Sententiarum*. His commentary on all four books of Lombard's *Sentences* survived in only one manuscript at the Jagiellonian Library (Krakow), and it is currently being edited. In the prologue, Gottschalk discusses the problem of theology as a scientific habitus and confines the object of

knowledge as a *complexe significabile* to the domain of theological knowledge. From a doctrinal perspective, the author belongs to a more general intellectual movement from the latter half of the fourteenth century, along with John Hiltalingen of Basel, James of Eltville, and others. Gottschalk's work develops themes common to English theologians from the first decades of the fourteenth century (e.g., Walter Chatton, Robert Holcot, Adam of Wodeham), but also relies on the texts of various Parisian theologians, such as Thomas of Argentina, Gregory of Rimini, John Mirecourt, and Henry of Ghent. His doctrinal orientation consists in both the adoption and criticism of Gregory of Rimini's thought.

### Thought

His commentary on the *Sentences* seems to be Gottschalk's only work; it was preserved in a single manuscript and composed at the end of the fourteenth century at Paris; the manuscript is written in a single hand, but without mentioning the name of the scribe. The manuscript is now at the Jagiellonian Library in Krakow under the no. 1499, having as incipit *Utrum per discursum theologicum possit haberi habitus proprie scientificus* (Kozłowska et al. 2012). We can, however, believe in the existence of at least three manuscripts that could have circulated, since this is obviously not the autograph; the manuscript is incomplete (the scribe notes the absence in the model he followed of several discussions regarding the relative properties of the divine nature – f. 41rb), and V. Doucet (1954: 34) notes the existence of a manuscript in Turin that probably burnt in 1904. The manuscript contains commentaries on all four books of Peter Lombard's *Sentences* and has a prologue in which the author discusses the nature of theology as a scientific disposition and also its hermeneutical value. It is certain that the work was accompanied by principal questions, which are mentioned by the author himself (74vb).

The commentary is organized in the form of *quaestiones*, which select topics from the content of Peter Lombard's work that was currently debated at the Protestant Faculty of Theology in Paris when Gottschalk was bachelor in theology. Gottschalk's doctrinal orientation can be clarified by studying the four *quaestiones* of his prologue from two points of view. The first is formal and implies studying the use of its sources. The second relates to the content and reflects how the originality of this author stems from the subtle combination of its sources, the juxtaposition of which often leads to new meanings in relation to those present in its sources.

It is known that the authors of *Sentences* commentaries dating from Gottschalk's period composed their works out of selected fragments of authors from previous generations, going back to the thirteenth-century authorities (in Gottschalk's case, Henry of Ghent). The preference for authors from previous decades is visible, in Gottschalk's case, in the use of English post-Ockhamist theology, recently introduced in Paris, and often the subject of controversy for Parisian theologians, as well as two Parisian theologians: Thomas of Argentina and Gregory of Rimini. Gottschalk uses these sources by selecting from their texts parts that are next adapted to their new context, often being radically rearranged. This technique was originally called by D. Trapp a reading *secundum alium*. Trapp identified Gottschalk as a doctrinal descendant of Gregory of Rimini, based on the numerous passages borrowed from the commentary on the *Sentences* of the latter (Trapp 1956: 251). The expression was criticized by M. Brînzei, which proposed in turn the expression "bricolage textuel" (Brînzei 2011: 560) as more appropriate to the complexity and doctrinal originality of these authors. In the particular case of Gottschalk, this complexity is verified by the way he, although copying from the massive work of Gregory of Rimini, often uses sources shared with this author (especially Adam Wodeham or Robert Holcot) to form a criticism of Gregory of Rimini.

At the level of his prologue, Gottschalk of Nepomuk may appear today to be an original author: his theses, grounded in an epistemology

centered around the concept of *complexe significabile*, are linked to an explicit support of a primate of a legitimate and competent interpretation of Scripture that is above the decisions of the ecclesiastical authority. At first glance, this last sentence could put its author in a pre-reformist tradition. However, his ideas could be more correctly understood in relation to his contemporary debates and as a possible defense of the theologian's position in the university and the university in relation to the church.

The first question of his prologue, indebted to Gregory of Rimini and Walter Chatton, discusses the nature of the scientific disposition (*habitus scientificus*) of theology, anchored in the hermeneutical condition of transmitting the doctrine, but emphasizing (originally from its sources) the historical condition of the legitimacy of interpreting Scripture: the longer we move away from the original writing of the sacred text, the more legitimate the interpretation is, since our condition is more different than the original context of the sacred text. The second question, which features William Ockham, John of Ripa, Gregory of Rimini, and Robert Holcot, contains an epistemological discussion and criticism of Gregory of Rimini. Gottschalk's main accusation against the Augustinian theologian is the latter's way of seeing the nature of the object of science. If, for William Ockham, this object had been the proposition and, for Walter Chatton, it was the object outside the soul, a third solution, proposed by Adam Wodeham, was recovered and supported by Gregory of Rimini. According to this theory, the subject of science is signified in a complex way, that is, the object that the human mind signifies through the propositional structures that it can form (*complexe significabile*). Gottschalk's critique aims to restrict the validity of this theory exclusively to the sphere of theology, where the signified in a complex way can guarantee the legitimacy of its significance. We may possibly assume that such a position rests on a theory of the proposition as an object of knowledge in the sciences other than theology.

The third question discusses the relationship between reason, will, and assent in producing

faith. It is based on a paraphrasing of *Summa*, IX–X, by Henry of Ghent, and proposes a primacy of the authority of the community of believers enabled to interpret the Scripture, as opposed to ecclesiastical authority. Henry of Ghent had only discussed the exceptional case in which believers who have already benefited from a historical transmission of doctrine (so it is excluded the case of newly converted) can freely interpret the text of the Scripture. Instead, Gottschalk proposes a hierarchy between God, Scripture, the community of believers, and the Church (“loquimur de effectis fidelibus, id est iam conversis, dico quod non debent seu tenentur magis fidem adhibere contentis in Sacra Scriptura quam Ecclesiae” – ed. Baumgarten 2016: 180, lines 16–19). Finally, the last question, indebted to Thomas of Argentina, is inserted into the fourteenth-century discussion of the distinction between the abstract knowledge and the intuitive knowledge. Godescalc proposes that within the limits of his condition as *homo viator*, man can have intuitive knowledge about the divine nature, even if this knowledge is proportionate to his condition, and can be strictly used only within the limits of a *notitia argumentativa* that properly belongs to the theologian.

In Book I, the author is interested in discussing questions about the Trinitarian relations and the possibility of their rational demonstration, the human possibility of having an intuitive knowledge of the divine nature, the relationship between divine processions, as well as the grace and predestination. The second book contains questions about the angelic movement and communication, as well as about the will and nature of angelic responsibility. Book III contains the sketch of a Christology, with an emphasis on the full presence of divine attributes in the soul of the incarnate Christ. In the last book, traditionally devoted to the sacraments, Gottschalk insists on baptism and the Eucharist, discussing the relationship between their original institution and their historical condition, deriving from here the last themes of his commentary: penitence and its system of distribution in the ecclesiastical hierarchy.

## Impact

The reception of Gottschalk’s work in the immediate period seems to have been intense: in 1369, Jean Regis makes use of his commentary as an implicit source; John Hiltalingen of Basel cites him several times in the prologue of his own commentary on the *Book of Sentences* (e.g., see Marcolino’s edition 2016:193, l. 1); and James of Eltville, in the prologue of his *Sentences* commentary, is preoccupied with rejecting Gottschalk’s theory of *complexe significabile*, returning to Gregory of Rimini’s position (see James of Eltville, f. 1ra-b). However, the subsequent reception of Gottschalk’s work is still not researched. The contemporary recovery of the Cistercian’s thought began with the author’s incorporation into a current of skepticism of the fourteenth century by Cardinal K. Michalski (1921) and continued with D. Trapp’s analysis of the Augustinian theology of the same century. Parts of Gottschalk’s work were edited by Bakker (1999) and Schabel (2014), and the editing of the entire work is in progress.

## Cross-References

- ▶ [Adam Wodeham](#)
- ▶ [Gregory of Rimini](#)
- ▶ [Henry of Ghent](#)
- ▶ [Jean Regis](#)
- ▶ [Walter Chatton](#)

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## Greek Texts Translated into Hebrew

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### Abstract

Only few Greek philosophical texts by Aristotle and by some of his main interpreters were partially or totally translated into Hebrew during the Middle Ages in Spain, France, and Italy; all these translations were based upon the previous Arabic and Latin ones. In the twelfth century, part of chapter 1 of book I of Aristotle's *De anima* was translated from the Latin *translatio vetus*. Some translations were made in the thirteenth century, from the medieval Arabic versions by Ibn al-Bīṭrīq, Ḥunayn ibn Ishāq, Ishāq ibn Ḥunayn, Yahyā ibn 'Adī, and 'Īsā ibn Zur'a. Aristotle's *Meteorologica* was translated by Samuel ibn Tibbon; Themistius' *Paraphrase* of book XII of Aristotle's *Metaphysics*, and Pseudo-Aristotle's *Problemata Physica*, were translated by Moses ibn Tibbon; Themistius' *Paraphrase* of Aristotle's *De caelo et mundo*, and Aristotle's *De generatione et corruptione* and *De anima*, were translated by Zerayah Hen; Aristotle's *Historia animalium*, *De partibus*, and *De generatione animalium* were translated from Michael Scot's Arabic-into-Latin version. Other translations were made in the fourteenth century, from the Arabic versions by Eustatius, Ishāq ibn Ḥunayn, Thābit ibn Qurra, and Naẓīf ibn Ayman. Aristotle's *Posterior Analytics*, *Physics*, and books I–X and XII of his *Metaphysics*, as found in Averroes' *Long Commentaries* on them, were translated by Qalonymos ben Qalonymos; Qalonymos also translated Nicolaus Damascenus' *De plantis*. Book I of Alexander of Aphrodisias' *De anima* was translated by Samuel of Marsailles; the *De intellectu* ascribed to Alexander was translated as found in Averroes' commentary on it; “Bryson”'s *Economics* was



translated by David ibn Ya'ish. All the translations of Aristotle or Pseudo-Aristotle's works made in the fifteenth century were based upon the medieval Latin versions by William of Moerbeke, Durand of Alvernia, Leonardo Bruni, and John Argiropoulos. They include the *Nicomachean Ethics*, translated by Meir Alguadez; books I and III of the *Economics*, translated by an anonymous scholar; books I–IV of the *Physics*, translated and commented on by Judah Messer Leon; books I–XII of the *Metaphysics*, translated by Baruch ibn Ya'ish. Baruch also translated the *Nicomachean Ethics* and the *Economics*, and might have translated Aristotle's *De anima*, as found in the Latin version of Averroes' *Long Commentary* on it.

In medieval Jewish thought, an important role was played by two main currents of Ancient Greek philosophy: Neoplatonism and Aristotelianism. However, the Jewish approach to each of them appears to have been different. Neoplatonism was mostly known to medieval Jewish authors working in Islamic lands (Muslim Spain, Tunisia, Egypt, and Iraq) through the medieval Arabo-Islamic interpretations of it, as found in a number of ninth- and tenth-century Arabic works: Pseudo-Aristotle's *Theology*, the *Liber de causis*, Pseudo-Empedocles' *Book of the Five Substances*, and the *Encyclopaedia of the Brethren of Purity*. Medieval Neoplatonic Jewish authors knew Arabic well, so that they did not need Hebrew translations of these texts. The case of Jewish Aristotelianism is different. In Spain, France, and Italy a number of medieval Jewish philosophers, working in the period 1150–1500, show to have known Aristotle's thought and doctrine. In reality, most of them approached Aristotelian philosophy via Arabic paraphrases and summaries of Aristotle; they particularly employed those by Averroes, where Aristotle's original words were not literally reproduced, but “interpreted” and adapted by the Arabic philosopher to his own thought. However, the knowledge of Arabic language was not so diffused among European Jewish philosophers, as it was among their colleagues living in Islamic

lands; on the other hand, not all of them seem to have known medieval Latin language, into which the whole of Aristotle's works were translated during the thirteenth century. They had to use the work of more or less professional Jewish translators, who rendered into Hebrew a number of the extant philosophical Arabic texts; after 1400, some of them continued this translation work by applying it to a number of medieval Latin texts. To sum up, only few Greek philosophical texts, mostly by Aristotle and some of his followers (Pseudo-Aristotle, Nicolaus Damascenus, Alexander of Aphrodisias, Themistius), were translated into Hebrew during the Middle Ages; some of them are part of Averroes' *Long Commentaries*, where the original words of Aristotle were literally quoted not in their original Greek text, but according to some of their medieval Arabic translations. Also, a non-Aristotelian Greek text, ascribed to the Neoplatonic author Bryson, was translated into Hebrew. A first list and partial examination of the characters of these translations was made at the end of the nineteenth century (Steinschneider 1893: 42–275); a tentative historical sketch of them was made at the end of the twentieth century (Zonta 1996a), mostly on the basis of the critical editions of some of them.

Probably, the first Greek philosophical text translated into Hebrew included the first paragraphs of Aristotle's *De anima*, book I, chapter 1 (402a1–403a2). This short passage was put at the beginning of an anonymous Latin-into-Hebrew translation of Dominicus Gundissalinus' *De anima*; since it covers a series of questions about man's soul, the translator probably inserted it in order to introduce some of the themes discussed in Gundissalinus' work. This partial translation, extant in a unique manuscript, was probably made in Spain, maybe in Catalogna (Teicher 1956: 409–414). It was allegedly based upon a medieval Greek-into-Latin translation even older than found in the so-called old translation (*translatio vetus*) of the *De anima*; but from an attentive analysis, it seems to depend on the latter instead (Zonta 1996a: 193–195). Since the “old translation” was made around 1150, this Hebrew version should be put after that date, possibly at the end of the twelfth century.



The first complete, albeit not yet literal translation of a Greek philosophical–scientific text into Hebrew, based upon an Arabic version, was made at the beginning of the thirteenth century by one of the main medieval Arabic-into-Hebrew translators: Samuel ibn Tibbon. A well-known Provençal Jewish philosopher of Spanish origin, Samuel wrote his version of Aristotle’s *Meteorologica* while he was sailing the Mediterranean Sea, in 1210; it was published in a very accurate critical edition, based upon five or six of the many extant manuscripts and upon a comparison of the medieval Arabic and Latin versions of Aristotle’s work, and translated into English (Fontaine 1995). Samuel’s version is not a mere translation of Aristotle’s work. He states in the introduction to it that he began to base it upon the early-ninth-century Arabic version by Yaḥyā ibn al-Biṭrīq, which is still extant; however, he found Ibn al-Biṭrīq’s version so confused, that he decided to correct it by consulting a number of manuscripts of it, as well as a lost Arabic translation of Alexander of Aphrodisias’ Greek commentary on the *Meteorologica* (second century). As shown by a detailed analysis (Fontaine 1995: lxii–lxxi), Samuel interpreted and commented on some passages of Aristotle’s work by referring not only to Alexander (whose Greek original is still extant), but also to Avicenna’s part 5 of the section on the *Physics* of his *The Cure (al-Shifā’)*, to Averroes’ *Middle Commentary* on the *Meteorologica*, and to another unidentified Arabic source. The textual transmission of Samuel ibn Tibbon’s version appears to be rather intricate: he might have written a first “rough” version of his work (a sort of “working-copy”), but he might have also revised his translation after having copied and diffused it among scholars (Fontaine 1995: xxi–xxviii).

A more literal, less “interpreted” version of a Greek philosophical text was made some decades after by another member of the Ibn Tibbons family: Moses ibn Tibbon, Samuel’s son, who worked in Provence as a philosopher and a translator of philosophical and scientific works in the period 1240–1283 c. In 1255, he translated into Hebrew, from the Arabic version by Ishāq ibn Ḥunayn, the *Paraphrase* of book XII (*lambda*) of Aristotle’s *Metaphysics* by the Greek rhetor and philosopher

Themistius (317–388). Themistius’ work includes a nonliteral reworking of the contents of Aristotle’s, according to a Neoplatonic interpretation of them; the original Greek text is lost, but the Arabic version of it is still extant. Moses ibn Tibbon’s translation is preserved by a number of manuscripts, and was published in a critical edition (Landauer 1903). A sixteenth-century Latin version of this translation, made by Moses Finzi, was first published in 1558; however, the best modern version of Themistius’ text as found in Arabic and Hebrew, which is based upon a tentative reconstruction of the contents of the original text, appeared in French (Themistius 1999). Moses ibn Tibbon also translated into Hebrew part of another Greek philosophical work: Pseudo-Aristotle’s *Physical Problems (Problemata physica)*. His literal translation was made in 1264 from the ninth-century Arabic version by Ḥunayn ibn Ishāq. This Arabic version, which is still extant, is not directly based upon the original text, but rather upon a later Greek revision of it, surely made after the end of the second century, maybe at the sixth-century by the Alexandrian school of Aristotle’s interpreters. The Hebrew version covers only the first 4 of the 17 books of the Arabic text; it is found in three manuscripts, and was published in a critical edition (Filius 1999: 663–793).

Zerahyah ben Isaac ben Shealtiel Hen was a Jewish philosopher and translator of philosophical and medical works from Arabic into Hebrew; he was from Barcelona, but worked in Rome in the period 1275–1290 c. He had a rather good knowledge of Arabic, a language that was almost unknown among Jews in Rome; for Roman Jews he wrote a number of translations, including those of some Greek-into-Arabic versions of Ancient philosophical works. His translations are usually literal, but are often marred by mistakes or omissions: he seems to have written many of them in the same period, possibly in a hurry. Some of Zerahyah’s versions probably aimed at creating a sort of *Corpus Aristotelicum Hebraicum*, a collection of works by and about Aristotle, which should have been a Jewish parallel to the Latin *Corpus* (Zonta 1996a: 222–225). According to what Zerahyah states in a passage of his *Corpus*,

he finished these versions in Rome in 1284; they included three important Greek philosophical works. The first and most interesting of them is Themistius' *Paraphrase* of Aristotle's *De caelo et mundo*. Zerahyah's translation of Themistius' work is very precious for the knowledge of it, since the text is lost both in its Greek original, and in its medieval Arabic version, apparently made by Yahyā ibn 'Adī, and no trace of another translation of it (in Syriac, or in medieval Latin) is extant. The Hebrew translation is preserved in four manuscripts. Two of them, dating back to the fifteenth century, were employed for the first edition of the work (Landauer 1902); however, the editor failed to notice the existence of the other two manuscripts. The most ancient of them, probably copied in Rome in 1284 and now in Florence (Biblioteca Nazionale Centrale, II.II.528), is surely the archetype of the textual tradition of the work, and should be employed for preparing a new critical edition of Themistius' *Paraphrase* (Zonta 1994a). As a matter of fact, also the partially reworked Latin translation of the text, made by Moses Alatino in 1568–1573, was apparently based upon this archetype.

Probably immediately after Themistius' *Paraphrase*, Zerahyah translated Aristotle's *De generatione et corruptione*. Here, the original Greek text is obviously extant; however, Zerahyah's translation is useful for the reconstruction of the medieval Arabic version of Aristotle's work. In fact, the original text of this Arabic version, probably made (according to Zerahyah's own statement) by Ishāq ibn Ḥunayn, is lost; its terminology and textual variants can be reconstructed both from Zerahyah's translation, and from another medieval translation of it: the Latin version by Gerard of Cremona (1175 circa). Something similar happens as for Zerahyah's translation of Aristotle's *De anima*: he rendered into Hebrew the first two books and chapters 1–7 of book III from Ishāq ibn Ḥunayn's lost Greek-into-Arabic version, made before 910, and chapters 7–13 of book III from another lost Greek-into-Arabic version, by Abū 'Alī 'Īsā ibn Zur'a (943–1008). Both translations by Zerahyah were published in critical editions (Tessier 1984; Bos 1994) on the basis of two extant manuscripts,

found in London and in Rome and copied in Italy during the fifteenth century. However, both editors failed to notice the existence of a third manuscript, found in Jerusalem (National Library of Israel, 4° 1108): the text of it, probably copied in the first quarter of the fifteenth century, is clearly independent from that of the other ones, and might be employed for correcting some points of them (Zonta 2007: 379).

Another important work by Aristotle was rendered into Hebrew, possibly in the same period when Zerahyah worked on his own translations: Aristotle's *Book on Animals* (*Liber de animalibus*). This was the name given by the medieval Latin tradition to the collection of the three main zoological works written by the Greek philosopher: the *Historia animalium*, the *De partibus animalium*, and the *De generatione animalium*, covering 19 books as a whole. The *Book on Animals* was translated into Hebrew neither from the Greek original text, nor from the Arabic translation ascribed to Ibn al-Biṭrīq, but from the Latin version of the latter, made by Michael Scot in southern Italy around 1220. The Hebrew translation was apparently made by a certain Samuel ha-Levi in an unknown date. It is preserved in four manuscripts, one of which (found in London, British Library) appears to be the oldest, and probably also the most faithful one: it was written down at the end of the thirteenth century, in Sephardic script, but it includes some glosses in a northern French dialect (Furlani 1922: 255–256). This fact would suggest that the translator was not Samuel ha-Levi Abulafia, who rendered from Castilian into Hebrew some scientific text around 1275, but another Hebrew scholar, having the same name but working in northern France. Since the translation was clearly employed as a source in Gershom ben Solomon's encyclopedia, *The Gate of Heavens* (1275–1300 circa), its possible date should be probably put not much before 1300 (Zonta 1996a: 195–196, 1999: 48–52).

A number of Arabic-into-Hebrew translations of Greek philosophical works were made by a well-known Jewish translator: Qalonymos ben Qalonymos of Arles (born around 1287 – died after 1328). He worked in Provence in the period

1307–1320 circa, and his translations covered many texts; some of them were made in a hurry, and were later corrected by other scholars – or even by Qalonymos himself – according to a reexamination of the Arabic text. In 1314, Qalonymos translated Nicolaus Damascenus’ *Book on Plants* (*De plantis*) from the Arabic translation by Ishāq ibn Ḥunayn and Thābit ibn Qurra. Qalonymos’ translation, found in some manuscripts, was published in a critical edition (Drossaart Lulofs and Poortman 1989: 407–436); however, it appears to be not very useful for the reconstruction of the lost Greek original text, since the latter is partially or totally transmitted through a number of other versions (into Syriac, Arabic, Latin, and even medieval Greek). The Spanish philosopher Shem Tov ibn Falaquera (1225–1295 circa), who knew and quoted some Greek philosophical texts in his own works (Zonta 2004), inserted into book IV of his own philosophical encyclopedia, *The Opinions of the Philosophers*, many passages from an otherwise unknown *Alexandrian Summary* (*Summa Alexandrinorum*) of Nicolaus’ *Book on Plants*, which he himself translated from Arabic into Hebrew (Drossaart Lulofs and Poortman 1989: 388–405; see also Zonta 1993: 337–340); however, this “summary” might be ‘Īsā ibn Zur‘a’s compendium of the Arabic translation of Nicolaus’ work.

In other cases, Qalonymos made an Arabic-into-Hebrew version of a Greek philosophical text from Averroes’ *Long Commentary* on it: in a *Long Commentary*, the Arabic translation of the Greek original text is divided into a number of passages, and each of these passages is commented on by Averroes himself in detail. By this way, Qalonymos translated three Aristotle’s works: the *Posterior Analytics*, the *Physics*, and the *Metaphysics*. Averroes’ *Long Commentary* on the *Posterior Analytics* was translated by Qalonymos at the end of 1314 (Steinschneider 1893: 95–96): it includes both books of the commentary, so being very useful for the reconstruction of the text of Averroes’ commentary on book II, which is lost in Arabic and is preserved by a medieval Latin translation only. (Its utility for the textual history of the still extant Arabic translation

of the *Posterior Analytics*, by Abū Bishr Mattā ibn Yūnus, has not yet been examined.) Around 1315, Qalonymos also translated Averroes’ *Long Commentary* on the *Physics* (Steinschneider 1893: 122–123). His version included Ishāq ibn Ḥunayn’s still extant Arabic translation of Aristotle’s text, and Averroes’ commentary on it, which is lost in its original text and is otherwise known in a medieval Latin translation. Possibly in the same period, Qalonymos might have translated Averroes’ *Long Commentary* on the *Metaphysics*: this translation was first edited and then totally revised by Moses ben Solomon of Salon, possibly a pupil of Qalonymos (Zonta 1996a: 243). Averroes’ commentary covers only books I–X and XII of Aristotle’s work. However, it is really important for the textual reconstruction of the Arabic transmission of the *Metaphysics*, since it is the only one extant witness of the medieval Arabic translations of some parts of it: that of book I, by Ishāq ibn Ḥunayn, that of book II, by Naẓīf ibn Ayman, and that of books III–X and XII, mostly by Eustathius. (Moreover, the original Arabic text of Averroes’ *Long Commentary* is transmitted by only one manuscript, where some parts of the text are missing, so that the Hebrew versions by Qalonymos and Moses of Salon, together with the medieval Latin version, have been very usefully employed for reconstructing and editing the whole text of Averroes’ work: Averroès, 1938–1952.)

Another important case of an Arabic-into-Hebrew translation of a Greek philosophical work made in Provence is that of Alexander of Aphrodisias’ *Book on the Soul* (*De anima*). This translation was based upon Ishāq ibn Ḥunayn’s medieval Arabic version, which is now lost; it covers only book I of the whole work, and was made by a contemporary of Qalonymos ben Qalonymos: Samuel ben Judah of Marseilles. Samuel stated in the introduction to his own translation (Berman 1978: 317–320) that he had written a first version of this work while he was in Murcia (Spain), in 1323, but revised this version later, while he was in Montélimar (Provence), in 1340. This revised version, preserved in three manuscripts, is not yet published (apart from an initial passage: Günsz 1886). However, it was

employed for the critical edition of the Greek text of Alexander's work (Brunns 1887), published in the series *Commentaria in Aristotelem Graeca*, whose apparatus includes a number of references to the variant readings found in the relevant passages of Samuel's translation (rendered into German). Samuel of Marseilles might have been the Arabic-into-Hebrew translator of another work, al-Fārābī's *Long Commentary* on Aristotle's *Categories*: a number of shorter or longer passages of an anonymous translation of this work, whose original Arabic text is lost, are found in the unique manuscript of a work by a late-medieval Jewish philosopher, Judah ben Isaac Cohen, and were published and translated into English (Zonta 2006c). Probably in the same period and in the same geographical area, another short work ascribed to Alexander of Aphrodisias was translated from Arabic into Hebrew: the *De intellectu*. This text was rendered into Hebrew as included into an Arabic commentary on it, Averroes' *Commentary on Alexander of Aphrodisias' On the Intellect*, which was based upon Ishāq ibn Ḥunayn's Greek-into-Arabic version. Averroes' work is transmitted by two ways. An incomplete copy of the original Arabic text, still extant in a Judeo-Arabic work by the Spanish Jewish philosopher Joseph ibn Waqqar (1360 c.) and translated into Hebrew, was published in a noncritical edition (Zonta 2001a). Another, direct Hebrew translation of the Arabic text of Averroes' work, covering only the first part of it, was probably made before 1340 and appeared in a critical edition (Davidson 1988); this translation was commented on by the Provençal Jewish philosopher Moses Narboni, who might have ordered it or even made it by himself. After 1350, only one Greek philosophical text was rendered into Hebrew from its Arabic version: a short book on the administration of the house, the *Economics*, ascribed to the Greek philosopher Bryson. The original text of "Bryson"'s work is lost, but its contents are preserved in some different medieval Arabic and Latin versions. One of these anonymous Arabic versions was translated into Hebrew by David ben Solomon ibn Ya'ish, a member of a famous family of Spanish Jewish physicians and scholars, who wrote it in Sevilla around 1375; Ibn

Ya'ish's Arabic-into-Hebrew translation, which is really very useful for reconstructing the lost original text of "Bryson"'s work, was published in a critical edition (Plessner 1928: 145–203).

In the fifteenth century, Arabic was no more the main and most important language of philosophy and science among European Jewish thinkers; a number of them, not only in Italy but also in Spain, read and employed medieval Latin texts instead. Therefore, some translations of Greek philosophical texts by Aristotle or ascribed to him, many of which were still ignored or almost neglected by Jewish philosophers, were made in this period. These translations were not based upon their Greek-into-Arabic versions, as most of the previous ones, but were made from the medieval Greek-into-Latin or Arabic-into-Latin ones. Around 1400, a Jewish physician of the king of Castile, Meir Alguadez, translated into Hebrew Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics* for another Jewish scholar, Benveniste ibn Labi. In his introduction to the translation (Steinschneider 1893: 210–212), he states to have based it upon a Latin version, since the extant Arabic version of the work, already translated into Hebrew (in reality, Averroes' *Middle Commentary* on the *Nicomachean Ethics*), was full of mistakes and alterations; he allegedly consulted also medieval Latin commentaries on Aristotle's work. Alguadez ascribes the Latin version he employed for his own translation to Boethius; in reality, a philologic–terminological analysis of Alguadez's version (Rothschild 1993: 697–698) shows that it was based upon the medieval Greek-into-Latin translation by Robert of Lincoln (d. 1253), as revised by William of Moerbeke around 1260–1270. Alguadez's Latin-into-Hebrew translation is found in a number of manuscripts; it was published in a noncritical edition, accompanied by a commentary, at the end of the eighteenth century (Satanow 1790). Another Latin-into-Hebrew translation of the *Nicomachean Ethics* was made later, by a Jewish philosopher and translator working in Castile or in southern Italy from 1460 (or 1480) to 1490 c.: Baruch ibn Ya'ish. The latter translation is preserved in only one manuscript, found in Hamburg; the analysis of some key-passages of it has shown that it was

based upon two fifteenth-century Greek-into-Latin versions of Aristotle's work, both of which were made in Italy: that by Leonardo Bruni of Arezzo, written in 1416–1420, and that by John Argiropoulos, going back to the period 1456–1470 (Zonta 1996a: 273–274). Ibn Ya'ish's translation was employed by Samuel Altortos, a pupil of him, for writing down a commentary on the *Nicomachean Ethics*, apparently based upon Ibn Ya'ish's own interpretation of Aristotle's words (Zonta 2006c: 111, 119–120).

In his above-mentioned introduction to the *Nicomachean Ethics*, Alguadez wrote that he intended to translate also Aristotle's *Economics* and *Politics*. In reality, although no Hebrew translation of Aristotle's *Politics* is extant, there were at least two anonymous, partial Latin-into-Hebrew translations of the *Economics* falsely ascribed to Aristotle (Zonta 1996a: 260–262, 274, b). Both of them include only book I and III of the work, about household and about the importance of having a good wife. The older translation, made before 1440 circa, is found in a number of manuscripts; in some of them, it includes an introduction, ascribed to a certain "Abraham ibn Tibbon," where it is stated that this work was based upon the original Greek text. The name of the translator appears to be fictitious, and was probably added by a later copyist for giving more value to the translation; the real translator might have been a Spanish Jew (maybe the Castilian Jewish philosopher Joseph ibn Shem Tov, died around 1460). This translation was based upon the Latin version of the *Economics* by Durand of Alvernia, made in Anagni near Rome in 1295, and was revised according to the commentary on Pseudo-Aristotle's *Economics* by Leonardo Bruni (1420–1421). Bruni himself retranslated books I and III of the *Economics* into Latin: this version was employed by another anonymous Jewish author (probably, Baruch ibn Ya'ish) for writing a new Latin-into-Hebrew translation of the pseudo-Aristotelian work, found in one manuscript (Zonta 2006c: 112).

Baruch ibn Ya'ish translated into Hebrew another work by Aristotle: books I–XII of the *Metaphysics*. Baruch based this translation, written around 1485 for Samuel Sarfati, upon the

thirteenth-century Greek-into-Latin version by William of Moerbeke (Steinschneider 1893: 157–158). This translation, preserved in some manuscripts, includes a long introduction by the translator: here, Baruch states that he made this work, since the previous Hebrew translation of the *Metaphysics*, based upon the Greek-into-Arabic version (found in Averroes' *Long Commentary*), was so altered with respect to the original Greek text, that not only its words, but even its contents were substantially different from those found in Aristotle's work. Another work, including an Aristotelian text, might have been translated from the Latin by Baruch ibn Ya'ish: Averroes' *Long Commentary* on Aristotle's *De anima*. An anonymous Hebrew translation of it, based upon the medieval Latin version ascribed to Michael Scot (first half of the thirteenth century), was made before 1470 circa, and is extant in four manuscripts. Very probably, the same translator rendered into Hebrew a Latin Scholastic work, John of Jandun's *Quaestiones in De anima* (Zonta 1994b; see also Zonta 2006c: 113–114); according to a hypothesis that has not yet been confirmed by sure proofs, this translator was Baruch ibn Ya'ish (Wolfson 1963: 100–104).

Also the first half of Aristotle's *Physics* was translated from Latin into Hebrew in the second half of the fifteenth century, and a great part of this translation is still extant. According to David Messer Leon, his father Judah Messer Leon wrote a very big commentary on books I–IV of the *Physics* while he was in Mantua (1473–1475); in this work, he reproduced and commented on not only Averroes' *Long* and *Middle Commentaries* on the *Physics*, but also the "Christian text" (in Hebrew: *ha-nusha' ha-nozrit*) of Aristotle's work. The original text of books I–III of Messer Leon's commentary was found in three manuscripts (two in Milan and one in Cambridge: Zonta 2001b); two more manuscripts (copied from the above ones) were found in Budapest and in Moscow (Zonta 2006c, 142 notes 24–25), while the text of book IV seems to be missing. From a philological examination of the text as found in the five extant manuscripts, it is clear that the above-mentioned "Christian text" employed by Judah Messer Leon was a Hebrew



translation of books I–IV of the *Physics* as found in the medieval Greek-into-Latin version by William of Moerbeke. Probably, the translator of Moerbeke's version was Messer Leon himself, who knew very well both Latin language and Latin texts about the *Physics* (Zonta 2006c: 214–280), and was a very important member of the fifteenth-century “Hebrew Scholasticism.”

## Cross-References

- ▶ Alexander of Aphrodisias and Arabic Aristotelianism
- ▶ Alexandrian Tradition into Arabic: Philosophy
- ▶ Aristotle, Arabic
- ▶ Arabic Philosophical Texts, Jewish Translations of
- ▶ Arabic Texts: Philosophy, Latin Translations of
- ▶ Aristotelianism in the Greek, Latin, Syriac, Arabic, and Hebrew Traditions
- ▶ al-Fārābī, Abū Naṣr
- ▶ Ibn Rushd, Muḥammad ibn Aḥmad al-Ḥafīd (Averroes)
- ▶ Plato, Arabic
- ▶ Porphyry, Arabic
- ▶ Thābit ibn Qurra
- ▶ Themistius, Arabic
- ▶ Translations from Greek into Arabic
- ▶ Yaḥyā ibn ‘Adī

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## Gregory Akindynos

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### Abstract

Gregory Akindynos (1300–1348) is one of the most important figures during the first phase of the hesychastic controversy in Byzantium. Practicing himself the hesychastic way of life, he attacked the main thesis of Palamas, who differentiates natural and creative energy of

God in connection with creation. He does not deny the essential uncreated energy of God, but he considers it identical to the divine essence itself. This energy is embraced by the creative energies of God. Akindynos' teaching is entirely Christological. According to him, there can be no other access to divinity except for Christ and the practicing of supernatural love, called forth by the sacramental participation. In order to prove his theses, Akindynos develops a precise hermeneutic teaching concerning the works of the Christian fathers.

## Biography

Gregory Akindynos was born about 1300 in Prilapos (Prilep). Gregory is his monastic name and Akindynos (faultless, trustworthy) is a byname. He received his education in Thessaloniki, studying predominantly rhetoric, ancient philosophy, and Christian literature. Among his teachers, one could mention Gregory Bryennios and Thomas Magistros. Toward the 1920s, he became acquainted with Gregory Palamas. Akindynos visited him after 1331 on the Athos and wanted to be introduced by him in the spiritual practice. In 1332, he moved once again to Thessaloniki, but after 1333, he stayed more often in Constantinople. In Thessaloniki, he met Barlaam of Calabria but did not become his student. In 1336, Palamas sent to Akindynos, who already knew the first version of Palamas' *Apodeictic Treatises* (1334), a letter in which he criticizes the syllogistic doctrine of Barlaam in his anti-Latin treatises. In regard to the problem of the possibility of an apodeictic syllogism concerning God, Akindynos defends the view of Palamas and rejects Barlaam's radical apophantics. Until 1341, he, himself practicing the hesychastic way of life (but not the psychosomatic technique), played the role of a mediator between Palamas and Barlaam. In the course of time, he got closer to the patriarch John XIV Kalekas and to the princess Irene Choumnena Paleologina, who supported him as her spiritual father. Akindynos, who acted meanwhile as the leader of one of the four main spiritual trends in Constantinople at the time, criticized in

1340 Barlaam's treatise *Against the Messalians* by attacking his view on the hesychastic prayer technique and on the light of transfiguration. He wrote five books altogether against Barlaam. This is the reason why he was indignant at his being made equal with Barlaam by the Council in July 1341, although the first doubt in him about the Palamite theology was already casted. During the Civil War, Akindynos carried out intense anti-Palamite activity. From that time, most of his texts are against Palamas, his *Antirrhethika* being the main work. In 1347, a Council explicitly condemned his doctrine, and John Cantacuzenos sent him into exile. Akindynos died before May 1348. In fact, he was anathematized only after his death by the Palamite molded Council of May 27, 1351, and his name was entered in the *Synodicon of Orthodoxy* among the heretics.

## The Doctrine

The activity of Akindynos is connected to the controversies of the time. He refutes the main thesis of Palamas who distinguishes, with regard to creation, one natural and one creative energy of God. According to Akindynos' critical account, this thesis points to an objective and real division of God in essence and energies, introduces multiplicity in the simplicity of divine nature, and, moreover, establishes a mediator between God and creation.

Akindynos himself differentiates between two uses of the term "energy." "Energy" in its improper sense denotes the natural qualities of God, which are identical with the indivisible divine essence. This highest "energy" is uncreated and not shared in, absolutely inaccessible and indeed invisible. "Energy" in its proper sense is used for the Charismata, Gifts, and the other creations of God, which are created for our good. This created energy is the visible action by which God's deeds are expressed. Unlike Barlaam, Akindynos does not deny the presence of the uncreated energies within creation. But the created grace is the bearer of the uncreated one, which enables the deification of man, i.e., the realization of the uncreated grace. The deification

takes place, thanks to the incarnation of the divine Logos. The teaching of Akindynos is entirely Christological. According to him there can be no other access to divinity except for Christ, the sacraments, and the practicing of supernatural love, called forth by the sacramental participation.

Akindynos does not reject the opportunity for man to participate in God, but he insists that the mystery of God and his actions are not intelligible. God can be partaken of only in the way the center of a circle is shared by all radii and the circumference of the circle; these do proceed from the center of the circle, without coinciding with it or comprising it completely. Here no distinction is presumed between essence and energies. It should be also noticed that by the different beings, God is partaken of in a different way, depending on the potential of their essence. This fact would remain completely unexplicable, Akindynos argues, if we had to do with a participation in the eternal divine essence, whereby it would necessarily be an eternal participation of the creature in God. Thus the created would be coeternal with the Creator.

The actual participation in God is not accomplished in the field of the essential being. It is likening to God through unification with Him within divine love. The participation in God is neither essential identity nor a possession of a common energy, but an interpersonal community of love. Love is characterized as an "uninhabited relation." A decisive peculiarity of this relation is the metaphysical gap between the loving and the loved. Within the relation of love takes place the union of man and God and exactly in it occurs the deification of man.

Akindynos does not accept the negative syllogistic of Barlaam. He claims that his own theses are based entirely on the tradition of the Fathers and their adequate interpretation. The authenticity is said to be the decisive criterion for the truth of the theological statements. Akindynos' argumentation relies fundamentally on literary critics, which is applied in terms of a scrupulous hermeneutic. The basic principle here is studying the language of the Fathers and separating the polemical, metaphorical, and analogical expressions from the properly dogmatic statements. From that point of view is raised the requirement

for taking also into consideration the spiritual context, in which the given text appeared, as well as the intertextual connections in which the concrete statement is made. Akindynos aims to show that Palamas uses the statements of the Fathers incorrectly, with no consideration for their own context, undertaking arbitrary abbreviations and even additions. Besides, Akindynos claims that Palamas did not comprehend the symbolic character of the theological discourse and its symbolic figures.

## Cross-References

- ▶ [Aristotelianism in the Greek, Latin, Syriac, Arabic, and Hebrew Traditions](#)
- ▶ [Barlaam of Calabria](#)
- ▶ [Demetrios Kydones](#)
- ▶ [Gregory Palamas](#)
- ▶ [Metaphysics, Byzantine](#)
- ▶ [Natural Philosophy, Byzantine](#)
- ▶ [Nicholas Chamaëtos Kabasilas](#)
- ▶ [Nikephoros Gregoras](#)
- ▶ [Philosophical Theology, Byzantine](#)
- ▶ [Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite](#)
- ▶ [Thomism, Byzantine](#)

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## Gregory of Rimini

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### Abstract

Gregory of Rimini (d. 1358) was an Italian member of the Augustinian Hermits active toward the middle of the fourteenth century. His major work of theology and philosophy, his commentary on the first and second book of Peter Lombard's *Sentences*, reveals a powerful and organized mind, widely read in the philosophical and theological literature from

antiquity to his own time, and unafraid of taking seemingly radical views on pressing issues of the day. He had a large impact on many areas of the Scholastic debate right into the sixteenth century. This entry concentrates on two of the most influential areas of his thought: his theory of cognition and his ideas on divine foreknowledge, predestination, and God's power to change the past.

## Life, Works, and Thought

The Augustinian Hermit Gregory of Rimini (aka *de Arimino*, *Ariminensis*) was born around 1300 in or near the Italian city of Rimini on the Adriatic coast, about 160 km south of Venice. He probably joined the Augustinians in his hometown, where he would have begun his elementary studies. We are uniquely fortunate to have detailed information about his career from a papal letter of January 1345, in which Clement VI supports Gregory's ambition to be promoted to master of theology at the University of Paris. The data the Pope provides suggest that the Augustinians sent Gregory to their Paris convent to study theology in 1322 or 1323, when Clement (Pierre Roger, OSB) was himself active in Paris as a theologian. For 6 years, Gregory remained at his order's main *studium generale*, attached to the university, where he would have learned the theories of John Duns Scotus, Durand of Saint Pourçain, and Peter Auriol, perhaps via contact with such Augustinian scholars as Gerard of Siena, James of Pamiers, and Michael of Massa.

From 1328 or 1329, his order assigned him to teach theology at important Augustinian *studia* in northern and central Italy: Bologna, Padua, and Perugia. Separate documentary evidence confirms that, at least from late 1332 to early 1337, Gregory was lector at the order's *studium* in Bologna, the city that housed the greatest law faculty of the medieval world. Since the General Chapter of the Augustinian Order was held at Siena in 1338, perhaps this was the occasion of his being transferred from Bologna. Clement's letter suggests that Gregory first went to Padua and then to Perugia, but it is possible that his stay in one of

those cities took place before his sojourn in Bologna. Although he could have come into contact with the works of the Oxford Franciscans William of Ockham and Walter Chatton while at Paris, it is probable that his extensive knowledge of their writings and certainly those of later Oxonian theologians, especially the Franciscan Adam Wodeham and the secular Richard FitzRalph, was acquired in Italy, whither exciting new English ideas had spread by the 1330s.

During the academic year 1340–1341, perhaps at the Augustinian General Chapter meeting in Montpellier in 1341, the Augustinians ordered Gregory to return to Paris, this time to teach as bachelor of theology at the central *studium* of his order's school system. After a year or two of preparation, it seems that Gregory delivered his lectures on the *Sentences* during the 1343–1344 school year. It is likely that Pope Clement's letter had the desired effect and that Gregory became Parisian master of theology in 1345. Traditionally, he would have been obliged to remain at Paris to act as regent master, and in 1345–1346 he would have presided over and determined a quodlibetal disputation while making revisions on his *Sentences* commentary, removing certain passages for the final written version (these deleted passages are known, counterintuitively, as the *additiones*, and have been included in the recent critical edition of Gregory's *Sentences* commentary).

In late 1346, as master of theology, Gregory was back home in Rimini, but in 1347 he was again teaching at the Augustinians' Padua *studium*. He spent several years in Padua, until in 1351 the Augustinian General Chapter at Basel assigned him to return again to Rimini to teach theology at the newly founded *studium* there. He was no doubt still based in Rimini when, on 20 May 1357, he was elected prior general of the Augustinian Order at the General Chapter held in Montpellier, replacing another towering figure in Augustinian theology, Thomas of Strasbourg. It was perhaps as prior general that Gregory produced his question on usury. He remained at the head of the order until his death in late 1358.

Gregory's doctrinal influence earned him the nicknames *Lucerna splendens*, *Doctor acutus* or

*authenticus*, and “Torturer of Infants.” Compared to most other major Scholastics, however, very little survives from Gregory’s pen. Some of his correspondence as prior general has been preserved, as well as biblical commentaries. A disputed question *De usura*, of philosophical interest, was printed in 1508 and 1622 (Kirshner 2015). But his reputation is built on his partial *Sentences* commentary based on his Paris lectures, covering the first two books of Lombard’s textbook. Numerous medieval manuscripts – 20 complete witnesses for book I alone – and some eight printings from 1482 to 1532 attest to its popularity, and at least one section, part 2 of book I, distinction 17, *De intensione et remissione formarum corporalium*, circulated as a separate treatise (see Loewe 2014 for a study of Rimini’s thought as found in this treatise). It is one of the few large theological works of the fourteenth century to have received a complete critical edition, in six volumes.

Gregory’s work is generally characterized by clear and well-organized exposition; he most often endeavors to distinguish and explain various senses of the most important terms he is using on any issue, thereafter dealing with a number of earlier and contemporary views on the matter, in the process giving his own opinion. His thought exhibits, in the terms of Damasus Trapp (1956), both a logico-critical attitude and a historico-critical attitude. The first of these involves a critical stance toward the elaborate metaphysical systems that were popular especially in the thirteenth century; it also involves privileging the extramental singular in both ontology and cognition. The second of these attitudes is characterized by an attention to detail when it comes to citing and quoting other thinkers, from very recent authors like Peter Auriol, William of Ockham, and Adam Wodeham, to important earlier writers like Aristotle, Anselm, and, most significant of all to Gregory, Augustine. In addition to those two attitudes, perusal of Gregory’s *Sentences* commentary reveals a thinker who routinely draws razor-sharp distinctions, constructs arguments and analyses of impressive logical rigor, and offers coherent and often startling positions on a great number

of issues. Indeed, Gregory was clearly rather uninhibited when it came to maintaining unusual views. Thus, he argued, against most of the Aristotelian tradition, for the possibility of actual infinities, prompting Anneliese Maier to call him “a radical infinitist” (Maier 1964: 82–84), and in defending this view and the consequences of it for the continuum Gregory develops an analysis of the infinite that “represents a huge advance on that of his predecessors and contemporaries” (Cross 1998: 109). In philosophical theology, Gregory argues for a fully deductive science of theology (Brown 1998: 653–655), he stresses God’s absolute simplicity to such a degree that he denies any distinction whatsoever between the divine attributes and the divine essence, and he develops a Trinitarian theology of radical minimalism on which person, personal property, and essence are all strictly identical, while nevertheless the one God is three really distinct persons (Friedman 2013: Chap. 12, Sect. 5).

### **Cognition, Philosophical Psychology, and Theory of Knowledge**

Gregory of Rimini developed a detailed theory of cognition that would be the subject of critical discussion into the sixteenth century. The foundation of his view is that cognition comes in two varieties: intuitive cognition involves no representational intermediaries, whereas abstractive cognition does involve representational intermediaries. The intermediaries at issue here were called “species.” Species were taken to be representational entities that came in several kinds. “Species in the medium” were held to convey information about some extramental thing from the thing itself to a cognizer’s external senses; “sensory species” were posited to convey that information further through a series of internal senses in the brain (e.g., common sense, imagination); and finally, as what was called an “intelligible species,” the relevant information was conveyed in immaterial form further still to the immaterial intellect. In addition to their role in

conveying information, species were appealed to as the means by which we could recall information that we had earlier obtained; thus, the species of, say, gold found in the imagination could be recalled even when not in the presence of gold, and upon recollection it could be used, for example, in creating an image of a golden mountain. Gregory's theory of cognition is predicated upon the adoption of the theory of species. This was not an entirely obvious move: many Scholastics in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries had rejected species outright, perhaps most famously William of Ockham. Gregory takes Ockham to task on several grounds. First, he claims that Ockham contradicted explicit and implicit testimony of the saints, and particularly St. Augustine. Second, he argues that certain cognitive functions that we know we have, like memory, are impossible to explain without the preservation of some representational entity; the representational entity in question is a species.

Gregory draws his account of species into the heart of his cognitive theory by basing upon it his own use of the then-popular distinction between intuitive and abstractive cognition. For Gregory, intuitive cognition is direct cognition of some object, and he holds that intuitive cognition is the foundation for all further cognition. In contrast, we have abstractive cognition when we perceive an object through some sort of representation, that is, through a species. In fact, all abstractive cognition is essentially linked with an intuitive cognition, inasmuch as an intuitive cognition of the species is a necessary precondition for having an abstractive cognition of the object represented by the species (if I just had an intuitive cognition of the species, without the further abstractive cognition, then I would be thinking about the species and not about what the species represents). This is why Gregory, again disagreeing with Ockham, claims that intuitive cognition has no necessary link with the existence of some extramental object (Tachau 1988: 358–370).

Thus, Gregory claims that intuitive cognition of singular extramental things is the origin of all our knowledge, providing us with the raw

material to then go on and remember, imagine, analyze, think, and reason. Gregory says:

the first knowledge of the intellect, namely by the primacy of generation, is intuitive knowledge of some sensible singular . . . if it were asked, which singular is that first knowledge of, it should be said that it is of that singular that first moves the senses with a sufficient motion, after the child is able to understand (*I Sent.*, d. 3, q. 3, in Gregory of Rimini 1979–1984, vol 1 [1981]: 409, ll. 2–4, 10–11).

Here we see clear evidence for Trapp's view that Gregory gave the singular extramental thing a privileged position in his philosophy (on Gregory's theory of cognition and esp. universal concepts, see now Girard 2017).

With regard to propositional knowledge, Gregory rejects the view of such important Scholastics as Ockham and John Buridan that thought has a compositional nature and further that concepts are arranged into mental propositions much like words are arranged into sentences in spoken and written language (i.e., as a mental language). Gregory claims instead that mental propositions are formed all at once as a unity; their semantic complexity is in no way mirrored by any compositionality of mental acts or objects. Gregory argues for this view by asking how else one could explain the difference between the following two mental propositions "every whiteness is an entity" and "every entity is a whiteness." In spoken or written language, these two sentences, one true and the other false, would be made unambiguously distinct by the spatial or temporal ordering of the component words. But there is no such ordering to be found in the immaterial intellect. Thus, according to Gregory, the only way to explain the distinction between the two propositions is to hold that mental propositions are formed all at once as a unity (Ashworth 1981: 73–75; Panaccio 1999: 292–296; Friedman 2009: 113–115). Although Gregory did not originate the "unity" view of the mental proposition, his name became associated with the position into the early modern period.

When we turn from mental propositions to mental attitudes like knowing and believing, we come to yet another development that Gregory



became renowned for: the *complexe significabile*. The view descends from the English theologian Adam Wodeham (d. 1358). Wodeham had claimed that the object of knowledge and belief is neither extramental things (Walter Chatton's view) nor propositions about extramental things (Ockham's view), but rather it is "what is able to be signified complexly" or "propositionally," that is, the *complexe significabile*, which he also says is the total object of a proposition. In trying to keep his ontology lean, Wodeham rejects that the *complexe significabile* is a thing; it is merely a mode of being, an item with a special ontological status outside of the Aristotelian categories and postulated solely to explain how our knowledge and beliefs can track reality. In adopting Wodeham's view, Gregory made several changes, including his explicit acceptance that, with the term "thing" understood correctly, one could call the *complexe significabile* a "thing." This lack of concern for strict ontological parsimony made Gregory's view a target for such later thinkers as Buridan (Zupko 1994–1997; Bermon 2007). It was through Gregory's work that Wodeham's *complexe significabile* was passed on to the continental universities, and thus it was in general his understanding of the position that was the center of attention into the sixteenth century (Ashworth 1978).

### **Philosophical Theology: Divine Foreknowledge, Predestination, and God's Power to Change the Past**

Gregory's doctrine and impact on the interrelated problems of divine foreknowledge and predestination have been well documented, and in addition, his view on God's power to change the past has received some attention. Gregory's treatment of foreknowledge is primarily in reaction to Peter Auriol's radical position from the 1310s. Auriol held that although we cannot comprehend how God knows the future, this occurs in a way that leaves propositions about the contingent future neither true nor false, but neutral. For Auriol,

this protected both the immutability of divine knowledge and the freedom of the human will, the main source of contingency in the world, for if anything, including foreknowledge and the truth or falsity of propositions, preceded the future, that future would be necessary, not contingent. In this, Auriol claimed the support of Aristotle in *De interpretatione*, ch. 9.

Gregory agreed with Auriol on some of these points: that how God knows the future is incomprehensible; that, contrary to the view of some prominent theologians, Aristotle had indeed denied that propositions about the contingent future are true or false; and even that true (and false) propositions about the future would always and immutably be true (or false) up until the time to which the propositions refer. But Gregory's conclusion is the opposite of Auriol's, for Aristotle and Auriol are mistaken: all propositions about the future are either true or false, since de facto either the Antichrist will exist or will not exist at time *x*, and therefore either "the Antichrist will exist at time *x*" is determinately true and "the Antichrist will not exist at time *x*" is determinately false, or vice versa.

Is the future not therefore necessary? Gregory appeals to elements of the common position that had been developing at Paris and Oxford, especially since the time of Scotus. Only God is absolutely necessary; all else is contingent, because God's will is free and acts contingently with respect to creation. Since it is logically possible for things to have been and to be other than they are, while it is nevertheless the case that true propositions about the contingent future have always been immutably and determinately true, ultimately those propositions are only contingently true and not necessarily so. Gregory went on to appeal to common logical devices, such as the distinctions between the composite and divided senses of propositions and between conditional and absolute necessity, to explain how there could be contingency – and human freedom – in the world (Schabel 2000: 264–274).

By the fourteenth century, discussions of predestination had often been reduced from a mass of

subtopics to the specific issue of whether humans play any role in their salvation and damnation and, if so, how. Following the late-antique controversy over pelagianism and semi-pelagianism, most early-medieval views tended to the opposite extreme and left little real room for human causality, even in the case of damnation. In the thirteenth century, the standard position was more nuanced, focusing on God as the cause of salvation and humans as the cause of damnation. Starting with Peter Auriol, a number of theologians proposed theories that tended toward semi-pelagianism, especially the Franciscans William of Ockham, Walter Chatton, and Gerald Odonis, and Gregory's confrere Thomas of Strasbourg (Schabel 2002).

Gregory of Rimini strove to destroy this trend. In a series of five conclusions, Gregory attacks every proposed solution. The first conclusion states that no one is predestined because of a good use of free will, that is, there is no positive cause of predestination on the part of those predestined. The second opposes Auriol: no one is predestined because it is foreknown that he will be without a habitual or actual obstacle to grace, which for Gregory means original or actual sin. The third is that predestination comes solely from God's mercy. Having thus rejected the positions that allowed for some human causation in salvation, Gregory goes much further. In conclusion four, he asserts that no one is reprobate because of a foreseen bad use of free will, and the final conclusion is that no one is reprobate because of a foreseen obstacle to grace. If Gregory had stopped with his third conclusion, his position would not have been very different from those of Aquinas and Scotus, but his last two conclusions put him in the company of some early medieval adherents of what has been called double-predestination, drastically limiting humans' causal role in the process of damnation (Vignaux 1934; Halverson 1998).

Can God change the past? Since Gregory asserts that the past is not strictly speaking necessary, but rather contingent, one might think that God can change the past. Yet Gregory never

asserts this, although he avoids denying it as well. Certainly for us the past is immutable and, unlike the future, we cannot make it so the past did not exist. Given his analysis of propositions that include past and future elements, such as "God foreknew that Peter would sin at time A," it seems that Gregory does maintain that the past simply cannot be changed. He writes:

One must know that some of the propositions about the past depend on the truth of some propositions about the future in order for them to be true, just as this proposition ['God foreknew that Peter is going to sin at time A']. For in order for it to be true, it is required that this proposition be true: 'Peter will sin at A,' which indeed is about the future. . . . But there are some propositions whose truths do not depend on the truths of any propositions about the future, for instance these: 'God created the world,' 'God was incarnated,' 'Peter was white,' and innumerable other propositions. But whatever the case about these last propositions, it is agreed concerning the first ones that they are contingent, if the propositions about the future, on which they depend, are contingent. . . . (I Sent., d. 38, q. 2, a. 3 in Gregory of Rimini 1979–1984, vol 3 [1984]: 302, l. 30–303, l. 5).

It seems, then, that Gregory does draw a modal distinction between the past and the future and that, in agreement with the Oxford *opinio communis* of his day, some sort of fixity applies to the past that does not apply to the future.

## Impact

Much further research is needed on the philosophy and theology written from the Black Death to the Reformation and beyond in order to determine with precision Gregory of Rimini's influence on later thinkers. We can already say, however, that Gregory's thought had a tremendous impact in the century after his activity. Thus, he exerted a pervasive influence on several leading Parisian theologians of the late fourteenth century, for example, the Cistercians Pierre Ceffons and James of Eltville and the secular Peter of Ailly. When Ailly's colleagues, Henry of Langenstein and Henry Totting of Oyta migrated to Vienna to establish the new university's theology faculty,

they brought Gregory of Rimini with them, notably in their positions on divine foreknowledge. For the next half century, if not longer, Gregory, via Langenstein and Oyta, was the explicit basis for the Viennese doctrine. More importantly, on predestination, where Langenstein and Oyta were largely silent, the Viennese adopted Gregory's teaching as well. Later, in the early sixteenth century, Gregory's ideas on mental propositions and the *complexe significabile* were the subject of a lively debate (Ashworth 1978: esp. 88–99, Ashworth 1981). In philosophical theology, there is evidence for *Gregoriistae* and a *via Gregorii* in the early sixteenth century, when Gregory's works were available in print, but whether this was a general trend or rather applies primarily to Augustinian Hermits or only to specific issues is a matter of debate. Given the limited scope of his pertinent surviving writings, the existence of a school of thought is *prima facie* questionable, yet his commentaries on the first two books of the *Sentences* provided a forum for discussion on a broad range of topics (Oberman 1981). There can be no doubt that Gregory's clear stance on the issues of divine foreknowledge, grace, and above all predestination remained current throughout the later Middle Ages. Gregory's position was more extremely predestinarian than that of any other major Scholastic, and the importance of his view at Vienna—arguably the leading university in Germanic lands – and beyond suggests that Martin Luther had to have known early on about the main later medieval advocate of the doctrine that he himself would famously defend. Indeed, Luther singles out Gregory as the one scholastic who upholds the true Augustinian doctrine of predestination (Oberman 2002: 123–124).

## Cross-References

- ▶ Adam Wodeham
- ▶ Durand of St. Pourçain
- ▶ Gerald Odonis
- ▶ John Buridan
- ▶ John Duns Scotus
- ▶ Michael of Massa

- ▶ Peter Auriol
- ▶ Peter Lombard
- ▶ Peter of Ailly
- ▶ Richard Fitzralph
- ▶ Walter Chatton
- ▶ William of Ockham

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## Gregory Palamas

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### Abstract

Gregory Palamas (1296–1357) is the acknowledged systematizer of Hesychasm. His philosophical–theological synthesis is focused on the so-called “energy” doctrine. According to this doctrine, every existing essence has its powers and expresses two types of energies or activities, which can be defined, respectively, as “causal” and “existential”; though the essence of every being remains unknowable in itself, it becomes knowable by means of its realization in action. The energies of the first type have a beginning and an end in their end product, while the latter are the very life of the essence, their existential expression *ad extra*. Palamas is regarded as the last teacher of Orthodoxy hitherto, and his doctrine underlies the theological systems of the contemporary Orthodox Churches.

**Biography** Gregory Palamas was born in Constantinople in the family of the senator Constantine Palamas. He received classical education for the purpose of a public career. Among his teachers, one mentions Theodore Metochites by whom Palamas, among other things, gained knowledge of Aristotle's doctrines. In 1314, however, he chose the monastic life and went to Athos. For 2 years, he was under the spiritual guidance of the hesychast Nikodemos. After his death (1316), Palamas became a monk in the Great Laura. During the Turkish invasion in Athos, he went in 1322 to Thessaloniki, where he was ordained to priesthood. In 1326, he became a hermit near Veroia. In 1331, he was again in Athos as a hermit at St. Sabbas. In 1333–1334, he was an abbot of the Esphigmenu monastery. His first writings date from this time.

In the second half of the 1330s, within the course of the disputation with Barlaam, he began to expose

his teaching in written form as a polemic defense of hesychasm and systematization of the hesychastic views. The first part of the debate (1335–1337) concerned the possibility of constructing apodeictic syllogisms about divinity and the way of applying Aristotle’s doctrine and apophatic theology; thus knowing God and the limits of knowledge were put into question. Meanwhile, Barlaam attacked the practice of the hesychasts. Central was the question as to whether the Tabor light, the vision of which the hesychasts experienced, is created or not. This phase of the hesychast controversy ended in 1341 through the official acceptance of the Palamite teaching and the condemnation of Barlaam. The second phase, which was marked by the controversy with Gregory Akindynos, developed during the period of the Civil War in the Byzantine Empire (1341–1347) and was strongly politically colored as Palamas and his followers supported Kantakouzenos’ party. Palamas was temporarily put in prison, and a synod called by the patriarch John XIV Kalekas excommunicated him on November 4, 1444. After Kantakouzenos ascended the throne (1347), Palamas was ordained bishop of Thessaloniki. At that time began the attacks of Nikephoros Gregoras against Palamas. The synod of 1351 anathematized Barlaam and Akindynos, reprehended Gregoras and his followers severely, and proclaimed Palamas’ doctrine a dogma. This state of affairs did not change even after the dethronement of Kantakouzenos (1354). The last years of his life was devoted to his duties as a bishop. He died on November 4, 1357. The council of 1368 declared him a saint. Palamas is considered as the last teacher of Orthodoxy hitherto, and his teaching is accepted as the official doctrine of the contemporary Orthodox Churches.

Among the writings of Palamas, one should mention the two published 1335–1336 treatises about the procession of the Holy Spirit as well as the *Anepigraphae*, directed against John XI Bekkos. As his main writing one considers the *Triads*, produced between 1338 and 1340, which contains a polemic defense of the hesychastic way of life. Worth mentioning is the dialogue *Theophanes* which appeared in 1343. An important source is the detailed *Antirrhetika* against Gregory Akindynos and Nikephoros Gregoras.

The mature works of Palamas are the *150 Psychological, Theological and Ethical Chapters* that elucidate in systematic form the Palamite mode of thinking. Palamas is also the author of a large number of small treatises, letters, and 63 homilies.

## The Doctrine

The focus of Palamas’ system is the so-called “energy” doctrine, which is developed by him to its ultimate consequences. This doctrine, being based on Book IX of Aristotle’s *Metaphysics*, was discussed by the Aristotelian commentators and especially by the Neoplatonists and, as early as the fourth century, a number of prominent Greek-speaking theologians adopted it in their teachings. It constitutes a crucial element of the metaphysical views of most of the Byzantine philosophers and theologians, however, without necessarily being the center of those doctrines. According to this doctrine, each existing essence has its powers and gives expression to two types of energies or activities, which can be defined, respectively, as “causal” and “existential”; though the essence of every being remains unknowable in itself, it becomes knowable by means of its realization in action. The energies of the first type have a beginning and an end in their end product, while the latter are the very life of the essence, its existential expression *ad extra*. From this perspective Palamas differentiates the creative and the deifying energy of God. According to Palamas, the saints are able, without becoming God by nature, to receive by grace the very essential or natural energy of God, which is uncreated and defined as the proper divine existence. The energies are realities (*pragmata*) but not essences (*ousiai*). The energy is not identical with the essence, nor does it constitute a separate substance, being the activity of the essence par excellence. This distinction is neither conceptual nor yet a real division (*pragmatike diairesis*); it is rather an actual differentiation (*pragmatike diakrisis*). Anyway, Palamas does not identify the distinction in a strictly logical manner. This is done only by George (Gennadius II) Scholarius.



The Light of Tabor is, according to the hesychasts, the expression of the natural divine energy on the part of Christ. The participation in this energy is exactly the deification, which can be received already in this life. In this connection Palamas underlines the free cooperation (*synergia*) of man; with the experience of the divine, man lives the life of God in God Himself. The Palamite Christocentrism is based exactly on the personal presence of the Savior – by essence, by energy, and by hypostasis – in history. Through Christ people obtain the possibility of direct communion with God, not mediated, say, by the hierarchy of angels. This existential participation in the essential energies of God does in no way replace the sacramental participation. It rather presupposes the sacramental life in Christ and is construed by Palamas precisely on the basis of the Eucharist.

Palamas does not underestimate the natural intellect and philosophy; he treats them as divine gifts, which are the condition and the cause of any knowledge. Thereby God is recognized as the cause of being. Nevertheless, the knowledge of God achieved in this way by man is only partial. The proper knowledge of God is the direct vision of the natural divine energy. This supernatural light is given to all, but only the saints see it. It is a positive existential experience and practice beyond rational knowledge, including the speculative theology. This positive experience goes beyond the cataphatic as well as the apophatic way of knowing God. Palamas does not refer to a next phase in the process of knowing, but to another sphere of knowledge, which is the field of true encounter with the living God. Both spheres of knowledge are not only subordinated but also coordinated within man.

Palamas insists that human nature is superior to that of the angels, precisely because man has flesh. This is why man receives life not only as essence but also as energy and man's spirit (*pneuma*) is life given to the body. Exactly, the body is the organ which coordinates between the natural and supernatural energies of man that are subordinated in the *nous* and are sent out of the flesh in the world. Palamas rejects the psychological interpretation of man and considers human beings as

psychosomatic entities; thus the stress is not on the nature, but on the hypostasis, which is conceptualized as the boundary and the center of the world.

## Cross-References

- ▶ [Aristotelianism in the Greek, Latin, Syriac, Arabic, and Hebrew Traditions](#)
- ▶ [Gregory Akindynos](#)
- ▶ [Metaphysics, Byzantine](#)
- ▶ [Natural Philosophy, Byzantine](#)
- ▶ [Nicholas Chamaëtos Kabasilas](#)
- ▶ [Nikephoros Gregoras](#)
- ▶ [Philosophical Theology, Byzantine](#)
- ▶ [Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite](#)
- ▶ [Thomism, Byzantine](#)

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## Guido Terreni

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### Abstract

Best known for his theological works, the early fourteenth-century Carmelite Guido Terreni demonstrated considerable independence and originality in his philosophical views. A follower of Godfrey of Fontaines and Aquinas, his defense of Aristotelian positions sometimes took novel turns, and he departed from Aristotle in important respects, for example, on forms. He denied that universals actually exist, challenged Aquinas' definition of natural law and the derivation of human law, and developed economic theories that may have influenced Buridan and Oresme.

Born in Perpignan around 1270, Guido Terreni (Gui Terré, Guiu Terrena) entered the Carmelite order at an early age. He studied with Godfrey of Fontaines at Paris near the turn of the fourteenth century and by 1312 was the third Parisian master of theology produced by his order. From 1313 to 1317 Guido served as Carmelite regent master at Paris; his students included fellow-Carmelites Sibert of Beek and John Baconthorpe. Elected Prior General of the Carmelites in 1318, Guido became a prominent theological advisor to Pope John XXII. In 1321 he was elevated to the bishopric of Majorca; in 1332 he was transferred to the diocese of Elné. Throughout this period, he continued to produce theological commentaries and polemics. Guido died in 1342. He is

commonly called “Doctor Breviloquus” or “Doctor Mellifluus.”

As a master of theology Guido was very active, producing not only a commentary on the *Sentences* of Peter Lombard but at least six quodlibets, 13 *quaestiones disputatae*, 12 *quaestiones ordinariae*, and commentaries on Aristotle's *Nichomachean Ethics*, *Physics*, *Metaphysics*, *Politics*, and *De anima*. His major theological works are the *Concordia evangelica* (a Gospel harmony), a commentary on Gratian's *Decretum*, a *Summa de haeresibus*, and two major responses on the Franciscan poverty question, the *De perfectione vitae* and its subsequent *Defensorium de perfectione vitae*. These works insured Guido's reputation. Particularly important were the *Summa de haeresibus* and the *Concordia evangelica*, both on subjects of broad interest. They were widely distributed in manuscript and early modern printed editions.

Guido's works on philosophical subjects were less fortunate. The Carmelites came late to the medieval universities and never had a large representation there; consequently, they failed to construct the apparatus necessary to assure the widespread copying of their masters' works. This seems the reason that many of Guido's early works are no longer extant, including his commentaries on the *Physics*, *Politics*, *Metaphysics*, and the *Sentences*. The loss of the latter has been particularly serious for scholars, as these lectures contain key elements of a medieval philosopher's thought early in his career. Guido did address many of the most important philosophical questions of his era in other - surviving works - his quodlibetal questions and commentaries on the *Ethics*, *Physics*, and *De anima* - but these too present difficulties. The quodlibetal questions are preserved in a single, corrupt manuscript, and the commentary on the *De anima* survives only in fragments reproduced in topical manuscript collections and in Guido's later theological works.

Generally, Guido Terreni adhered to the views of his master Godfrey of Fontaines on major questions; however, his philosophy also shows the strong influence of Thomas Aquinas, Durand of Saint-Pourçain, and other prominent

Dominicans. For example, on the problem of knowledge he followed Thomas and Godfrey, but on lesser questions he took eclectic positions that he felt conformed with the views of the church fathers. His theological discussions also reflect a serious concern to harmonize patristic and modern thought.

The surviving questions of Guido's *De anima* give a clear picture of his views on the intellect and knowledge. The intellect is prior to the will both in knowledge and in the contemplation of God. While charity can be said to be prior in a relative sense during the soul's earthly life, knowledge (vision) is prior in an absolute sense in that it will be the happiness the soul will ultimately enjoy. Terreni's approach to the problem of knowledge generally follows Aristotle. Humans can understand the essences of things through the action of the agent intellect alone. No special illumination of the sort posited by Augustine is necessary. The knowledge thus gained must be knowledge of the essences of things, because only that which has being can effectively move the intellect or more generally act as causes. Accidents, perceived in mere sensory experiences, cannot effectively cause, as they have being only in a secondary sense. Any epistemological theory that holds that the senses bring knowledge must be wrong. Guido even contends that interpreters of Augustine have misunderstood his meaning regarding illumination. The light Augustine speaks of is, according to Terreni, the light of the agent intellect as it participates in the divine light.

Guido holds that the sensitive and vegetative powers reside in the composite of body and soul, while the intellect and will reside only in the soul. The intellect issues directly from the soul, and the will issues from the intellect, because only one effect can flow immediately from one principle that is entirely simple. The intellectual soul relative to its faculties is not active, but passive or potential, just as any subject contains its faculties only potentially. Guido also identifies the agent intellect with the possible intellect on the grounds that realities should not be multiplied without reason. (Here he contradicts his commentary on the *Ethics*, which distinguishes the two

intellects). On the relation of the faculties of the soul to the essence of the soul, Guido maintains that the faculties are different from the soul and are permanent qualities – again, because only one effect can follow from a simple principle.

The soul is humanity's substantial form, according to Terreni. For him, this means that it is found in every part of the body because all forms are extended in their quantified matter. His demonstration that the human powers of intellect and will are spiritual rather than organically based ignores Aquinas's argument that the intellect is immaterial because humans can comprehend general concepts and instead relies on the human capacity to understand infinity. Since no material thing is infinite, Guido declares, the intellect that gives humans the capacity to understand infinity must itself be immaterial.

Guido denies that universals actually exist. For him, they are only discernible resemblances between substances that are, in fact, individually distinct. Their resemblance is merely a relation based in substances being compared and discernible to the intellect, that is, a conformity of sense perceptions. Thus, genus and species are conformities of sense perception; they differ only in that species are predicated less generally than genera. The influence of Godfrey of Fontaines, Gerard of Bologna, and Henry of Harclay is clear in this discussion.

Guido's treatment of forms varies from Aristotle's in some respects. For Guido, form is the principle of individuation. Responding to Scotus's claim that things can be formally distinct without being really distinct, he argues that, since forms are real, a formal distinction is a real distinction. The same form can be both identical to another form and different from it, depending on how it is related to other things. And formalities may differ in that one form may connote something another does not, despite being identified in the same subject. Guido rejects Richard of Mediavilla's claim that forms can evolve into one another by citing the traditional Aristotelian notion that substantial change occurs suddenly, after a number of accidental changes. He also denies Giles of Rome's assertion that accidental forms can vary.

Although Guido stays close to Aristotelian and Dominican teachings, his solutions can be surprising and creative. For example, the analysis of economic theory found in his commentary on the *Ethics* and his *De perfectione vitae* offers an apparent defense of the Aristotelian virtues that depend on wealth, such as magnanimity. These were normally ignored or viewed suspiciously by later Christian theorists. Further, Guido provides an unusually sophisticated analysis of supply and demand conditions as determinants of value and demonstrates an understanding of the economic impact of government alteration of money, especially the debasement of coinage, that may well have influenced Buridan and Oresme decades later. Similarly, Guido proposes a unique perspective on law. Inspired by Aquinas but simplifying his position considerably, Guido defines natural law as the act of human reason – not the power of reason, as Aquinas had said, but the act, functioning properly and with God’s grace. In opposition to Thomas, Guido declares that all human laws are derived from natural law, as long as they are either direct conclusions or remote deductions from common principles. And on the nature of final cause, Terreni vigorously defends the view that an end in its intentional being is a real cause.

His unusual views on the rational soul, on universals, and on ethics distinguish Guido Terreni as a philosopher. The extent of his influence on subsequent scholarly debate is still to be determined.

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# H

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## Happiness

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### Abstract

The medieval concept of happiness has its origins in the writings of Aristotle and Augustine. Both Aristotle and Augustine posit a single end for all human moral activity: for Aristotle that end is *eudaimonia*, the perfection of the potentialities within the human soul; for Augustine that end is beatitude, the eternal perfection of the soul granted by God. For centuries, Augustine's ideal dominated medieval moral thought, but in the thirteenth century medieval authors had to confront philosophical challenges to the Christian understanding of human perfection. The earliest commentators on the Ethics of Aristotle understood Aristotle's notion of happiness as a perfect activity of the soul as support for their own belief in the possibility of the perfection of the beatified soul. The writings of Robert Kilwardby, Albert the Great, and Thomas Aquinas redirected the attention of medieval authors to questions of the relation between earthly happiness and perfect beatitude, the cause of happiness, and the function of moral and intellectual virtues as the foundation of human goodness. Aristotle's notion of

happiness never supplanted the Augustinian view of human purpose, as is evident in the criticisms of the philosophical doctrine of happiness by Henry of Ghent, John Duns Scotus, and William of Ockham.

The intellectual antecedents to the medieval understanding of the ideal of happiness lie in the writings of Aristotle and Augustine. Augustine's influence on the doctrine of happiness remained generally unchallenged until the beginning of the thirteenth century when Aristotle's Nicomachean Ethics became an integral part of the curriculum of the arts faculties of the universities of western Europe. Aristotle considers the goal of ethical deliberation to be the determination of the nature of happiness (*eudaimonia*). Despite the verbal agreement concerning the definition of happiness as living and acting well, opinions differ concerning its true nature. Aristotle seeks to refine the notion of happiness by describing the essential characteristics of that end which all human beings seek. Happiness must also be that which is desired for its own sake, and never as a means to attain a superior goal (*Nicomachean Ethics* = NE, 1097a28–29). Aristotle restricts his investigation to a search for a practical good, since were a separate supreme good to exist, it would contribute little to an understanding of human moral purpose (NE, 1096a30–35).

The general characteristic of happiness as a final, self-sufficient end to which all actions are

directed tells little about its specific nature, as Aristotle freely admits. In order to determine specifically human goodness, one must examine the proper function of human beings (NE, 1097b29–35). Aristotle considers the most proper human actions to originate in the soul, and the most fitting human existence to be the active life of the rational faculty (NE, 1098a3–4). Aristotle’s preliminary discussions on the nature of human goodness conclude with his summary of the prerequisites for happiness: the human function is a certain kind of life, which is an activity of the soul in accordance with reason; and the performance of this activity must harmonize with what a good person does according to his own particular excellence or virtue (NE, 1098a13–16). The acceptance of these conditions leads Aristotle to formulate his own definition of happiness as of happiness as a final, self-sufficient end to which all actions are directed, and if there are more than one virtue in accordance with the best and most complete (NE, 1098a17–18). The inclusion of the phrase, “more than one virtue,” has provoked much discussion concerning the exact meaning of Aristotelian happiness, both in the medieval and modern eras. Aristotle at times seems to indicate that happiness consists in the supreme human activity of intellectual contemplation to which all other actions must be directed. At other times he seems to claim that only a life of both intellectual and moral virtue can make a person truly happy (Cooper 1975; Nussbaum 1986). In Aristotle’s view, the one who can best resolve the conflicting demands of the theoretical and practical lives is the *phronimos*, the person of practical wisdom. The practically wise can know what is good for the individual and the society and the best means to attain it (Celano 2015). Aristotle also implies a distinction between the essential nature of happiness (*eudaimonia*) and the life of virtue blessed with all the benefits of good fortune (*to makarion*). These topics were examined most carefully in the medieval commentaries of the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries. Whatever the ultimate determination of these questions may be, Aristotle clearly viewed happiness as a human activity that could be attained by human efforts within a lifetime.

Augustine, like Aristotle, considers human goodness to be a self-sufficient end toward which all human activities are directed. Despite modern translations that often render the words, *beatitudo*” and “*beatus*,” as “happiness” and “happy,” Augustine generally distinguishes between the concepts of happiness and beatitude. His preferred notion of human goodness is beatitude, which consists in the eternal life granted by God. Augustine interprets Paul’s exhortation to the Thessalonians to desire without cessation (5, 17) as a reference to the blessed life which is nothing other than eternal existence given by God alone (*Epistula* 130, 4, 9). Earlier in the same letter, Augustine compares earthly happiness (*felicitas*) unfavorably with eternal beatitude. He admonishes Christians not to consider themselves to be great because they enjoy those pleasures that flow only from a fountain of earthly happiness (*terrenae felicitatis*). Augustine advises them to condemn and scorn these things. (*Epistula* 130, 3, 7). In another letter Augustine again dismisses temporal happiness (*felicitas*) in favor of the beatitude whereby the soul becomes blessed (*beata*) when its mutable nature is turned to the immutable good (*Epistula*, 140 2, 3 and 23, 56).

Augustine’s understanding of the nature of true beatitude remains remarkably consistent throughout his long and prolific literary career. In an early work devoted specifically to the topic of goodness and beatitude, the *De beata vita*, Augustine argues that the possession of what one desires brings beatitude. He adds another condition that one must desire, and pursue, only good things. Augustine then excludes transitory goods from those objects that could possibly bring beatitude, since he notes that all of these objects of desire may be lost. Even when they are in our possession we fear that we may lose them. Augustine makes the same arguments in the tenth book of the *Confessions* (X, 25) and letter 130. What completes the soul and fulfills human desire is wisdom, and true wisdom for Augustine is the recognition of divine truth. Augustine claims that the full satisfaction of the soul is the blessed life, which is gained through the pious and complete recognition of God through whom one is led to the truth enjoyed in the highest manner (*De beata vita* 4, 35;

*Confessions* 10, 22). In book II of *De libero arbitrio* Augustine argues that no one can become blessed except by means of the supreme good, which is discovered in the truth called wisdom (*De libero arbitrio* II, 9, 26; *Confessions* 10, 24). Despite the doubts of his student, Evodius, Augustine argues that a common, immutable and objective truth, which is separate from, and superior to, the human mind is the supreme good that reveals all true goodness. Only one who enjoys this truth is indeed blessed (*beatus*) (*De libero arbitrio*, II, 13, 36). Early in his career Augustine relies on both philosophical and scriptural arguments to determine the nature of wisdom and beatitude. He praises the conclusions of the Platonists that he views as harmonious with the sacred truths of Christianity (*Contra academicos*, III, 20, 43), but later in his *Retractiones* Augustine regrets his praise of human reason, since it could bring great errors to Christian belief (*Retractiones* I, 14). In the *Retractiones* Augustine doubts seriously the ability of human reason to bring one to beatitude. He admits that as far as human nature is concerned nothing is better in mankind than mind and reason. One who seeks beatitude, however, should not live according to that mind, for then one would live according to man, whereas to attain beatitude one must live according to God. In order to achieve beatitude the mind should not be content with itself, but should subject itself to God (*Retractiones* I, 12).

While the moral doctrines of Boethius, Anselm, and Abelard are interesting, and at times innovative, they do not significantly alter the Augustinian ideal of human goodness. The primary challenge to Augustine's notion of beatitude occurs in the thirteenth century when the *Nicomachean Ethics* was translated into Latin (Wieland 1981). The earliest commentators on the *Ethica vetus* (books II and III of the NE) and the *Ethica nova* (book I) failed to notice any great difference between Aristotle's and Augustine's concepts of human goodness. The early attempts to understand Aristotle's ideal of happiness were based upon its designation as a perfect activity of the soul. To these Christian authors no act could be more perfect than the soul's union with God. They, therefore, understood Boethius' definition

of beatitude as a "perfect state with an accumulation of all goods" to be a fitting definition of the supreme human activity (Celano 2006). An anonymous commentator on the *Ethica nova* considers the Aristotelian and Boethian notions of human goodness to be similar when he claims happiness to be nothing other than ultimate perfection. This perfection is the delight in the union of potency with its own act. This commentator, while explaining the text of Aristotle, signals his preference for the teachings of Augustine and Boethius when he uses terms such as "perfection" and "delight" to describe the union of the soul with the Supreme Being. Like other authors of this period he shifts the emphasis from the soul's activity to the divine object of contemplative action. Happiness, therefore, actualizes every potential within the soul by apprehending and contemplating the first cause (Tracey 2006).

Another anonymous commentator of this era understands happiness to be the unqualified perfection of the soul. All human endeavors become merely means whereby the soul is joined to the Supreme Being, and this being is happiness in the proper sense. Human beings cannot attain happiness through their virtuous activities; they can only be joined to happiness as the Supreme Being itself (Gauthier 1975). This understanding of the meaning of happiness appears in the works of the commentator erroneously identified as John Pecham, Arnoul of Provence and the compiler of the examination guide for students in the Arts Faculty at Paris (Celano 2006). During this early period of assimilating Aristotle's ethics, Robert Kilwardby distinguishes clearly between the philosophical ideal of happiness and the Christian belief in perfect beatitude. He limits Boethius' definition of beatitude to what is "perfect" in the genus of human operations. He no longer views happiness as a separate object to which one is united, but rather restricts it to the perfection of the potential within the human soul. Happiness, as determined by Aristotle, is an act (*opus*) that is proper to a human being *qua* human, and cannot be the absolute perfection of the separate soul. Kilwardby argues that his contemporaries misunderstood Aristotle's definition of happiness as the perfect activity of the soul. For Kilwardby, a



concept of limited perfection within a genus is necessary to understand the meaning of Aristotle's central idea of moral goodness properly. Kilwardby, like Albert and Thomas, allows for the possibility that Aristotle thought the absolute perfection of the separate soul to be possible, but he dismisses such a discussion as irrelevant to philosophical speculation (Celano 1999).

Albert the Great's early work on goodness, the *De natura boni*, contains a notion of happiness heavily influenced by the insights of Augustine and Boethius. Albert considers the ultimate perfection of the soul to be unattainable through human efforts, since no one can comprehend God without error. Through its own powers the soul may perform virtuous acts that merely prepare it for the reception of the supreme perfection of beatitude. Albert's *De bono*, however, represents a transitional phase in his understanding of happiness and beatitude, since he considers the question both in Aristotelian and Augustinian terms. Albert provides in the first Latin commentary on the entire text of the *Nicomachean Ethics*, the *Super ethica*, his most profound and complex determination of the questions concerning human happiness. Albert here concentrates upon the problem of human happiness on earth, and relegates the problem of the absolute perfection of the soul to theological considerations (Müller 2001). The unifying element within moral theory is contemplative happiness, the intellectual activity of wisdom that elicits and completes all other human acts. The practical realm is governed by prudence, which is the primary operation of civic happiness, and to which all moral virtues are directed. Albert so closely identifies the habit of civic happiness with that of prudence itself that he says civic happiness is the activity of prudence, which regulates and determines all other moral virtues. Albert's understanding of the directive force of the virtues of wisdom and prudence leads him to conclude that there are two distinct human ends: (1) civic happiness, which is ordered to (2) contemplative happiness. The former happiness disposes a human being to the latter by calming passions and permitting uninterrupted intellectual activity. By identifying the goal of contemplation, and therefore all human endeavors, to be

knowledge of the first being, Albert believes his interpretation to be consistent with the intention of Aristotle. Albert seeks to define human goodness only insofar as it falls within the category of *operata bona*. Although the division of happiness into two distinct types, each complete within its own order, is a misreading of Aristotle's own doctrine, Albert's explanation of happiness had enormous influence on subsequent commentaries on the *Nicomachean Ethics*. In the thirteenth century only Thomas Aquinas and Boethius of Dacia rejected Albert's interpretation in favor of a unified concept of happiness, in which both contemplation and moral practice contribute to the single human goal of happiness (Celano 1987).

In his commentary on the *Nicomachean Ethics* Thomas Aquinas limits his discussion to a consideration of the supreme end among all human actions (*summum omnium operatorum*). Thomas' distinction between the philosopher's *felicitas* and the theologian's *beatitudo* permits him in his philosophical works to concentrate upon the way in which a person attains human happiness during a lifetime. Aristotle's praise of the contemplative life convinces Thomas that happiness results from the exercise of the soul's intellectual abilities. While both Albert and Thomas understand contemplation to be the supreme achievement of a human being, Thomas does not divide the intellectual and moral virtues into two distinct types of happiness (*due felicitates*). He regards these virtues as complementary elements of human perfection, which together constitute human happiness.

Since contemplative activity is essential to the attainment of happiness, Thomas must identify that object which best perfects the intellect. He concludes that happiness is achieved through an intellectual union of man with God. This knowledge of God is, however, imperfect and interrupted while the soul remains joined to the body. The natural desire of humans to know leads them to speculate metaphysically upon the nature, and primary cause, of all being. Even Aristotle argued that the object of metaphysics is divine, and that no one can be happy without some knowledge of the first being. In this way the pursuit of philosophical knowledge and the desire for religious illumination are similar. In order to

explain the concept of a single universal end for individual human beings, and to account for individual accomplishment of such an end, Thomas in the *Summa theologiae* divides the goal of human actions into the *finis cuius* (the end of which) and the *finis quo* (the end by which). The former term refers to the first being, which is the exact same object of contemplation for all; the latter term designates the activities of individual human whereby happiness is achieved, and which may differ according to the levels of virtue attained.

Thomas follows Albert in distinguishing happiness further into that which is according to the best which can be (*secundum optimum quod esse potest*) and that which exists essentially (*secundum esse*). This distinction does not indicate the difference between Augustinian beatitude and Aristotelian *eudaimonia*, but rather a division within human goodness on earth. This classification allowed Thomas and other commentators to resolve satisfactorily the dilemma of Solon, who warned against judging a man happy until death places him beyond the reach of misfortune. Happiness in its essential nature is the exercise of virtuous activity, which remains largely unmoved by grave misfortune. Happiness according to its best state can only occur when a virtuous person is blessed with a multitude of the benefits of good fortune. The latter concept is equivalent to Thomas' notion of imperfect beatitude because it designates the best possible human life (*beatitudo*), which can always be subject to change and loss (*imperfecta*). Thomas argues that misfortune may tarnish beatitude (*coinquinat beatitudinem*), but it alone cannot destroy happiness. Only the cessation of virtuous activity can deprive one of happiness (Bradley 1997).

The Arts Masters of the medieval university, who commented upon the ethics of Aristotle, generally avoided the difficult question of the relation between the philosophical ideal of happiness and the Christian concept of perfect beatitude. Unlike Augustine, they did not urge others to scorn and condemn earthly happiness, but they cannot come to a resolution concerning the way in which the virtuous life contributes to the expectation of the perfect vision of God. Thomas, like many others in this era, argues that Aristotle was not concerned

with the fate of the soul after death, but did not expressly deny the possibility of eternal perfection. Although Thomas concludes from philosophical principles that the knowledge of God that constitutes perfect beatitude must be considered superior to imperfect beatitude or happiness, he is very careful in his formulation of the relation between the two ideals of human perfection. He says in his commentary on the *Sentences* and in the *Summa theologiae* that human happiness participates somehow in perfect beatitude according to the condition of human nature. Thomas does not make explicit the nature of this participation, since he is aware of the danger in claiming that human actions somehow merit eternal beatitude. The participation of which he speaks is most likely the similarity between the intellectual processes of beatitude and happiness. On earth one may attain a fleeting and partial understanding of the first cause through contemplation; after death this understanding is made complete and eternal.

Two extremely important figures at Paris during this time were Siger of Brabant and Boethius of Dacia, both of whom were primarily interested in philosophical solutions to the important questions of their era. Their many logical works certainly reflect their teaching in the Arts Faculty. Although they wrote no commentary on the NE, they did produce some interesting contributions to moral thought, even if they were limited in length and scope. Siger left a few questions that address themes in the NE, but they comprise only a few pages in a modern edition. Siger discusses the question whether ultimate happiness consists in the supreme human activity and which state is best suited to philosophers (Stegmüller 1931; Bazan 1974). More interesting than these few questions is perhaps Siger's lost work, *De felicitate*, which the Renaissance thinker, Agostino Nifo, cited in his treatise on the intellect. In the few citations of Nifo Siger may have defended a position taken by Boethius of Dacia in his *De summo bono* (Nardi 1945).

Boethius of Dacia's treatise differs from the usual methods of commenting closely upon a required text and he prefers to concentrate on a single topic related directly to the notion of happiness found in book I of the NE. Boethius

himself states that his subject is the first principle, which is the philosophical term for *Deus gloriosus* and how it affects human happiness (Boethius of Dacia 1976). His discussion on Aristotle's notion of human goodness depends upon his acceptance of Aristotle's idea that for each power of the soul there must be a corresponding supreme good. Boethius combines the virtues of the speculative and practical intellect and concludes with Thomas Aquinas that the supreme human good consists in knowledge of truth and the practice of morally good actions. Boethius does not produce a traditional commentary, but composes a treatise arising from topics in the first and tenth book of the NE. His primary concern is stated in the title of the work, the supreme good, which is God. But Boethius limits his consideration of the first being to the way it affects human happiness, both as its object and cause. He also considers both the problem of the meaning of imperfect beatitude and the more difficult question of the relation between human achievement and the religious expectation of perfect bliss: "For he who is more perfect in the beatitude, which we know through reason is possible to a human being in this life, he is closer to the beatitude, which we expect in the future life through faith." In his short treatise Boethius of Dacia has carefully selected the most important topics raised in the first book of the NE.

Thomas' modest claim about the participation of happiness in beatitude and the work of Siger and Boethius provoked a swift and hostile reaction from theologians, who preferred Augustine's notion of human perfection to Aristotle's ideal (Celano 1990). Henry of Ghent criticizes those whom he believed to have overemphasized human actions at the expense of the divine object of universal desire. For Henry, beatitude is the vision of the essence of God, which is hidden from human science and results only from the will's reception of divine grace. Such a reception may occur imperfectly on earth and perfectly after death. John Duns Scotus, like Bonaventure before him, prefers to ignore the question of the connection between earthly happiness and eternal beatitude. Scotus identifies true beatitude with the supreme perfection of a beatificable nature in complete union with its highest object. Because

reason knows nothing concerning the true nature of happiness (*felicitas*), the opinions of Aristotle and other philosophers have no authority whatsoever. William of Ockham prefers the terminology of Augustine (*frui* and *diligere Deum*) to that of Aristotle (*felicitas* and *cognitio Dei*) when discussing human goodness. Ockham dismisses any natural progression from knowledge of created causes to an understanding of the first cause. He also denies the existence of any natural inclination to human perfection, and views moral goodness and human fulfillment as the result of the will's desire to love God above all things. While Albert and Thomas attempted to discover a connection between imperfect earthly knowledge of God and the perfect vision of the divine being, Ockham insists that the topic of beatitude is best treated as a matter of faith. No natural means can determine with any certainty that the beatific vision is a universal goal for all human beings. Ockham doubts that human reason can identify God as the cause of beatitude, but he does admit that complete divine causality is a more likely explanation than any that involves human cooperation.

Despite the importance of the *Nicomachean Ethics* within the curriculum of the medieval universities, Aristotle's ideal of human happiness never replaced the doctrines of Augustine and Boethius, who identify true human beatitude with the absolute perfection of the separate soul. Some thinkers, such as Meister Eckhart and Johannes Tauler, reject the Aristotelian virtues completely in favor of the Christian practices of acceptance (*Gelassenheit*) and detachment (*Abgeschiedenheit*) (Enders 1996). Even in works of authors sympathetic to philosophical moral speculation the tension between rational and religious ideals is never resolved. Thomas Aquinas in a sermon delivered relatively late in his life indicates his acceptance of the Christian path toward human perfection when he states that an old woman after the coming of Christ knows more about living well and has a greater knowledge of God than any philosopher with all his arguments (Ayo 1988). Since living well and cognition of God are synonymous with Aristotle's notion of happiness, Thomas, like many of his

contemporaries, recognizes the superiority of the Christian understanding of human perfection over the accomplishments of philosophical reason in the final determination of the nature of human happiness and beatitude.

## Cross-References

- ▶ [Albert the Great](#)
- ▶ [Augustine](#)
- ▶ [Boethius](#)
- ▶ [Boethius of Dacia](#)
- ▶ [Ethics](#)
- ▶ [Henry of Ghent](#)
- ▶ [John Duns Scotus](#)
- ▶ [John Pecham](#)
- ▶ [Nicomachean Ethics, Commentaries on Aristotle's](#)
- ▶ [Robert Kilwardby](#)
- ▶ [Thomas Aquinas](#)
- ▶ [Thomism](#)
- ▶ [William of Ockham](#)

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## Hasdai Crescas

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### Abstract

Hasdai ben Judah Crescas (c. 1340–1410/1411) is the last outstanding original Jewish philosopher in the late medieval period. Although Crescas had no interest in science *per se*, he was embroiled in precisely the same set of scientific issues that occupied scholastic philosophers after the condemnation of 1277. His major work *Sefer Or Adonai (The Book of the Light of the Lord, 1405–1410)*, finished several months before his death, is a polemic against his two Aristotelian

predecessors Maimonides and Gersonides. In this work, Crescas sought to undermine the Aristotelian cosmology and physics that pervaded the works of his predecessors. Crescas' critique of Aristotelianism was momentous in that while arguing for the liberation of Scripture, he was arguing as well for the liberation of science. Thus, many of his anti-Aristotelian arguments contain what turn out to be scientific innovations.

## Biographical Information

Hasdai ben Judah Crescas (c. 1340–1410/1411) is the last outstanding original Jewish philosopher in the late medieval period. Although Crescas had no interest in science *per se*, he was embroiled in precisely the same set of scientific issues that occupied scholastic philosophers after the condemnation of 1277. Crescas was born in Barcelona and studied with the famed philosopher Nissim ben Reuben Girondi. In 1389, he assumed the post of rabbi of Saragossa. In 1391, responding to riots against the Jews, Crescas wrote a polemic *Sefer bittul Iqqarei ha-Nozrim (The Book of the Refutation of the Principles of the Christians, 1397–1398)* in which he argued that major Christian principles such as Original Sin, the Trinity, and Transubstantiation are all self-contradictory and philosophically absurd. His major work *Sefer Or Adonai (The Book of the Light of the Lord, 1405–1410)*, finished several months before his death, was written as a polemic against his two Aristotelian predecessors Maimonides and Gersonides. In this work, Crescas sought to undermine the Aristotelian cosmology and physics that pervaded the works of his predecessors. A final extant work is his philosophical and halakhic *Sermon on the Passover (Derashat ha-Pesah)*, which contains discussions of miracles, faith, and free choice.

## Philosophical System

Crescas' major philosophical work *Or Adonai* was directed against those Aristotelians (e.g.,

Maimonides and Gersonides) who in his mind, used Aristotle's arguments to undermine Judaism. In an attempt to weaken Aristotle's hold upon Jewish philosophy, and to uphold the basic dogmas of Judaism, Crescas subjects Aristotle's physics and metaphysics to a trenchant critique. The work is divided into four books that analyze (1) the roots or first principles (*shorashim*) of Scripture, (2) the fundamental beliefs or cornerstones (*pinnot*) of Scripture, (3) the true doctrines of Scripture (*de'ot amitiot*), and (4) some non-obligatory speculations in Scripture (*de'ot usevarot*). This distinction is based on Crescas' belief that the principal beliefs of Judaism are those without which there could be no revealed religion in general, or Judaism in particular. All of his anti-Aristotelian diatribes thus occur against the backdrop of Scriptural concerns. As Harvey has pointed out (Harvey 2007), Crescas' critique of Aristotelianism was momentous in that while arguing for the liberation of Scripture, he was arguing as well for the liberation of science. Thus, many of his anti-Aristotelian arguments contain what turn out to be scientific innovations.

Book One of *Or Adonai* addresses the roots of Jewish belief, central of which is belief in God. Maimonides had provided Aristotelian arguments for the existence, unity, and incorporeality of God, maintaining that correct beliefs about God must be based in sound Aristotelian principles; these arguments were based on 26 propositions drawn from the corpus of Aristotle's physics. Crescas, however, objected to Maimonides' approach, arguing that God's existence, unity, and incorporeality cannot be based on philosophical proofs, for these "proofs" are themselves based on faulty propositions. Crescas thus proceeds to show the weaknesses inherent in each of the 26 propositions adduced by Maimonides. For example, Crescas rejects Aristotle's theory of place and argues that place is prior to bodies: in contradistinction to Aristotle's conception of place, space for Crescas is not a mere relationship of bodies but is the "interval between the limits of that which it surrounds" (Wolfson 1929: 195). Space is seen by Crescas as an infinite continuum ready to receive matter. Because this place or extension of bodies is identified with space,

there is no contradiction in postulating the existence of space not-filled with body, i.e., the vacuum (see Wolfson 1929: 38–69). Crescas, in fact, assumes that place is identical with the void, on the grounds that "place must be equal to the whole of its occupant as well as to [the sum of] its parts" (Wolfson 1929: 199).

Further, Crescas rejects Aristotle's theory of time, arguing that the correct definition of time is that it is the measure of the continuity of motion or of rest between two instants. By *hitdabequt*, Crescas means to emphasize that time is not to be identified with physical motion or bodies, but with the duration of the life of the thinking soul. Time is "indeed measured by both motion and rest, because it is our conception (*tziyurenu*) of the measure of their continuity that is time" (Wolfson 1929: 289). On this basis, Crescas concludes that "the existence of time is only in the soul" (*ibid*). It is because humans have a mental conception of this measure that time even exists. The continuity of time depends only upon a thinking mind, and is indefinite, becoming definite only by being measured by motion. Were we not to conceive of it, there would be no time. It is in this context that Crescas comes closest to reflecting his near scholastic contemporaries Peter Auriol and William of Ockham, both of whom develop a subjective theory of time.

In book two of *Or Adonai*, Crescas lists the six beliefs that are intrinsic to a notion of divine revelation: God's knowledge of particulars, Providence, God's power, prophecy, human choice, and the purposefulness of the Torah. Each of these beliefs is then analyzed in light of the tension between religion and reason. In each case, Crescas reintroduces his rejection of an Aristotelian intellectualistic conception of the relation between God and humanity. Versions of this intellectual Aristotelianism can be found in Crescas' predecessors Maimonides and Gersonides, and includes the following sorts of positions: God does not know particulars; God cannot exercise providence over particulars; God's power is limited by the laws of nature; prophecy is a natural phenomenon that requires intellectual preparation on the part of the prophet; free will is possible, since God has no knowledge of future events; and



the purpose of Torah is to provide intellectual, as opposed to moral, perfection. Crescas rejects their views, arguing that God acts toward the world with goodness, love, and grace. Against Gersonides, for example, Crescas affirms God's knowledge of future contingents, even those determined by human choice. He then argues that human freedom is only apparent and not genuine: humans think they are free because they are ignorant of the causes of their choices. Human responsibility for action lies not in the actual performance of the action, but rather in the agent's acceptance of an action as its own. The feeling of joy an agent feels at acquiescing to certain actions, e.g., fulfilling the commandments, is the reward for that action. So too, God experiences joy in giving of himself to the world (Crescas 1990: 123–205).

Of the non-fundamental obligatory beliefs, Crescas in book three distinguishes those beliefs that are independent of specific commandments (e.g., creation, survival of the soul, reward and punishment, resurrection) from those dependent on specific commandments (e.g., the efficacy of prayer, the spiritual value of the festivals). The denial of even the non-fundamental beliefs, according to Crescas, leads to heresy. In this context, his discussion of the doctrine of creation is noteworthy. In contradistinction to Maimonides who in *Guide* 2:25 argued that the doctrine of creation is necessary to uphold the validity of Judaism, Crescas argues that one could believe in revelation even if the world were eternal. In fact, he goes on to argue that the doctrine of creation is best understood as eternal emanation of the world: the world is both created and eternal (see Crescas 1990: 273–318; Feldman 1980).

Many scholars have tried to trace the formative influences upon Crescas' thought. In his recent study of Crescas' *Sermon on the Passover*, Ravitzky has argued that Crescas' discussion of will appears to reflect a connection to Latin scholasticism in its acceptance of Scotist ideas regarding the moral and religious primacy of the will (Ravitzky 1988: viii). After noting important similarities and differences between Aquinas' and Crescas' conceptions of belief, Ravitzky turns to a comparison of Scotus and Crescas, arguing that

both philosophers reject their predecessors' insistence upon an intellectualist conception belief that leads to ultimate felicity, and replace it with a conception of belief based on the primacy of will (Ravitzky 1988: 54–60).

In a similar vein, Harvey suggests that Crescas' work was "perhaps connected in some way with the pioneering work in natural science being conducted at the University of Paris" (Harvey 1998: 23). More specifically, Harvey has compared the works of the two contemporaries Nicholas Oresme and Crescas, arguing that they are the two most important philosophers representing the new physics. Working in Pamplona in the 1330s, both argue for the existence of many worlds, both claim that many worlds do not imply existence of more than one God, and both argue that generation and corruption in the sublunary world is evidence for successive worlds. Crescas himself describes his analysis and critique of Aristotelian science as having "no small benefit for this science" (Wolfson 1929: 180). In fact, it can be argued that Crescas' critique of Aristotle helped lay the groundwork for the abandonment of Aristotelian science in subsequent centuries.

## Cross-References

- ▶ [Gersonides](#)
- ▶ [Moses Maimonides](#)
- ▶ [Time](#)

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## Heloise

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### Abstract

Heloise (c. 1095–1164) was the lover and intellectual partner of the controversial philosopher and theologian, Peter Abelard (1079–1142), and abbess of a religious community that he entrusted to her, the abbey of the Paraclete from 1129 until her death. She is most well-known for the letters that she exchanged with Peter Abelard c. 1132/1133, after reacting to his *Historia Calamitatum*, in which he argued that providence had enabled him to survive a turbulent career in which she herself was profoundly implicated. Whereas Abelard had presented their affair simply in terms of lust, Heloise emphasizes that she had always been

driven by ideals of selfless love. In a third letter, she extends her interest in the ethics of intention, asks him for an account of religious women in history, and a rule better adapted to the needs of women. Widely revered for her learning, she prompted Abelard to provide many writings for the Paraclete, including responses to a series of 42 *Problemata* about questions presented by inconsistencies within the Bible. Mews (The lost love letters of Heloise and Abelard, 2nd edn, 2008. St Martin's Press, New York, 1999), Mews (J Mediev Latin 19:130–147, 2009) argues that she is the young woman whose voice is preserved in an exchange of over 100 Latin love letters (the *Epistolae duorum amantium*) between a controversial teacher and his brilliant pupil, preserved in a fifteenth-century manuscript of Clairvaux.

## Biographical Information

From Abelard's *Historia Calamitatum*, we learn that Heloise was the niece of Fulbert, a canon of the cathedral of Notre-Dame, Paris. She had been raised and educated at the royal abbey of Argenteuil but had moved to Paris to live in her uncle's house in the cathedral cloister, in order to pursue further her studies. Nothing is known of her father, but her mother could have been Hersende of Champagne, a noble widow of Anjou, who befriended the controversial preacher Robert of Arbrissel, c. 1095, and enabled Fontevraud to be established c. 1100 as an abbey of which she became the prioress (Robl 2003; Mews 2006). Heloise inherited a similar revulsion for hypocrisy in religious life as inspired Robert of Arbrissel and the early community at Fontevraud but combined this with a profound interest in classical literature and ethics, echoing the interests of Baudri of Bourgueil and his literary circle, which included women connected to religious houses like Argenteuil.

Her relationship with Abelard developed through an intense exchange of letters c. 1115–1117, climaxing in her becoming pregnant and giving birth to Astralabe. She initially resisted Abelard's insistence that they should

marry with arguments recalled by Abelard in the *Historia Calamitatum*. After reluctantly yielding to Abelard's desire for a secret marriage, Heloise moved back to Argenteuil, but only became a nun; thereafter, Abelard had been castrated and had chosen to become a monk at St. Denis. Heloise rose to become prioress of the community at Argenteuil until 1129, when the nuns were expelled by Suger, abbot of St. Denis, who successfully took over the abbey in that year, replacing the nuns with his own monks. This prompted Heloise to obtain from Abelard control over the oratory, dedicated to the Paraclete that Abelard had initially established in 1122, after escaping from St. Denis. Abelard recalls these early years of the Paraclete in the *Historia Calamitatum*, ostensibly written to provide encouragement for a "friend" then experiencing distress but quite likely intended to offer guidance and support for the nuns of the Paraclete. Heloise proved much more successful than Abelard in building up this community, obtaining papal protection for it in 1131. By resuming contact with Abelard, through both letters and visits, Heloise elicited from him a significant series of letters and writings, by putting issues and questions to him that had a significant effect on his own intellectual development. The authenticity of her letters, once questioned by scholars, is now widely accepted (Newman 1992). She became widely respected by contemporaries for her wisdom, learning, and literary activity, otherwise only known through her exchanges with Abelard.

## Thought

Perhaps the most celebrated statement of Heloise is her rejection of the notion of marriage and external wealth, articulated in her initial response to Abelard's *Historia Calamitatum*. In a phrase that would be picked up by Jean de Meun in *The Romance of the Rose*, she says that she would rather have not married and be called his prostitute (*meretrix*) than to obtain the wealth of the whole world as the empress (*imperatrix*) of Augustus

(Letter 2, ed. Hicks, 49). Although this has often been read in a romantic sense as a declaration of her selfless love, Heloise's argument here is part of a broader ethical reflection that true love is like true friendship in not being based on any external reward but is pursued solely for the sake of the other person. Heloise takes the Ciceronian ideal that friendship should not be pursued for personal gain but here transposes it to her own situation that of her friendship with Abelard (Mews 2007). She does not accept Abelard's presentation of their love (*amor*) in the past, as having been essentially lustful in character. After Abelard had responded with a letter urging her to turn her attention to Christ, away from the past, Heloise develops further arguments in her impassioned second letter about her failure to feel truly repentant about her past behavior, because she is certain about the fundamental rightness of her love for Abelard – even if she had committed sins in the eyes of the Church. These arguments challenge Abelard's contrast between selfish lust and the love he thinks she should develop for Christ.

A similar emphasis on selfless love is evident in the young woman's letters in the *Epistolae Duorum Amantium*, attributed to Heloise by Mews (1999), Piron (2005), and Newman (2016), a view contested by Von Moos (2003) and Ziolkowski (2004). In letter 25, she responds to his attempt in letter 24 to answer her question about the nature of love, by adopting quite a different approach from her teacher. Whereas he had paraphrased Cicero's notion that love creates a common mind to emphasize that love already existed between them, she argues that true love is more of an ideal that they strive to reach, but which must be distinguished from general precepts about loving one's neighbor, and must involve the correct inner disposition. In letter 49, she engages on an extended reflection, linking *amor* to *dilectio* and *amicitia* as not concerned with external gain. This prompts her teacher to reflect in letter 50, that she was not so much inspired by Cicero, as giving him instruction – an accurate observation given that Cicero had only theorized friendship within an all-male

context and had not related *amicitia* to the notion of *dilectio*. During their early relationship, Abelard may have admired such ideas in Heloise, but he was then more preoccupied intellectually by questions of logic than of ethics.

Heloise seems to have had more influence in shaping Abelard's ethical ideas after resuming correspondence with him in the 1130s. Her emphasis, however, is always that outward behavior should reflect inner intention (Georgianna 1987). This underpins her critique of contemporary religious life. The 42 questions or *Problemata* that she puts to Abelard similarly show that she was also acutely aware of contradictions within the scriptural record and shared Abelard's concern to identify its underlying significance, beyond the variation evident in specific accounts within the Bible.

## Cross-References

- ▶ [Bernard of Clairvaux](#)
- ▶ [Peter Abelard](#)

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## Henry Harclay

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### Abstract

The works of Henry Harclay include his unedited commentary on the *Sentences* and 29 *Quaestiones ordinariae*. The early Parisian commentary of Harclay demonstrates a Scotistic and realist influence, while his latter questions at Oxford break with John Duns Scotus in numerous ways that anticipate the writings of William of Ockham. Harclay's positions on universals and relations are central to understanding his break with Scotus as he develops an antirealist position on both universals and real relations.

Henry Harclay (b. c. 1270– d. 1317) was an Englishman and a theologian who served as the Chancellor of Oxford University from 1312–1317. He was ordained to the secular clergy (1297) and lectured on Peter Lombard's *Sentences* at Paris around 1300; he became a master of theology at Oxford sometime before 1312. These dates and locations place Harclay in an interesting historical position between John Duns Scotus and William of Ockham; lecturing on the *Sentences* while Duns was in Paris and serving as chancellor until the same year Ockham began his lectures on the *Sentences* at Oxford (1317–1319). During his chancellorship, Harclay often sided with the University against the Dominican Order, a policy that is often evident philosophically and theologically in his critiques of Thomas Aquinas (Maurer 1954: 5–7). Harclay is particularly strong in his opposition to Aquinas on the immortality of the soul, arguing that Thomas betrayed the Christian faith in his attempt to reconcile it with Aristotle (Maurer 1957: II 40–44).

The writings of Harclay can be divided into a Parisian period (Commentary on Book I of the *Sentences*) and an Oxford period (*Quaestiones ordinariae*). The commentary on the first book of

the *Sentences* is unedited and exists in two codices (MS Vat. lat., 13,687 and Casale Monteferrato, Biblioteca del Seminario Vescovile, MS b 2); the 29 *Quaestiones ordinariae* have recently been edited and translated by M. Henninger and are published in the series *Auctores Britannici Medii Aevi* (2008). The earlier work originating from Paris demonstrates a close adherence to the writings of Scotus, often adhering to the Subtle Doctor's argumentation or citing him explicitly (Henninger 1981). Harclay is a careful and subtle thinker, developing complex arguments and citing both patristic and medieval authorities with remarkable precision.

### The Ontology of Universals and Relations

Harclay's position on universals in his unedited commentary on the *Sentences* remains obscure, but it is clear that by the time he wrote *Quaestio de universalibus* at Oxford he is increasingly critical of Scotus' strong realist theory of universals. Harclay states that in extramental reality the only things that exist are singular (*quod in re extra animam nulla est res nisi singularis*); commonness, it must be stressed, is not an extramental reality (Gál 1971: 211). Harclay's position is that there is no extramental common nature; two singular things (individual) are related by relations of similarity.

Harclay's position is that an individual can be conceived either distinctly or indistinctly, and the example Harclay uses is that of Socrates and Plato. When Socrates is conceived distinctly, he is known through a particular concept, when he is conceived indistinctly, he is known through a universal concept. But, as Harclay argues, indistinct knowledge of Socrates is confused knowledge; that is, if one has indistinct knowledge of both Plato and Socrates standing a half mile away, one conceives of Plato and Socrates as human beings through a universal concept (human being) that does not distinguish Plato from Socrates. This knowledge is confused in that it cannot distinguish the universal concepts representing Plato and Socrates. Harclay insists that all knowledge, whether conceived distinctly or indistinctly,



is of individuals. The distinct knowledge of Socrates is clearly of an individual, but so is the indistinct knowledge of Socrates in that the confused concept exists as a singular thing in the soul in that it is not predicable to another extramental thing. In the example above of indistinct knowledge, this is evident in the fact that there would be two indistinct concepts of human being in the soul of the observer.

The position defined above was criticized by Ockham because surprisingly Harclay argues that both the confused concept of Socrates and the singular extramental thing are both universal; the confused concept is universal because it represents many indistinct things in the species (different human beings), and the singular extramental thing is universal when it is conceived indistinctly. The obvious objection of Ockham being that the same thing cannot be both universal and particular (the singular extramental thing above would be both universal and particular for Harclay).

Harclay's theory of real relations developed in conversation with and in reaction to Scotus' theory of relations, as Henninger has demonstrated (Henninger 1989). The first position held by Harclay in his *Commentary on the Sentences* was similar to that of Scotus, but he would eventually come to reject Scotus' ontology of real relations in his *Quaestiones ordinariae*.

Scotus held that a real relation was an extramental relative thing, a *res*, which is distinct from but inheres in its foundation. This formulation is rejected by Harclay who agrees with Scotus that in order for there to be a real relation it is necessary for there to be two extramental realities that exist, but argues that the relation is not a mind-independent thing (*res*) that inheres in a foundation. The point is that the relation is not a *tertium quid*, but a non-inhering condition in one of the extramental realities (things) to the other. For example, if Socrates is being seen by an Ox – to use Harclay's example – there is not a real relative thing that inheres in Socrates. Rather, the Ox is “to the other,” or toward Socrates, in a new way, what Harclay calls *aditas*. Henninger has fleshed out Harclay's account of real relations in great detail, demonstrating this “non-inhering condition of *a* toward *b*” (*aditas*) as the distinctive aspect of Harclay's theory of relations (Henninger 1987: 118).

## Conclusion

The writings of Henry Harclay are theological in nature, and his position on almost every philosophical topic is intertwined with a theological vision. While this dichotomy is admittedly anachronistic, it must be insisted that for Harclay the questions above involved significant theological implications. For example, the discussion of real relations has significant implications for both Trinitarian theology (Trinitarian relations) and God's relationship to creation.

The philosophical and theological views of Henry Harclay are significant as a witness to the intellectual development between Scotus and Ockham, but also possess an intrinsic philosophical quality that warrants much greater appreciation. It has been surmised since Armand Maurer's work on the univocity of being that Harclay is an important antecedent to Ockham; a position that has been supported since by G. Gál and M. Henninger (Gál 1971: 183; Henninger 1989). The publication and translation of Henry's *Quaestiones ordinariae* will certainly assist in establishing Henry's place in medieval philosophy and theology and his complex relationship to both Scotus and Ockham.

## Cross-References

- ▶ [John Duns Scotus](#)
- ▶ [Thomas Aquinas](#)
- ▶ [Universals](#)
- ▶ [William of Ockham](#)

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## Henry of Ghent

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### Abstract

One of the most prominent figures at the Faculty of Theology in Paris during the last quarter of the thirteenth century, Henry of Ghent has been traditionally considered a conservative, “Neo-Augustinian” theologian, fighting against the spread of Aristotelianism and Arabic philosophy – an impression that seemed to

be confirmed by Henry's participation in the commission set up by Bishop Tempier in view of the famous condemnation of March 1277, and by his heated controversies with those theologians closer to the doctrinal legacy of Thomas Aquinas, such as Giles of Rome and Godfrey of Fontaines. However, the progress of the new critical edition of *Opera Omnia* Henry's – begun in Leuven by Raymond Macken in 1979 and now continued by an international team – has already demonstrated that this image needs to be substantially revised. Indeed, Henry sought to reconcile traditional Augustinian theories with some of the basic principles of Aristotelian epistemology and Avicennian ontology, thereby giving rise to a complex and original synthesis, certainly different from that of Thomas Aquinas, but also from that of the Franciscan masters of his day.

### Biographical Information

Henry's date of birth is unknown, but should presumably be placed before 1240. Information about his career is also scarce. He was in Paris in 1265; from 1267, he begins to appear in the documents as *magister*, though nothing is known about his presumed teaching activity at the Faculty of Arts. From 1276, the year in which he disputed his first *Quodlibet*, until his death, Henry was Regent Master at the Faculty of Theology. He was canon of Tournai, archdeacon of Bruges (probably from 1277), and archdeacon of Tournai (from 1279). His name was recorded in the death register of Tournai cathedral on June 23, 1293.

During his university career in Paris, Henry was personally involved in almost all of the important events in university and ecclesiastical life. In 1277, he was a member of the commission of theologians set up by Bishop Tempier in order to censure propositions considered erroneous that were being taught at the Faculty of Arts and that would be condemned on March 7 of the same year. Nevertheless, not only did Henry affirm on different occasions that he neither understood nor

approved of the condemnation of certain articles, but he himself was pressured by Tempier and the papal legate Simon of Brion to distance himself from the theory of the unicity of substantial form in man.

From 1281, the year of the publication of the papal bull *Ad fructus uberes* issued by Pope Martin IV, Henry represented the main theological reference point for the faction of prelates (secular clergy) in their conflict with the Mendicant Orders concerning the privileges granted by the Pope to the latter in matters of confession.

Henry is the author of a monumental, though incomplete, *Summa* (the second part *De creaturis* is missing, even though it was surely envisaged in the general plan of the work), 15 *Quodlibeta*, disputed and published while writing the *Summa* (Gómez Caffarena 1957), a short commentary on the *Book of Genesis* (*Lectura ordinaria super sacram Scripturam*), a lengthy treatise on the issue of confession (*Tractatus super factum praelatorum et fratrum*), as well as a few sermons. The authenticity of the *Quaestiones variae* recently published in the series of the *Opera omnia* is doubtful. Other still unedited works are of uncertain attribution: a treatise on the *Syn-categoremata* (probably authentic), a commentary on the *Physics*, and an incomplete commentary on the *Metaphysics*.

## Thought

### Knowledge, Intellect, and Will

Henry's *Summa* does not open with a direct treatment of God, but with a detailed analysis of the problem of human knowledge, beginning with the classical skeptic's question: can man know anything at all? Taking knowledge in its most generic meaning, for Henry it is undeniable that man is able to know something through the senses and without divine intervention. Moving on to knowledge in the strict sense, things get more complicated. Following Augustine's *Soliloquia*, it is important to distinguish between what is true and truth itself: sensation only grasps *id quod verum est* ("what is true"), while knowledge of the truth implies the knowledge of the

nature or essence of a thing, which can only be gained by comparing the thing itself to its *exemplar*.

There are, however, two exemplars: (a) the universal species of the object that the mind obtains by abstraction, on the basis of sensible data (in this case, the truth of the *res* is the conformity between the really existing thing and its mental representation); (b) the ideal form present in the divine mind that acts as the formal cause of creaturely essences, and from this perspective the truth of a thing is its ontological conformity to its eternal model. This double relation thereby produces two different levels of truth: on the one hand, the truth of Aristotelian science, deriving from the purely natural faculties, through an abstracting process; on the other, the "sincere truth" (*sincera veritas*), obtained only through divine illumination. The first truth does not have the same infallibility, purity, and absolute certainty as the second; nevertheless, it is necessary for the fulfillment of the second: the action of the divine *exemplar* can only work on a concept already obtained by the intellect through abstraction. For Henry, divine illumination does not directly provide the mind with any content, but rather certifies definitively the representation of a thing present in the human intellect as coinciding with the representation existing *ab aeterno* in the divine intellect. The action of divine illumination is therefore neither a direct donation of intelligible contents, independent of the conditions of sensible knowledge, nor is it a simple purification, preparation or refinement of the mind in order to predispose it to intellectual knowledge; rather, it is the certification of our created *exemplar* by the uncreated one (Macken 1972).

Over the years, however, Henry seems gradually to abandon this theory of the double *exemplar* in order to make room, on the one hand, for a reworking of the defining process of essences through their progressive determination, as described by Aristotle in the *Posterior Analytics* (Marrone 1985, 2001), and on the other, for a reinterpretation of illumination as the constant presence in act, albeit in a recess of the mind (*abditum mentis*), of the image of God (*Quodl.* IX, q. 15; cf. Emery 2001).

In this evolution, the partial rejection of the function of intelligible species (*Quodl.* III, q. 1; *Quodl.* IV, q. 7) is particularly important, and anticipates the similar solution adopted by “nominalists” a couple of decades later. For Henry, the particular phantasm is made immaterial and universal by the abstraction of the agent intellect and imprints itself on the potential intellect without the mediation of an intelligible species that is numerically different. The phantasm is therefore the efficient cause of intellectual knowledge, or better, of the first operation of the intellect (that of simple understanding). Henry does not eliminate sensible species, however, nor does he eliminate all types of representation in the sphere of intellectual activity. Indeed, after the phantasms are impressed on the possible, or potential, intellect, making simple understanding possible, the intellect then forms complex judgments and produces its own species, or *verbum* (mental word), as a result of this activity.

Concerning the relation between will and intellect (an issue to which he dedicates no less than 20 quodlibetal questions), Henry can be considered a voluntarist (Müller 2007), even though with regard to the more “radical” voluntarists, such as Walter of Bruges, he does not confine himself to interpreting the role of reason as that of a mere “advisor,” but instead as that of a cause (albeit a *causa sine qua non*): without the prior knowledge of the intellect, the will cannot desire anything (Macken 1975, 1977). In other words, for Henry the intellect and the good that it proposes are not the sole or necessary origin of the motion of the will; however, by presenting the objects that this faculty can freely choose, reason is the *conditio sine qua non* of the action of the will itself, which otherwise would be prey to sensible appetites and the determinism of the passions. Moral action is therefore performed both by the intellect, which presents the kinds of good to choose, and by the will, which freely chooses one of these, yet without being forced to opt for that which is judged best by reason.

### Metaphysics

Following Avicenna, Henry affirms that every *res* possesses its own “certitude” (*certitudo*) that

makes it what it is, that is, that expresses the objective content (the essence or *quidditas*) by which every thing is identical to itself and is distinguished from other things. This content can be considered in itself, as independent from its physical (and particular) or mental (and universal) existence: in itself, essence is just essence (“*essentia est essentia tantum*”). Nevertheless, every *res* only exists in physical reality or in the mind. Possessing an absolute concept does not mean possessing an absolute, separate existence. More simply, through such a concept, a thing can be considered independently of all that does not form part of its essential content and that therefore constitutes an additional determination. For instance, physical or mental existence, particularity or universality, do not form part of “horseness” as such. Yet for this very reason “horseness” as such does not exist; instead what exists are horses as individuals (individual *supposita*) and the universal concept of “horse” which the mind obtains by abstraction from them (Porro 1990, 1996). Actual existence is therefore an “intention” (*intentio*) that occurs to essence without adding anything real, and so it differs from essence only in an “intentional” way.

The term *intentio* designates here a “note” (a feature or trait) of the essential content of a *res*, which does not differ from it in any real sense, nor from its other identifiable “notes,” yet can nevertheless be expressed through an independent concept (*Quodl.* V, q. 6). *Intentio* is thus the fruit of an operation of the intellect, which delves inside (for Henry *intentio* comes from *intus tentio*) the thing to which the intention itself belongs, by considering its constitutive “notes,” and gives rise to different concepts. It can also be said that intentions really exist in a *res*, but only potentially, whereas their distinction is an operation of the intellect alone.

While two distinct things differ in a real sense, all that gives rise to different concepts, albeit founded in the same simple thing, differs intentionally (*Quodl.* V, q. 12). In an intentional distinction, in other words, the very same thing is expressed by different concepts in different ways. From this perspective, an intentional distinction seems akin to a purely logical distinction, to the

point that the two are often confused. Nevertheless, in the first case, one of the concepts excludes the other (one can be thought of separately, in the absence of the other), whereas in the case of a distinction based on reason the various concepts are perfectly compatible. As Henry explicitly states, this means that everything that differs in intention differs in reason too, but not vice versa. Unlike a purely logical distinction, an intentional distinction always implies a form of composition, even though this is minor with regard to that implied by a real difference. Actually, for Henry there are two levels of intentional distinction: a major and a minor. In the major, none of the intentions includes the other or others, even though they are all part of the same thing; moreover, it has two modes: the distinction between the differences in man (rational, sensible, vegetative, and so on) and the distinction between genus and specific difference (animal and rational). In the minor, the concept of one intention includes the other but not vice versa. And here Henry lists four modes: the distinction between species and genus; the distinction between living and being in creatures; the distinction between a *suppositum* and its nature or essence; and the distinction between a *respectus* (relation) and the essence on which it is founded. The distinction between essence and existence belongs to the last mode.

Yet independently of actual existence, and preceding it, essence is already constituted as such in a specific being, which Henry calls *esse essentiae*. This must not be taken as a real separate being, but indicates only the fact that a *res* thus constituted has an objective content and so it is objectively possible; that is, it can be placed in act by God. Indeed, not every *res* conceivable by the human intellect corresponds to a nature that can be actualized. The being of essence thus coincides with the possibility, or the ability, to receive actual existence that a purely imagined *res* does not have. Henry appeals here to the distinction between *res a reor reris* and *res a ratitudine* (cf. *Summa*, art. 21, q. 4; art. 24, q. 3). In the first case, a thing is considered in its purely nominal conception, to which a reality, outside a purely mental one, need not correspond (*reor* is here synonymous with *opinor* – “to imagine” or

“to suppose”). In the second case, a thing is “certified” (*rata*) by the fact that it possesses at least the being of an essence. If the nothing that stands in opposition to a *res a reor reris* cannot even be conceived, the nothing that stands in opposition to a *res a ratitudine* is not the lack of actual existence, hence nonexistence in the physical world, but rather the lack of formal constitution: the fact that a thing can be conceived (e.g., a chimera or a mountain of gold) without being “certified” as a determined essence. For Henry even the distinction between *esse essentiae* and the content (*realitas*) of an essence is of an intentional type, even though Henry was initially tempted to make a distinction based on reason alone between essence and its essential being (*Quodl.* I, q. 9; a spectacular example of this change of position is the recasting of q. 4, art. 21 in the *Summa*).

Every essence is what it is in reason of its nature (*Quodl.* X, q. 8), albeit through participation (*participative*), since the very fact of being an essence, content aside, is dependent on God. Essence is therefore not strictly an “effect” or “product” of God, and yet it is constituted only through a relation of participation in, or imitation of, the divine essence. More precisely, *esse essentiae* belongs to essence because of its eternal relation to God as formal cause. It is only in virtue of this relation that essences can also come into actual existence, which signals a new relation between a creature and God, the latter now as efficient cause. In the first case, essences depend on the divine intellect, in the second, on the divine will. Being therefore always indicates a relation in creatures, which is simple for essences in themselves (*esse essentiae*), and twofold for actualized essences (*esse essentiae* plus *esse existentiae*). Nevertheless, the two types of relation are not perfectly symmetrical. In the first place, while essence can be conceived independently of its existence in the physical world, it cannot be conceived independently of its being-essence, otherwise it would be a mere figment. Consequently, the relation that forges *esse existentiae* is in some way accidental, whereas that which forges *esse essentiae* is essential. In the second place, since God chooses, from all the essences eternally constituted as such by His intellect, those that He will

actualize over time, on the basis of His free will, one relation is such from eternity, while the other takes place in time.

Essences thus correspond to divine ideas, which represent their eternal exemplars. More precisely, according to Henry, an idea is in God for the fact that divine essence is in some ways imitable by creatural essences. God's knowledge of what is different from Himself coincides with the knowledge of the different ways in which He considers Himself imitable, since divine knowledge is not determined by the presence of external objects, but rather is itself the formal (exemplary) cause of its own contents. Here, however, the classic question of the relation between divine simplicity and creatural multiplicity again arises. Were God to know immediately the plurality of creatable objects (essences), His simplicity and unity (divine knowledge is not really distinct from divine essence) would be irremediably compromised. On the other hand, if God did not have access to the multiplicity of all that is distinct from His essence, He would not know anything. So, according to Henry, divine knowledge has a primary object, which is divine essence itself, absolutely simple and indivisible, and a secondary object, which is in some way "other" than divine knowledge. To avoid any excessively brusque passage, the knowledge of this secondary object is then subdivided into two distinct moments: in the first, every creatural essence coincides with divine essence itself; in the second, every such essence is taken as distinct, endowed with a specific *modus* of being – *esse essentiae* – which nevertheless always derives from a relation of formal participation in the divine essence. In Henry's vocabulary, these two moments indicate respectively the *exemplar*, which is the divine idea, and the *exemplatum* (also called *ideatum*), which is an essence fully constituted in its quidditative content and so able to be placed in act, depending upon divine free will.

One might ask whether God possesses this same freedom in bestowing *esse essentiae* on possible essences, that is, on (doubly) secondary objects of His knowledge. Unlike what happens for the being of existence, the reply would seem to be negative in this case. As mentioned above,

there is an asymmetry between the relation of efficient causality and the relation of formal dependence that conjoin creatures and Creator: while the former is in time, the latter is eternal. This means that the distinction between what is possible and what is not possible is necessarily such from eternity. Moreover, since essences can never cease to be in their essential being (i.e., in their being eternally thought by God), they are absolutely necessary. As such, not only can they not be destroyed, but they cannot even be modified. With respect to actual existence, all essences are equally indifferent with regard to the Creator's power, so that God can place in act one *res* before another as He chooses, without any mediation, whereas in their own being essences are arranged in a hierarchical order that God himself, on whom that order depends, cannot modify. This fact has at least two consequences. In the first place, according to Henry, God cannot now introduce *ex novo* a new essence in any part of the series without irremediably destroying the whole order. In the second place, since there is a perfect correspondence between creatural essences and divine ideas, the latter are numerically finite, like the former (Porro 1993). This theory, which is highly unusual to say the least, is explicitly put forward by Henry on at least two occasions in his *Quodlibeta* (*Quodl.* V, q. 3 and *Quodl.* VIII, q. 8), before being partially retracted, albeit reluctantly, in virtue of an unspecified article condemned in Paris (*Quodl.* XI, q. 11).

### Analogy of Being and Knowledge of God

In describing the role of divine illumination in the cognitive process of the human intellect, Henry is always careful to specify that God functions only as *ratio cognoscendi* and not as *obiectum cognitum*. From another perspective, however, God is also the first known object of the human intellect, according to one of Henry's most famous and characteristic doctrines (*Summa*, art. 24, q. 7; Laarmann 1999; Goris 2007). More precisely, God is not the first but the last concept in the order of rational knowledge, after the knowledge of creatures, but He is the first object of natural knowledge, which concerns the first and most general intentions. In this kind of knowledge,

our intellect always proceeds from what is most indeterminate. God, as subsisting and absolute being, is contained within the indeterminate concept of being, and it is for this reason that every time an *ens* is conceived, the *ens primum*, God, is also conceived, at least on more general levels of knowledge.

Between creatural being and divine being there is, of course, no real identity, but only a form of community originating precisely in the indeterminacy of the most general concept of being. Divine being is indeterminate and indeterminable; in itself, it eludes all possibility of determination. Being in general initially seems just as indeterminate, though not because it is indeterminable: the process of human knowledge aims at an ever more complete determination of being as a given thing. Nevertheless, at the level of our first, confused knowledge, our intellect is not able to distinguish between the negative indeterminacy of God (*indeterminatio per abnegationem*) and the private indeterminacy of creatures (*indeterminatio per privationem*), and so it forms a single concept.

The equivocal term “being” is thus interpreted by our intellect as a univocal term, and this gives rise to a peculiar form of analogy. As a matter of fact, the first concept of being is both equivocal and univocal at the same time: it is equivocal in itself, since it signifies two completely heterogeneous realities (finite and infinite, being in potency and being absolutely and purely in act); it is univocal for the human intellect, since at this initial level the distinction remains hidden to our comprehension.

Yet it is this peculiar form of analogy, or community, that offers the only positive starting point for a metaphysical demonstration of the existence of God, a demonstration that, in appealing to Avicenna and to Augustine’s *De trinitate*, proceeds by investigating this falsely univocal concept of entity in order to isolate the notion of God as pure, necessarily existing Being (*Summa*, art. 22, q. 5; art. 24, q. 6). To this demonstration Henry also adds some *a posteriori* proofs – in the order of efficient, formal, and final causes – that nevertheless refer exclusively to the existence of God *de complexo*, in other words, to the truth of the statement “God exists” (*Summa*, art. 22, q. 4).

### Other Characteristic Doctrines

We can only briefly mention here other characteristic elements of Henry’s metaphysical and theological system:

- The theory of human dimorphism: man alone has two substantial forms, one of which is the rational soul (*Quodl.* II, q. 2, after the hesitations of *Quodl.* I, q. 4 and the subsequent threats by Tempier and Simon of Brion).
- The essential identity between grace and glory (*Quodl.* IX, q. 13; cf. Arezzo 2005).
- The defense of the role of human merit in the doctrine of divine grace, at least in terms of congruity (*Quodl.* VIII, q. 5).
- The superiority of the active over the contemplative life, under given conditions, in the present life (*Quodl.* XII, q. 28).
- The relative superiority of personal over common good in the hierarchy of spiritual goods (*Quodl.* IX, q. 19).
- The formulation of a basic vocabulary of human rights (see especially *Quodl.* IX, q. 26 – “whether someone condemned to death can legitimately escape” – in which the idea of a natural right to survival seems to emerge for the first time in western thought).
- The elaboration of an authoritative doctrine of time, based on a reworking of Averroes’ theory, according to which time coincides, in its material aspect, with the continuity of motion, and in its formal aspect, with the division (*discretio*) applied to this motion by the numbering activity of the soul (*Quodl.* III, q. 11, in clear opposition to Augustine’s doctrine of time).
- The admission of a distinction between *potentia ordinata* and *potentia absoluta* in the case of the pope, and the refutation of this distinction in the case of God. For Henry *potentia absoluta* always indicates the possibility of acting in a disorderly way, which the pope, who is capable of sinning, possesses, but God does not (*Tractatus super facto praelatorum et fratrum*; cf. Porro 2003).
- The severe criticism of Aquinas’ and Giles of Rome’s doctrine of the subalternation of theological science to the science of God and the Blessed (*Summa*, art. 7, qq. 4–5).



- The doctrine of *lumen supernaturale* (“supernatural light”), which is the prerogative of theologians only, and which makes their scientific habit superior to that of the “philosophers” (*Quodl.* XII, q. 2; Porro 2009).

Indeed, one of the central concerns throughout Henry’s career was the vindication of the absolutely scientific nature of theology. Moreover, it is the Master of Theology’s duty to give, on request, his authoritative opinion on any topic; hence the numerous questions of a pastoral, social, political, and even economic kind that make Henry’s *Quodlibeta* one of the richest and liveliest theological works of the entire Scholastic production (Porro 2006). Henry’s influence has been considerable, especially in the first decades of the fourteenth century: for instance, even though both John Duns Scotus and William of Ockham criticize many of Henry’s doctrines, they consider him to be the most authoritative master of thirteenth century Scholasticism.

## Cross-References

- ▶ Augustine
- ▶ Being
- ▶ Causality
- ▶ Essence and Existence
- ▶ Godfrey of Fontaines
- ▶ Ibn Sīnā, Abū ‘Alī (Avicenna)
- ▶ Ibn Sīnā (Avicenna), Latin Translations of
- ▶ Intention, Primary and Secondary
- ▶ John Duns Scotus
- ▶ Mental Representation
- ▶ Mental Word/Concepts
- ▶ Metaphysics
- ▶ Natural Rights
- ▶ Parisian Condemnation of 1277
- ▶ Posterior Analytics, Commentaries on Aristotle’s
- ▶ Proofs of the Existence of God
- ▶ Sense Perception, Theories of
- ▶ Skepticism
- ▶ Species: Sensible and Intelligible
- ▶ Syncategoremata
- ▶ Thomas Aquinas
- ▶ Time
- ▶ Truth, Theories of
- ▶ Will
- ▶ Will, Weakness of

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## Heresy

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### Abstract

Medieval theologians took their concept of heresy mainly from the texts of Jerome and Augustine quoted in Gratian's *Decretum*. Thomas Aquinas argued that anyone who pertinaciously denies even a minor item of church or Bible teaching falls into heresy. Ockham developed criteria for pertinacity and argued that a Christian, even if his or her opinions

are actually in error, cannot be regarded as pertinacious simply for refusing to defer to the teaching of a pope.

Medieval theologians at first do not seem to have reflected much on the concept of heresy. Peter Lombard in the *Sentences*, for example, asks the question what is heresy, but gives a very uninformative answer (PL vol. 192, col. 868). The concept of heresy was more seriously explored in the textbooks of canon law. Gratian's *Decretum* (written some time around 1150) includes a significant collection of patristic texts relating to heresy, and the collection of decretals issued in 1234 by Gregory IX (the *Liber extra*) includes titles concerning Jews, Apostates, Schismatics, and Heretics (Friedberg, vol. 2, col. 749ff). Gratian's Causa 23 (Friedberg, vol. 1, col. 889ff) concerns warfare, compulsion, and physical punishment directed against the wicked, including heretics. In C.24 q.3 cc.26–31 Gratian offers materials toward a definition of heresy drawn mainly from Jerome and Augustine. The texts quoted suggest that a person who has been a member of the church becomes a heretic by pertinaciously maintaining a false doctrine despite correction.

### Thomas Aquinas

The first major theological treatment of heresy was by Thomas Aquinas. He refers explicitly to Gratian as the source of some of his quotations from the fathers, and Gratian could have been his source for others also.

Thomas holds that revelation comes to individuals mainly in two ways, through the Bible and through the teaching of the church. "The formal object of faith is the First Truth, as manifested in the sacred scriptures and the teaching of the church. Anyone who does not adhere, as to an infallible and divine rule, to the teaching of the church, which proceeds from the First Truth manifested in the sacred scriptures, does not have the habit of faith but holds things that belong to the faith in some other way than by faith. . .

A heretic who pertinaciously disbelieves one article is not ready to follow church teaching in all things – but if not pertinaciously, then he is not a heretic but only one who errs" (ST 2–2 q.5 a 3). He refers here to the articles of faith, but the argument could be applied to the secondary objects of faith, such as the proposition that Abraham had two sons. Thomas makes this application later (ST 2–2 q.11 a.2). This thesis, that anyone who pertinaciously disbelieves or doubts even such minor point as that Abraham had two sons has no faith at all, illustrates de Guibert's statement, "*Tandis qu'Augustin refuse de mettre dans cette catégorie d'hérétiques ceux qui erreraient sur un détail de la vérité révélée, nous mettons aujourd'hui [1920] sur le même rang toute négation de vérité révélée, quelque en soit l'importance et le lien avec l'ensemble de l'économie chrétienne*" (de Guibert:381): this development seems to be due to Thomas Aquinas.

Thomas quotes Jerome's remark that "heresy" comes from the Greek word for choice, and says that heresy is the species of unbelief found in those who profess the Christian faith but corrupt its teachings by choosing to assent not to what Christ really taught but to their own ideas. False opinions in geometry are not heresies, since heresies are in matters belonging to the faith – namely the articles of faith, which belong to faith directly and principally, and the secondary objects of faith, denial of which leads to disbelief in some article of faith. For the secondary objects, implicit faith is enough, and it is possible to err about such matters without being a heretic. Thomas quotes Augustine (from the *Decretum*, C.24, q.3, c. 29): "We should by no means class as heretics those who defend a false and perverse opinion in no pertinacious spirit, but seek the truth with careful solicitude, ready to correct their opinion when they have found the truth," because they do not choose against the doctrine of the church. Jerome and Augustine differed on some questions, but neither was a heretic because the questions either did not concern faith or had not yet been determined by the church. Pertinacious defense of an error in a matter determined by the church would be heresy. The authority to decide matters of faith belongs to the pope (for this Thomas quotes *Decretum*, C.24

q.1 c. 12, Friedberg, vol. 1, col. 970; cf. ST 2–2 q.1 a10, where he refers to *Decretum*, d.17 c. 5, col. 51); Jerome, Augustine, and other orthodox doctors never defended any error against the authority of the pope (ST 2–2 q.11 a.2 ad 3).

## William of Ockham

The next major treatment of heresy and heretics was by William of Ockham in Part 1 of his *Dialogus*. In this work, Ockham does not speak in his own person, but it is generally possible to recognize which positions he recommends, and for brevity, I will summarize the argument as if it were directly presented. The interpretation can be confirmed from other works not in dialogue form, notably *Contra Ioannem* and *Contra Benedictum*, in which Ockham speaks directly in his own person. The whole of Part 1 of the *Dialogus* is concerned with heresy and heretics, but in this article we will restrict our attention to the first four books.

In 1 Dial. 1 Ockham argues that the topics of heresy and heretics belong primarily to theologians. In the prologue to his *Summa aurea* the canonist Hostiensis claims that the science of canon law is the “science of sciences,” comprehending both all law and theology. “All ought to be led by it and not by their own understanding.” (On this claim, and on the rivalry between canonists and theologians, see Scott.) Ockham rejects such claims. Canon law is a collection of Bible texts, texts of the fathers, imperial laws, and statutes and determinations of councils and popes, touching on theological and moral matters (c. 8). The canonical science is subalternated to theology and moral philosophy (c. 10). Canonists may have better memory of the canon law texts, but the theologians can understand them more deeply. It is for theologians, not canonists, to decide what is heresy and how to determine whether an individual is a heretic. Canonists are experts on the legal processes, but “it pertains to theologians to judge by universal rules whether the ecclesiastical laws about punishing heretics in certain ways and about the way of proceeding against them are

contrary to the divine scriptures, because if such laws were opposed to sacred scripture they should not in any way be tolerated” (c. 15).

In 1 Dial. 2 the question is, What counts as catholic truth and what as heresy? In early times opponents of heresy referred to “the rule of faith” as the measure against which orthodoxy is to be tested. Sometimes the rule of faith seems to be a summary of leading doctrines that candidates for baptism were expected to know, sometimes the general purport of the Christian tradition (Kelly:39, 40, 43). Canonists sometimes seemed to think that heresy was any disagreement with or disobedience to the pope, yet at other times they acknowledged that a pope might become a heretic. For some (Marsilius, and later the Protestants) the rule of faith is the Bible. For Ockham, the rule of faith is what it was also for Thomas Aquinas, namely “sacred scripture and the teaching of the whole church, which cannot err” (CI, 72.34–5). This rule is twofold: it may be difficult to ascertain what is the teaching of the whole church, but someone who has access to the Bible will, in some cases, be able to find a sure answer in its text. “Concerning many questions of faith those learned in sacred letters can be certain of catholic truth, notwithstanding the question or doubt of anyone else whomsoever” (CB, 250.4–6).

Ockham tries to clarify the notion of catholic truth by listing five classes of truths that catholics (members of the universal church) are obliged to believe (1 Dial. 2.2, 5), namely: (1) anything contained in the Bible, either explicitly or by necessary implication; (2) anything handed down, outside the canonical scriptures, from the Apostles; (3) factual information in chronicles, histories, etc., that are worthy of trust; (4) anything necessarily implied by the Bible and tradition together, or by either in conjunction with chronicles etc.; (5) new undoubted revelations made by God to the church. Corresponding to the five kinds of truths that catholics are obliged to believe are five kinds of “deadly errors” (1 Dial. 2.17). However, these truths and errors are not equivalent to catholic truths and heresies respectively. What makes something catholic truth is revelation by God to the church in one or other of the modes corresponding to (1), (2), and (5).

To identify apostolic tradition or post-Apostolic revelation (categories (2) and (5)) would require historical research, but there is a short cut. Ockham interprets Matthew 28:20, “I am with you all days, even unto the end of the world,” as a promise that error will never prevail in the church (1 Dial. 2.3, etc.). If at some period (e.g., in the recent past) catholics all held that some proposition is a truth of faith, then it is indeed a truth of faith: even if we cannot find any basis for it in the Bible, even if we cannot trace the process by which this belief was handed down from the Apostles, even if we have no evidence of a post-Apostolic revelation, we can be sure that it is a truth of faith that came to the Church in one or other of these three ways.

In 1 Dial. 3 the question is, What makes a person a catholic, and what makes a person a heretic? A person is a catholic if he or she has been baptized and holds the whole of the catholic faith; a heretic is anyone who has been baptized (or presents himself as such) who pertinaciously rejects or doubts any catholic truth whatsoever (1 Dial. 3.3). To explain how it is possible to hold the whole of the catholic faith, Ockham draws on Thomas Aquinas’ distinction between explicit faith and implicit faith. To believe a truth implicitly means (a) to believe explicitly some other truth in which it is implied and (b) not to believe pertinaciously anything inconsistent with it (1 Dial. 3.1). (Thomas Aquinas perhaps supposed the second point but did not make it explicitly.) Catholics must have explicit belief in some catholic truths (CI, 45.35–40; cf. 2.1 Dial. 11.13–23), but it is enough to believe the others implicitly – that is, to have explicit belief in a something that implies the rest, namely that whatever is contained in the Bible and the teaching of the church is true (CI, 46.20–22). Thus, someone who believes that everything in the Bible is true implicitly believes that Bilhah was the mother of Dan even though he has never read Genesis 30:5–6, unless for some reason he believes pertinaciously that Bilhah was not the mother of Dan. People who regard themselves as orthodox catholics may be heretics without knowing it, if they hold pertinaciously some belief (even on some minor matter) that is really inconsistent with

something they have never realized was a catholic truth (1 Dial. 4.2, 4; 2.1 Dial. 11.106ff).

According to Thomas Aquinas, it belongs especially to the pope to draw up formulations of the articles of faith. Ockham agrees: it is especially the function of the pope, aided when that is appropriate by a council, to settle doubts about the faith (1 Dial. 2.14). However, according to Ockham a pope may become a heretic (as the canonists and even papalist theologians also generally acknowledged (see Tierney 1955: 57–67; McGrade 1994: 148ff.)). Neither pope nor council nor any part of the church is infallible. Christ’s promise to be with his church all days does not guarantee that any part of the church will never err. “What is promised to the whole and not to any part ought not to be attributed to any part, even to a more principal part” (1 Dial. 5.22). What Christ’s promise does guarantee is that there will be somewhere in the church at least one person who speaks out against a false doctrine being presented as catholic truth (1 Dial. 5.28). If a pope or council asserts that some doctrine is catholic truth and some catholics, even a few illiterate lay people, contradict that assertion, the deniers may be right – they may be witnesses to the truth, speaking out against false doctrine being asserted as catholic truth.

In 1 Dial. 4 the question is, what is pertinacity and how can it be established? In 1 Dial. 4.5–34 Ockham discusses 20 possible ways of recognizing that a person is pertinacious and a heretic. According to the fourth way, for example, if a person denies any catholic truth that is widely disseminated as catholic among all catholics, including those with whom he has been living, he is immediately, without further examination, to be judged a heretic – though he can be excused if he can prove (e.g., merely by oath, if he is an uneducated person) that he did not know that this truth was catholic (1 Dial. 4.11). Another way is the seventh, the way of “legitimate correction,” according to which a person can be adjudged pertinacious if he does not change his mind when shown from the Bible or otherwise that his opinion is not catholic truth (cf. CI, 52.2–6; see McGrade 1974: 48ff). Even an illiterate is not obliged to change his mind just at the

behest of some prelate; such a person may defend a heresy a thousand times before the pope without being pertinacious or a heretic. Before he can be judged pertinacious, it must be shown to him, in a way suited to his education and understanding, that his opinion is heresy (1 Dial. 4.15–24). On the other hand, according to the eighth way, anyone, including a pope, who tries to impose a heresy as catholic truth on others by commands, threats, punishments, promises, oaths, etc., is to be judged pertinacious without examination to see whether he is ready to be corrected – the attempt to impose his erroneous opinion on others is sufficient proof of pertinacity (1 Dial. 4.25). Like a simple person, a pope or other prelate can put forward and defend a heretical opinion without being a heretic as long as he does not attempt to impose it on others: as soon as he tries to impose it by authority he can be adjudged pertinacious. Ockham’s discussion of the ways of proving pertinacity amounts to a defense of freedom of discussion within the church. Concerning the Inquisition, he remarks: “Some people say that inquisitors and some prelates often proceed unfairly and unjustly. For they say that many are unlearned and simple men blinded by greed and avarice who try to condemn those accused of heresy in order to acquire their goods. And therefore no assertion should be based on their practice” (1 Dial. 4.21).

Ockham had the same conception of the rule of faith as Thomas Aquinas had and a very similar view of implicit faith and of pertinacity. Ockham perhaps puts less emphasis on the distinction between articles of faith and the secondary objects of faith, though Thomas also held that there can be heresy in the pertinacious rejection of any detail of the Bible. Ockham’s discussion of how pertinacity is recognized was an original contribution. According to Thomas, the fact that Augustine and Jerome never defended their opinions against the authority of the pope showed that they were not heretics, whereas according to Ockham even an illiterate might defend a heresy before the pope “a thousand times” without being a heretic.

*Dialogus* was copied and studied, for example by Peter of Ailly who made an *abbreviatio* of the work, and in the fifteenth century it was printed

twice. Ockham’s ideas on the fallibility of pope and councils and on the role of individual dissenters in witnessing to catholic truth were not adopted by later theologians or canonists. His 20 ways of proving pertinacity were taken over by Turrecremata in his *Summa de ecclesia*, lib. IV pt. 2 c. 16 (according to a communication from Thomas Izbicki to A.S. McGrade).

## After the Middle Ages

Medieval Christian thinking on unbelief was based on the proposition that “without faith it is impossible to please God” (Hebrews 11:6), interpreted as meaning that God requires of every human being adherence (at least by implicit faith) to the particular body of doctrine found in the Bible and the teaching of the church. Some post-medieval writers put forward another view of what God requires. According to Pierre Bayle, we are required, not to believe the Bible and the church, but to search for truth and believe and act on whatever seems true – if there is any sin in relation to belief, it is not failing to believe the orthodox doctrine, but negligence and self-deception in the search for truth, of which the orthodox may also be guilty. A human being is not in a position to judge whether another person is guilty of such sin, and in any case human authority is not called on to punish it. Under the influence of such ideas, the punishment of heretics came to seem simply unjust.

## Cross-References

- ▶ [Thomas Aquinas](#)
- ▶ [Toleration](#)
- ▶ [William of Ockham](#)

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## Hermes Trismegistus

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### Abstract

Hermes is best known in the Renaissance as the supposed author of the *Corpus Hermeticum*, a collection of 17 Greek texts on spiritual education of which 14 were translated into Latin by Marsilio Ficino in 1463. One text of the ancient *Corpus Hermeticum* was translated into Latin

in late Antiquity under the title “Asclepius” (the Greek text is lost), and was the main conduit through which the doctrine of Hermes Trismegistus was known in the Latin West. The theoretical Hermeticism in the *Corpus Hermeticum* was accompanied by numerous texts of technical Hermeticism (in alchemy and talismanic-making), most of which were transmitted via Arabic.

In the older Classical tradition we find two Hermes. In the *Asclepius* (fourth century CE) Hermes Trismegistus states that his grandfather (or ancestor) was the god Hermes. Saint Augustine (*De civitate Dei*, VIII, 8) identifies the older Hermes as the son of Maia, daughter of Atlas, and Mercurius Trismegistus as his grandson. In the Arabic tradition, however, we find three. Abū Ma‘shar (787–886), in his *Kitāb al-ulūf* (*Book of the Thousands*), had stated that the first Hermes lived in Egypt before the flood, the second in Babylon, and revived the sciences after the flood, and the third, once again in Egypt, taught alchemy and passed on his wisdom to Asclepius. This appears to be a survival of a legend in ancient Egyptian history, as told in the *Book of Sothis* that one Hermes inscribed Egyptian knowledge on stone before the Flood, and another recovered it after the Flood. This became known to Arabic scholars through a chronicle written by Annianus (after the fifth century), who is cited by Abū Ma‘shar, al-Birūnī, and Bar Hebraeus. But Abū Ma‘shar makes the second Hermes a Babylonian, perhaps because of his Iranocentricity. The story of the three Hermes then became embedded in the alchemical tradition, and in this way reached the Latin West.

In their catalogue of medieval Latin Hermetic texts, Paolo Lucentini and Vittoria Perrone Compagni list 41 different works, extant in some 400 manuscripts. Most of these give instructions on the various materials to be used to make talismans and to summon spirits, so providing the practical aspect to the theory of the *Asclepius*. However, it cannot be immediately assumed that all these works were thought to be by an Egyptian Hermes or to convey Egyptian wisdom. When Hermes is quoted

by Abū Ma‘shar, he is a Persian, and this is reflected in Hermann of Carinthia’s *De essentiis* (1143), in which quotations of “Hermes” (or “Hermes Persa”) refer to citations from Abū Ma‘shar’s *Great Introduction to Astrology*, whereas quotations of “Trismegistus” refer to the *Asclepius*.

A significant number of texts in Arabic purport to convey the occult teaching of Hermes as transmitted by Aristotle to his royal pupil Alexander (the pseudo-Aristotelian Hermetica), and excerpts from these books survive in Latin translation (*Antimaquis, De luna secundum Aristotelem, Liber de quattuor confectionibus*).

No overlap has been observed between the Arabic texts attributed to Hermes and the Greek Hermetic corpus, but it is undoubted that the Greek *Corpus Hermeticum* originated in Egypt. Of Egyptian origin, also, is the art of alchemy, with which Hermes’ name is closely associated, and the magical art, which used spirits (daemons) in its operations. A leitmotif in Hermetic works is the discovery in an underground chamber or crypt of a stele made of marble, ebony, or emerald with mysterious writing or symbols on it. The best-known of these steles was the emerald tablet of Hermes, on which is written a hymn that encapsulates the mystery of alchemy. This first appears in Latin in a mid-twelfth-century translation of the *Secret of Creation* of Pseudo-Apollonius, made by Hugo of Santalla (see the entry on “► [Apollonius of Tyana](#)” in this volume).

The *Asclepius* remained the best-known conveyor of Hermetic doctrine in the Latin West. It was known to Lactantius in the second century CE and Augustine in the fourth, and was copied and quoted frequently in the Middle Ages and the Renaissance. It takes the form of a dialogue between Hermes Trismegistus and Asclepius. The Egyptian context of the conversation is presumed from the beginning, but the first explicit mention is in Section 24, when the conversation turns to statues “ensouled and conscious, filled with spirit and doing great deeds, foreknowing the future, and predicting by prophecy, dreams and other means.” During the course of this conversation, Trismegistus refers to Egypt as an “image of heaven” and states that “our land is the temple of the whole world.” The editor and

commentator on the *Corpus Hermeticum*, A.-J. Festugière, had claimed that the Egyptian element of the *Corpus* is only a veneer, and that the texts represented rather the academic culture of Hellenistic Alexandria. But discoveries in Armenian and in the Coptic papyri of Nag Hammadi prompted a reappraisal of the Egyptian roots of the doctrines.

These are some of the doctrines, as expressed in the *Asclepius*. The administration of all things is by the heavens, as “a perceptible god” (Section 3), but through the agency of the sun and moon, and the aid of daemons (5). Man is a “great wonder” with the capacity for becoming a god; everything is permitted to him, and he can know all things (6). The sensible universe is a “second god” created by the master and shaper of all things, and man was brought into being to admire this creation (8); hence there are three gods: the master of eternity, the universe, and mankind (10). Man’s aim should be to disdain earthly possessions and seek out the divine (11). Music brings all knowledge into its correct sequence (13). In the beginning, there was *hylē* (the Greek word used for matter), infused with spirit, which had the capacity for coming into being and procreating (14). God fills all things with spirit (16); matter nourishes bodies, spirit nourishes souls (18). All mortal and immortal things and all sensible and insensible things are connected in that they all depend on one thing (19). God cannot be named, is of both sexes, and ever pregnant with his own will (20). Man is superior to the gods in that he is both mortal and immortal, whereas gods are only immortal (21). Man can call down souls into appropriate matter in order to make living statues, which have the power of looking after things and foretelling the future (24); this is the art of making gods (37). Hymns, praises, and sweet sounds in tune with heaven’s harmony keep the statue-god happy in the presence of mankind. It is these lesser gods who help humankind through loving kinship, looking after individual things and giving advice for the future (38). The world is eternal, governed by the action of the sun and the movement of the stars (30), and regulated by *heimarmenē* (fate), necessity, and order (39). God requires no gifts other than worship and prayer (41).

The emphasis on ensouling matter, making “gods” who can help man, binds the theoretical Hermetic texts of the *Corpus Hermeticum* with the technical ones, such as the *Antimaquis*, and the various texts on making talismans. For a talisman is analogous with a statue, in that it is made of natural substances, but endowed with soul or spirit through the performance of various ritual acts, and spirits of the upper world are summoned to do the bidding of the practitioner. The *Corpus Hermeticum* enjoyed a new vogue after Ficino’s translation of 1463, under the title *Pimander* (printed in 1472), and encouraged the idea of a “perennial philosophy” or “ancient theology” founded by sages of hoary antiquity. Only with the debunking of an age-old Hermes by Isaac Casaubon in 1614 did the Hermetic doctrines start to lose their interest.

## Cross-References

► [Apollonius of Tyana](#)

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## Hervaeus Natalis

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### Abstract

Hervaeus Natalis was a fourteenth century Dominican philosopher and theologian. Both before and after he became Master General of his Order, he took part in different political as well as theological controversies, in the course of which he defended the doctrine of Thomas Aquinas. Historians, however, have questioned his Thomistic orthodoxy, inasmuch as he departed from Aquinas on important doctrines such as the distinction of essence and existence in creatures, individuation, truth, and relation. He was the first medieval philosopher to introduce and discuss the notion of intentionality, which had important ramifications both within his own century and in centuries to come.

## Biography

Hervaeus Natalis (Variants of his surname include: de Nedellec, Nédélec, Nédélek, Noël; and of his forename: Arveus, Erveus, Hervé, or Harvey) was born in Brittany probably between 1250 and 1260, and he entered the Dominicans in April of 1276. From 1302 to 1307, he was in Paris studying theology at the convent of Saint-Jacques. On June 26, 1303, while a *Bachelor sententiarus*, he was one of numerous Dominicans at Saint-Jacques who signed the petition of Philip the Fair, seeking to convoke a council, which would judge Boniface VIII on the subject of royal versus papal jurisdiction. Also during this period, Hervaeus composed his *Commentary on the Sentences of Peter the Lombard* and received his licentiate in 1308. Besides his *Sentences commentary*, he authored other works and engaged in numerous controversies, which resulted in various polemical writings. Among these was a *Defense of the Doctrine of St. Thomas*, plus works directed against Duns Scotus (1266–1308), Peter Auriol (d. 1322), Henry of Ghent (1217–1293), James of Metz (fl. 1295–1309), Jean de Pouilly (d. c. 1321), and especially Durand of Saint Pourçain (c. 1275–1334). In 1309, Hervaeus became Provincial Superior of the Dominicans in France. In 1318, he was elected Master General of his Order, in which office he remained until his death at Narbonne on August 7, 1323. Worthy of note here is that Thomas Aquinas (1225–1274) was solemnly canonized at Avignon on July 18, 1323, but Hervaeus, who as Master General had vigorously promoted his cause, was too ill to attend.

## Thought

Whatever his purpose, Hervaeus was at best an eclectic Thomist. Thus, he denied the central Thomistic doctrine of a real distinction between essence and existence in creatures. In his most explicit work on proving God's existence, Hervaeus, to some degree influenced by Duns Scotus (1266–1308), from among the famous five ways of Aquinas, embraced only the second

from efficient causality and the fourth from degrees of being. He downgraded the first way from motion, although in his *Treatise on Second Intentions*, without mentioning Thomas by name, he seems to accept, and even to highlight, this first way. Other points of departure from Thomism included an embrace of a real unity of species and a doctrine, which in contrast both to Thomas' quantified matter and Scotus' *haecitas*, attributed individuation to a combination of an extrinsic cause and the intrinsic essence of a thing. Again, he taught a doctrine of relation, which centered on connotation and came close to that later adopted by William of Ockham (c. 1284–1349). At the same time, he allowed for real as well as conceptual relations and, for example in his *Quodlibet* I, question 9, he affirmed the reality of the last six Aristotelian categories. The distinction between real and conceptual relations was important for Hervaeus' understanding of intentionality. While intentions had been discussed by many others from Avicenna (980–1037) on, Hervaeus apparently first coined the term “intentionality” (*intentionalitas*), which he used 235 times in his *Treatise on Second Intentions*. Here two things to note are: (1) for him intentionality was basically a relation from the known, or the knowable, to the knower, and (2) the point of departure for his discussion was not the *De anima* but rather the *Metaphysics* of Aristotle. In this last, the key was Aristotle's distinction between real being in the categories and being as true. More specifically, the relation involved for Hervaeus in the constitution of the whole order of intentionality was not a real categorical relation from knower to known but a conceptual relation in the opposite direction. Connected with his teaching on intentionality was his doctrine of truth, which he described as a relation of conformity between a thing in its objective being and the same thing in its real being. Again connected is his non-Thomistic position that creatures from all eternity have in the mind of God not actual but rather objective being. This position was later rejected not only by most Thomistic commentators, such as Cajetan [aka Thomas de Vio (1469–1534)], Ferrara [Franciscanus de Silvestris Ferrarensis (1474–1528)], Domingo Bañez (1528–1604),

and John of St. Thomas (1589–1644), but also by Luis de Molina (1535–1600). It was, however, accepted by Molina's fellow Jesuit, Francisco Suárez (1548–1617), who in his famous *Disputationes metaphysicae* (Salamanca 1597) cited Hervaeus 77 times. Other things to mention now are Hervaeus' views on temporal and spiritual jurisdiction, and also on dominion, rights, and ownership. All these views, which have links yet to be explored with his intentionality theory, had importance for changing understandings of state and church, for government and subordination of power within the church, as well as for objective and subjective rights, in the early fourteenth century and after.

## Cross-References

- ▶ [Aristotelianism in the Greek, Latin, Syriac, Arabic, and Hebrew Traditions](#)
- ▶ [Essence and Existence](#)
- ▶ [Ibn Sīnā, Abū 'Alī \(Avicenna\)](#)
- ▶ [Intention, Primary and Secondary](#)
- ▶ [John Duns Scotus](#)
- ▶ [Natural Rights](#)
- ▶ [Thomas Aquinas](#)
- ▶ [Thomas of Vio \(Cajetan\)](#)
- ▶ [Thomism](#)
- ▶ [Truth, Theories of](#)
- ▶ [William of Ockham](#)

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## Heymeric of Camp

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### Abstract

Heymeric of Camp (van de Velde) was a theologian and leading representative of the Albertist school at Cologne in the fifteenth century, and the author of approximately 30 philosophical as well as theological works, of which only a fraction have been printed or edited. He served as rector of the University of Cologne and its representative at the Council of Basle, and is remembered as a friend and confidant of Nicholas of Cusa, who briefly studied theology under him at Cologne. Heymeric's thought is generally considered to belong to the scholastic Neoplatonic tradition, and is strongly impressed by the influence of Albert the Great as well as by the *Ars generalis* of Ramon Llull.

### Life and Work

Heymeric was born approximately in 1395 in Zon (Brabant), in the vicinity of Eindhoven in what is now the Netherlands, and died on August 11, 1460 in Leuven, Belgium. Between 1410



and 1420 he studied in Paris, where he came under the tutelage of John de Nova Domo. From 1420 to 1422 he taught philosophy in Diest (vicinity of Leuven), where he composed his first major work, the *Compendium divinorum*, a handbook on the subject of metaphysics. In 1422, he entered the Theology faculty at Cologne. Works belonging to Heymeric's theological studies include a *Sentences* commentary, the *Quadripartitus quaestionum supra libros sententiarum*, and commentaries on Aristotle, including the *Quaestiones supra libros philosophiae rationalis, realis et moralis Aristotelis*, *Compendium logicae*, *Compendium naturalis philosophiae*, and *Compendium ethicorum*. He became Master of theology at Cologne in 1428 and was appointed professor of theology shortly thereafter. In 1432, Heymeric was made rector of the university, and between 1432 and 1435 he represented the university at the Council of Basle. During this time, he composed a lengthy conciliar tract, the *Disputatio de potestate ecclesiastica*, a defense of the revelations of St. Birgitta of Sweden (*Dyalogus super reuelacionibus Beate Birgitte*), as well as a number of important philosophical works. From 1435 to 1453, Heymeric served as professor of theology at the University of Leuven.

His early philosophical work, the *Compendium divinorum*, which presents an emanation model of reality whereby creation is a hierarchical unfolding into plurality of the divine first principle, already manifests the strongly Neoplatonic orientation of Heymeric's thought. He maintains in this work that, by virtue of its emanation, the inner structure of everything in the universe bears a Trinitarian structure which is an image, or assimilation, of its divine principle. Accordingly, each substance is a unity, but with an inner Trinitarian structure – the most fundamental of which is determined as *esse*, *posse*, and *operari* – that corresponds to the divine persons. This Trinitarian model of reality is further developed in a later work, entitled the *Theoremata totius universi*, where the divine Trinity is mirrored in creation through triadic structures such as *unitas*, *veritas*, and *bonitas*. Although Heymeric does not explicitly identify his approach as Albertist in these works, his trinitarian theory is heavily marked

by the influence of Albert the Great, especially the latter's commentary on the *Divine Names* of Pseudo-Dionysius.

In his *Tractatus de sigillo aeternitatis* (1432–1435), the central figure is that of an encircled, equilateral triangle with lines extending inward from each corner to the center of the circle. The circle symbolizes the unity of God, the triangle symbolizes the Trinity, and the radiating lines stand for the external working of the divine power in creation. Heymeric maintains that this divine symbol is the best means for making the trinitarian structure of reality apparent, due to its ability to communicate traces in the lower echelons of the human understanding (*ratio*) to its upper echelons (*intellectus*). In this way, the symbol is not only the key to all scientific knowledge, but will lead one to the first principles of that knowledge, that is, to their divine archetypes.

The *Colliget principiorum iuris naturalis, divini et humani philosophice doctrinalium*, written during his Basle years, is Heymeric's largest work next to the *Disputatio*, and comprises a wide-ranging survey of philosophical principles. The *Ars demonstrativa*, written around the same time, develops a method of demonstration through a peculiar application of the Aristotelian principle of non-contradiction, whereby a series of philosophical as well as theological truths are shown to be true via a process of demonstrating the absurdity resulting from the assertion of their opposite.

*De signis notionalibus* (1435–1460), a treatise written most probably during Heymeric's professorship at Leuven, revisits the question of how observation of aspects of creation can in a step-wise manner lead to knowledge of the divine Trinity, and belongs to the tradition of *vestigia trinitatis* treatises of the likes of Bonaventure's *Itinerarium mentis in Deum*. In this work, he brings forth many examples of such *vestigia* found in nature, including the Trinitarian structure of the four elements, whereby each is seen to be comprised of a triad of characteristics interrelated in a manner that mirrors the divine Trinity. So, for example, fire is alleged to consist of the characteristics of warmth, dryness, and lightness, such that warmth is the primary characteristic, out of

which is generated dryness, and out of these both proceeds lightness. Another of Heymeric's late works is the *Centheologicum* (c. 1454), a compendium of 100 different philosophies, including sections on Nicholas of Cusa and Ramon Llull.

All of Heymeric's speculative works are concerned with finding a universal form of knowledge that will encompass both philosophy and theology. Trinitarian concepts play an important role in this universal knowledge. Because it is an image of the divine Trinity, the human soul is a *thesaurus omnium scibilium*, which can be unlocked through self-knowledge, and which therefore has the potential to grasp through natural means not only all human knowledge, but divine truths as well. In so affirming the ability of human reason to discover divine wisdom, Heymeric comes down firmly on the side of the *via antiqua*, as one who rejects the nominalist division of philosophy and theology.

### Heymeric and Nicholas of Cusa

Nicholas and Heymeric were lifelong friends and exerted a mutual influence in terms of philosophical ideas. As mentioned, Cusa studied theology under Heymeric at Cologne in 1425–1426, and they were colleagues at the Basle council. Heymeric makes reference to Cusa's works *De docta ignorantia* and *De pace fidei* in his *Centheologicum*, and refers to Cusa as "Praeceptor meus" in a letter. On the other hand, it was probably Heymeric who introduced Cusa to the philosophy of Ramon Llull, and Heymeric's writings on the subject of Christianity and Islam in his *Disputatio* had a marked effect on Nicholas' *De pace fidei* and *Cribatio Alkorani*. There are three codices containing manuscripts of works by Heymeric in the Cusanus Library in Bernkastel-Kues (Cod. Cus. 24, containing Heymeric's commentary on the *Apocalypse*; and Cod. Cus. 105 and 106, containing the *Compendium divinatorum*, *Quadripartitum quaestionum supra libros sententiarum*, *Quaestiones supra libros philosophiae rationalis, realis et moralis Aristotelis*, *Theoremata totius universi fundamentaliter doctrinalia*, *Ars demonstrativa*, *Tractatus de sigillo aeternitatis*,

*Disputatio de potestate ecclesiastica*, and *Colliget principiorum*).

### Heymeric and Albertism

It was as a student of John de Nova Domo, the founder of the Albertist school, that Heymeric came to be a representative of Albertism, a fifteenth-century movement which defended Albert the Great's reading of Aristotle against the interpretations of its major competitors, namely the Thomists, Scotists, and Nominalists. Albertism is distinguished from the other schools of thought by its strongly Neoplatonic orientation. One of its key distinguishing features is the teaching that it is possible for the intellect to attain knowledge of separate substances in this life and without the mediation of sensible experience. In defending this as an interpretation of Aristotle, the Albertists relied heavily on the concept of the "intellectus adeptus," taken from the Islamic Aristotelians. In 1423, Heymeric penned the *Tractatus problematicus (Problemata inter Albertum Magnum et Sanctum Thomam*, printed in Cologne in 1496), an Albertist tractate in which he first identifies and rejects the position of the Nominalists, before examining the points of difference as well as agreement between the Thomists and Albertists. This treatise incited a violent response from Thomist Gerard de Monte, who rejected the notion that there might be any points of agreement between Albertists and Thomists. Heymeric's influence on academic theology in the fifteenth century — especially through the *Tractatus problematicus* — was considerable, and his activities as a representative of Albertism were largely responsible for the institutional solidification of the Albertist school at Cologne and beyond.

### Cross-References

- ▶ [Albert the Great](#)
- ▶ [Albertism](#)
- ▶ [Aristotelianism in the Greek, Latin, Syriac, Arabic, and Hebrew Traditions](#)
- ▶ [Bonaventure](#)

- ▶ [Nicholas of Cusa](#)
- ▶ [Ramon Llull](#)
- ▶ [Thomism](#)
- ▶ [Trinity](#)

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## Hildegard of Bingen

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### Abstract

Hildegard of Bingen (1098–1179) was brought up from the age of 7 at the monastery of Disibodenberg, near Mainz, Germany. Little is known of her early life until a mystical experience in her 43rd year prompted her to start recording her visionary insights in *Scivias* (*Know the Ways*), a work that gained the approval of both St. Bernard and Pope Eugenius III at the Council of Trier in late 1147 or early 1148. Soon after 1150, she succeeded in moving with her female community from Disibodenberg to Rupertsberg near Bingen. There she became famous as a prolific author and as a spiritual guide and counselor for both her nuns and the wider community. Although not trained in philosophy, her visionary treatises, *Scivias*, the *Liber vitae meritorum*

(*Book of Life's Rewards*), and the *Liber divinorum operum* (*Book of Divine Works*) reveal her desire to interpret religious doctrine in the light of nature. She was profoundly interested in the therapeutic properties of plants, stones, and living organisms in the natural world, as well as in the capacity of music to restore the human soul. Although she never traveled outside of Germany, she was widely recognized by contemporaries across Europe as being one of the most extraordinarily gifted women of her day.

## Biographical Information

Hildegard reveals relatively little about her early life, other than that ever since the age of 5, she had been gifted with “secret and wonderful visions,” which she had once spoken to a woman under whose care she had been placed (Jutta, daughter of the Count of Sponheim), but that by the age of 15 she had learned not to speak about them, out of fear of what others might say (*Vita Hildegardis* II.2). Having been offered to Disibodenberg as a child, she was formally enclosed as a recluse there in 1112, along with Jutta – who was 6 years older. According to the *Life of Jutta*, written soon after her death in 1136, Hildegard's mentor was widely known as offering advice and healing, but who was committed to extremes of self-mortification (Silvas 1999, 65–84). Only gradually did Hildegard move out of her shadow. She recalls that her life changed in 1141 with a mystical experience of “the living light” by which she claimed to understand the true meaning of the scriptures, of the Fathers (and also of some philosophers, she would later add) (*Scivias*, Prol.; *Vita Hildegardis* II.2). She was encouraged to record her insights by close friends, in particular by a monk called Volmar and Richardis von Stade. She spent the next 10 years working on *Scivias*, or “Know the Ways” (of the Lord). Yet, only after prolonged bouts of illness and after getting support from St. Bernard and Pope Eugenius III at the Council of Trier (1147/48) was she able to move with 18 nuns to a new monastic site, at Rupertsberg, where she was officially the

*magistra* with Volmar as provost, but operated as its abbess (*Vita Hildegardis* II.7). She quickly became widely recognized as a healer and visionary, consulted by bishops, monks, and simple layfolk. She engaged in extensive correspondence with contemporaries at the same time as composing many songs for the liturgy at Rupertsberg. At this abbey, she devoted herself to writing not just about the Church and Scripture but about the healing properties of natural elements and creatures, psychological development, and the relationship of the natural world to the process of redemption.

Hildegard went on several preaching tours in Germany and was particularly concerned by the growth of heretical groups that rejected the worldliness of the established Church. In the final year of her life, Hildegard and her nuns were excommunicated by the archbishop of Mainz, ostensibly for burying an excommunicated nobleman in their grounds. This prompted an impassioned defense of their right to sing the liturgy and thus recreate the original voice of Adam in Paradise (*Epist.* 23). While this excommunication was lifted shortly before her death on September 17, 1179, Hildegard's devoted admirers never succeeded in getting her recognized by the papacy as a saint.

## Thought

Hildegard's first major work, *Scivias*, is concerned with the evolution of *Ecclesia*. She describes and comments on 13 visions (subsequently illustrated in the manuscript produced under her direction). While she professed ignorance of the technical skills of exegesis, she uses visual images to highlight her reading of the great themes of creation, the fall of humanity and the redemption, and the return of *Ecclesia* to a godly path. Identifying herself with John the Divine, she quotes extensively from Scripture to explain that although the natural universe was created by God, humanity had been led astray (*Scivias* I). Her frequent theme is that natural *viriditas*, or greening power, has fallen away and that it is only through God's love that *viriditas* can be restored (Mews 1998b). Hildegard gives detailed advice to different orders within the

Church about how they ought to lead their life. Rather than single out Eve as the temptress of Adam, she sees the devil as having ensnared Eve, mother of creation, but *Ecclesia* as the reawakened Bride, mother of the faithful, destined for mystical union with Christ (Newman 1987). Much of the third part of *Scivias* is taken up by an account of the elevation of *Ecclesia* through the Virtues, to which Christians can appeal for support in their effort. It concludes with a series of mystical songs that serve to remind a sluggish soul of her true calling, expanded in her *Ordo Virtutum* (*Order of Virtues*), a morality play about the soul's journey. Hildegard also included songs in her *Symphonia of celestial harmonies*, songs that she may have started to compose long before she moved to Rupertsberg in 1150.

In the *Liber subtilitatum rerum creaturarum* (*Book of the Subtleties of Created Things*), preserved as two separate texts, the *Physica* and the *Causae et curae* (*Causes and Cures*), Hildegard considers not only how did God create all things but how creation, rightly used, can help restore human health to physical and spiritual balance (Moulinier 1995). Her teaching recapitulates some familiar themes of traditional medical wisdom, but placed within a spiritual framework, in which physical illness is seen not simply as a means for testing spiritual stamina, but as a sign of spiritual imbalance within the human being. Hildegard constantly refers to physical illnesses by which she was afflicted throughout her life. Whereas Jutta seems to have treated the body by ascetic exercises, Hildegard understood the spiritual life as involving a restoration of physical as well as spiritual harmony. She developed the psychological aspect of her teaching in the *Liber vitae meritorum*, composed after 1158, on a visual image to highlight her teaching about conduct that ultimately leads away from God. Using apocalyptic imagery to warn against vices of infidelity, slothfulness, and worldly love, and the consequences of such behavior on those who follow such vices, she sees herself as a legitimate philosopher, though wiser than those who simply trusted in head knowledge (*Liber vitae meritorum* III.9).

In 1163, Hildegard started her greatest composition, the *Liber divinorum operum* (*LDO*), a vast synthesis of visionary teaching, expanded



through her technique of describing and commenting on a series of 10 visions. The task took her another 10 years to complete. While Hildegard was never trained in the schools, she would have been exposed to theological works like the *De sacramentis* of Hugh of St. Victor, with its theme of God's plan for restoring humanity to God. She takes a very different tack, however, from scholastic theologians. The first section of *LDO* is devoted to a symbolic account of the natural world and the relationship of the human person to the wider universe. She has an apocalyptic figure proclaim her distinctly dynamic vision of the life force, divine in origin, that sustains creation:

I am the supreme and fiery life, which sets aflame all living sparks, and breathed forth nothing dead, and I judge all things as they are. [. . .] For the air lives in viridity and flowers, the waters flow as if they live, the sun also lives in its light (*Liber divinorum operum* I.1.2).

With this rich poetic writing, Hildegard distances herself from traditional philosophical categories about divine being and instead emphasizes the divine force that sustains the created world. Her consistent theme is that body and soul need each other to survive and that imbalance in this relationship disturbs the entire order of creation.

## Cross-References

- ▶ [Bernard of Clairvaux](#)
- ▶ [Hugh of St. Victor](#)
- ▶ [Medicine and Philosophy](#)
- ▶ [Virtue and Vice](#)

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## Hugh of St. Victor

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### Abstract

The writings of Hugh of St. Victor encompass pedagogical, exegetical, theological, and spiritual works. These four areas of Hugh's thought are brought together by various themes, the



central one being the creation of the world by the Triune God and redemption of the world through the grace of the incarnation and the sacraments of the Christian Church. This unifying theme is worked out exegetically, spiritually, and systematically through a conception of world history that takes into account the historical and eschatological realities revealed in the Christian Scriptures. The present article briefly traces these themes as they are woven through Hugh's central works.

Hugh of St. Victor (b. 1097/1101–d. 1141) was a member of the Augustinian canons regular at the Abbey of St. Victor, located on the left bank of the Seine just outside the city walls of twelfth-century Paris. Perhaps a student of William of Champeaux, Hugh was profoundly influential in the intellectual flowering that took place in western Europe from the early twelfth to the mid-thirteenth century. Hugh, called by his contemporaries the *secundus Augustinus*, was significantly influenced by Augustine of Hippo; Hugh's influence can be traced in the writings of Richard of St. Victor, Adam of St. Victor, Thomas Gallus, and Bonaventure.

Like many of the victorines, Hugh is more of a theologian and biblical exegete than a philosopher in any modern sense of the term, and his works can be divided into pedagogical, exegetical, theological, and spiritual works (Poirel 1998: 37–47). The writings of Hugh (including numerous misattributions) are collected in the *Patrologia Latina* 175–177 and are currently being edited in modern critical editions.

### Hugh's Pedagogical Division of Philosophy

In his *Didascalicon*, Hugh divided philosophy (the sciences), following Augustine's *De doctrina christiana*, into four basic categories: (1) theoretical, (2) practical, (3) mechanical, and (4) logical. The theoretical sciences consist of theology, mathematics (arithmetic, music, geometry, and astronomy), and physics. The practical sciences

are made up of individual concerns (ethics), domestic concerns (economic), and public concerns (political). The mechanical sciences consist of fabric making, armament, navigation, agriculture, hunting, medicine, and theatre. Finally, the logical sciences are divided into grammar and the art of reasoning (demonstration, dialectic, and rhetoric). The divisions explicated above inform Hugh's other pedagogical works such as *De institutione nouitiorum*, *De grammatica*, and *De tribus maximis circumstantiis gestorum* (*Chronicon*). These works emphasize the importance of historical learning and memory as well as proper exegetical method.

### Biblical Exegesis

The Abbey of St. Victor was characterized by a focus on biblical exegesis (Smalley). From Hugh and Andrew of St. Victor's reevaluation of the historical sense (Zinn) to Herbert of Bosham's interest in the *hebraica veritas* and Hebrew exegesis (Goodwin), the school had a significant impact not only on twelfth-century exegesis but also on the subsequent medieval tradition. The Hugonian corpus includes theoretical works of exegesis (*De scripturis et scriptoribus sacris*, PL 175, col. 9–28; *Didascalicon*) and several important individual exegetical works (*Expositio super Psalmos*, PL 177, col. 589–634; *Homiliae in Ecclesiasten*, PL 175, col. 113–256).

Again, following Augustine (*De doctrina christiana*), Hugh divided Scripture into three distinct scriptural types: (1) literal (historical), (2) allegorical, and (3) tropological (moral). The literal sense, as Hugh understands the category, is closely related to a historical understanding. Hugh places a strong priority on the historical sense, and it functions as a guide by which he evaluates the other senses, in particular arguing against an uncontrolled or undisciplined use of the spiritual sense (*Didascalicon* 6, 3; *De scripturis et scriptoribus sacris* 3–5). A particular passage of Scripture can be understood to have a literal, allegorical, and tropological sense, implying that these are not “competing” categories in Hugh's exegesis.

## Theological Speculation

Hugh's pedagogical and exegetical works form the foundation of his *De sacramentis christianae fidei*, a work that is often considered the first theological *Summa* of the high medieval period. This systematic work is not Hugh's only theological treatise, although judging by the extant manuscripts *De sacramentis* (224 mss.), and the shorter *De tribus diebus* (114 mss.) are Hugh's most significant theological tracts for the later Middle Ages (Poirel 1998: 41–43).

Hugh argues in the prologue to *De sacramentis* that readers are often distracted by various unorganized and disparate volumes, therefore he proposes a systematic order that is contained in a single *Summa*. He argues that the subject matter of the Scriptures is the restoration of humanity, and this restoration is found in two works: (1) the work of creation (*opus conditionis*) and (2) the work of restoration (*opus restorationis*). This basic division of the treatise is between the time before the incarnation and the time after the incarnation. The first work includes all things that came into being in the time before the incarnation including angels, humanity, the fall, human restoration, the sacraments (sacraments of the Hebrew Bible), faith, and the law. The second work is an explication of the restoration of creation through the incarnation and the sacramental nature of all of reality. In Hugh's language, "the work of restoration is the incarnation of the word with all his Sacraments" (*opus restorationis est incarnatio Verbi cum omnibus sacramentis suis*; PL 176, col. 183). Hugh explicates the narrative of creation, fall, and redemption in the first book of *De sacramentis*, leaving to the entire second book an elaborate discussion of the incarnation of the Word and the divine grace given through the sacraments.

The narrative of creation and redemption found in *De sacramentis* is also the significant theme of the Ark trilogy and numerous other writings, locating the heart of Hugh's thought in the plan of redemption as worked out in the grace of the incarnation and the sacraments of the Christian Church. The exegetical, mystical, aesthetic, and theological threads of Hugh's oeuvre are intricately woven together in his short work *De tribus diebus*.

## Spirituality

The culmination of Hugh's theological enterprise – and clearly the most copied, and presumably read, works – are his spiritual writings. Some of these works, such as the *Soliloquium de arrha animae* (327 mss.), *De virtute orandi* (226 mss.), and *De archa Noe morali* (152 mss.) exist in hundreds of manuscripts, demonstrating that they were incredibly popular spiritual writings (Poirel 1998: 44–47). The works that have received the most scholarly attention recently are Hugh's triad of works on the theme of Noah's Ark: *De archa Noe morali* (or *De archa Noe*), *De archa Noe mystica* (or *Libellus de formatione arche*), and *De vanitate mundi*.

The Ark trilogy is an elaborate schema in which the human heart or soul is related to God. God, throughout the trilogy, is found to dwell in the human being through knowledge and love; knowledge constructs the structure of faith, the Ark, and love is that which gives the Ark its beauty and embellishment. God dwells in the human heart as if in a temple or an Ark. But, the relationship between God and the human heart is worked out through a complex structure of scriptural and historical imagery. This work is begun in *De archa Noe morali* and continued in *De archa Noe mystica*. The latter work encapsulates all of Biblical and Church History, emphasizing the place of the Church (CCCM 176:127; PL 176, col. 685) and its human inhabitants from Adam through the pontificate of the present Pope Honorius (CCCM 176:128–132; PL 176, col. 686–7). The final work in the triad, *De vanitate mundi*, is in the form of a dialogue between Reason and the Soul. The work continues the same theme, in which the Ark saves humanity from the flood and brings it to God – who both resides above, but is also the helmsman, or captain, of the Ark.

## Cross-References

- ▶ [Augustine](#)
- ▶ [Bonaventure](#)
- ▶ [Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite](#)
- ▶ [Richard of St. Victor](#)

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## Ibn Abī Jumhūr al-Aḥsāʾī

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### Abstract

Ibn Abī Jumhūr al-Aḥsāʾī (d. after 904/1499), was a Shīʿī theologian and a philosopher who spent his life between his homeland of Baḥrayn, the sacred Shīʿī places of Iraq, and Khurāsān. His bibliography is mainly divided in works of Imāmi classical theology (*kalām*) and works combining theology with philosophical and mystical ideas. In his magnum opus, the *Mujlī mirʾāt al-munjī fī l-kalām wa l-ḥikmatayn wa l-ṭaṣawwuf* (“The Book of the Illuminated, Mirror of the Savior, on Theology, the Two Wisdoms, and Sufism”), he upheld the harmony between Twelver Shīʿism, Sufism, and – Peripatetic as well as Illuminist – philosophy. Shīʿī scholars would eventually adopt contrasted attitudes towards him; however, his influence upon the “philosophical Renaissance” in the tenth-to-eleventh/sixteenth-to-seventeenth-century Iran was certainly decisive

Muḥammad Ibn Zayn al-Dīn Abī l-Ḥasan ‘Alī b. Ḥusām al-Dīn Ibrāhīm, known as Ibn Abī Jumhūr al-Aḥsāʾī (d. after 904/1499), was a Shīʿī theologian, philosopher, and mystical thinker of the

second half of the ninth/fifteenth century. He is commonly associated with Sayyid Ḥaydar Āmulī (d. after 787/1385-86) and al-Ḥāfiẓ Rajab al-Bursī (d. after 813/1410-11), as a prominent representative of the rapprochement between Twelver Shīʿism, Sufism, and philosophy, during the somewhat chaotic post-Mongol period in Eastern Islamic world. However, he was much more acquainted with philosophical doctrines than these two. He can be seen as one of the main agents of the integration of Avicennism and Illuminationist philosophy into the Shīʿī thought. Although he composed all his work in Arabic, his influence was mainly in Iranian Shīʿī circles. In this regard, his influence upon the “philosophical Renaissance” in the tenth-to-eleventh-/sixteenth-to-seventeenth-century Iran shall not be overlooked.

### His Life

Little is known about Ibn Abī Jumhūr al-Aḥsāʾī’s life. The scant information available to us is mainly due to self-testimonies contained in his writings, his colophons, and the *ijāzas* (licenses to teach some scholarly works) that he issued or received (Schmidtke 2009; al-Ghufrānī 2013). He was supposedly born in 838/1435 in the village of al-Taymiyya in the region of al-Aḥsāʾ. Located in the northeast of the Arabian Peninsula, this area belonged to the historical province of Baḥrayn, along with the present-day Baḥrayn islands, and is

known for an early period as a Shī'i center (Shaybī 2011, Vol. 2, p. 312; Muwahhid 1988, p. 635; Schmidtke 2000, pp. 14–15; Lawson 1996, p. 662). In the mid-fifteenth century, the rule of the Sunni Banu Jabr put the Shī'is under pressure to convert; however, the region continued to produce Shī'i scholars who frequently travelled to Iraq for further study (Newman 2013, p. 148).

Ibn Abī Jumhūr spent his life between the region of Baḥrayn, the sacred Shī'i places of Iraq, and Khurāsān in the northeast of Iran. At that time, Arab and Persian worlds were not so politically and culturally separated, and Ibn Abī Jumhūr made many trips back and forth between the two areas. He carried out his earliest studies in traditional sciences in al-Aḥsā', under the tutelage of his father Shaykh Zayn al-Dīn 'Alī b. Ibrāhīm al-Aḥsā'ī (d. before 895/1489-90). Then he set out for Najaf in Iraq, which houses the shrine of the first Shī'i Imām 'Alī b. Abī Ṭālib (d. 40/661) and was the main center for Shī'i learning. He completed there his formation in religious sciences, notably in the circle of Shaykh Sharaf al-Dīn Ḥasan b. 'Abd al-Karīm al-Fattāl (fl. 870/1465-66), from whom he received an *ijāza*. In 877/1472, at the age of 40, he took the way of Mecca to perform the pilgrimage. Upon completion of the *ḥājj*, he spent some months in Karak Nūḥ, Jabal 'Āmil (present-day South Lebanon), a reputed Twelver Shī'i center, where he integrated the circle of Shaykh 'Alī b. Hilāl al-Jazā'irī (d. between 909/1504 and 915/1510), from whom he also received an *ijāza* (Shūshtarī 2014–15, Vol. 5, p. 602; Schmidtke 2000, pp. 16–17). After a short stint back in his homeland, he travelled again to the Shī'i sacred places of Iraq, under the sovereignty of the Sunni Ottoman Empire. From here, he set out for Khurāsān to visit the mausoleum of Imām Riḍā (d. 203/818) in Mashhad. On the road, he composed his *Risāla Zād al-musāfirīn fī uṣūl al-dīn*, a treatise on dialectic theology (*kalām*). In Mashhad, he took part in theological debates with a Sunni scholar named al-Fāḍil al-Hirawī in 878/1483; one of these controversies, about the succession of the Prophet and the imāmate of 'Alī b. Abī Ṭālib, is reported by the Shī'i-oriented historian Nūrallāh Shūshtarī (d. 1019/1610) (Shūshtarī 2014–15, Vol. 5, pp. 603–620).

Ibn Abī Jumhūr spent most of the last decades of his life in Mashhad and other cities of Khurāsān. In 886/1481–82, he visited Baḥrayn and Qaṭīf, and in 893/1488, he achieved in his homeland his *Nūr al-munjī min al-ḡalām* (see below). In 894/1488-89, he made a second pilgrimage in Mecca, followed by a 2-year stay in Najaf. Then he came back to Mashhad, where he completed his *Mujlī mir'āt al-munjī* (see below), in 896/1490. In 904/1499, he composed in Madīna what seems to be his last work, a commentary on *al-Bāb al-ḥādī 'ashar*, a theological treatise of al-'Allāma al-Ḥillī (d. 726/1326). The last piece of evidence of his life is an *ijāza* issued in Ḥilla, Iraq, in Rajab 906/1501 (Fārmad in *Mujlī*, pp. 65–67; Schmidtke 2017, pp. 400–401). At the very same year, the young leader of the Safavid brotherhood, Shāh Ismā'īl (r. 906–930/1501–1524), and his troops of fanaticized dervishes, took the city of Tabriz, the capital of the Aq Quyunlu state, and proclaimed Shī'ism as the religion state of Iran. The death of Ibn Abī Jumhūr must have occurred after this event, but its date remains unknown.

## His Thought

Ibn Abī Jumhūr's bibliography is mainly divided in works on theology (*kalām*) in a conventional style, on the one hand, and works combining theology with philosophical – Peripatetic as well as Illuminationist – and mystical thought, on the other hand. The first group notably contains his treatise *Zād al-musāfirīn*; its autocommentary *Kashf al-barāhīn li-sharḥ Zād al-musāfirīn*, achieved in 878/1474; and his creedal tract *Maslak al-afḥām fī 'ilm al-kalām*, composed in 886/1482 (IAJ 2014). The second group contains *al-Durra al-mustakhrīja min al-lujja*, a brief epistle introducing the metaphysics of lights, composed between 886/1483 and 888/1483; its autocommentary *al-Bawāriq al-muḥsinīyya li-tajallī al-durra al-jumhūrīyya*, completed in 888/1483; and the *Mujlī mir'āt al-munjī fī l-kalām wa l-ḥikmatayn wa l-taṣawwuf*, an autocommentary of *al-Nūr al-munjī min al-ḡalām*, which was in turn an autocommentary of the

*Maslak al-afhām fī 'ilm al-kalām* (Fārmad in *Mujlī*, pp. 85–86; Ṭihirānī 1934, Vol. 20, p. 13; Madelung 1978, pp. 147–156; Schmidtke 2000, pp. 28–30).

The earliest works of Ibn Abī Jumhūr do not witness of any philosophical or mystic influence, despite a certain inclination toward rationalism. He may have get acquainted with the philosophy of Avicenna and the “Peripateticians” (*al-mashā'īyyūn*), as well as the “wisdom of Illumination” (*ḥikmat al-ishrāq*) of Shihāb al-Dīn Suhrawardī (d. 587/1191), through the teaching of Shaykh Ḥasan al-Fattāl. As for Sufism, and in particular Ibn 'Arabī's theosophy, he seems to have become learned in it even later. However, it is noteworthy that philosophical mysticism was a living tradition in his homeland Baḥrayn, counting scholars such as Kamāl al-Dīn Mītham al-Baḥrānī's (d. after 681/1282), whose *Sharḥ Nahj al-balāgha*, a commentary of the collection of sayings attributed to the Imām 'Alī, is quoted by Ibn Abī Jumhūr in his *Mujlī*.

The first stage of Ibn Abī Jumhūr's philosophical thought appears in his *Durra al-Mustakhrija min al-lujja* and its autocommentary *al-Bawāriq al-muḥsiniyya*. The former epistle deals with spiritual conduct (*sulūk*) through five stations (*maqām*). It describes the fall of the soul from the higher world to the lowest, and its release from the latter, while drawing the metaphor of a bird in a cage; it also describes the progress from religious “blind imitation” (*taqlīd*) to “independent judgment” (*ijtihād*). The author adopts many concepts and topics of Illuminationist philosophy, like the “incorporeal lights” (*anwār mujarrada*) and the “victorial lights” (*anwār qāhira*), by quoting Suhrawardī's *Kitāb Ḥikmat al-ishrāq* and the *Risālat al-Zūrā'* of his contemporary Jalāl al-Dīn al-Dawānī (m. 908/1502-03) (IAJ 2014, 598 sq); in its autocommentary, he also quotes Ibn Sīnā's poetry on Soul (*Qaṣīdat al-naḥs*) (IAJ 2014, pp. 464–465). The conclusion of both epistles contains a complain (*shikāya*) against the “sons of the time” and a recommendation not to disclose this teaching to the common people (*al-'āmm*).

The *Mujlī mir'āt al-munjī fī l-kalām wa l-ḥikmatayn wa l-taṣawwuf* (“The Book of the Illuminated, Mirror of the Savior, on Theology,

the Two Wisdoms, and Sufism”) is undoubtedly the author's *magnum opus* on philosophy and theology. As suggested by its title, its purpose is to reconcile, and to integrate into Twelver Shī'ī theology, various elements coming from Ash'ari and Mu'tazili theologies (*kalām*), which are reputed to be contradictory with each other; concepts and positions inherited from the Peripatetic or speculative philosophy (*baḥthiyya*) as well as from the Illuminationist or intuitive philosophy (*dhawqīyya*), both designated as “the two wisdoms” or “philosophies” (*al-ḥikmatayn*); and basic topics of Ibn 'Arabī's theosophy, identified to Sufism (*taṣawwuf*) (*Mujlī*, pp. 134–135). It is noteworthy that the philosophical and mystical topics are absent in the matrix epistle and appear gradually in its commentary and supercommentary. Ibn Abī Jumhūr's main source in the field of philosophy is the monumental work of Shams al-Dīn Shahrazūrī (d. between 687/1288 and 704/1305), a disciple of Suhrawardī, entitled *Rasā'il al-Shajara al-ilāhiyya fī 'ulūm al-ḥaqā'iq al-rabbāniyya* (“Epistles of the Divine Tree. On the Sciences of the Divine Realities”), completed in 680/1281, of which he must have had a copy at his disposal. Throughout the *Mujlī*, numerous lengthy passages of the *Shajara* are quoted without mention of their source (Schmidtke 1997). As for the field of Sufism, he mostly borrowed his information and argument from Ḥaydar Āmulī's *Jāmi' al-asrār wa manba' al-anwār* (“The Sum of Secrets and the Source of Lights”), a manifesto for the unity of Sufism and Shī'ism.

Ibn Abī Jumhūr's primary concern in his *Mujlī* was apparently to establish the right of philosophy to exist within Islamic religion. He upheld a pre-established harmony between divine Law (*shar'*) and Intelligence (*'aql*), synthezizing between the rationalist meaning of *'aql* and its early Imāmi conception as “hiero-Intelligence” (Amir-Moezzi 1994, pp. 6–13). “In truth, as Intelligence is a divine Law which is revealed from the inner, the divine Law is an Intelligence coming from the outer. Both support each other and help each other. Because the divine Law is Intelligence, God denied the latter to the infidels in different loci of His holy book, like in his saying: “Deaf are they, and dumb, and blind: for they do not use



their reason" (2:171, transl. Asad). As for Intelligence as being a divine Law, that is what God has claimed in His saying: "It is harmonious with the nature which God has designed for people. The design of God cannot be altered. Thus is the upright religion, but many people do not know" (30: 30, transl. M. Sarwar), where He gives to Intelligence the name of religion. About the unity of both Intelligence and Law, He said: "Light upon Light," meaning the light of Intelligence and the light of Law. He also said: "God guides to His Light whom He will" (24: 35, transl. Arberry), making of both lights one and the same light" (*Mujlī*, pp. 935–936). This passage may remind us Averroes' argumentation in his *Faṣl al-maqāl fī mā bayn al-sharī'a wa l-ḥikma min al-ittiṣāl* ("Decisive Treatise Determining the connection between the [Islamic] Law and Philosophy [or Wisdom]"). However, it is unlikely that Ibn Abī Jumhūr had the slightest knowledge of Averroes' work, which seems to have not penetrated the Eastern Islamic world. Moreover, it is noteworthy that his argument had more impact in the Shī'i intellectual world than Averroes' one in Sunni Islam. As an illustration, this passage is resumed in Qutb al-Dīn Ashkiwarī's (d. between 1088/1677 and 1095/1684) *Maḥbūb al-qulūb* ("The Beloved of the Hearts"), in support to the harmony between Imāmi religion and Greek philosophy (Ashkiwarī 1999, I, p. 102; Terrier 2016, pp. 187–188).

In the field of theology, Ibn Abī Jumhūr adopted many of the Shī'i Sufi Ḥaydar Āmulī's mystical views, rather than the rationalist positions of Imāmi or Mu'tazili theologians. He distinguished three levels of testifying the divine unity (*tawḥīd*), respectively opposed to three degrees of infidelity (*kufr*): at the top level, the "testimony of the ontological unity" (*al-tawḥīd al-wujūdī*), in other words "unity of existence" (*waḥdat al-wujūd*), an idea inherited from Ibn 'Arabī and condemned as a form of pantheism by a number of theologians, whether Sunni or Shī'i; at the intermediary level, the "testimony of the unity of divine attributes" (*al-tawḥīd al-ṣifātī*); and at the lowest level, the testimony of God's unity according to exoteric Islam (*al-tawḥīd al-islāmī*) (*Mujlī*, pp. 477–478). He

quoted Āmulī stating that "the *tawḥīd* is the vision of unity in the very multiplicity and the vision of multiplicity in the very unity (...), the contemplation of the gathering (*jam'*) in the detailed explanation (*tafṣīl*) (...); the distinction between the divine Real and the human creature (*tamyīz al-ḥaqq 'an al-khalq*) and the annihilation of the latter within the former" (*Mujlī*, pp. 484–485; Āmulī 1989, p. 75). Likewise, he borrowed Āmulī's doctrine – mainly developed in the latter's treatise on Qur'anic exegesis *al-Muḥīṭ al-a'zam* – of correspondences between "the book of Qur'an" (*al-kitāb al-qur'ānī*); "the book of horizons" (*al-kitāb al-āfāqī*), i.e., the physical world or *macrocosmos* (*al-'ālam al-kabīr*); and "the book of souls" (*al-kitāb al-anfusī*), i.e., the inner self or *microcosmos* (*al-'ālam al-saghīr*); each of these three books possesses letters, words, verses, and surahs. In this frame, absolute mankind is the locus of manifestation of the Qur'anic verse "*bi-smi-llāh al-rahmān al-rahīm*" ("In the name of God, the Merciful, the All-Compassionate") in the book of horizons; and the rational soul (*al-naḥs al-nāṭiqā*) is its correspondent in the world of the souls (*Mujlī*, pp. 496–498; Āmulī 1996).

When confronting, on several issues, the views of philosophers and those of theologians, Ibn Abī Jumhūr generally adopted those of the former while arguing that the views of both groups are essentially identical. On the discussion whether God has created the world *ex nihilo* or *ex novo* or whether creation is coeternal with God, its first cause, he supported the Avicennan idea of an essential and not temporal "createdness" of the world (*ḥudūth dhātī*), on which he saw an agreement between wise philosophers and prophets (*al-ḥukamā' wa l-anbiyā'*) (*Mujlī*, pp. 357–409). By the way, he resumed the distinction made by Avicenna and echoed by Shahrzūrī between time (*zamān*), i.e., the relationship of changing things between them; meta-time or second eternity (*dahr*), i.e., the relationship of immutable entities with changing things; and no-time or first eternity (*sarmad*), i.e., the relationship of immutable essences between them, which is God's thought of the thought (*Mujlī*, p. 362).

As for the proof of God's existence, Ibn Abī Jumhūr stated that the demonstration of the "divine wises" or "metaphysicians" (*al-ḥukamā' al-ilāhiyyīn*), deducting His existence from the very nature of existence (*wujūd*), was superior to the argumentation of theologians (*mutakallimūn*) and physicians (*tabī'iyūn*) (*Mujlī*, pp. 514–515). On the uniqueness of God, his Essence, as well as his Science, he scrutinized the positions of a number of philosophers and mystics, such as Avicenna, Suhrawardī, Naṣīr al-Dīn al-Ṭūsī (d. 672/1274), and Athīr al-Dīn al-Abharī (d. circa 663/1265). Concerning the Essence of God, he recalled Avicenna's thesis, according to which the quiddity (*māhiyya*) of God is not added to His individual existence (*annīyya*) but is His very existence; in other words, "what God is" is none other than His act of being. Ibn Abī Jumhūr defended this opinion against the criticism of Suhrawardī, according to whom existence is no more than a point of view taken on quiddity and went so far as to affirm that the Necessary Being was devoid of quiddity (*Mujlī*, pp. 519–524). In regard to Science as an essential attribute of God (*ṣifa dhātiyya*), he argued that divine Science was not a knowledge acquired by means of forms (*bi-l-ṣuwar*), or by representation (*taṣawwūrī*), but a knowledge through enlightenment (*ishrāqī*), unveiling (*kashfī*), and presence (*ḥudūrī*), without any intermediary between God and the object of knowledge (*Mujlī*, p. 544). He also stressed that God's Science of his own Essence was his very Essence (*Mujlī*, p. 551). These theological views would eventually be adopted and developed by the Shī'ī philosophers of the eleventh/seventeenth-century Iran Mīr Dāmād (d. 1041/1631) and Mullā Ṣadrā (d. 1050/1640-1).

Ibn Abī Jumhūr upheld that the divine Providence (*ināya*), universal and eternal (*kullīyya*, *azaliyya*), guides everything to the perfection defined for it by means of love (*'ishq*) or desire (*ishtiyāq*). Reproducing an excerpt from Shahrazūrī's *Shajara*, whose leitmotif comes from a short writing of Avicenna, he asserted that love runs through all the existents, so that no existent can be devoid of it, since all the existents, according to their own perfections, seek to reach the perfections of the Necessary Being and strive

to become similar to Him. The Creator is the end of all the existents, the goal of their design. Therefore, love and desire are the causes of the existence of all existents with their own possible perfections (*Mujlī*, pp. 575–576. Shahrazūrī 2004, Vol. 3, p. 628) Finally, Ibn Abī Jumhūr regarded the existence of the Perfect Man (*al-insān al-kāmil*), conceived as the locus of manifestation of the divine attributes of perfection, as the ultimate goal of the creation. The impeccability (*'iṣma*) of Prophets and Imāms is to be seen as a necessary effect of divine Emanation (*al-fayḍ al-ilāhī*) or eternal Providence (*Mujlī*, pp. 997–998).

In accordance with Islamic orthodoxy, Ibn Abī Jumhūr stressed the impossibility of unifying the human spirit with God. However, he supported the idea, developed by philosophers, of a unification of the subject of intellection with the Intelligible (*ittiḥād al-'āqil wa l-ma'qūl*), a conception inherited from Aristotle's *De Anima*. Quite surprising, he asserted that this noetic process was the motive of the Sufis' ecstatic utterances (*shaṭaḥāt*), like the famous declaration of al-Ḥallāj (executed in 309/922): "I am the Real (God)" (*anā l-ḥaqq*). In support of this idea and in defense of those who have expressed it, he put forward scriptural arguments (*manqūl*), based on the Qur'an and *Ḥadīth*, and other rational arguments (*ma'qūl*) (*Mujlī*, pp. 647–651). By doing so, he seemingly attempted to save together philosophers and Sufis from the accusation of heresy.

In this concern, Ibn Abī Jumhūr emphasized the need to interpret the Qur'an in order to reconcile the truthfulness of Revelation with the demonstrations of reason. Spiritual exegesis (*ta'wīl*), distinct from literal commentary (*tafsīr*), consists in discovering the inner or hidden meaning (*bāṭin*) of verses whose apparent meaning (*zāhir*) contradicts the truths of reason, as in the case of anthropomorphic verses. According to him, such an exegesis is an obligation made to the true scholar by God in the Qur'an, especially in the verse 3:7: "It is He who sent down upon thee the Book, wherein are verses clear that are the Essence of the Book, and others ambiguous. As for those in whose hearts is swerving, they follow the ambiguous part, desiring dissension, and desiring its

interpretation; and none knows its interpretation, save only God and those firmly rooted in knowledge. . .” (transl. Arberry modified) (*Mujlī*, pp. 653–659). Once again, his argument, undoubtedly influenced by the Mu‘tazili theology, is reminiscent of that of Averroes in his *Decisive Treatise*. Ibn Abī Jumhūr’s inspiration, however, remains basically Illuminationist. In his interpretation of several Qur’anic verses, God is described as an incorporeal Light, a symbol which he claimed to be already present in the doctrine of ancient philosophers such as Pythagoras, Empedocles, Socrates, and Plato. Interestingly, by the way, Ibn Abī Jumhūr attributed the ecstatic account found in the *Theology* of the Pseudo-Aristotle to Plato, following the lead of Suhrawardī and against the Arabic text (*Mujlī*, pp. 724–726).

Ibn Abī Jumhūr also supported the existence of the *mundus imaginalis* (*‘ālam al-mithāl*), intermediary between the intelligible and the sensible world, as conceived by Suhrawardī and theorized by Shahrazūrī, which he identified with “the absolute imagination” (*al-khayāl al-muṭlaq*) as evoked by Ibn ‘Arabī (*Mujlī*, p. 186). This world is said to embrace the perfect apparitional forms (*ashbāh*) of the first Intellect (*al-‘aql al-awwal*) and other separated Intelligences and to have many strata (*tabaqāt*), each of them encompassing an infinite number of individuals. Some strata are luminous and pleasurable, which are those of paradise (*tabaqāt al-janān*); others are tenebrous and painful, which are those of hell (*tabaqāt al-jaḥīm*). Thus, the imaginary world is assimilated to the isthmus (*barzakh*) described in many *ḥadīths*, where the events following natural death and prior to the great Resurrection (*qiyāma*) occur. According to Ibn Abī Jumhūr, all Prophets and Sages have confirmed the existence of this world (*Mujlī*, pp. 775–779).

On the issue of the creation of human acts (*khalq al-a‘māl*), in other words of free will (*ikhtiyār*) versus determinism (*jabr*), Ibn Abī Jumhūr supported the happy medium expressed by the Shī‘i Imāms’ formula: “Neither predestination nor unrestricted human delegation (*tafwīd*), but something in between” (*Mujlī*, pp. 795–825). On the level of God’s unity of existence and acts,

there is no agent but He within the whole system of existence; but on the level of multiplicity, i.e., of the manifestation of divine unity, every cause is responsible for its effects, which attests the reality of human responsibility (*taklīf*), the necessity of a Law (*sharī‘a*), and the need of a Prophet-legislator to guide mankind toward its perfection in society (*Mujlī*, pp. 803–805). Free will, responsibility, and duty thus participate in the divine, universal and eternal, Providence.

As for the fate of the soul after death, Ibn Abī Jumhūr widely followed the views of Shahrazūrī by quoting extensively from the latter’s *Shajara* without identifying his source. In his assumption, the human rational soul is not incarnated in the body but governs it and uses it as an instrument to reach perfection. Therefore, according to what Shahrazūrī considered to be the view of the ancient sages of Greece, Egypt, and other nations, perfect souls and intermediate ones in perfection are disembodied after death, while deficient souls undergo a process of metempsychosis (*tanāsukh*) in order to purify themselves (*Mujlī*, pp. 1575–1599; Schmidtko 1999).

The *Mujlī* also contains an apology of Sufism from the Shī‘i point of view. Ibn Abī Jumhūr resumed from Ḥaydar Āmulī’s *Jāmi‘ al-asrār* a twofold argumentation, mytho-historical and ontological, establishing the affiliation of Sufism to the “true religion” of the Shī‘i Imāms. First, he asserts that the great masters of ancient Sufism, such as Ma‘rūf al-Karkhī (d. 200/815) and Abū Yazīd al-Bastāmī (d. 234/848 or 262/874), were initiated by Imāms (Āmulī 1989, pp. 225, 431, 614–615; *Mujlī*, pp. 1245–1246 and 1262–1264), which is credible in some cases and impossible in others. Secondly, he supports the essential harmony between the exoteric religion, the Sufi path, and the pure spiritual contemplation: “Know that Law (*sharī‘a*), Path (*ṭarīqa*) and Truth (*ḥaqīqa*) are synonymous terms for the single Truth, which is the Truth of Muḥammad’s Revelation viewed from different standpoints and at different levels. There is no contradiction between these standpoints and levels. The Revelation (*shar‘*) is like the complete almond containing the shell, the kernel, and the kernel of kernels (*lubb al-lubb*): the shell may be likened to

the Law, the kernel to the Path, the kernel of kernels to the esoteric Truth of the Innermost (*al-ḥaqīqa al-bāṭina li-l-bāṭin*), and the almond is the gathering of all” (Āmulī 1989, pp. 14, 41, 344; *Mujlī*, p. 1072).

Sufis have often made use of this triadic theme for defensive purposes, arguing that the initiatory Sufi path is the necessary link between religious Law and divine Truth. However, the meaning of the terms and the general conception of their relationships seem to be different for a Shī'ī philosopher. Ibn Abī Jumhūr considered the spiritual Truth (*ḥaqīqa*) as the object of a direct contemplation (*mushāhada*) obtained by the combination of intellectual speculation (*baḥth*) and mystical experience (*ta'alluh*), so that philosophical gnosis becomes the ultimate science that conciliates the exoteric religion and the life forms of Sufism. He wrote: “The Law is the expression of assent to the Prophets' words, of action in conformity with their orders through imitation and obedience. Path is the expression of the realisation of the acts and customs of the Prophets through certainty and embellishment. Truth is the expression of the contemplation of the spiritual states and stations of the Prophets through spiritual unveiling and tasting (*kashf<sup>an</sup> wa dhawq<sup>an</sup>*), and of their abiding through spiritual state and ecstatic consciousness (*ḥā<sup>an</sup> wa wijdān<sup>an</sup>*)” (*Mujlī*, p. 1078). Moreover, the reason Ibn Abī Jumhūr emphasized this fundamental unity was not only to protect the Sufis from serious accusations made against them but also to protect these very accusers, the Shī'ī jurists (*fuqahā'*), against their own guilty ignorance: “The reason for the accusation of infidelity and heresy aimed at this sect [the Sufis], is only the ignorance of their principles and rules. Indeed, if [the doctors of the Law] knew the founding principles [of the Sufis], if they realized that Law, Path and Truth are truly synonyms to designate a single reality, that of Revelation, they would not use such language, and would leave aside this fanaticism (*ta'aṣṣub*) (...); they would strip their hearts of these envious and thoughtless words, and would free their souls from the abyss of sophisms and doubt” (*Mujlī*, p. 1081).

Finally, Ibn Abī Jumhūr placed this synthesis of theology, philosophy, and Sufism under the

aegis of Twelver Shī'ī imāmology, by dealing at length with Imām 'Alī's *walāya*, i.e., his covenant with God and his sovereignty, both spiritual and temporal, over believers. He recalled all the scriptural evidence of 'Alī's designation (*naṣṣ*) as the Prophet's successor and denounced the misdeeds of the first three caliphs (*Mujlī*, pp. 1161–1217 and 1349–1457). In his views, 'Alī is the paragon of all virtues, the origin of all sciences, whether mystical or rational; his nature is theophanic, if not divine, as attested by sayings attributed to the Prophet or to 'Alī himself (*Mujlī*, pp. 1223–1346). Ibn Abī Jumhūr quoted from Ḥaydar Āmulī some esoteric *hadīths* where the Imāms claim their connection or even their unification with God (Āmulī 1989, pp. 363–364 and 676; *Mujlī*, p. 1682). Conventional Shī'ī scholars generally regard these *hadīths* as spurious, dangerously similar to the Sufis' ecstatic utterances (*shataḥāt*), and the conceptions that they corroborate as “exaggeration” or “extremism” (*ghuluww*). As a Twelver Shī'ī, Ibn Abī Jumhūr asserted that 'Alī's *walāya* was passed on after him to 11 successive Imāms, the last of whom being in occultation (*ghayba*) until the end of historical time (*Mujlī*, pp. 1459–1495). However, 'Alī and Muḥammad represent together for eternity the Perfect Man, which is the finality of divine Providence (*Mujlī*, pp. 1503–1523).

It shall be kept in mind that this work was written only 10 years before the young Shāh Ismā'īl established Shī'ism as the official religion of Iran (906/1500-01) – in other words on the eve of a new era for Shī'ism, Sufism, and philosophy. Ibn Abī Jumhūr was maybe the last Shī'ī thinker to be able to urge reconciliation between these traditions without having to defend himself from attacks launched by the Shī'ī orthodox party. He seems to have called his Shī'ī fellows to a real spiritual revolution by breaking out of narrow legalism and opening themselves to intellectual speculation and mystical experience (Shaybī 2011, Vol. 2, p. 319). Yet, the proclamation of Shī'ism as the religion state resulted in a completely different revolution. 'Alī al-Karakī (d. 940/1534), a contemporary of Ibn Abī Jumhūr who had also been a pupil of al-Jazā'irī in Jabal 'Āmil, after becoming the official theologian of

the Shī'i Safavid state, eventually defined an orthodoxy opposed to the gnostic Shī'ism as defended by Ibn Abī Jumhūr (Shaybī 2011, Vol. 2, p. 313; Arjomand 1984, pp. 133–137; Abisaab 2004, pp. 15–20). However, the latter's call did not remain unheard; in the end of the eleventh/seventeenth-century Iran, Shī'i scholars such as Muḥsin Fayḍ Kāshānī (d. 1091/1680–1681) and Quṭb al-Dīn Ashkiwarī would eventually adopt his harmonization between Shī'ism, Sufism, and philosophy.

Ibn Abī Jumhūr was also a traditionist, and his *'Awālī al-la'ālī l-'azīziyya fī l-aḥādīth al-dīniyya*, achieved in 897/1491 in Mashhad, became a classical work in the field of Shī'i *ḥadīth*. As explained in its introduction, all the quotations of the book go back to al-'Allāma al-Ḥillī, an authoritative scholar of the Mongol period. In its turn, the work was quoted by many Shī'i thinkers in the following centuries, among them Fayḍ Kāshānī in his mystic-philosophical *opus* entitled *Kalimāt maknūna* ("Concealed Words"). However, the *'Awālī al-la'ālī* was particularly censured for comprising traditions from Sunni sources, or of "mystical fragrance," or peculiar to "extremist" Shī'ism (*ghuluww*) (Majlisī 1957, Vol. 0, pp. 183–184; Mar'ashī Najafī 2013, p. 4). This panel of accusations, although seemingly inconsistent, reveals that Ibn Abī Jumhūr was assuming both a radical Shī'i affiliation and an ecumenical trend by which he aimed not only to reconcile Shī'is and Sufis but also to bring up the positions of Shī'is and Sunnis.

As a result, Shī'i scholars of Safavid and Qājār Iran adopted two contrasted attitudes toward Ibn Abī Jumhūr. On the one hand, his works were held in esteem by thinkers with philosophical and mystical leanings, such as Ashkiwarī and Fayḍ Kāshānī. On the other hand, he was blamed to be a Sufi, a "[Shī'a] extremist" (*ghālīn*), a "philosopher," or a "traditionalist" (*akhbārī*), by influential theologians, historians, and traditionists, such as al-Ḥurr al-'Āmilī (d. 1104/1692), Muḥammad Bāqir Majlisī (d. 1111/1699), and his pupil Mīrzā Afandī (d. 1130/1718) (Mar'ashī Najafī 2013, pp. 4–5; al-Ḥurr 2011, p. 32; al-Amīn 1986, Vol. 9, p. 434). It is noteworthy that he was not so much criticized for his *Mujlī* than for

his *'Awālī al-la'ālī*, certainly because the former, if more inclined to syncretism and containing the most esoteric *ḥadīths* attributed to Imām 'Alī, is a scholastic work addressed to specialists in philosophy, while the latter belongs to the religious science of *ḥadīths*, in which heterodoxy is regarded to be more pernicious. Moreover, Ibn Abī Jumhūr seems to have adopted in his last work, the *Sharḥ al-Bāb al-ḥādī 'ashar*, a much more conventional stance than in his earlier works, probably in order to avoid attacks from his *sharī'a*-minded fellows and students (Schmidtke 2013).

In conclusion, the thought of Ibn Abī Jumhūr is certainly one of the most achieved synthesis between philosophy, Shī'i esotericism, and Sufism, composed in the late Islamic Middle Age. It should not be narrowed down to a preparatory stage for the great synthesis made by Mullā Ṣadrā in the eleventh/seventeenth century (Lawson), since it emerged from a far different sociohistorical context. Prior to the institutionalization of Twelver Shī'i religion and to the repression of Sufism in Iran, Ibn Abī Jumhūr's works reflect a free effort to match together the main spiritual traditions of Islam, in what could be called a "sacred alliance of heterodoxies."

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*falsafa* rather than one of its Ashʿarite opponents. Ibn al-Malāḥimī feared that the process of adaptation of Avicennan philosophy among Muslim theologians – and here particularly among the Ashʿarites – would eventually lead to an Aristotelian reformulation of Islamic theology, similar to what happened in Christianity in late antiquity.

## Biographical Information

Rukn al-Dīn Maḥmūd ibn ʿAbdallāh Ibn al-Malāḥimī lived in the first half of the twelfth century in Khwārezm, the delta region where the Amu Darya (Oxus) river once flew into the Aral Sea. Khwārezm is today split between Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan. The region was one of the last holdouts of Muʿtazilite theology at a time when that school hardly existed at places other than here and in Yemen. Together with his contemporary and colleague al-Zamakhshārī (d. 1144), who was also from Khwārezm and who wrote an influential Qurʿan commentary, Ibn al-Malāḥimī was the most important Muʿtazilite thinker of the school’s late period, after its most productive activity ended during the mid-eleventh century. He presents himself as the torchbearer of Abū l-Ḥusayn al-Baṣrī’s theology. Abū l-Ḥusayn al-Baṣrī (d. 1045) was active in Baghdad and had studied theology with the Qāḍī ʿAbd al-Jabbār (d. 1025). A practicing physician, Abū l-Ḥusayn came into contact with Greek learning and in that context may have studied philosophy, which, in turn, may well have triggered the important innovations in his thought (Ibn al-Murṭadā, 118–9, Madelung 2006). Many of his arguments were directed against teachings of the Muʿtazilite school of Abū Hāshim al-Jubbāʿī (d. 933), the so-called Bahshāmiyya, of whom the Qāḍī ʿAbd al-Jabbār was the leading proponent during Abū l-Ḥusayn’s lifetime. During the last decades of the eleventh century, a Muʿtazilite physician from Isfahan moved to Khwārazm and introduced Abū l-Ḥusayn’s theology there. Ibn al-Malāḥimī may have studied with him.

The little we know about Ibn al-Malāḥimī’s life stems from a single, very short entry in a

## Ibn al-Malāḥimī, Rukn al-Dīn Maḥmūd

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### Abstract

A Muʿtazilite theologian of the school of Abū l-Ḥusayn al-Baṣrī, Ibn al-Malāḥimī wrote works that include intensive discussions and refutations of teachings of the *falāsifa*. Ibn al-Malāḥimī was active in the first half of the sixth/twelfth century in Khwārezm, today a part of Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan. Like in other literature of this period, he used the term *falāsifa* as a reference to the followers of Ibn Sīnā (Avicenna, d. 1037). His concern is with Ibn Sīnā’s philosophical system, particularly its teachings on God, His attributes, the pre-eternity of the world, and on the soul. Ibn al-Malāḥimī’s most important work in philosophy is his *Tuḥfat al-mutakallimīn* (*Gift to the Kalām-Scholars*), a fully-fledged refutation of Avicennan philosophy. Although Ibn al-Malāḥimī wrote a generation after al-Ġazālī, he does not refer to his *Tahāfut al-falāsifa* and considers him a member of the movement of

biographical dictionary of Muʿtazilites (Ibn al-Murṭadā, 119) and from remarks in his own books.

Ibn al-Malāḥimī wrote an abridgment of Abū l-Husayn al-Baṣrī’s highly influential work on the methods of Islamic law (Ibn al-Malāḥimī 2011) as well as two important compendia of *kalām*, the very extensive and comprehensive *Kitāb al-Muʿtamad fī uṣūl al-dīn* (*The Firmly Based Book in Theology*) and the shorter *Kitāb al-Fāʾiq fī uṣūl al-dīn* (*The Surpassing Book in Theology*), which was conceived as an abridgment of the former. Only the first quarter of the long work has come down to us (Ibn al-Malāḥimī 2012). The shorter work, however, which was completed in 1137, is fully available (Ibn al-Malāḥimī 2007). These two books were fairly widespread and major theologians such as Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī (d. 1210), who was himself active in Khwārezm, as well as the Shiite Muʿtazilite al-ʿAllāma al-Ḥillī (d. 1325) used them (Schmidtke 1991). Ibn al-Malāḥimī’s third work of importance is *The Gift to the Mutakallimūn in Their Refutation of the Philosophers* (*Tuḥfat al-mutakallimīn fī l-radd ʿalā l-falāsifa*), which is intended as an invalidation of Aristotelian, or more specific Avicennan philosophy. *Tuḥfat al-mutakallimīn* depends heavily on the section dealing with the teachings of the *falāsifa* in *Kitāb al-Muʿtamad* (Ibn al-Malāḥimī 2012: 683–798). Given that it mentions both earlier works of its author (Ibn al-Malāḥimī 2008, 178, 185), *Tuḥfat* was written between 1137 and Ibn al-Malāḥimī’s death in 1141 (Madelung in Ibn al-Malāḥimī 2012, v–ix).

## Thought

Ibn al-Malāḥimī’s *Tuḥfat al-mutakallimīn* is divided into twenty chapters (singl. *bāb*), addressing positions that Ibn Sīnā had taken and that the author wishes to refute. The book begins with five chapters on the greatest stumbling block for a Muʿtazilite theologian, the pre-eternity of the world. It then moves to the subject of the divine attributes (*ṣifāt*), particularly that of being the designer of the world, and from there to divine actions (*aʿāl*), including moral obligations,

prophecy, and the afterlife. The latter subject leads to a discussion of human psychology (Madelung 2012) and, in the final chapter, to a refutation of the position that revelation has an inner meaning that one must learn from other sources. The structure of Ibn al-Malāḥimī’s refutation is dictated by the table of contents of a *kalām* compendium, such as Ibn al-Malāḥimī’s *Surpassing Book* (*al-Fāʾiq*). There, a Muslim *mutakallim* first produced arguments for God’s existence and determines from that God’s essence (*dhāt*), His attributes, and His actions. The five early chapters on the world pre-eternity are indeed devoted to a discussion of the divine essence: Given Ibn Sīnā’s view that God’s essence is His existence and that He is pure unity, the philosopher denies that God could change from being a noncreator to becoming a creator, which leads to Ibn Sīnā’s position that the world must be pre-eternal. Ibn al-Malāḥimī argues in opposition to this that God can change from non-creator to becoming a creator without this affecting His essence. He sees in Ibn Sīnā’s position a potent challenge to the Muslim view of a personal God, who engages in interactions with His creatures. Ibn Sīnā’s God is a mere principle of creation that cannot react to it. This, Ibn al-Malāḥimī believes, threatens the bedrock of Muslim theology.

In the introduction to *Tuḥfat al-mutakallimīn*, Ibn al-Malāḥimī complains that many of his contemporaries who consider themselves experts of Islamic law began to study the works of the Muslim philosophers. He particularly singles out the Shafīʿite school of law – here meaning the Ashʿarites – but sees this tendency also getting hold among the Hanafites, his own school of law. In fact, “Hanafites” should probably be read as a reference to the Muʿtazilites. Ibn al-Malāḥimī sees Islam in the same position as Christianity in the first centuries of its history. According to a view widespread among Muslims, Christian theologians who had studied Greek philosophy distorted Jesus’s original message. Ibn al-Malāḥimī writes that he fears the same will happen to Islam: “The leaders of the Christians sympathized so much with the learning of the Greeks in philosophy that they ended up leaving the religion of Jesus (. . .) on the path of the philosophers

and proposed such things as the three hypostases, the union [of Jesus with God], Jesus becoming a god after he had been human, and other such nonsense” (Ibn al-Malāḥimī 2008, 3). Muslim philosophers such as al-Fārābī and Ibn Sīnā, so Ibn al-Malāḥimī, did indeed “leave the religion of Islam” by following the ways of the ancient philosophers.

Ibn al-Malāḥimī complains about the hubris of the philosophers and their conviction that philosophy is superior to all other studies. He reports a claim made by the *falāsifa*, that philosophy leads people to overcome their religious divisions as it makes them appreciate all religious traditions equally. Philosophers pointed out, for instance, that a Muslim such as Ibn Sīnā participated in philosophy just as the Jew Abū l-Barakāt al-Baḡdādī (d. c. 1165), and a Christian philosopher. That claim, however, is not true, so Ibn al-Malāḥimī. Rather, philosophy makes people misunderstand their religious differences (Ibn al-Malāḥimī 2008, 14). The Muslim *falāsifa* present their teachings as the true Islam and because by his time many of them worked in Islamic jurisprudence (*fiqh*) they were, in Ibn al-Malāḥimī’s opinion, more dangerous than those who attacked Islam from outside. They give the impression that what they teach would bring people closer to Islam. The opposite, however, is true and they are enemies of the prophets whose errors need to be spelled out.

Ibn al-Malāḥimī’s *Tuḥfat al-mutakallimīn* is a head-on confrontation between the teachings of the *falāsifa* – meaning Ibn Sīnā and his followers – with that of “the Muslims,” as he says, a word that here stands for Muʿtazilites. In earlier centuries, the Muʿtazilites had developed their own ontology, based on a theory of powerless atoms, as well as their own explanations of physical change. These theories are highly incompatible with the ontological assumptions of Aristotelianism, which gives Ibn al-Malāḥimī much occasion to voice his disagreement and present the arguments for his school. He thinks Aristotelian ontological assumptions, which manifest themselves in explanations of such phenomena as the human self (*nafs*), are too complicated and introduce elements (here a self-subsisting soul) whose

existence the *falāsifa* cannot prove. Ibn al-Malāḥimī counters this with arguments that he characterizes as intuitive or commonsensical and that invalidate the existence of these elements or render them at least superfluous (Madelung 2012).

Ibn al-Malāḥimī regards Ashʿarite theology as an enemy that needs to be defeated just like the *falāsifa*. His book illustrates how close Ashʿarite teachings were to those of Ibn Sīnā. On moral obligations (*taklīf*), for instance, Ibn Sīnā had taught that human actions are causally determined by factors such as the human’s volition, his or her motives, and other causes, which are themselves determined by causes that all begin in God. For Ibn Sīnā all chains of causes and effects end in God – or rather they begin there – which means God is the ultimate cause of everything. From the point of view of a Muʿtazilite, the Ashʿarites – whom Ibn al-Malāḥimī polemically calls “compulsionists” (*mujbira*) – hold very similar opinions (Ibn al-Malāḥimī 2008, 51). Both groups believe that God is the creator of *all* events in this world and they explicitly include human actions. God would thus pre-determine all human actions and He would also become the source and the creator of good *and* evil in this world, two positions that were unacceptable for any Muʿtazilite. Ibn al-Malāḥimī insists that God is only the source of good and that evil comes into this world through the agency of humans. God does not create human actions and their immediate consequences. Humans also have free will and respond in their decisions to the moral obligations God puts upon them. They act either in accord with these obligations and are rewarded in the afterlife or they violate them and are punished.

Ibn al-Malāḥimī was well-informed about differences among philosophers and in his discussion of their arguments for the world’s pre-eternity, he quotes among other works Proclus (d. 485 CE) as well as John Philoponus’ refutation of him (Ibn al-Malāḥimī 2008, 52–57). One of his main sources, however, is al-Ġazālī’s (d. 1111) *Doctrines of the falāsifa* (*Maqāṣid al-falāsifa*) as well as another of his works where he presents his own opinions on human psychology (al-Ġazālī 1979). Although he never mentions

al-Ġazālī's name in his book, Ibn al-Malāḥimī was well informed about his œuvre. He did not, however, regard him as a predecessor in refuting the *falāsifa* – he claims his is the very first book of this kind (Ibn al-Malāḥimī 2008, 4) – but rather as a *faylasūf* and a follower of Ibn Sīnā. He either did not know or did not accept that al-Ġazālī's *Maqāṣid* was meant as a neutral and uncommitted report of Ibn Sīnā's philosophical system. Even teachings that appear in al-Ġazālī's committed works, such as *The Revival of the Religious Sciences* (*Ihyā' 'ulūm al-dīn*), are here associated with "one of the philosophers" (Ibn al-Malāḥimī 2008, 185–86; Griffel 2016, 449–50). Ibn al-Malāḥimī likely regarded al-Ġazālī as one of those philosophers who meddled it with Islam. He acknowledges, however, that al-Ġazālī at least accepted moral obligations (*taklīf*), and prepared his readers for them, something that other philosophers did not do (Koloğlu 80–81). Still, agreeing with Ibn Sīnā's teachings on the soul and adopting one's understand of the afterlife according, as al-Ġazālī did, was too much for Ibn al-Malāḥimī, who criticizes him for that. Ibn Taymiyya (d. 1328), in fact, includes the name of Ibn al-Malāḥimī in a list of more than a dozen scholars of Islam who were known critics of al-Ġazālī's leanings towards *falsafa* (Ibn Taymiyya 1980, 6:240).

A comparison with al-Ġazālī's *Tahāfut* shows that these two books pursue different strategies of refutation (Griffel 2016, 448–53). Both authors realized that Ibn Sīnā's philosophical system posed a threat to the authority of the theology they had grown up with. Ibn al-Malāḥimī took this challenge as an occasion to defend Mu'tazilism and present the truths of its teachings. Al-Ġazālī, on the other hand, adopted numerous teachings of Ibn Sīnā and appropriated them to the demands of Ash'arite theology. He also pointed out those elements in Ibn Sīnā's system that he thought were unfit to be integrated into Muslim theology. This is one of the tasks of his *Tahāfut*. There, he focuses on the *falāsifa*'s two claims that their sciences are built on demonstrations and are independent from revelation. The demonstrative method also comes up in Ibn al-Malāḥimī and he ridicules the philosophers for assuming their teachings are superior to that of the ordinary

believers or to those of the *mutakallimūn* because they are based on demonstrations. Unlike al-Ġazālī, however, he does not address the demonstrability of the *falāsifa*'s teachings with arguments that aim at refuting this particular claim, which makes his book from a purely philosophical point of view less interesting than the *Tahāfut*.

## Cross-References

- ▶ [Abū l-Barakāt al-Baġdādī](#)
- ▶ [Aristotelianism in the Greek, Latin, Syriac, Arabic, and Hebrew Traditions](#)
- ▶ [al-Ġazālī, Abū Ḥāmid Muḥammad](#)
- ▶ [Ibn Sīnā, Abū 'Alī \(Avicenna\)](#)
- ▶ [Kalām](#)
- ▶ [Philosophy, Arabic](#)
- ▶ [Theology Versus Philosophy in the Arab World](#)

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## Ibn al-Samḥ

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### Abstract

Abū 'Alī Ḥasan b. Sahl b. Ġālib Ibn al-Samḥ (d.1027) was the Christian disciple of the Jacobite Yaḥyā b. 'Adī and, later on, of the Nestorian Abū l-Faraj Ibn al-Ṭayyib.

He owned a bookstore (*dukkān*) at Bāb al-Ṭāq in Baghdad where, according to Abū Ḥayyān al-Tawḥīdī, he occasionally hosted the debates of the philosophical circle grouped around his teacher Yaḥyā b. 'Adī. Ibn al-Samḥ transmitted the lecture-course of the so-called Baghdad circle on Aristotle's *Rhetoric* and *Physics*.

In the MS Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale, ar. 2346, the *Rethoric* in all likelihood was copied from Ibn al-Samḥ's copy for which he collated two defective copies; he consulted also the Syriac translation (Vagelpohl 2008). As we can see from the ms. Leiden, Universiteitsbibliotheek, or. 583, the text of Aristotle's *Physics* was redacted by the Mu'tazilī theologian Abū l-Ḥusayn Muḥammad 'Alī b. al-Ṭayyib b. al-Baṣrī (d. 1044), a student of Ibn al-Samḥ, on the basis of Yaḥyā b. 'Adī's autograph copy of Ishāq b. Ḥunayn's translation. The lemmas of the text are completed with a commentary in the form of glosses in the margins, giving a written record of the lecture-course given in Baghdad circle in the year 1004. In these notes one can find the commentaries of Abū Bishr Mattā Ibn Yūnus, Yaḥyā b. 'Adī, Ibn al-Samḥ, and Abū l-Faraj Ibn al-Ṭayyib (Aristūṭālīs 1964–1965). John Philoponus' *Commentary* on the *Physics* is one of the sources of Yaḥyā b. 'Adī's notes and heavily influenced al-Samḥ's commentary, in particular for books III to VI. Ibn al-Samḥ follows John Philoponus' *Commentary* with regard to the scope of physics and its relation with mathematics and the doctrine of causation, while he agreed with Aristotle against Philoponus' criticism of Aristotle's theory of propulsion and against Philoponus' theory of "impetus."

In addition to his "editorial" work, Ibn al-Samḥ is the author of a treatise on the scope of philosophy which has come down to us. It is entitled *Answer [to the question] To Which End do Human Beings Devote Themselves to the Study of Philosophy?* (*Jawāb [ʿan masʿalat sāʿil]: Mā l-ġāya allatī yanḥū l-insān nahwahā bi-l-tafalsuf*; Ibn al-Samḥ (1977). It is an introduction to philosophy which can guide man to perfection; philosophy consists in rational cognition through demonstrative proofs and in the purification of the soul. Through theoretical philosophy, man can obtain sure knowledge (*al-ilm al-yaqīn*) of the first principle which has no equal, i.e. God, called by Ibn al-Samḥ One, First, Pure Good from which other beings flow. The highest form of human happiness consists in achieving this science of divinity. Through practical philosophy, whose goal is the acquisition of virtue, man can be in the best human condition for doing good. The



acquisition of a virtuous character requires a virtuous family and a virtuous society, willingness to acquire the virtues, diligence in practicing them, and the intellectual insight of the good.

Ibn al-Samḥ is the author also of another treatise on the conditions of truth for statements pronounced on the same topic by many people. He stresses the primacy of logical demonstration with respect to tradition (*naql*): in fact the number of witnesses is without consequence for a statement whose validity can be deduced according to the criteria of rational deduction. The polemical target of this writing is the truth criteria of the religious tradition in the science of *ḥadīth*. This treatise is entitled *On Statements Which Many People Pronounce [in agreement with each other] (Qawl fī l-Akhbar allatī yukhbir bihā kathīrūn; Dānishpaḏūh, (1970–1971); Bernard-Baladi (1969).*

## Cross-References

- ▶ [Abū Bishr Mattā ibn Yūnus](#)
- ▶ [Ibn al-Ṭayyib](#)
- ▶ [Translations from Greek into Arabic](#)
- ▶ [Yahyā ibn 'Adī](#)

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## Ibn al-Ṭayyib

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### Abstract

Abū l-Faraj ʿAbdallāh ibn al-Ṭayyib's life in Baghdad marked the end of an era in which he and his fellow scholars cultivated the heritage of ancient Greek philosophy, notably Aristotle's philosophy. Thanks to Mattā b. Yūnus and Yaḥyā b. ʿAdī, there had arisen a scholarly tradition that flourished over several generations and whose last representative was Ibn al-Ṭayyib himself. These scholars wrote commentaries on Aristotle's works by studying the Greek commentaries of late classical antiquity, by translating them, and also by writing some based in form and content on ancient Greek models. Ibn al-Ṭayyib was the author of numerous commentaries on philosophy, theology, and medicine and taught at the hospital (al-Māristān al-ʿAḍudī) that had been founded by the Buyid ʿAḍuddawla. That his writings were intended for teaching purposes is evident from their form and content. The study of philosophy was an integral part of the training of medical doctors. Indeed, medical students were expected to be thoroughly grounded in Aristotle, in addition to having a sound knowledge and understanding of Plato. Accordingly, their studies began with the *Organon*, which at that time also included rhetoric and poetics. They also studied elementary logic, which was especially important in so far as it was held that only through the instrument of logic could a doctor, let alone an ordinary human being, distinguish between the true and the false and thus make correct judgments.

### Biographical Information

The Christian Abū l-Faraj ʿAbdallāh ibn al-Ṭayyib al-ʿIrāqī held various high positions in the

Nestorian Church of Mesopotamia, one of them as Patriarchal Secretary (*kātib al-Jāthalīq*) to the Nestorian Catholic Bishop Yūḥannā b. Nāzūk (1012–1022). He was also a doctor at the hospital (al-Māristān al-ʿAḍudī) founded by the Buyid ʿAḍuddawla. Owing to his numerous commentaries on philosophy, theology, and medicine, his influence was varied and extensive. He died in 1043 CE and was buried in the chapel of the ancient monastery, Dair Durtā, on the river Tigris.

### Ibn al-Ṭayyib's Thought and Philosophy

In his commentaries on the works of Aristotle, Hippocrates, and Galen, as well as on Porphyry's *Isagoge*, Ibn al-Ṭayyib adheres closely to ancient Greek models. Judging by their form and content, those of his writings that have been handed down were intended for teaching purposes, whereby the author undertook to combine them into an encyclopedic body of knowledge, usefully broken down into specific themes and topics. He is concerned with four main areas of scholarship: Aristotle's philosophy, the natural sciences, medicine, and Christian theology. He also wrote short treatises on ethics and a paraphrase of Plato's *Leges*. The curriculum began with the *Categories* and with Porphyry's introduction to it, entitled the *Isagoge*. According to biobibliographical sources, Ibn al-Ṭayyib seems to have written a commentary on the entire *Organon*, although only the commentary on the *Categories*, a summary of the commentary on the *Posterior Analytics*, and a commentary on the *Isagoge* have been handed down. Through his commentary on the *Categories*, we can get a clear idea of his scholarly methods and of his relationship to his ancient Greek models. Indeed, his text is remarkable for the fact that it sticks closely in form and content to the structures of the commentaries written by the school of Olympiodorus. Yet, not only does he adhere to the ancient Greek commentaries with respect to form, but there are parallels to be noted with respect to content also. It is in these ways that most of the questions raised by the ancient Greek commentators are to be found in our Arab author. And though his writings were not altogether new

or original, there are new and original ideas to be found in them here and there. Ibn al-Ṭayyib's works should not be classified as mere pale imitations of these models. Certainly in the systematization of content, he goes further than his models, attempting as he does to solve every problem that arises within a text. For example, he explains Aristotle exclusively through Aristotle himself. His interpretation of the text he is commenting on is, therefore, always very faithful to its author. It was never his intention to criticize the content. Rather, his aim was to create an Aristotelian system whereby all the contexts of a logical and natural tenet could be explained. His interpretation of Aristotle's texts is stamped by the Neoplatonic tradition of the Aristotelian commentators of late classical antiquity (Porphyry, Ammonius, Olympiodorus, Simplicius, Philoponus, and Elias), all of whom, as far as we can judge from those of his works that have been handed down, he adheres to closely. In his numerous commentaries on theology and medicine, too, he endeavors to bring his entire scholarship to bear on a particular subject at the same time as he is elucidating it. Only part of Ibn al-Ṭayyib's commentaries on Aristotle's philosophy mentioned in the biobibliographical sources has been preserved. Some important commentaries, including the long commentary on Aristotle's *Metaphysics* mentioned by Ibn al-Ṭayyib's pupil, Ibn Buṭlān (Ibn Abī Uṣaybi'a 1882–1884: 240–243), have not been handed down (Ferrari 2006: 20–27). Since Aristotelian logic was fundamental to medical studies in Ibn al-Ṭayyib's day, it is easy to understand why it should have played a prominent role in his commentaries. Still, only a small part of his commentaries on the *Organon* has been preserved. In addition to this, however, his commentary on Porphyry's *Isagoge*, which is based on the same pattern as the commentary on the *Categories* is extant. But whereas the *Isagoge* is meant to serve as a kind of springboard to Aristotelian logic, the detailed commentary on the *Categories*, on the other hand, is to be seen as an appropriate basis for further study of Aristotle's philosophy. Although no other commentaries on Aristotle's logic have been preserved, we nevertheless find that an epitome of the commentary on the

*Posterior Analytics*, corresponding in structure and content to the commentaries on the *Categories*, has been handed down, as well as an epitome of the commentary on the *Categories*. During his studies on Aristotle's entire work, Ibn al-Ṭayyib also wrote a commentary on Aristotle's *Physics*, which exists in the form of lecture notes taken down by Abū l-Ḥusayn al-Baṣrī (d. 436/1044), who, from a lecture given by Ibn as-Samḥ, compiled the notes of various commentators (especially those of John Philoponus). Thus, from Book VI 5 onward, Abū l-Ḥusayn al-Baṣrī falls back on Ibn al-Ṭayyib's statements (Lettinck 1994: 459–472, 514, 527, 564–593). But here, we usually have to do with summaries of Aristotelian arguments and only seldom with discursive writing. This is especially true when Ibn al-Ṭayyib deals with the First Mover, since he maintains, in contrast with Aristotle, that movement must have begun through an act of creation (Lettinck 1994: 564). This view of Ibn al-Ṭayyib is doubtless to be traced to his Christian background. He also wrote a commentary on Aristotle's writings about animals. This commentary is, however, known not in Arabic, but in Hebrew, and exerted a considerable influence, especially in medieval Spain. For this extensive commentary (*tafsīr*), Ibn al-Ṭayyib evidently made use of Ḥunayn b. Ishāq's revised version of the *Historia animalium* (Zonta 1991: 243). Only an eclectic compilation of questions on Aristotle's *Historia animalium* has been handed down in Arabic. Also attributed to Ibn al-Ṭayyib is a short lecture on Aristotle's economic theories, though its authorship is just as uncertain as is the writing on Plato's *Leges*. There has also been a dispute as to whether this text is in fact based not on Fārābī's paraphrase of the *Leges* but rather on a common third source, possibly Galen's *Synopsis of Plato's Dialogues*. Ibn al-Ṭayyib also made translations of works such as the pseudo-Aristotelian *De virtutibus*, which he rendered from Syriac into Arabic. Indeed, from this translation we may infer that he had a good command of Syriac. Whether his knowledge of ancient Greek was comparable cannot be said for certain, even though some competence in this language has definitely been ascribed to him. He left his most visible traces in medieval medicine. His most

famous pupil was, in fact, the medical doctor, al-Mukhtār ibn al-Ḥasan ibn ‘Abdūn ibn Buṭlān, who was especially well known for his work on hygiene, dietetics, and medical ethics. Noteworthy in this connection is the polemics that took place in Cairo between him and ‘Alī ibn Riḍwān (d. 453/1061 or 460/1068) as to whether a medical student should be trained only by means of books or whether he should also have a teacher. It was a polemics in which Ibn Buṭlān prudently and sensibly defended the role of the teacher. Ibn al-Ṭayyib also wrote commentaries on Hippocrates’ many writings, though he is especially important for the reception of Galen’s works. Thus, he wrote commentaries on the entire *Summaria Alexandrinorum*, namely, the entire output of Galen’s œuvre in 16 volumes, which had been compiled by various Alexandrian medical doctors. One of his treatises of relevance to medical theory that has been handed down is the one on natural forces (*Risāla fī l-Quwā al-ṭabīyā*), which is also concerned with Galen’s theory of natural forces. Ibn Sīnā wrote a rebuttal of this work, and it is noteworthy that this text and Ibn al-Ṭayyib’s treatise have often been handed down together. As a Christian theologian and church dignitary, he produced a number of theological works. Among them is to be included probably the greatest exegetical collections of Christian Arabic literature, namely, a commentary on the entire Bible entitled *The Paradise of Christianity* (*Firdaws al-naṣrānīya*). He also wrote commentaries on the Psalms and the Gospels as well as various treatises on dogmatic and ethical topics. Through his influence on philosophy and medicine, Ibn al-Ṭayyib was one of the last proponents of an academic tradition whose banner stood for the cultivation and maintenance of the ancient Greek heritage. It is particularly with respect to Galen’s reception that he occupies an important place in Islamic as well as Christian medieval medicine (Ullmann 1970: 157). He enjoyed a great reputation among his contemporaries and in biobibliographical literature as an erudite commentator, though, thanks to Ibn Sīnā, he also got caught in the cross fire of criticism.

## Cross-References

- ▶ [Abū Bishr Mattā ibn Yūnus](#)
- ▶ [Alexander of Aphrodisias and Arabic Aristotelianism](#)
- ▶ [Alexandrian Tradition into Arabic: Medicine](#)
- ▶ [Alexandrian Tradition into Arabic: Philosophy](#)
- ▶ [Aristotle, Arabic](#)
- ▶ [Logic in the Arabic and Islamic World](#)
- ▶ [Medicine in the Arab World](#)
- ▶ [Yaḥyā ibn ‘Adī](#)

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## Ibn 'Arabī, Abū Bakr Muḥammad Muḥyiddīn

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### Abstract

Ibn 'Arabī belongs to a kind of mysticism or Sufism that can be considered esoteric: he seeks mystical experiences and is strongly

influenced by Neoplatonism. He claimed that the experiential and intuitive knowledge he possessed came directly from God. The use of philosophical doctrines and terminology makes his work of great interest to philosophers. Among his doctrines, the most important are the transcendental unicity of being and the perfect man, who plays a central role in creation.

Born in Murcia (Spain) in 1165, Abū Bakr Muḥammad ibn 'Arabī is also known by his various epithets: “The Master of Masters,” “Sultan of the Gnostics,” and “Reviver of Religion.” He lived in Seville, where he received his education and was influenced by two great women mystics. In Cordoba, he met Ibn Rushd, an encounter that represents the meeting of two great figures in Islam that personified different paths to the Truth: the Gnosis and reason. He traveled throughout North Africa and the Near East: Cairo, Mecca, Konya, Baghdad, Aleppo, and Damascus, where he died in 1240. He wrote about 350 works, which range from brief treatises to his great book *The Meccan Illuminations*, containing 560 chapters dealing with different sacred sciences and his own spiritual experiences. Another of his most widely read works is *The Bezels of Wisdom*, in which, over 26 chapters, he expounds the fundamental doctrines of Islamic esoterism. *The Interpreter of Desires* is also famous, a poetic text centered on love and desire. All of his work is difficult to read and hard to understand, as it is written in his own style of language using very technical vocabulary, based on that used in the earliest Sufi texts. The reader must learn not only the exact meaning of his words but also the related nuances and images. This is a complex symbolic language that requires deciphering.

His constant evocation of the meeting with the prophets, his continual affirmation that he is conversing with the saints of the past, his claim to a special divine inspiration through an angel or the prophet Muḥammad, and his incessant recourse to

the so-called evidence for the invisible earned him charges of unorthodoxy and, even, of being a satanic spirit. Seen as a pantheist by some, others have emphasized the eminently spiritual character of his thought. Through him, Islamic esoterism provided the only doctrines that could guarantee the survival of the spiritual tradition among those who ran the risk of going astray due to incorrect reasoning.

He has been considered as a “philosopher” like any other, precisely because he formulated a complete metaphysical and cosmological, psychological and anthropological doctrine, which in principle seems to signal a break with the Sufi tradition existing up until that point. However, he adopted a clear position against philosophy of Greek origin and even stated that the science of the philosophers is totally vain. He rejected reflection because it causes confusion and lack of truthfulness. He also maintained that reflection is a veil, debated by some, but that is not negated by any of those who follow the Path; only those who practice speculative reflection and reasoning by induction claim otherwise. It is very rare that philosophers experience spiritual states; if and when these do occur, they are similar to the introspection and contemplation of the mystics. The only true philosopher, the one worthy of the name “wise,” a term, which for him is synonymous with Gnostic, is the one who seeks to perfect his knowledge through contemplation and spiritual experience. The rest, who use only their intellects, will never even perceive more than a tiny part of the truth. The truth has two aspects, the manifest and the concealed. There is a truth that is reached by following a new path; not that of human reason, but that of the heart, the true organ of mystical perception.

Ibn 'Arabī expounded the doctrine of Being and its manifestations more gnostically than philosophically in the usual sense of the term. He talked about Divine Essence, the Names and Qualities, theophany, and other issues of this kind, but he did not use the language of the Islamic philosophers. His metaphysics transcends ontology: he starts at the Beginning, which is above Being, of which Being is the first

“decision.” His doctrine of necessity included an exposition of the meaning of the term “existence” understood as Being, although he approached the problem from a different angle with respect to that of the philosophers. He was the first to formulate the doctrine of the unicity of existence or transcendental unicity of being. This means that as God is totally transcendent in relation to the universe, then the universe is not totally separate from Him. Reality cannot be radically different from Absolute Reality; if this was so, it would imply the association of other beings with God, meaning polytheism and the negation of divine unity. The Essence of God forms a unicity that spans complementary and opposite terms. He is the center in which all oppositions meet, and it transcends all the contradictions involved in multiplicity. In Him, there is a kind of “coincidence of opposites,” which cannot be reduced to the categories of reason. God is at once exterior and interior, One and multiple, first and last, Creator and creature, eternal and temporary, necessary and contingent, lover and beloved, intelligent and intelligible. All of these conflicting divine attributes form a single reality. This thesis has led some to view it as pantheistic. However, Ibn 'Arabī does not maintain that God should be known in His essential reality, but only through his divine names, which are reflected in creation, but not included in it. He therefore denies that the divine essence can be assimilated to the essence of creation and that the divine transcendence is preserved in this way.

The perfect man, the reason for the world's existence, is the full image of divine reality and contains within him all the possibilities of the universe: he is a microcosm, and, on knowing himself, he knows God. This man is the prototype of creation, because human perfection is linked to the divine image. He is a being which does not need adornment or special characteristics to be honored and respected, because he is God's representative on earth. No other identity is needed for men to consider each other as brothers. One loves all creatures because one loves God. If He is the creator, everything created by him is worthy of love.

The human soul is part of the universal soul, represented as matter, and residing in the human body. Understanding the unity of the soul and body is only possible through mysticism, which is the path created by God for humans to approach Him. For this reason, the mystic's purpose is to unite with the divine, an act, which is the result of the love that divine beauty stirs within humans. This union does not imply an end or annihilation of existence, rather an understanding of human existence as a ray of divine Being not possessed by other things. Most of those who have experienced the divine pressure maintained that the end of existence was a precondition for attaining knowledge of God, which is incorrect. Knowledge of God does not presuppose the end of existence, because things do not exist properly speaking, and that which does not exist cannot cease to exist: an end of existence implies a defense of existence, which equals polytheism. So if one knows that one lacks existence and end, one knows God; if one does not know this, one cannot know Him. This state of union is the supreme goal of the Gnostic or Sufi, the result of spiritual practice culminating in prayer from the heart.

Ibn 'Arabī's influence on Islamic spirituality has been great, reaching many Sufi brotherhoods. Thanks to him, there was a reconciliation between Sufism and the doctrine of Imami Shī'ism, which was against Sufi practice because of the conviction that Sufism usurped the privilege of union with God and the knowledge of divine secrets, privileges that were reserved for the Imam. However, his influence in the European Latin West was negligible.

## Cross-References

- ▶ Being
- ▶ Ibn Rushd, Muḥammad ibn Aḥmad al-Ḥafid (Averroes)
- ▶ Ismāʿīlī Philosophical Tradition
- ▶ Philosophy, Arabic

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## Ibn Bājja, Abū Bakr ibn al-Sāʿiq (Avempace)

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### Abstract

Ibn Bājja was one of the main representatives of the *falsafa* in the Muslim West between the eleventh and the twelfth centuries. He was the



precursor of Averroes, on whom he had a decisive, if indirect influence. Known in the Latin world under the name of Avempace, he wrote several commentaries on Aristotelian writings of logic and natural philosophy, although his knowledge of them does not rest on a direct study of the works of Aristotle, but rather on Graeco-Arabic abbreviations or comments by Alexander of Aphrodisias, Themistius, Philoponus, etc. Toward the end of his life he focused on ethics and political philosophy: in the *Regimen of the Solitary*, he maintained that the philosopher should isolate himself intellectually from the corrupted community, in order to attain the ultimate happiness of theoretical life; in another short writing, *The Conjunction of Intellect with Man*, he maintained that this ultimate happiness consists in the highest perfection of the human intellect.

## Life

Abū Bakr Muḥammad ibn Yaḥyā ibn al-Šā'ig ibn Bājja was born in Zaragoza, in all likelihood from a family of craftsmen; the most authoritative biographers place his birth between 1077 and 1082. His teachers in philosophy are unknown, but one can safely assume that his studies were influenced by the intense philosophical activity that was then conducted in the Jewish communities of Zaragoza. Before 1109, when the Banū Hūd dynasty ruling Zaragoza was defeated by the Almoravids, it was reported by Ibn al-Sīd al-Baṭalyūsī, with whom he was involved in a dispute, that Ibn Bājja was a young and extremely talented teacher of logic with a devoted group of disciples. From 1110 to 1117 (?), he held the office of vizier to the new Almoravid governor of Zaragoza, Ibn Tafālwīt. During this period, he was sent as an ambassador to the former ruler of Zaragoza deposed by the Almoravids. He was there imprisoned as a traitor, and only narrowly escaped execution. After the conquest of his native city by the Christians in 1118, Ibn Bājja lived in different cities in southern Spain and North Africa, for example, Almeria, Granada, Oran, and Fes. We know from one of his letters that he was

imprisoned a second time during this period. He wrote several musical poems, and has therefore been regarded as the inventor of a poetic genre that became considerably widespread, namely the *muwashshah*. He traveled to Seville in 1135, where he revised the transcription of his works made by his compatriot and disciple, 'Alī ibn al-Imām, who became lieutenant of the city of Seville and vizier to the Almoravid's governor of Granada. This very close friendship inspired Ibn Bājja to dedicate several of his later works to 'Alī ibn al-Imām. After the latter's departure to Egypt, Ibn Bājja intended to join him, but he was assassinated in Fes in 1139, possibly poisoned by his rival, the famous physician Ibn Zuhr (Avenzoar).

## The Earlier Works

In a letter to his friend Abū Ja'far Yūsuf ibn Ḥasdāy, studied by J. al-'Alawī, Avempace describes his scientific career. He first studied mathematics, music, and astronomy. He then became interested in logic, and later, again in the physical sciences. In the last period of his life, not yet begun at the time of writing the letter, he wrote a series of works, culminating with *The Regimen of the Solitary* (*Tadbīr al-mutawaḥḥid*), which had an enormous impact on posterity. Most of the works from the first period of his life have not survived, but we do know that he wrote a commentary on al-Fārābī's *The Major Book of Music*. We also know of a short writing on the relations between the humors of the body, the strings of the lute, and the melodies of the spheres. The letter to Ibn Ḥasdāy alludes to criticism of the astronomer al-Zarqālī (Arzachel, d. 1087) about the calculation of the apogee of Mercury. Other texts allude to research on the *Conics* of Apollonius of Perga.

Later on, he focused on the study of logic, which was studied in al-Andalus on the basis of the logical works by al-Fārābī. Several writings from this period of Ibn Bājja's lifetime have been preserved: some notes on the *Five Chapters* (*al-Fuṣūl al-khamsa*) by al-Fārābī (a small propaedeutic treatise), as well as on the Farabian summary of Porphyry's *Isagoge*, and on the

Farabian commentaries on the *Categories*, *De interpretatione*, *Prior Analytics*, and *Posterior Analytics*. Although these notes appear more like a collection of glosses than as a full-fledged treatise on logic, elements of systematicity emerge, however, highlighted by a series of successive divisions that define the status of the various branches of logic with respect to other philosophical disciplines. The first of these is the division, within the field of language, between *lafẓ* (meaning) and *ma'nā* (concept, “intention,” pl. *ma'ānī*), which alone is the proper subject of logic. The *ma'ānī* can in turn be divided into singulars and universals, which allows the setting apart of disciplines such as rhetoric and poetic – which attribute a universal predicate to a singular subject – from philosophy, dialectics, and sophistry, which, notwithstanding the diversity of the nature of their premises, predicate the universal of the universal. The latter is itself either simple or compound, such as the definitions, which consist of genera and differences. The science of definitions is thus an understanding of a compound universal, while the science of simple universals is introduced by the *Categories* (*Maqūlāt*). To reassemble universals (or singulars) into complex predications, and further into syllogisms, gives rise to the various sciences, depending on the status of the syllogisms used therein.

Just as with logic, most of Ibn Bājja's writings of physics do not rest on a direct study of the works of Aristotle, but rather on Graeco-Arabic abbreviations or commentaries of Alexander of Aphrodisias, Themistius, Philoponus, etc.; he uses paraphrases of the *Physics* and the *Meteorology* as well as of the *De generatione et corruptione*. The writings of Ibn Bājja on the physical sciences did become important sources for the early writings of Averroes and his *Compendia* of natural philosophy. The commentary on the *Physics* presents some corrections and moderated critiques of Aristotle's dynamics. He for example considers it necessary to posit a cause for unnatural motion, in addition to the movement imparted by the originator of the motion: this cause must be an immaterial kinetic force inherent in the moved object. The theory of falling bodies that Ibn Bājja formulates is based on his reading of

the Arabic Philoponus, and allows for the explanation of how a motion having a finite speed can take place in an environment offering no resistance, as in the case of the celestial bodies, thus leading the way to a dynamic model applicable to both the sublunary and the celestial world. These developments, endorsed by Averroes in his *Great Commentary on the Physics*, might have influenced John Buridan, whose model was the starting point of Galileo's discoveries.

Ibn Bājja's commentary on the *De generatione et corruptione* follows roughly the order of the exposition of Aristotle's text, but some conceptual innovations are noteworthy, for example, the fact that the commentary pivots around the distinction – not explicitly mentioned by Aristotle – between the generation of the four simple bodies (*kawn al-basā'it*) from each other, and the generation of composite bodies (*kawn al-murakkabāt*). This distinction elicits the foundation of the hierarchy of natural beings (i.e., simple body, homeomer composites, anhomeomer organs, animal, and human) which is the foundation and guiding principle of Ibn Bājja's physics, linking together the latter and the science of the soul.

Ibn Bājja frequently cites the Arabic version of the *Nicomachean Ethics* and a commentary on it by Porphyry (in twelve instead of ten books, as in Aristotle's original work) that is mentioned in the Arabic sources. A small epistle, possibly spurious, also undertakes to defend al-Fārābī against the accusation of having, in his own lost commentary on *Ethics*, denied the possibility of the union of humans with the separated Intellect. Ibn Bājja also composed a commentary on Pseudo-Aristotle's *De plantis*. An important role is attributed to the *Book of Animals* (*Kitāb al-Ḥayawān*), the Arabic summary of the three main zoological treatises of Aristotle, of which only the *De generatione animalium* and the *De partibus animalium* are commented upon in Ibn Bājja's own *Kitāb al-Ḥayawān*. Zoology is not a peripheral science of lesser importance, but a higher part of physics, which serves as an introduction to the science of the human soul and intellect. It is particularly Aristotle's account of *De gen. an.* II, 3 (736a35-b15), on the successive appearance in humans of the faculties imprinted in the living soul, which for

Ibn Bājja provides a model for hierarchically arranging the natural forms realized on lower substrates, that then organize themselves in a continuous way, from the simple elementary forms to the forms of the living beings and eventually to the intellect. Of particular importance in the commentary on *De animalibus* is the comparison between natural and artifactual forms, by which Ibn Bājja shows how the formative power (*vis formativa*), which gives form to living beings, cumulates the qualities of the artifactual forms – that depend upon an intelligence extrinsic to the created object – and those of the substantial and intrinsic natural form. The design of the hierarchy of forms implemented in Ibn Bājja's *Kitāb al-Ḥayawān* also serves as a guide to his *Book on the Soul* (unfinished), which, beginning from the cognition of the forms of simple bodies, studies their composition in complex bodies and the successive combinations that lead to the existence of living beings with a soul. He borrows this from the *De anima* by Alexander of Aphrodisias, rather than from the work of Aristotle, to which Ibn Bājja does not refer directly.

### The Works on Ethics, Politics, and Noetics

In addition to several short works, many of which were published by J. al-'Alawī (*Rasā'il falsafīyya li-Abī Bakr ibn Bājja*: see the Bibliography), three major texts (all edited by M. Fakhry and more recently by Ch. Genequand: see the Bibliography) can be placed in the last period of Ibn Bājja's life. At this time, some interconnected ethical, political, and intellectual concerns surpassed the study of physics. The order of the composition of these works are *The Regimen of the Solitary* (*Tadbīr al-mutawahhid*), *The Letter of Farewell* (*Risalat al-Wadā'*), a spiritual guide for his friend 'Alī ibn al-Imām on his departure for Egypt, and an epistle entitled *Conjunction of the Intellect with Man* (*Ittiṣāl al-'aql bi-l-insān*).

*The Regimen of the Solitary* is subdivided into two parts, respectively devoted to human actions and to "spiritual forms." This is preceded by a discussion of clearly political import about the

place of the philosopher in the state. Ibn Bājja uses the same analogy throughout the work between the political governance or "regimen," the personal governance, and "medicine," corresponding to the health of the political body, the health of the soul, and that of the body. Just as there is only one perfect balance between the humors of the body, subject to any number of undetermined disorders, there can be only one model of a perfect state, and many deviations from this standard. The imperfection of the societies causes almost necessarily the imperfections of its members, which are determined by their environment, except for a small number of superior humans, who can acquire their perfection independently of any society. The duty of these individuals, also in the interest of the imperfect society they inhabit, is to maintain their impermeability to the vicious standards of the society, and to restrict their dealings with these societies to the maximum, by taking advantage of resources offered to them when necessary: something which would not be the case, if the philosopher lived in a virtuous society. It is in this way that he develops the conditions of the perfection of philosophy, and possibly the improvement of the state, since only the philosopher is capable of reforming the vicious state and he is only able to guard himself against the corruption by taking himself away. Scholars differ on what this "aleness" advocated by Ibn Bājja actually means, that is, strict individualism or political activism.

The regimen followed by the philosopher is obviously a spiritual one: Ibn Bājja hence establishes a typology of human actions related to the "spiritual forms" (*ṣuwar rūḥāniyya*), because all acts accomplished by a human being are necessarily related to some form perceived by the soul. The actions are sorted hierarchically according to their relation to the body: to the hierarchy of acts corresponds that of the spiritual forms. This notion encompasses for Ibn Bājja forms of individual beings that are produced by sense perception and imagination, and are placed in the pneuma surrounding the heart and located in the brain (individual spiritual forms), abstract universal concepts realized in the human intellect, and the extramental forms that are incorporeal,

intelligible, universal, and separated (universal spiritual forms).

All human actions are accompanied by the apprehension of a form by a faculty. Hence “eating,” “drinking,” and “getting dressed” involve the existence of bodily forms. An act of desire involves forms perceived and imagined, and an act of thinking involves forms enhanced to the level of intellect. Since acts are as good as the “spiritual forms” that accompany them, the noblest acts of a human being are his thoughts, and they culminate in the apprehension of an intelligible reality entirely separate from matter: such an apprehension constitutes the ultimate happiness (*sa'āda quṣwā*) of a human being.

In *The Conjunction of the Intellect with Man*, Ibn Bājja undertakes to prove apodictically the possibility of such a union of the human being with the separated Intellect. Having stated that the intellect can be either potential or actual, and that the forms imagined by the human being – that are individual entities – constitute the potential intellect of an individual human being, Ibn Bājja proceeds to claim that “intellect” means in fact two things: the potentiality to become intelligible that belongs to the various imagined forms, and the intelligence that is the true essence of the human being. The latter is a necessarily universal form; hence, it is separate, and by the same token unique. As a consequence, the human being who has reached union (*ittiṣāl*) with this separate form becomes necessarily “one.” The essence of a human being is, however, distributed across a plurality of individuals, in which the intellect, which is the essence of the human being, spreads itself and particularizes itself, giving rise to instantiations where the intelligible reality is present in various degrees of particularity and materiality. This is why the human souls conceive in themselves spiritual forms that are particular. The form of a given extramental reality is individual, and it is as an individual reality that is first perceived, and then imagined. Thus, the particularization concerns the intelligible forms of the material beings received in the intellect: even though they are not themselves material, they are nevertheless related to the imagined individual forms of which they are the intelligible

counterparts. In the process of production of the intelligible form out of the imagination of a given material object, the thinking intellect does not already coincide with the intelligible form. The intellection of a thing in an individual human intellect is distinct from the intellection of the same thing in another individual, because these two intelligible forms are related to two imagined forms different from one another, located as they are in the imaginative faculty of different human individuals. However, the relative individuality of the intelligibles merges in the intellection of the intelligible form, which is one for all humans, totally separate, and counts as the foundation for the intelligibility of all things. The actual perfection of the human being consists of this ultimate act of intellection by which he reaches his true essence.

## Cross-References

- ▶ Alexander of Aphrodisias and Arabic Aristotelianism
- ▶ Aristotle, Arabic
- ▶ al-Baṭalyūsī, Abū Muḥammad ibn al-Sīd
- ▶ Ethics, Arabic
- ▶ al-Fārābī, Abū Naṣr
- ▶ Ibn Rushd, Muḥammad ibn Aḥmad al-Ḥafīd (Averroes)
- ▶ Ibn Ṭufayl, Abū Bakr (Abubacer)
- ▶ Philosophy, Arabic

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## Ibn Farīgūn

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### Abstract

Ibn Farīgūn, a little-known author of a conspectus of the fields of knowledge, was a direct or, more probably, an indirect pupil of Abū Zayd al-Balkhī (d. 934) and dedicated his work to the local ruler of a province in north-eastern Iran who died in 955. These scanty data situate the author in the tradition of the “Eastern” school of al-Kindī to which belong Ibn Farīgūn’s teacher al-Balkhī, al-Sarakhsī (d. 899), and al-‘Āmirī (d. 992). Ibn Farīgūn’s “encyclopedia,” called *Jawāmi‘ al-‘ulūm*, appears to be a handbook for the *kātib*, the state secretary, meant to furnish him with the catchwords and the internal structure of all kinds of theoretical disciplines and professional skills. Some sections of his work permit comparison with contemporary “mirrors for princes.” The fields of knowledge are, in the order of their appearance, the following: Arabic grammar (mainly parts of speech and morphology), various departments of state officials, statecraft and warfare, Islamic theology and religious duties, knowledge as such (*‘ilm*) and its forms of transmission, and the occult sciences. Almost all these subjects are presented in the peculiar form of the so-called *tashjīr*, that is, “trees,” which resemble the *arbor porphyriana* and aim at visualizing the relation between a given category, or general term, and its various species, or aspects. The section on the parts of philosophy (contained in the chapter on *‘ilm*) clearly reflects the order developed by the Alexandrian commentators on Aristotle’s works and mediated by al-Kindī’s ideas, to be traced also in Ibn Farīgūn’s quasi-identification of the object of, and the logical method of inquiry into, metaphysics and Islamic theology.

The three known facts about Ibn Farīgūn’s life and work are that he moved in the circle of the poly-histor Abū Zayd al-Balkhī (d. 934) and that he is the author of a conspectus of the fields of knowledge, called *Jawāmi‘ al-‘ulūm*, which he dedicated to the ruler of Chaghāniyān (a region north of the river Oxus), the Muḥtājīd Abū ‘Alī Aḥmad b. Muḥammad b. al-Muẓaffar (d. 955). These scanty data locate Ibn Farīgūn in the fertile tradition of the “Eastern” pupils of al-Kindī, along with his teacher Abū Zayd, Aḥmad b. al-Ṭayyib al-Sarakhsī, and Abū l-Ḥasan al-‘Āmirī, whose common feature is an effort in combining (a) Arabic-Islamic disciplines, (b) certain traits of Iranian statecraft and ethics, and (c) the Hellenistic philosophical and scientific tradition, not least its models of the classifications of knowledge, initiated by Aristotle, developed by his commentators, and refined to an unprecedented degree by Islamic scholarship.

As for Ibn Farīgūn’s identity, there is no trace of him in the rich Arabic biobibliographical literature; even his given name which appears on the three known manuscripts of his *Jawāmi‘* remains unclear. It has been suggested that he was a scion of the Āl-i Farīgūn, rulers of the district of Jūzjān in northern Afghanistan and tributaries of the Sāmānids, and that he may be identical with the anonymous author of the geographical work *Ḥudūd al-‘ālam*, written in Persian. Real evidence, however, can only be gleaned from his *unus liber* itself, but then this contains no explicit quotations from earlier authors, nor is it quoted in later works. This is due, to some degree, to its quite idiosyncratic arrangement, the so-called *tashjīr*, “arborization, ramification”: almost all the material, the fields of knowledge, the various crafts and professional functions, etc., is arranged in tree diagrams, the “trunk” representing the primary term and the branches and twigs, done in black or red ink, leading to secondary and tertiary terms. Thus, we find in the top right corner of p. 144 of the facsimile edition (= p. 255–257 ed. Janābī) a sketch, classifying philosophy as follows (for practical reasons, the *tashjīr* visualization is tentatively changed to numerical notation):



Philosophy [is divided into]:

1. Praxis
  - 1.1. Politics
  - 1.2. Economics
  - 1.3. Ethics
2. Theory
  - 2.1. Metaphysics (*ilāhī*) investigating the *intelligibilia*
    - 2.1.1. Mathematics (*ta'limī*) concerned with imaginary things (*ashyā' wahmiyya*)
    - 2.1.2. Mathematics (*riyādī*) investigating imaginary things [a doublet of 2.1.1.?] as to their quantity and quality [...]
      - 2.1.2.1. Arithmetic, a simple science [...]
      - 2.1.2.2. Geometry, composed in the first order, since 2.1.2.1. is employed in it
      - 2.1.2.3. Astronomy, composed in the second order, since 2.1.2.1. and 2.1.2.2. are employed in it
      - 2.1.2.4. Music, composed in the third order, since 2.1.2.1.–3. are employed in it
  - 2.2. Natural sciences
    - 2.2.1. Medicine [...]
    - 2.2.2. Animals
    - 2.2.3. Plants
    - 2.2.4. Mechanics (?) [...]

This outline of the philosophical sciences is clearly that of the Alexandrian commentaries on Aristotle's writings; the interesting idea of the growing complexity of the mathematical sciences may well have its roots in al-Kindī's system as presented in his *Letter on the Number of Aristotle's Books*, perhaps transmitted by al-Balkhī who is credited with a work on the classification of the sciences; the extensive subdivisions of Medicine may again be due to al-Balkhī who composed a monograph on the subject or to Ibn Farīgūn's own predilection whose system of the natural sciences as such

seems quite sui generis. On the following page (145 of the facsimile edition = p 258 f. ed. Janābī), the author classifies and discusses at length the contents and purpose of metaphysics (cf. above, 2.1.), which he sees as a culmination of all philosophical sciences, because (a) it investigates the cause of things (and not the caused things); (b) its object is the ultimate goal of all knowledge, God's Lordship; and (c) only the faculty of the intellect is employed (and not faculties concerned with material or imaginary objects). An investigation of this kind will lead to the understanding of the Creator's wisdom which, from His oneness, generates the intellect, the soul, and nature. This Neoplatonic order of emanation and the implicit complementarity, if not identity, of the object and the logical method of metaphysics and Islamic theology (*ṣinā'at al-kalām*, classified on p. 136 of the facsimile edition = p. 242 ed. Janābī) are central elements of the tradition of al-Kindī and show "a trend in the earliest philosophical school in Islam, perhaps existing already in the last phase of antiquity, to emphasize the theological aspect of Aristotle's *Metaphysics* at the expense of that dealing with the first philosophy, being-as-such" (Gutas 1988: 249).

The general sequence of the *Jawāmi'* is not easy to establish. Two substantial blocks appear to frame the whole work: the introductory chapter treats Arabic grammar, particularly in the form of morphological tables, implicitly stating the key character of language for all information to follow, and the final chapter classifies – in remarkable detail – the occult sciences, that is, "those fields of knowledge that are subject to controversy on whether they are really that, or rather fraud, trickery, and means to make a profit." Between these two blocks, the order of disciplines is roughly as follows: (1) the professional skills and virtues of the various types of secretary at court (*kātib*); (2) ethics and virtues, particularly of the good ruler; (3) statecraft and warfare; (4) Islamic theology (*kalām*) and religious duties; and, as a kind of climax, (5) sources of knowledge and forms and methods of its transmission, from which the above excerpts are taken.

Passages such as those discussed above and the frequent use of technical, or epistemological,

catchwords such as “form” and “matter,” “genus” and “species,” “idea” and “expression,” and “quality” and “quantity” should not divert from the fact that the *Jawāmi‘* does not aim to be a philosophical system of the sciences. They share with al-Khwārazmī’s *Mafātīḥ al-‘ulūm* the focus on technical terms; they show isolated parallels with concepts of al-Kindī, Abū Zayd al-Balkhī (in statecraft), and al-‘Āmirī (in the classification of genres of communication); but they lack the systematic distinction between indigenous Islamic and foreign, Hellenistic, sciences. This distinction governs the *Mafātīḥ* and al-‘Āmirī’s improvised classification in his *I‘lām* and, above all, al-Fārābī’s *Iḥṣā’ al-‘ulūm*, which finally – before the epochal advent of Avicenna’s encyclopedic designs – constitutes a truly systematic attempt at integrating the Aristotelian and the Islamic traditions. To all appearances, Ibn Farīgūn’s *Jawāmi‘* is a handbook for the state secretary interested in the catchwords of all kinds of disciplines and professional skills, with a penchant for philosophical categories and a – in a sense both practical and philosophical – quest for systematization.

## Cross-References

- ▶ Aristotle, Arabic
- ▶ al-‘Āmirī, Abū I-Ḥasan
- ▶ al-Balkhī, Abū Zayd
- ▶ al-Fārābī, Abū Naṣr
- ▶ al-Kindī, Abū Yūsuf Ya‘qūb ibn Ishāq
- ▶ al-Sarakhsī, Aḥmad ibn al-Ṭayyib

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## Ibn Ḥazm of Cordoba

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### Abstract

Ibn Ḥazm is one of the first thinkers from al-Andalus whose numerous books have been preserved. By reading his texts, one can deduce that he was a man of letters: poet, theologian, jurist, polemicist, historian of ideas, and even philosopher. It is not possible to find in his texts any commentaries to the works of Greek philosophers, nor a complete system of thought. However, he is worth a place on the history of philosophical thought due to the presence of enough metaphysical, cosmological, gnosological, psychological, ethic, and political elements on his texts, besides his knowledge of Aristotle’s logic.

### Biography

Abū Muḥammad ‘Alī b. Aḥmad b. Sa‘īd b. Ḥazm was born, according to himself, in Cordoba, in the suburb of *Munyat al-Mugīra*, on the last day of the month of *Ramaḍān* in the year 384 of Hegira – which corresponds to the 7th of November of 994. He claimed to be a descendant of a Persian man linked to the first Umayyad caliphs; however, he is of Muladi origin – that is, he descended from converted Christians to Islam. Thanks to the position that his father had in the court of Cordoba under the Caliphs, he had access to the knowledge of his epoch by studying the Koran and the Islamic religious sciences. He also attended

courses and meetings in which religious and scientific topics were discussed, and this is how he achieved a solid education. After the riots that started in 1008 – which ended up in the *fitna* or civil war – Ibn Ḥazm’s family lost the favor they had with the Cordovan court. His father died in 1012 and he found himself forced to leave Cordoba. He settled down in Almería where, later, he fell from grace: he was arrested and sent into exile. He settled down in Valencia and in Xàtiva, where he wrote *Ṭawq al-hamāma* around the year 1022. In 1023 ‘Abd al-Raḥmān V, an educated man, was elected caliph and named Ibn Ḥazm as vizier, acknowledging his fight in favor of the Umayyad. In January 1024, the caliph was killed and Ibn Ḥazm was imprisoned again. One year and a half later, he was freed, and he decided to withdraw from any political activity and devoted himself to studying. He adopted then the legal ritual *zāhiri* and abandoned the one that was predominant in al-Andalus, the *Mālikī* ritual. This fact resulted in him having many difficulties with the political and religious powers. After the definitive fall of the caliphate, on the 30th of November, 1031, Ibn Ḥazm went all over different Taifa kingdoms where he was welcomed at the beginning but rejected at the end due to his criticism to power. The King of Seville, Al-Mu‘taḍid, ordered all his works to be burnt in public, and Ibn Ḥazm answered to this measure with a famous poem that reads as follows:

“Though you may burn the paper, you cannot burn what the paper bears; / which is kept safe within my spirit in spite you / and goes with me wheresoever my feet lead me. / Wherever I rest, there too rests my science, / and it shall be buried with me in my tomb the day I die.”

During this period, he wrote a great part of his works. At an unknown date, he went back to his family’s house in Munt Lishām, in Niebla, in the district of Huelva, where he died, according to his son Abū Rāfi‘al-Faḍl, on the 28th of *sha‘bān* of the year 456, which corresponds to the 15th of August of 1064.

This same son gave account of the enormous literary production of his father in a report in which he stated that his works on law, *ḥadīth*,

religious foundations, doctrines and sects, history, genealogy, *adab* books, and controversy reached around 400 volumes – only knowing nowadays 150 out of them. The reading of these works demonstrates the extensive knowledge that he had on various fields as well as on the works of different authors on almost every field of knowledge, as his *Risāla fī faḍl al-Andalus (Treatise on the Merits of al-Andalus)* reveals. Being a deeply religious person, he addressed his critics against all religious deviations and against the leaders' indifference.

He also knew some ideas put forward by the first Arab philosopher, al-Kindī, whose metaphysics he criticizes in his *al-Radd 'alā l-Kindī al-faylasūf (Refutation of the Philosopher al-Kindī)*. To the education he acquired is added knowledge by oral tradition of nonpublic theories as well as information on Jewish and Cristian religions and the diverse Islamic sects, as shown by his great work *Kitāb al-Fiṣal fī l-milāl wa-l-ahwā' wa-niḥal (Book of Critical Examination concerning Religions, Sects and Denominations)*.

## Sciences

Since he was a religious man, his works reveal his strong belief in God and conviction that Islam was the only true religion. However, being a man of letters in the broadest sense of the word, he clearly saw the value that knowledge had for the integral development of humans, as well as the interdependence between the different disciplines on this field. He understands that science has two aspects which complement one another: the spiritual aspect, which is linked to revelation, and the solely scientific aspect, which is linked to reason. Only by acknowledging both aspects, the sense of science can be understood as the whole of human experience. In his *Risālat al-tawqīf 'alā shāri' al-najāt bi-ikhtiṣār al-ṭarīq (Treatise for setting up the Way of Salvation in a brief Manner)*, he wonders if this path goes through the sciences of the ancients, as philosophers pretend, or through the faith in prophetic revelation, as theologians support. He claims the temporary

utility of the sciences of the ancients – which are philosophy and logic – which were taught by Plato, his disciple Aristotle, Alexander, and whoever followed their steps. These are valid sciences as long as they provide with knowledge about the universe and everything within it. The evidence to reach truth is established through logic, which is one of these sciences; therefore, this is a very useful knowledge in order to determine the realities of things. He also includes mathematics, geometry, medicine, and astronomy among these sciences, being all demonstrative sciences very useful for humanity and, even, for religion. Regarding judiciary astrology, it is a vain and useless science because it lacks any kind of demonstrative evidence. He then explains the advantages of that which has been revealed to prophets: it is a knowledge that is used to correct the habits of the soul, to avoid injustice and violence against human life, and, in short, to save the soul. The prophecy promotes the healing of the soul having, therefore prevailing over the healing of the body. It is then impossible for philosophy to improve the character of the soul if it does not rely on prophecy. After, he presents the truths that the revelation has brought to light and that the reason verifies. These are issues related to theoretical philosophy: the created character of the universe, the fact that it has a beginning and an end, and the fact that space and time are finite.

Among the truths that are known by revelation and recognized by reason, there is language, which is necessary for teaching because no science can exist without teaching. This reference to language leads him to the affirmation that language has a divine origin, as claimed in several of his works such in his *al-Taqrīb li-ḥadd al-manṭiq (Introduction defining Logic)*. In this work, not only he refers again to language as a gift of God, but he also exalts the merits of logic. He also offers a summary of sciences in a classification that, according to him, differs from that one given by philosophers. The sciences that are practiced by people are the following: the sciences of the Koran, traditions, doctrines, legal ruling, logic, grammar, lexicography, poetry,

history, medicine, mathematics, geometry, and astronomy, and, as a result of all these, the science of interpretation and rhetoric is added.

In the succinct description that he gives of all of them, he points to the merits of each of them, the relation between them, their objectives, and their diffusion. In *Risālat al-talkhīs li-wujūh al-takhliṣ* (*Abridgement dealing with the various Aspects of Salvation*), he goes back to the issue of sciences, he suggests a course of study, and he considers that devoting oneself to teaching is the best activity in life together with the practice of justice and striving (*jihād*) in the path of God. Even though that course tends to exalt religious education, it contains various secular sciences. He suggests the memorization of the whole Koran or of a great part of it, the study of the seven Koranic readings, the traditions, the grammar, and the lexicography, since all these sciences concern all Muslims. To these sciences, he adds the knowledge of poetry, mathematics, medicine, opinion books, and other topics. These and other purposes should be carried out to achieve salvation and the improvement of the moral character, but not to achieve leadership and prestige.

Finally in his work specifically dedicated to the classification of sciences, *Risālat marātib al-'ulūm* (*Treatise on the Categories of the Sciences*), he organizes the knowledge established in al-Andalus at the beginning of the eleventh century. For him, science is a universal knowledge, and, therefore, it must contain both theological and philosophical knowledge, since its origin is God. Among all the human sciences, he gives a special value to logic and to language: to the first one because it helps to differentiate what is certain from what is probable and to the second because it is used to specify and to clarify the wording from the Sacred Book, the Koran. These are two sciences that are related to the theological knowledge: one represents the summit of human wisdom and the other should deserve, strictly speaking, humans' attention. By combining a rigorous scientific method with religious criteria, he was able to admit that all secular sciences, even the most precise and veracious ones such as mathematics and logic, are only useful as auxiliary and propaedeutic sciences in order to get to

knowledge and to the practice of the revealed science. Human sciences help and prepare humans on their investigation of truth. All of them cooperate so that humans can reach salvation, and they are sciences that have a universal value for all the peoples. His evaluation of sciences did not mean a rejection of reason but a recognition of its importance. He adopted a balanced position in order to solve the differences between those who supported revelation as the only value criteria and those who supported reason as something exclusive and excluding of all religious feelings. Human reason is too limited; only revelation can show those truths that reason is unable to access. Reason, by itself, cannot produce any religious value judgment over things, since it is incapable of establishing or constructing truth; its only purpose is to identify it.

## Logic

In the *Taqrīb*, the author wishes to establish a rule or criterion that would be valid for all the sciences: "As for the science of logic, expounded in this book: it is the criterion for all the sciences." Logic is the result of the gift given to humans by God, which makes humans superior to animals: reason and the ability to understand. Because logic is universal, it can be applied to the natural world and religious affairs. It is this last statement that makes this text by Ibn Ḥazm original: it is an introduction to logic using accessible vocabulary, in a simple and familiar style that can be understood by everyone, using legal examples that show how this can be applied to the religious sciences. This was a new, innovative method. This method was the cause of some scandal in certain circles.

The work begins with a prologue in which, after setting out the most important gifts humankind has received from God, reason and language, he criticizes those who maintain that logic is not necessary merely because the pious tradition of Islam did not consider it as such. His response is clear: none of the pious ancestors had need of grammar either; however no one would question its utility, since, due to the spread of ignorance, it

became necessary to rid the Arabic language of ambiguity to ensure that the Word of God was properly understood. The same could be said of law: previously, no legal books existed, and now they are indispensable. Consequently, logic is necessary for four reasons: for the existence of things, because it contributes to their explanation; for the perception of these things by the intellect, because logic helps to give them form and discern them by the mind; for the existence of spoken language, which makes it possible for the speaker and the listener to communicate, that which is held in the mind of the speaker being transmitted to the mind of the listener; and, lastly, for the existence of signs, of which the most important is writing, which allows communication between two people separated by distance and time.

Some scholars wrote books to classify the ways in which things can be denoted, establishing definitions in order to make them easier to understand. Among these was Aristotle, author of eight books which establish the definitions of logic, making these works invaluable. People's responses to these works can be divided into four groups: those who believe they hold the seed of non-belief and further the cause of heresy; those who maintain that they contain incomprehensible and rambling ideas; those who read them with unstable understanding, twisted desires, or through eyes full of contempt; and those able to examine them with a calm mind, pure reflection, and clear understanding. The oneness of God is confirmed in the latter group, as they are witness to the division of things and the footprints left in them by God; they see in these books both a pious companion and a true refuge. The cause of so much disparity of opinion on Aristotle's books on logic lies in the complexity of the translation and in the use of infrequent terms used in very limited contexts. Ibn Ḥazm's intention is, therefore, to use simple terms that are easily understood. These books are like powerful medicine, beneficial for those with a sound and healthy disposition but harmful to those with a weak and sickly constitution.

The Cordovan thinker therefore sets out to remedy the difficulties involved in reading the Greeks' books on logic. This treatise was written

to clarify everything which made them difficult: "Whoever reads this book will know that these books [on logic] are not only useful for one science, but for all sciences. It is also highly useful for the Book of Almighty God, for the traditions of the Prophet and the fatwas on the licit and the illicit, that which is obligatory and that which is tolerated."

After the prologue, he presents Porphyry's *Isagoge* or introduction to logic followed by Aristotle's *Organon* together with *the Rhetoric* and *the Poetics* – according to Greek tradition accepted in the Arab world – and offers a summarized view of all of them. It looks like the source of his exposition is not Aristotle's and Porphyry's books, since, by simply comparing the vocabulary present on the texts translated into Arab and on Ibn Ḥazm's work, one can see a remarkable difference. It is possible that his sources were the authors from al-Andalus which had already written about logic. This deduction can be made by analyzing the pages in which he describes the category of "substance," since the poverty they present in content reveals his unfamiliarity with Aristotle's texts.

The same assumption can be made after reading the lines he dedicates to *the Rhetoric*. On the one hand, because he uses the term *balāga* in the expression *'ilm al-balāga*, which designates one of the Islamic sciences – the one that is related to eloquence and the explanation of the inimitable character of the Koran – therefore, it seems to be an "Islamic" motivated rhetoric compared to the use of the term *khatāba*, which is used in philosophy to refer to Aristotle's *Rhetoric*. On the other hand, Ibn Ḥazm devotes to the Rhetoric.

## Religion

His interest in religion led him to give maximum importance to religious sciences, which hold the highest position on his ranking. Human sciences are just propaedeutic and auxiliary to get to knowledge and to the practice of revelation. The science that holds the highest position in sciences is the Law of Islam, which is divided into four: the science of the Koran, the science of traditions, the



science of law, and the science of theology. They all express the will of God.

Ibn Ḥazm incorporated then the science of theology to the *zāhirī* doctrine, which was fundamentally a legal school. However, the theology that he elaborated had little to do with a speculative one, since he had supported the impossibility of considering the essence, the nature, and the attributes of God. Additionally, his concern for religion led him to compose his great work *Kitāb al-Fiṣal*, in which he analyzes the different well-known religions and the religious movements or sects that existed in Islam.

In this text, he presents the main religious attitudes that existed in humanity toward truth and the eternity of the world. He also establishes ontology problems referring to essence and existence and to substance and accidents, cosmology problems about the world and its creation, and anthropology issues about human freedom, ethical virtue, and love. He considers the skepticism of sophists, the atheism of those philosophers who affirm the eternity of the universe, and the deism of those other philosophers that consider God to be the Creator of the world. He also analyzes the dualism of Manicheans and Zoroastrians, the polytheism of trinitarian Christians, the rationalism of those who deny the prophetic message, the monotheism of Jews, and of those who accept a revelation. He likewise examines religious indifference, vulgar beliefs, and the doctrines of those who are experts in magic and spells. With this, Ibn Ḥazm aims to determine the true conception of Islam. According to him, it is the one that establishes the literal sense of the revealed text dismissing any allegoric or esoteric interpretation which can lead to arbitrariness. Due to this, he gave a significant importance to human language, as stated earlier. Only by considering his position about Muslim revelation, one can understand his interest in grammar and his study of language. The human word can confuse the distinction of the divine Word. Literal meaning is the one that helps to prevent the dangers of that human word. Therefore, it is a work that comprises and solves, from this particular conception of Islam -the *zāhirī*-, the main problems posed in this religion.

But this intellectual and religious position did not mean for the author a rejection of reason, as has already been said. Human reason is too limited to understand what is definite in religion, which is that related to God, and therefore humans must limit themselves to knowing how to differentiate confusion from truth, which is a task that belongs to logic. Only revelation can show those truths that reason is unable to know; this, by itself, cannot produce any religious value judgment over things, since it is incapable of establishing or constructing truth; its only purpose is to identify it.

### Love and Beauty

Ibn Ḥazm was one of the authors in the Islamic world, among others, that wrote about love, as an answer to Mālikī jurists, for whom talking about love in relation to God was an anthropomorphism. In his most representative work, *Ṭawq al-ḥamāma* (*The Dove's Ring dealing with Love and Lovers*), he reflects on the forms of love and sexual passion by combining prose and poetry in a masterful way. He adopts the literary form of an epistle addressed to a friend, in which Platonic elements are preserved and taken out of the *Kitāb al-zahra* of Muḥammad b. Dāwūd from Ispahan.

Ibn Ḥazm looks for the essence of love by looking into its signals and the paths where it transits and by doing an analysis based on personal data and other people's experiences. He narrates the most complex circumstances related to love with great subtlety and social and psychological penetration: its nature, its forms, and its degrees. Love has a sacred character because it is not condemned by faith nor is it prohibited by law. Therefore, the best type of love is the one that culminates in God. However, love is something innate in humans; it is a particular category in the universal law of attraction present in all beings. It is a unique phenomenon that, nonetheless, has multiple tendencies which depend upon the variety of human desire. Love is both tendency and desire rooted in the very being of human soul for it being an innate impulse. This impulse, out of

which the feeling of love arises, starts when an observer establishes visual contact with the image or shape of another being and perceives it as beautiful. This triggers a feeling of liking and affection in the observer which can go up in rank until provoking delirium or, even, death. Elevating itself to more beautiful shapes in degree, it can provide humans with the greatest of happiness they can aspire to have, a happiness that gives maximum joy, serenity, and stillness to the soul and provides with all perfections at their highest levels and establishes a “renovated life” on human beings. Love, as a tendency, requires knowledge, because there is no desire out of that which is unknown. Authentic love needs, due to the very nature of the soul, to promote knowledge:

“Love is the union between souls on the roots of their superior world, and what we have said verifies it. We know that in this under world soul is covered up with veils and accidents and surrounded by worldly and mundane natures that, even if they do not alter it, they stand in the way between itself and other souls. Therefore, a real union is only possible when the soul is ready and up for it, after acknowledging the existence of something similar and coinciding with itself and after exposing itself to the natural characters which are similar to itself and which were hidden in the beloved object.”

The great purpose of love is the union with the lover, which is the greatest happiness one can get in this world and which is only surpassed by the happiness in Paradise in which one will live eternally in body and soul enjoying the pleasures of love. This love is not passionate or ardent but tender toward the other half. Then, why there is not always a correspondence between the lover and the beloved? Considering it is an attraction to which they are destined to feel, how to explain the attractiveness of the perfect bodies? Ibn Ḥazm answers platonically underlining that this is due to the existing deficiencies in the world of the senses and to the carnal exterior of souls. For him, human beings differ from animals, above all, in their God-conferred capacity to practice virtue and to defeat desire, which is what leads them toward what is wrong and evil. The best determination a person can have to control this

desire is to possess knowledge; this is the only means to overcome the ignorance in which most mortals live. By perceiving beauty, the impulse of love is awakened. For this reason, aesthetic contemplation, the knowledge of beauty, is what provokes that renovation of life, which also means a new ethic, referring to moral actions of individuals.

All his love theory must be understood as an ethic projection regulated by the divine message and the right practice of reason. He presents this ethic in a very personal way, through his own experiences, in his *Risāla fī mudāwāt al-nufūs* (*Treatise on the Therapeutics of Souls*). This epistle is a sort of personal diary in which he wrote down his meditations, observations, and opinions on people and on life in general, which also discloses the life of the author in al-Andalus. In this work, he tries to reflect his attitude toward life and society pointing at the virtues and vice that exist in human life. Good moral conduct is based on a life of balance and tranquility:

“I have thoroughly looked for a purpose of human actions that all humans would judge unanimously as good and that all would yearn for, and I did not find but one: the purpose of avoiding worry.”

He uses his personal experiences also to present his political views on diverse works, especially on his *Kitāb al-siyāsa* (*Book on Politics*), which is only partially preserved. In this book, he explains that the caliphate is the most convenient and legitimate form of government, while any other form of government causes disturbance and confusion. He says the following:

“Since the caliphate is established by God through his Prophet and it is the foundation of religious precepts, people need someone among them to sometimes take the role of Prophet, God bless him and save him. This is because when people fear him, uncontrolled passions cool down, and when people respect him, separated hearts are reconciled. In addition, thanks to his power, the hands that fight against each other calm down and, by venerating him, rebel spirits are subjected. This is because the desire for fight and power naturally present in human beings is such that they only give up on it if there is someone strong enough to stop it and to restrain it.”

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## Ibn Hindū, Abū l-Faraj

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### Abstract

Abū l-Faraj ibn Hindū was a medical scholar and poet who studied philosophy under Abū l-Ḥasan al-‘Āmirī.

Abū l-Faraj ibn Hindū was a native of Rayy. He studied medicine under the guidance of Ibn Suwār ibn al-Khammār and was a disciple of Abū l-Ḥasan al-‘Āmirī in philosophy. He died in c. 1029/32. He became well-known as a medical scholar, and a poet. He wrote an introduction to

the study of philosophy entitled *Treatise Encouraging the Study of Philosophy (al-Risāla al-mushawwiqa fī l-madkhal ilā l-falsafa)* and was then invited by a reader of his first work to write a second introduction to the study of medicine, entitled *The Key to Medicine and the Students’ Guide (Miftāḥ al-ṭibb wa minhāj al-ṭullāb)*.

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- ▶ al-‘Āmirī, Abū l-Ḥasan
- ▶ Ibn Suwār (Ibn al-Khammār)

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## Ibn Kammūna, ‘Izz al-Dawla

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### Abstract

Ibn Kammūna (d. 1284 c.) was a polymath of Jewish origin, whose main works are devoted to philosophy and comparative religion.

A commentator of Avicenna and Suhrawardī, he also compiled the doctrines of Naṣīr al-Dīn al-Ṭūsī, with whom he had a scientific and philosophical correspondence.

‘Izz al-Dawla Sa’d b. Maṣṣūr b. Sa’d al-Ḥasan b. Hibat Allāh ibn Kammūna presumably originated from Baghdad where he spent most of his life. He was born into a Jewish learned family and he must have received an early education in both Hebrew and Jewish literature and Islamic letters. He states that he was self-taught in philosophy. He probably spent some time in Aleppo. According to Ibn al-Fuwaṭī, who met him in 1280–1281 in the Niẓāmiyya *madrasa* of Baghdad, he was well versed not only in philosophy, but also in astronomy, mathematics, and literature, and wrote poetry in Arabic and Persian. There is no evidence that he was a regular teacher in one of the *madrasa*-s of Baghdad, but probably gave informal philosophical lectures. He also corresponded with many scholars of his time such as Naṣīr al-Dīn al-Ṭūsī and Kātibī.

He seems to have been patronized by the family of the *ṣāḥib al-dīwān*, Shams al-Dīn al-Juwaynī. After the latter’s execution in 1284, Ibn Kammūna moved from Baghdad to the nearby town of Ḥilla. He refuted there because his son was serving as an official in that town, and Ibn Kammūna was in contact with some of the local Shī‘ite scholars. It is assumed in modern scholarship that this move was caused by hostile reaction to Ibn Kammūna’s comparison between Judaism, Christianity, and Islam in the *Tanqīḥ al-abḥāth li-l-milal al-thalāth (Examination of the Three Faiths)*, completed in 1280, but it is more likely to be connected to the execution of his patron. Ibn Kammūna died in Ḥilla short after 1284.

It has been argued that Ibn Kammūna converted to Islam at some stage of his life. However, Pourjavady and Schmidtke (2006) remark that in the *Tanqīḥ al-abḥāth li-l-milal al-thalāth* Ibn Kammūna’s loyalty to Judaism is beyond doubt, and that it cannot be decided whether Ibn Kammūna did or did not convert to Islam after the composition of the *Tanqīḥ* (1280) for opportunistic reasons, i.e., to avoid persecution.

As a philosopher, Ibn Kammūna's favorite topic of inquiry was the nature of human soul; he formulated on this issue his main doctrines, such as that of the pre-eternity, immortality, and simplicity of the soul. He wrote several treatises on this topic, three of which are extant: the *Maqāla fī l-taṣdīq bi-anna nafs al-insān bāqiya abadan* (*Treatise on the Pre-eternity of the Human Soul*), the *Maqāla fī anna wujūd al-naḥs abadī wa-baqā'ahā sarmadī* (*Treatise on the Immortality of the Soul*), and the *Maqāla fī anna l-naḥs laysat bi-mizāj al-badan wa lā kā'ina 'an mizāj al-badan* (*Treatise on the Simplicity of the Soul*). Ibn Kammūna followed Ibn Sīnā in cosmology and metaphysics, and commented the *Ishārāt wa-l-tanbīhāt* (*Pointers and Reminders*); he was also influenced by Shihāb al-Dīn al-Suhrawardī, the founder of the philosophy of illumination, and commented on the latter's *Talwīḥat* (*Intimations*). In addition, Ibn Kammūna was familiar with the writings of Abū Ḥāmid al-Ġazālī and Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī.

The list of Ibn Kammūna's philosophical works, for which the principal source is Ḥājī Khalīfa, includes excerpts from Naṣīr al-Dīn al-Ṭūsī's *Talkhīṣ al-Muḥaṣṣal* (*Summary of [al-Razī's] Harvest [of the Thought of the Ancients and Moderns]*); a comprehensive exposition of thirteenth-century science and philosophy entitled *al-Ḥikma al-jadīda* (*The New Wisdom*); a short work on philosophy entitled *al-Maṭālib al-muhimma min 'ilm al-ḥikma* (*Key Issues in the Science of Wisdom*); the short treatise *Talkhīṣ al-ḥikma* (*Summary of Wisdom*); and the *Kalīmāt wajīza mushtamila 'alā nukat laṭīfa fī l-'ilm wa-l-'amal* (*Brief Words Encompassing Some Fine Points of Knowledge and Praxis*), a compilation of ethical and moral advices for a ruler, dedicated to one of the sons of the *ṣāhib al-dīwān* al-Juwaynī.

Ibn Kammūna also wrote on comparative religion: the above-mentioned *Tanqīḥ al-abḥāth li-l-milal al-thalāth*, an overview of the polemical arguments for and against Judaism, Christianity, and Islam, and a treatise on the differences between the Rabbanites and Karaites.

## Cross-References

- ▶ al-Ġazālī, Abū Ḥāmid Muḥammad
- ▶ Ibn Sīnā, Abū 'Alī (Avicenna)
- ▶ al-Rāzī, Fakhr al-Dīn
- ▶ al-Suhrawardī, Shihāb al-Dīn Yaḥyā al-Maqtūl
- ▶ al-Ṭūsī, Naṣīr al-Dīn

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## Ibn Khaldūn, Abū Zayd ‘Abdarrahmān

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### Abstract

A historian as well as a sociologist and anthropologist *avant la lettre*, Ibn Khaldūn was one of the most original figures of the medieval Arab culture. His political experience in various courts of the Maghreb and Muslim Spain during the first half of his life, as well as his many travels to the Middle East, provided him with a concrete understanding of the social and political realities of his time. His education was first and foremost religious, legal, and literary, but he also had strong foundations in the Graeco-Arabic philosophical tradition. In his works he raises a new question, namely, how does one write true history exceeding the limits of formal critique of historical information as it was practiced in the Arabic historiographical tradition. The answer he developed involves knowledge of society as well as taking into account all available knowledge as a condition for historical knowledge. He thus felt obliged to invent a “science of the society” in the narrow sense of the word, in which the social and political realities of the Maghreb and the Arab world in medieval times obviously occupy an important place. From this point of view, he deserves the title of “sociologist.” However, his global approach to the civilizations of his time, despite the limited information he had at his disposal, equally makes him a careful “anthropologist,” whose ideas even to

this day retain attention. He was foremost a historian, however, and as such he contributed more than an innovative approach. He had a vision of history based on the internal dynamics of societies and on their universal struggles for dominance, on the scale of the great empires of his time.

Abū Zayd ‘Abdarrahmān ibn Khaldūn was born in Tunis in 1332. According to the information in his *Autobiography*, his family, of Arab Yemeni origin, settled in Spain in the eighth century and emigrated in the thirteenth century to Tunis after a short stay in the Moroccan city, Ceuta. Destined by his aristocratic origins to occupy a high position in state administration, Ibn Khaldūn felt torn, until the age of 36, between his political ambitions and his profound attraction to science. After an eventful first half of his life when he was called to hold high political positions in various courts of the Maghreb and in Muslim Spain, he made a crucial decision to withdraw into the castle of Qal’at ibn Salāma (near Frennda, in Algeria) to write. During the 4 years he spent in this deserted place, away from the bustle of cities, he wrote the first draft of the most important work of his life, *The Book of Examples*, which includes the famous *Muqaddima* (Introduction) as the first volume. Finally, having fallen seriously ill, and being obliged to leave his retreat to find the documentation he needed for his research, he returned for a few years to his native city, Tunis, before finally leaving for Alexandria, and thereafter for Cairo, where he spent the last 24 years of his life. Shortly before leaving Tunis, he had offered the first version of *The Book of Examples* to the library of the Ḥafṣid Sultan Abū l-‘Abbās. Once in Cairo, the support of the Mamluk king Zāhir al-Barqūq enabled him to obtain a position as a teacher and judge. But he kept these positions a relatively short time, because of jealousy and hatred that aroused against him due to his severity as a judge, his haughty attitude, and commitment to his country of origin, the Maghreb. Also, he led a precarious existence almost entirely dependent on



his royal patron, but he could nevertheless dedicate himself to completing his work, of which he presented a near-final version to his benefactor in 1397. Toward the end of his life, he met the famous conqueror Tamerlane at the gates of Damascus and had many conversations with him that he recounts in his *Autobiography*. He died in Cairo on March 17, 1406.

Ibn Khaldūn proposes two conceptions of history, one focused on society, social activities, and laws determining its evolution, which is the subject of the first volume of *The Book of Examples*, and another, the subject of two other volumes, that covers world history from creation to the time of the author. However, the first, while constituting an autonomous part, is considered a prerequisite for the second to the extent that, in explaining the work and the various mechanisms of society, it allows the reader to better judge the veracity of the historical accounts described therein. This is why Ibn Khaldūn presents this as an introduction – in Arabic, *Muqaddima*. This distinction is important, and by insisting upon a global knowledge of society, it reveals a methodological concern very close to that of the modern social sciences, as well as a philosophy of history, which places the social functioning itself at the core of the historical movements and historical developments.

Ibn Khaldūn’s *Science of Society* though presupposing creation, has a materialistic basis. On the one hand, it relies on the examination of the physical environment, namely the geography and climate in which humans live; on the other, it attempts to explain the social functions through purely human and material factors. The research and analysis it proposes revolve around four main axes, namely (1) the forms of sociability and the social relationships they give rise to; (2) the political life including its forces of domination, and formation of power and state; (3) the economic life including livelihoods, the acquisition of wealth and production; and finally (4) the intellectual and spiritual life, the formation and history of sciences, education and its methods, language and literary creations. At least in their content, these axes cover largely those found in what is known today as cultural anthropology.

Ibn Khaldūn shows that society is divided between two poles, the *badāwa*, or rural lifestyle,

which includes that which is necessary for life, and *hadāra*, or urban lifestyle, which seeks the superfluous and luxury. These two poles are both opposed and complementary, and society constantly oscillates from one to the other following a cyclical evolution. The formation of political power pivoting on the *‘aṣabiyya*, the social solidarity based on either blood ties or on the links of patronage, is largely responsible for this oscillation that causes great social, political, economic, and cultural upheavals. History is therefore designed as the study of the appearance, development, and disappearance of states and empires that have been able to capture and instrumentalize to their advantage the *‘aṣabiyya* in order to establish their power.

## Cross-References

- ▶ [Ethics, Arabic](#)
- ▶ [Political Philosophy, Arabic](#)

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## Ibn Masarra, Muḥammad ibn ‘Abdallāh

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### Abstract

Despite having been regarded for a long time as the first Andalusian philosopher, it can now be seen, thanks to the ideas contributed by some of his works, that Ibn Masarra's thought

tends more toward mysticism and Gnosticism than pure philosophy. Although he does expound philosophical ideas, these owe more to his cultural context than to a rigorous understanding of the implications of Greek philosophy. In fact, in his two surviving works he attacks the philosophers, pointing out that the path of philosophy strays from that leading to the truth.

Little is known of the life of Muḥammad ibn ‘Abd Allāh ibn Masarra. He was born in Cordoba (Spain) in 883. His father introduced him to Mu‘tazilite and Bāṭinī teachings and initiated him into the ascetic life. He received mystic ideas from some of his teachers, which were reinforced after his pilgrimage to Mecca. On his return to Cordoba he lived as a hermit in the mountains near the city, surrounded by disciples, whom he instructed in secret doctrines. He died in 931 and his teachings soon aroused the suspicion of jurists who obtained a sentence from caliph ‘Abd al-Raḥmān III against his followers. Of the many works attributed to him, only two are known: *Characteristics of Letters* and *On Reflection*. These works reveal a more Gnostic than philosophical Ibn Masarra, with absolutely no dependence on the Pseudo-Empedocles assumptions ascribed to him for many years as the origin of his thought.

The *Characteristics of Letters* can be classed within the tradition of Gnostic texts aimed at the attainment of knowledge of reality and the highest truths through the interpretation of letters. The divine Word is expressed in the Book and unifies the multiplicity of letters and words. Ibn Masarra aims to decipher the mysterious letters that feature in some of the suras in the Qur’ān, because “the learned differ in their interpretations, although the disagreement between them is not because they are unaware of them, nor is it proof that they are unable to understand them.” Humankind has been given two means of knowledge: on one hand, thought, involving reflection about the created world, through which humans can infer and contemplate the unity of God, his power, nobility, and glorification through his names and attributes; and on the other hand, revelation, which God has

given to his Prophet and is collected in the Book, which is the explanation of all things and the sum of both ancient and modern science. Ibn Masarra seems to have been familiar with some philosophical teachings, but he unambiguously expresses the superiority of Muḥammad's prophecy. His interest is in the Qur'ānic letters and he points to the fact that those who study the occult sciences maintain that these letters are the foundation and origin of all things.

In this work there are no explicit references to philosophical positions. It does not contain any doctrine which refers to ideas expounded by philosophers; only some philosophical principles and terms used by them. This is not a philosophical book, rather its contents are closer to Islamic Gnosticism. The divine Essence, the Universal Intellect, the Great Soul, and Nature are the terms used to show the hierarchy of beings. However, these are simply ideas that were circulating around the Islamic world at the time, not the principles of an original philosophical system.

The other work, *On Reflection*, could be seen as philosophical, not merely because of its title, which makes use of a term of the philosophical vocabulary (*i'tibār*), but also because of its initial approach: it appeals to the intellect, to humankind's reason as the highest faculty for discovery which, when used, gives rise to reflection. But Ibn Masarra also clearly points out that the human intellect has its origin in the divine light, indicating a very unusual slant in his thought. He also states that in addition to reflection, revelation also counts as a path to truth. Careful reading of his work shows that the author's intention is far from that of the philosophers: he simply aims to explain the Qur'ānic idea that advises and exhorts humankind to use reason to think about the signs placed in the world by God, to find in them that which is hidden, and to recognize the supreme ruler of the universe and his absolute oneness. He affirms that the universe is a book, whose letters are words read by those who see through the eyes of intellect. This book, which confirms that which has been made known in the revealed Book, must be read and studied. Ibn Masarra refers to knowledge reached by seeing from inside the heart: he mentions the heart's perception, which reveals hidden truths. This is a different kind of wisdom with

respect to the purely philosophical knowledge, a wisdom that is characteristic of those who are close to God: the "saints or friends of God." All of this seems to indicate that the term "reflection" is a different activity from that carried out by philosophers, as can be inferred from the following text: "By this path mentioned in the Book and pointed out by the Messengers is acquired the light that is never extinguished and true inner visions are achieved by which one can approach those who are closest to the Lord, who reach in this world and the next the place worthy of praise, who see through their hearts with their own eyes that which is hidden and who know the science of the Book, whose hearts testify to that which is Truth." He points to another kind of knowledge, that of an inner vision which reveals hidden realities. Humankind should apply its faculties to the study of the universe, because from the lowest to the highest levels, the truth can be discovered through reflection that brings humans' inner life into play. Man confirms revealed testimony, in an action which implies the meeting of the descending path of revelation with the ascending path of thought.

Thinking about the signs of the universe leads to knowledge of divine unity, which "is the ultimate Truth." Philosophers have not reached the Creator through his signs because they have ignored and deviated from this straight path, made arrogant by lies in which there is no light. Prophets, however, have affirmed all of this. Prophecy comes first, descending from the Throne to earth; thought, an activity common to all humans and not the sole preserve of philosophers, ascends from earth to the Throne: there is no difference between them.

Ibn Masarra simply wishes to abide by the Qur'ānic recommendation to make use of the intellect to understand the signs that God has placed in the universe. No (pseudo-)Empedoclean doctrines are to be found, as it was contended in past scholarship, apart from the affirmation of the Soul, the Intellect, and the Creator, which are not solely pseudo-Empedoclean topics, rather common Neoplatonic concepts that had been disseminated throughout the Islamic world. As a result, Ibn Masarra should be considered more as an exponent of esoteric thought, a Gnostic with

philosophical elements, than as a philosopher in the strict sense of the term as it is usually understood.

## Cross-References

- ▶ [Doxographies, Graeco-Arabic](#)
- ▶ [Ismā'īlī Philosophical Tradition](#)
- ▶ [Philosophy, Arabic](#)

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## Ibn Rushd (Averroes), Latin Translations of

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### Abstract

Some of the most important philosophical works by Averroes, or the Commentator, as he was called in the Middle Ages, were translated into Latin. Beginning in the thirteenth century, this flow of translations made available to the Latin scholarship a great amount of Averroes' commentaries on Aristotle. In the fourteenth century, Latin translation were done of the main personal philosophical work by Averroes, the *Tahāfut al-Tahāfut* against al-Ġazālī's critique of philosophy. Later on, in Renaissance Italy, new translations were done of Averroes' commentaries, on the basis of the Hebrew versions, that made available several texts previously ignored. An uninterrupted chain of translations from the Middle Ages to the early modern times, most of them gathered in the epoch-making "Giuntine" editions, show the never-ceasing interest of western scholarship in Averroes' interpretation of Aristotle.

## The Thirteenth Century: The Aristotelian Commentaries

During the Middle Ages, most Latin translations of Averroes' works were done between the years 1220 and 1260 by a few scholars in command of

Arabic, who were active either in the milieu of the translators of Toledo, or in Sicily at the court of Frederick II. The most prolific of these translators was Michael Scot, who was born in Scotland in the second half of the twelfth century and died in Sicily between 1234 and 1236. He probably studied at Oxford and Paris; in 1215, he participated in the fourth Lateran Council in the retinue of the Archbishop of Toledo. He stayed in this city, and in 1217 he completed the Latin version of *al-Kitāb fī l-hay'a* (lit. *On Cosmology*, trans. as *De motibus celorum*) by al-Bīṭrūjī (Alpetragius). His translation of the Arabic version of the three zoological treatises of Aristotle (*History of Animals*, *On Generation of Animals*, *The Parts of Animals*), under the common title *De animalibus* (*Kitāb al-Ḥayawān*), perhaps also dates from this period. He stayed in Bologna from 1220, and then became the court astrologer of Frederick II in 1227. Probably before this period, but in any case after 1217, he finished the Latin version of Averroes' Great Commentary on Aristotle's *De caelo*. His translations of the other commentaries of Averroes, which were available in Paris already in 1231, might have been done at the court of Frederick II. The translations stemming from this period are those of Averroes' Great Commentaries on the *Physics*, *De anima*, and *Metaphysics*, of the Middle Commentaries on *On Generation and Corruption* and the *Meteorology*, of which Michael translated only the fourth book, as well as of the paraphrase of the Arabic version of the *Parva naturalia* (all of the short treatises included in the *Parva nat.* bear in the Arabic version the title *Kitāb al-ḥiss wa-l-maḥsūs*, *De sensu et sensato*). The Latin translation done by Michael Scot circulated in two versions: the second one, preserved in a single manuscript in Paris (*versio Parisina*) was probably a quite unfaithful adaptation of Michael's translation. He also translated a collection of five treaties and short writings of Averroes on cosmology, the *De Substantia orbis*. With the sole exception of the commentary on the *De caelo*, the attribution of these versions to Michael Scot is not explicit in the manuscripts, although their circulation – grouped as they are into the same manuscripts – as well as their style

and vocabulary render Michael's authorship most likely.

Another Latin translation of Averroes' Great Commentary on the *Physics* is known, but only partially preserved. It has been attributed with good reasons to Hermann the German. His life is even less known than that of Michael Scot, but he seems to have been associated, at a somewhat later time, to the same circles as his predecessor. Since Roger Bacon calls him *translator Manfredi*, one can assume that he was also appointed at the court of the Hohenstaufens. He became Bishop of Astorga in 1266 and died in 1272. It was in Toledo that he did the translations we credit him with, and in particular that of Averroes' Middle Commentary on the *Nicomachean Ethics*, dating from 1240. According to his own testimony, his Arabic was far from good, and it is assumed that he benefited from the assistance of some Muslim interpreters who explained the texts to him. Hermann was interested in the Graeco-Arabic tradition of Aristotle's *Rhetoric*, and did a partial translation of Averroes' Middle Commentary on it, perhaps in 1256. He also used it for his translation of Aristotle's *Rhetoric*, in which Aristotle's text is alternated with commentaries by al-Fārābī (*Didascalía in rhetoricam*), Avicenna, and in which also Averroes' Middle Commentary is cited. On the other hand, the date of 1256 for his translation of Averroes' Middle Commentary on the *Poetics* is sure.

The remaining works of Averroes about logic were translated by a scholar known as William of Luna, who probably originated in the town of Luna in Spain. After having been in touch with the group of translators in Toledo in the first half of the thirteenth century, he was active at the court of King Manfred between 1258 and 1266. During this period, he did several translations from Arabic, namely five Middle commentaries and paraphrases of Averroes' logical works that had previously and independently been translated from Arabic into Hebrew by Jacob Anatoli in Naples, around 1232. The translations by William of Luna are the following: (a) Averroes' Middle Commentary on Porphyry's *Isagoge*, lost in Arabic; the date of the original work is unknown;

(b) the Middle Commentary on the *Categories*; (c) the Middle Commentary on the *De interpretatione* (edited by Roland Hissette: see the Bibliography); (d) the Middle Commentary on the *Prior Analytics*; and (e) the Middle Commentary on the *Posterior Analytics*. These works might have been sent by King Manfred to the University of Paris near 1263; be this as it may, their circulation was limited.

A dozen medieval manuscripts (see Lacombe, *Aristoteles Latinus*, vol I, pp 107–110) transmit isolated chapters or fragments from Averroes' epitome (*Talkhīṣ*) of the *De animalibus* (containing *The Parts of Animals* and *On Generation of Animals*). One of these manuscripts explicitly attributes the translation to Pedro Gallego (Petrus Gallegus, d. 1267), who was a Franciscan in command of Arabic and counselor to the King of Castile, Alfonso X the Wise. Pedro Gallego also translated Pseudo-Aristotle's *Œconomica* and had a genuine interest in Aristotle's zoological works, as shown by his own paraphrase of the *Historia animalium* (not commented upon by Averroes). The Latin translation is in fact a selection of chapters of Averroes' *Epitome* of the *De animalibus* wisely chosen by Pedro, because it contains many important passages from Averroes' *Epitome*: for example, his discussions of the influence of sperms (corresponding to *On the Generation of Animals* II, 1–4), on male and female features (*On the Generations of Animals* IV, 1), on the brain (*On the Parts of Animals* II, 7), and on the heart (*On the Parts of Animals* III, 4).

In 1278, the Catalan Dominican Raimondo Martí completed his famous work of religious–philosophical polemic entitled *Pugio fidei adversus mauros et judaeos*. This work contains many long quotations from Averroes, and among them the whole epistle entitled *Qualiter possit Deus singula scire*, known in Arabic as *Ḍamīma* (Appendix) on divine knowledge (*al-'ilm al-ilāhī*); this Latin translation also circulated separately. Finally, a Latin version of the medical encyclopedia *al-Kulliyāt fī l-ṭibb* (*The General Rules of Medicine*) was made in 1255 in Padua by the Jewish scholar Bonacosa.

## The Fourteenth Century: The *Destructio destructionis* and Other Personal Works

In the fourteenth century, a version was done (with an incomplete end) of the famous refutation of al-Ġazālī by Averroes, the *Tahāfut al-Tahāfut* (*Destructio destructionis*). It was translated in 1328 by the Jew Calonymos ben Calonymos ben Meir of Arles at the request of King Robert the Wise of Naples, but it had at the time a very limited circulation. Other texts translated in the Middle Ages had so a limited spread, that only recently their existence has been discovered. This is the case of a treatise entitled *De separatione primi principii*, which discusses issues relating to the exegesis of *Physics* VIII, 10, on the movement of the celestial bodies. The Latin version was done in 1334 by Alfonso Dinis in Valladolid (d. 1352), an alleged bastard of the Portuguese royal family. A bishop, a doctor, and a master of theology, Alfonso Dinis was assisted in the translation by Abner of Burgos, a well-known polemicist, a converted Jew, and Sacristan of the cathedral of Burgos. This text is preserved only in the manuscript Oxford, Bodleian Library, *Digby* 236, which also contains a compilation of two treatises by Averroes on the union of the human being with the Agent Intellect, reworked and enlarged with passages taken from al-Fārābī. This compilation bears the title *De perfectione naturali intellectus*, and was anonymously translated into Latin in the fourteenth century, on the basis of a Hebrew text concocted in all likelihood by the Jewish philosopher Maimonides Hillel of Verona (d. 1295). This text, also known under the alternate title *De animae beatitudine*, did not emerge from the shadows until the commentary that the Paduan Averroist Agostino Nifo wrote on it; the commentary, completed in 1492, was published in 1503.

## The Renaissance and the Hebrew-to-Latin Translations

The Latin Middle Ages did not know the complete works of Averroes. The Jewish communities,



heirs to a scholarly tradition in which Averroism played a pivotal role, had a more complete corpus at their disposal. Thanks to the new cultural climate of the Renaissance Italy, this heritage gave rise to a second wide movement of translations, that made available to readers several texts previously ignored. With few rare exceptions, the translators were Jews, coming either from various eastern countries or from southern Italy, or again fled to Italy from Spain after the expulsion of their community in 1492. These scholars began to play a leading role in the intellectual life of Italy in the late fifteenth century. The most important of these were (a) Elia del Medigo, a Cretian from Chania (d. 1497): a physician and a philosopher, he taught in Padua and in Florence and did numerous translations on behalf of Pico della Mirandola and Cardinal Domenico Grimani (d. 1523); (b) Calonymos ben David (also known as Maestro Calo Calonymo), a doctor who lived in Naples and Venice in the first half of the sixteenth century; (c) Abraham de Balmes (d. 1523), the most prolific of all these translators: he was from Lecce, Puglia; after having been awarded his doctorate in Arts and Medicine in Naples, he moved to Padua and Venice; he was the physician to Cardinal Grimani, and most of his work was dedicated to him; (d) Jacob Mantino, son of a Jewish family exiled from Tortosa in 1492, and doctor of medicine from the University of Padua; he became the personal physician to Pope Paul III (d. 1549), and taught medicine at the University of Rome between 1539 and 1541. Having accompanied the Ambassador of the Republic of Venice on a mission to Damascus, he died in this city in 1549; (e) Paolo Ricci, or Paulus Israelita (d. 1541), was a converted Jew, and a professor of philosophy and medicine at Pavia; (f) Vitale Nisso, known only by a few translations: this name is mentioned in some editions of the Renaissance and early modern times; (g) Giovanni Francesco Burana (d. after 1523 in Venice), a Christian and professor of logic at Padua. He published several translations of Averroes' logical works. His linguistic skills have been questioned, however, making one suspect that his translations were based on earlier anonymous translations.

The work of these scholars is inseparable from the academic activity at the time. Averroism flourished at the universities of Bologna and Padua. The patronage of humanists of the time, clergy or laity, also played a big role. We must also recall the important role played by the development of printing in making the works of Averroes widely circulate together with the editions of the complete works of Aristotle, that were often printed along with the commentaries by the master of Cordoba. The period saw the mass distribution, by printing, of most of the works translated from the Middle Ages onward, the publishing of new translations, most of them from Hebrew, which were often considered difficult and corrupt, and, finally, the production of new translations, from Hebrew, of works previously unknown in Latin.

The first editing enterprise took place between 1472 and 1475. During this period, the Paduan publisher Laurentius Canozius edited in order Aristotle's *Physics* with Averroes' Great Commentary (translated by Michael Scot), the *De anima* with the Great Commentary (in Michael Scot's translation), *On Generation and Corruption* and the *De caelo* together with the Great Commentary (translated by Michael Scot), the *Metaphysics* together with the Great Commentary (in Michael's translation), the *Meteorology* and the *Parva naturalia* with the Middle Commentary (in Michael's translation), and the *De substantia orbis*, also in Michael's translation.

A little later, the edition of the works of Aristotle with Averroes' commentaries published in Venice (Andreas Torresanus de Asula and Bartholomaeus de Blavis, or de Alexandria, 1483) by Nicoletto Vernia (d. 1499), the teacher of Nifo and of Pomponazzi, adds to the corpus of the "natural" works also Averroes' commentaries on the *Organon*, in the translation of William of Luna. The Middle Commentary on the *Poetics*, in the translation of Hermann the German, had previously been published together with Aristotle's *Rhetoric* and the corresponding compendium by al-Fārābī (Venice, Philippus Petri, 1481). The partial version of Averroes' Middle Commentary on the *Rhetoric*, still in Hermann's translation, was published later, in *Rhetorica Aristotelis* [...]

(Venice, per Georgium Arrivabenum, imp. Octaviani Scoti, 1515).

Many reprints of this corpus, with little or no change, followed in the decades after. In the same period, some new Hebrew–Latin translations appeared separately. Aldus Manutius published in 1497, in Venice, a collection of seven logical questions of Averroes (on the *De interpretatione*, *Prior Analytics*, and *Posterior Analytics*) translated by Elia del Medigo from Hebrew at the request of Pico della Mirandola. These logical questions circulated in Italy in the fourteenth century Hebrew versions by Samuel b. Yehuda b. Meshullam (1320) and Calonymos ben Calonymos. Elia had also published the first translation of the Summary (i.e., the small commentary) of Aristotle's *Meteorology*, and Book I–III of the Middle Commentary on the same work (*In meteorologica Aristotelis* [...]), Venice, Andreas Torresanus, 1488). Both of these works would be included in the Giunta editions of 1550–1552 and 1562 (vol V, f. 487r–400r). The same volume from 1488 also contains the first Latin version, made by Elia del Medigo himself, of the prologue to Book *Lambda* of the *Metaphysics*, which was absent from the medieval Latin translation. In 1489, he produced a translation of Averroes' commentary on Plato's *Republic*, which was later followed by another version, a paraphrase by Jacob Mantino, printed in the Giunta editions of 1550 and 1562 (vol III, f. 334v–372v).

In 1511, an edition appeared in Milan, presenting a translation from Hebrew of Averroes' Middle Commentary on the *De caelo*, by Paolo Ricci (reprinted in the Giunta editions of 1550–1552 and 1562, vol V, f. 272r–336v), together with Ricci's version of the Hebrew–Latin prologue to the Great Commentary on the *Physics* (different from the one which was published after 1472 in Michael Scot's version), and the version of the prologue to the commentary on Book *Lambda* of the *Metaphysics*. The latter was reprinted in the Giunta edition of 1550–1552, which includes a third version of the prologue to *Lambda* by Mantino.

In 1521, Jacob Mantino presented for the first time, in Rome, a complete translation based on a Hebrew model, of the paraphrase of Averroes'

commentary on *De animalibus*. This is reprinted in the Giunta edition of 1550–1552 and 1562 (vol VI, part 2, f. 43v–144r).

The Middle Commentary on the *Physics* exists in two unedited Hebrew–Latin versions. One of these (MS Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale de France, lat. 6507) was conducted in 1500 by a certain Vitalis Dactylomelos, whom some have thought they could identify as the famous Jewish Platonist who inspired Pico della Mirandola, Johanan Alemanno (d. 1504). The other unedited version was due to Abraham de Balmes (MS Vat. lat. 4548). Jacob Mantino undertook to translate the paraphrase of *Physics*, but he was interrupted by death in 1549. The Giunta edition of 1550–1552, reprinted in 1562 (vol IV, f. 434r–456v), includes this translation until the third book, where the work of Mantino was interrupted.

The 11 sections of the summary (*Mukhtasar*) of Averroes' logic were translated for the first time into Latin from the Hebrew version by Jacob ben Makhir, completed in 1289. This translation (ed. Giunta, 1562, vol I, part 2b, f. 75r–36r) first published in 1523 (Venice, typ. Ant. De Sabio) was done by Abraham de Balmes (d. 1523). In the same volume of 1523, Abraham also offers a new collection, much more complete, of the logical questions mentioned above; as we have seen, seven questions had been translated by Elia del Medigo, whereas this version includes 18 questions (reprinted in 1550–1552 and then again in the Giunta edition of 1562 [vol I, part 2B, f. 75v–120v pars 2B]). In the same volume Abraham included, also for the first time, the Great Commentary on the *Posterior Analytics* unknown to the Latin Middle Ages, but which had been translated into Hebrew by Calonymos ben Calonymos in 1314. Another version, by Giovanni Francesco Burana, was published for the first time in the Giunta edition of 1550–1552. Finally, a third version, by Jacob Mantino, is found in the Giunta edition of 1562 (partial: Book I, until comm. 149). The synoptic edition of these three versions is contained in the Giunta edition of 1562 (vol I, part 2A, f. 1r–568v). In the 1523 volume mentioned above, Abraham includes also the first translation of the Middle Commentary on the *Topics*, which had not been

available in the Middle Ages. Another partial version (Books I–IV) was made by Mantino and published in 1550 next to Abraham’s version in the Giunta edition (reprinted in the Giunta edition of 1562, vol I, part 3, f. 3r-138r). This applies to the Middle Commentary on the *Sophistical Refutations* as well, which Abraham published in 1523 and which was reprinted in the Giunta editions of 1550 and 1662 (vol I, part 3, f. 139r-176v). Abraham also published in the volume of 1523 his translation of the Middle Commentary on the *Poetics*, which was already known in its medieval version. It is accompanied by another version by Mantino in the Giunta editions of 1550 and 1562 (vol II, f. 217v-228v). The complete translation by Abraham of the Middle Commentary on the *Rhetoric* superseded the partial version of Hermann the German. This complete version was also published in 1523 and reprinted in the Giunta editions of 1550 and 1562 (vol II, f. 69r-156v).

Giovanni Francesco Burana took over the retranslation of two of the Middle Commentaries on the *Organon*, i.e., that on the *Prior Analytics*, published in Venice a year after the death of the translator in 1524 and incorporated in the Giunta editions of 1550–1552 and 1562 (vol I, part 1, f. 1r-168v) and that on the *Posterior Analytics*, which is first found in the Giunta edition of 1550–1552, and then in the one of 1562 (vol I, part 2b, f. 1r-35v). Based on the Arabic–Hebrew version of Jacob Anatoli, Jacob Mantino retranslated the Middle Commentaries on the *Isagoge* and *De interpretatione*. This version, originally published in 1550, was then included in the Giunta edition of 1562 (vol I, part 1, f. 1r-22r).

In 1527, David ben Calonymos makes a new translation, more complete, of Averroes’ *Tahāfut al-Tahāfut* under the title *Destructio destructionis philosophiae Algazelis*, as well as a version of one of Averroes’ Epistles on the union of the Agent Intellect with the human being (*Libellus seu epistola Averrois de connexione intellectus agentis cum homine*), which had already been incorporated, with adaptations, in the treatise *De animae beatitudine*. Finally, the Renaissance translations of the *Colliget* must be mentioned: the partial translation by Symphorien Champier (done within

1537) was superseded by the complete translation by Jacob Mantino (done within 1549).

The work of the Renaissance translators also enriches the corpus of the whole series of summaries or “short commentaries” that the medieval Latins had ignored. The one on the *Physics* was not known in the Middle Ages. In addition to the summaries on logic mentioned above, and to that on the *Meteorology* translated by Elia del Medigo, the short commentary on the *De gen. corr.* was translated and edited by Abraham de Balmes. The version edited in the Giunta edition (vol V, f. 389v-398v) is attributed to Vitale Nisso. The short commentary on the *Metaphysics* was translated by Jacob Mantino in 1524, the one on the *De anima* by Abraham de Balmes. The latter also translated in 1521, for Cardinal Grimani, a theological treatise by Averroes, the *Kitāb al-Kashf ‘an manāhij al-adilla (The Clarification of the Methods of the Proofs)*, but the translation remained unpublished.

The whole of the collective work represented by the translations of the Renaissance, a work that covers nearly a century, was printed in the editions mentioned above, the so-called Giuntine, created at the instigation of the Tommaso Giunta, one of the Florentine editors Giunta, who settled in Venice. The first edition was published between 1550 and 1552, and a second, further increased, in 1562 (reprint Frankfurt am Main, 1962). It was the largest and most systematic publication that emerged in this period. It gathered the works of Aristotle, including those not commented on by Averroes, as well as some of the personal works of Averroes. In particular, it includes the *Tahāfut al-Tahāfut (Destructio destructionis)* in the 1328 translation by Calonymos ben Calonymos (the 1550 edition forms the basis of the modern edition of the Latin text provided by Beatrice Zedler: see the bibliography), as well as Jacob Mantino’s Latin version of the *Kulliyāt fī l-tibb (Colliget)*.

## Cross-References

- ▶ [Arabic Texts: Natural Philosophy, Latin Translations of](#)
- ▶ [Arabic Texts: Philosophy, Latin Translations of](#)

- ▶ al-Fārābī, Latin Translations of
- ▶ al-Ghazālī's Maqāṣid al-Falāsifa, Latin Translation of
- ▶ Ibn Rushd, Muḥammad ibn Aḥmad al-Ḥafīd (Averroes)

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## Ibn Rushd, Muḥammad ibn Aḥmad al-Ḥafid (Averroes)

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### Abstract

Averroes (1126–1198 CE) was the most famous and prolific commentator on Aristotle in all of medieval philosophy: 38 works are extant, at all levels of instruction. This

concentration on Aristotle was not happenstance, instead, it reflects Averroes' maturing philosophical outlook. For Averroes, Aristotle's teaching came to represent the pinnacle of philosophical wisdom, and answers to all the most pressing problems in philosophy were to be found in a thorough and careful exploration of what that teaching truly implied. In the course of Averroes' deepening investigations into Aristotelian lore, alternative interpretations were advanced and different traditions of thinking carefully laid side by side, producing a field guide to the Peripatetic tradition, as it was known to an Arabic scholar of the classical period. The resulting body of texts represents a high watermark in Aristotelian synthesis and systematization, even if Averroes failed in the end to resolve satisfactorily all the problems that had accumulated over the centuries.

In addition to his *Aristotelian Commentaries*, *Explications*, and *Compendia* (which, besides Aristotle, encompassed works by Plato, Galen, Ptolemy, and al-Ġazālī), Averroes wrote smaller, independent essays and questions that explored contested issues in Aristotelian teaching; polemical works that argued the religious innocence and intellectual respectability of Peripatetic philosophy, correctly understood; and medical and legal treatises of solid but unspectacular standing. Averroes' reputation was made in Latin Scholasticism and in Jewish circles of learning, while in the Arabic world his works fell mostly by the wayside. Today, his name is evoked in the Arabic world as a rallying-point for a rationalist Islam – a fitting legacy, if not always especially well grounded (modern-day Averroists displaying at best a cursory knowledge of the Commentator's philosophy).

### Life

Averroes, whose full Arabic name was Abū l-Walīd Muḥammad ibn Muḥammad ibn Rushd al-Ḥafid, came from a distinguished family of Andalusian jurists working in the Māliki school

of Islamic law. Averroes studied Islamic jurisprudence and medicine, as well as presumably philosophy, at a time when the Almoravid rulers of the region were being overthrown in a series of violent upheavals, a development that will have had worrying implications for the Rushd family as well. The new ruling dynasty, the Almohads (from *al-muwahhidūn*, those who profess divine unity), pledged allegiance to the revival movement spearheaded by the Berber Ibn Tūmart, who advocated a fierce religiosity fueled by a minimalist, rationalizing interpretation of Sunni belief. Averroes appears to have drawn inspiration from the rationalist precepts of the Almohad movement, and to have navigated successfully the treacherous ideological and political waters (Urvoy 1991). He was introduced to the Almohad court sometime in the 1150s by Ibn Ṭufayl (1116–1185), the most distinguished Andalusian philosopher of his day as well as court physician to the ruling family, and eventually rose to a position of trust within the court himself.

Averroes was first appointed as *qāḍī* (judge) to Seville in 1169, then Cordoba's chief judge in 1172. It was around these dates that he moved from the composition of scientific compendia (*mukhtaṣar/jam'*) to the more demanding task of summarizing Aristotle in a form that approximates the order of presentation in the original works (*talkhīṣ*). Perhaps emboldened by his success in this venture, Averroes next turned to religious polemics, producing a series of works for which he is most famous in the Islamic world: a *Decisive Treatise* (*al-Faṣl al-maqāl*) outlining his considered opinion on the relation between Law and Wisdom (i.e., the commandments of religion and philosophical endeavor); a *Supplement* (*Damīma*) to the same, further skirting around the question of divine knowledge; an *Exposition of the Sorts of Arguments Found in Religious Creeds* (*al-Kaṣḥf 'an manāhij al-adilla fī 'aqā'id al-milla*), which purports to disclose the logical status of the arguments commonly advanced in theology; and the *Incoherence of the Incoherence*, a blow-by-blow refutation of al-Ġazālī's famous *Incoherence of the Philosophers*.

Averroes was influenced by al-Ġazālī from an early date (see Frank 2002). In light of his later criticisms, it is important to emphasize the positive impact al-Ġazālī's project had on the formation of Averroes' own. It was in response to al-Ġazālī's critique of the philosophers that Averroes became convinced that a return to the letter of Aristotle was necessary, and as an extension of al-Ġazālī's stated aim of sorting out the logical status of the Muslim philosophers' arguments that Averroes could subject al-Ġazālī to a similar analysis (and find him coming up short). Averroes agreed with al-Ġazālī on the importance of the demonstrative ideal to the philosophers' claims to possessing not only the truth, but the necessary truth. Where he differed was in his assessment that demonstrative certainty was indeed to be found in Aristotle, if not in his later followers.

In Averroes' eyes, al-Ġazālī's most grievous error was the way in which he had pitched his arguments to the masses, who in Averroes' opinion could never appreciate fully the subtleties of philosophical reasoning. It is revealing that once his own polemical work was complete with the publication of the *Incoherence of the Incoherence*, Averroes for the remainder of his career turned to address a select, scientifically trained audience. The period post-1180, when Averroes again served as *qāḍī* in Seville, saw the publication of five great *Commentaries on Aristotle*, plus two sets of disputed questions. It is in these works that Averroes most fully realizes his program of setting out Aristotelian teaching in demonstrative form, simultaneously taking on all comers and pointing out the numerous ways in which aspects of Aristotle's system rely on others so as to form a tightly interlocking whole.

Through his years of public service, Averroes had gained his share of enemies, especially among the Almoravid traditionalists who still enjoyed a significant presence in Andalusia. In 1194, charges of unbelief were brought against Averroes: for the purposes of the struggle against the northern invaders the Sultan needed the support of the traditionalists, and in an effort to placate them saw fit to sacrifice his personal physician and old friend. Averroes was exiled to



the small town of Lucena for a spell, and although he was reinstated shortly before his death, the experience will have proved dispiriting as well as humiliating. Perhaps the oppressive atmosphere contributed to Averroes' last commentary work, a *Compendium* of Plato's *Republic*, teeming with barely concealed contempt for the present political age (see Butterworth 1992). Averroes died in Marrakesh in December 1198: a mule carried his remains back to his native Cordoba, the burden according to a story balanced by the weight of his philosophical writings.

## Cycles of Knowledge

Though his writings included contributions to medicine and legal theory, Averroes is principally remembered for his efforts in two directions: Aristotelian commentary and the public defense of philosophy. As already indicated, the two projects were intertwined. It is because of al-Ġazālī's religiously motivated critique that Averroes sought refuge in a return to Aristotle, and because of his faith in the Aristotelian corpus as the repository of all knowledge and scientific methodology that Averroes could feel confident that theological controversies, too, would find their proper resolution in a thorough investigation of the same. This high opinion of the Peripatetic curriculum Averroes took over from the earlier tradition of *falsafa*. Still, it took several decades for Averroes to come to the view that what was needed was a strict adherence to Aristotle's very words. Even then, a literal understanding of the master was no simple matter (see al-'Alawī 1986).

Averroes' writings on the philosophical curriculum divide into three principal categories, commonly if misleadingly known as the short, middle, and long commentaries. It has sometimes been thought that the three are enumerated in a story related by al-Marrākushī in which the Sultan (very likely Abū Ya'qūb Yūsuf), frustrated by the obliqueness of Aristotle's expression, expressed a wish to Ibn Ṭufayl that somebody should "summarize them and expound their aims, after understanding them thoroughly." Being otherwise occupied himself, Ibn Ṭufayl would then have

delegated the task to Averroes. The overliteral interpretation is fanciful – if anything, Averroes' own comments on the story peg the government-mandated activity to the middle phase of crafting *talākhīṣ* – but the basics of the story ring true. Without institutional backing or encouragement, it is unlikely that Averroes would have set upon or completed such a comprehensive program on top of his other duties. The reasons, however, for the three different layers of exposition are to be sought in internal factors and in Averroes' philosophical development rather than any external remit.

The Compendia (*mukhtaṣar* or [pl.] *jawāmi'*), written at a youthful age, concisely recapitulate the philosophers' teachings in dogmatic form. In stating their aim, Averroes speaks interchangeably about the Peripatetics' "scientific," "demonstrative," or "universal" statements (*al-aqāwīl al-'ilmīyya/burhāniyya/kulliyya*). In practice, the doctrines expounded often reflect the Peripatetic tradition more than they do any text of Aristotle's: in the case of *De anima*, the depth of Averroes' acquaintance with Aristotle's treatise at this stage has been questioned (Druart 1993: 193), while in the case of the *Organon* Averroes explicitly epitomizes al-Fārābī rather than Aristotle (see *Compendium of the Physics*, 8.9–10). Because the Compendia aim solely at providing the reader with what is necessary (*al-darūrī*) to know about the fundamentals (*uṣūl*) of a given discipline – there is a cycle of this description on the *Organon*, another on natural philosophy, individual treatises on the soul and on metaphysics, and to these we may add Averroes' summary of al-Ġazālī's legal treatise *al-Mustasfā* as well – these synopses are short on dialectic, detail, and controversy.

The Explications (*talkhīṣ*) form the largest body of texts. Besides Aristotle's logical, natural, and metaphysical works (the triptych of theoretical philosophy) Averroes wrote on the *Nicomachean Ethics* and on Galen and Ptolemy in this genre. To call the *talākhīṣ* paraphrases in the strict sense would be a misnomer (Gutas 1993: 38–42): much more than rephrasing individual sentences, Averroes in these works sets out to rework the contents of Aristotle's corresponding treatises in systematized form. Still, these works,

in Averroes' own words, explicate the texts in question according to their meaning (*'alā l-ma'nā*), and in that regard at least the traditional title of Paraphrase is descriptive of the work done.

The *Commentaries* (*tafsīr* or *sharḥ*), the crowning achievement of Averroes' career, follow the lemma-by-lemma model established in late antiquity. Averroes completed five of these commentaries, tackling those works he considered most crucial for the imposing Aristotelian edifice of theoretical knowledge: the *Posterior Analytics*, for scientific methodology, followed by the *Physics*, *On the Heavens*, *On the Soul*, and finally the *Metaphysics*. The quoted Aristotelian texts form an important witness to the Arabic textual tradition: so do the commentaries themselves, which take onboard the bifurcation of *theoria* from *lexis*. Here the full weight of the foregone tradition as it was known to Averroes makes itself felt, as Averroes finds it necessary to grapple not only with those philosophers with whom Aristotle himself wrestled but also with subsequent Peripatetics, chief among them Alexander of Aphrodisias, Themistius, Philoponus, al-Fārābī, Avicenna, and Ibn Bājjā. When commenting on the Presocratics, Averroes even finds occasion to censure the speculative theologians (*mutakallimūn*) of his day, whose methodology and thought he finds faulty in much the same way Aristotle had found, for example, the Atomists and the Megarians to be lacking in subtlety and common sense.

Characteristic of Averroes' mature approach is his determination to treat any apparent discrepancy in Aristotelian teaching as resulting either from (a) a misunderstanding concerning the meaning of Aristotle's text or (b) an intrusive and unwelcome piece of innovation on behalf of a later commentator. This not only affords Averroes a measure of distance toward the Peripatetic tradition but also offers him the rudiments of what would later become known as internal criticism (Urvoy 1991: 58–59). Averroes confidently pronounces his judgment on what Aristotle would say, should say, or must have said, sometimes in manifest opposition to what Aristotle actually did say, either in the Arabic text in front of him or the Greek in front of us. Averroes always

has his reasons for such emendations. For him, Aristotle's intentions form a tightly interwoven whole in which nothing remains ungrounded, few things prove superfluous, and nothing whatsoever can be allowed to stand in contradiction to anything stated elsewhere. For all that these commentaries assume a unity of thought in Aristotle, which modern scholars find hard to countenance, they nevertheless bring forth into actuality a compelling systematic Aristotelianism where one only exists in Aristotle's own writings *in potentia* (the phrase is Jonathan Barnes').

To this final phase belong also Averroes' independent treatises and two sets of questions, composed on the model of Alexander of Aphrodisias in order to address apparent inconsistencies and doctrinal lacunae. These treatises commence with the *Sermo de substantia orbis* in 1178 (as in many cases, the original Arabic is lost, but we have Hebrew and Latin versions), and continue right up to a collection of short treatises on Aristotle's syllogistic compiled in 1195. They show that Averroes, for all his protestations concerning Aristotle's infallibility as a guide to the workings of reality, remained intellectually curious to the end of his career, still searching for answers to pressing questions of fundamental importance (see Endress 2004). Also reflecting this, all three types of writing – Compendium, Explication, and Commentary – remained subject to revision by the author. Averroes edited his youthful Compendia to include criticisms of Avicennian positions he himself had held earlier: meanwhile, Ivry (1997: 511–519) has plausibly suggested that work on the long-form Commentaries was an ongoing process spanning several decades, influencing the phrasings adopted in the Explications along the way.

## Argument and Assent

Central to Averroes' views regarding the pursuit and transmission of knowledge are the notions of conception (*taṣawwur*) and assent (*taṣdīq*), two concepts that early became part of Arabic Peripatetic teaching. Conception and assent, which typically were introduced as preliminaries to logic,

tie in psychological with logical considerations, thereby effecting a much-needed (from a naturalist point of view) link between ontology, epistemology, and reasoned argument. Briefly, it was thought that every act of assent requires prior conception, but that both conception and assent can be arrived at through various means. Besides apprehending a thing as it is in itself, one may conceive of a thing through its likeness (*mathāl*); similarly, and more importantly from the point of view of logic, besides the demonstrative syllogism one may be moved to assent to a proposition through dialectical or sophistic argumentation, or indeed through rhetorical or poetic persuasion.

This so-called context theory of argument and persuasion, which the Arabic philosophers took over from Alexandrian teaching, served to counterbalance the great weight placed on demonstration (found in science) with a recognition that scientific discourse is after all only one form of communication and may prove inappropriate in some situations, for instance in dealing with people with inadequate scientific training. Under such circumstances, the responsible interlocutor will take into account his or her social context and the intended audience and choose the means of persuasion most likely to have a salutary effect (see Black 1990).

It is the context theory that accounts for Averroes' approach to the public defense of philosophy. Thanks to the context theory, Averroes can regard himself as a faithful follower of the Prophet at the same time that he operates unapologetically as a scientifically minded philosopher. In the *Decisive Treatise*, Averroes puts forward his case in terms of Islamic law (see Mahdi 1984), arguing first that the Qurʾān and the Prophetic traditions obligate the pursuit of knowledge, which in turn is best accomplished according to the method of the philosophers, that is, through scientific investigation (from effects to causes) and demonstrative argument (from causes to effects). However, because not all people are capable of attaining such a demanding ideal, the divine Law has also made provisions for the dialectically minded (i.e., the theologians) and the rhetorically persuaded. The latter comprise the greater majority of the populace, who come to

rest securely in a viewpoint through an unreflective acceptance of striking and compelling imagery. In his *Messenger*, Muḥammad, God has provided humanity with the ultimate rhetorician, someone who has been handed images of such rare power that they bring forth immediate recognition of their essential correctness. These religious images reveal the exact same truths, which the demonstrative sciences uncover: after all, "truth does not oppose truth; rather, it agrees and bears witness to it" (*Decisive Treatise*, 9.1–2 Butterworth; see Taylor 2000). Averroes neatly sidesteps the issue of whether the Prophet himself should be regarded as a philosopher, something over which al-Fārābī and Avicenna had notably disagreed. For Averroes, it is enough that the Prophet has at his disposal resources for persuasion, which the philosopher *qua* philosopher is unable to access.

For Averroes, the claims of religion should be taken at face value whenever possible. The likenesses of philosophical conceptions, which these claims encapsulate, are rich enough to stand on their own; besides, the argumentative procedures necessarily involved in any unpacking of allegory or metaphor quickly become so convoluted that untrained people run the risk of losing their way. For this reason, Averroes apologizes for engaging in polemics with al-Ġazālī in the first place; it would have been better for all concerned had he not had to embark on this path (*Incoherence*, 409, 427–429). However, because al-Ġazālī and the Muslim speculative theologians in general had made such a bad hash of attempting to reason dialectically (and also of interpreting the religious metaphors handed down by the prophets: see Averroes' *Exposition*, *passim*), it had become imperative for a genuine philosopher to come forward, set the record straight, and show at the very least that the charges brought by al-Ġazālī against the philosophers did not stick.

Averroes' views on human nature and interaction are undeniably elitist, insofar as he judges the majority of people to be incapable of handling properly philosophical and scientific argumentation. Averroes himself stresses the positive message that all people are called to the truth through the three means of assent (*Decisive Treatise*,

8.2–17 Butterworth), whereas a stricter method would leave happiness entirely out of reach of some people and put others at mortal risk of losing their way. His approach, essentially Fārābīan, sanctions a degree of dissimulation in matters where the philosophical doctrine is on the surface level very far from the popular understanding of the matter – personal immortality provides a suitably infamous example – but it is nevertheless a far cry from the doctrine of double truth for which the Latin Averroists of the thirteenth and sixteenth centuries were notorious.

As might be expected, in his philosophical commentaries, Averroes greatly favors the demonstrative approach, to the point of repeatedly recasting Aristotle’s dialectical arguments in natural philosophy as demonstrative proofs. Another indication of the hold the demonstrative ideal had on Averroes is the way he conceives of medicine in the *Kulliyāt* (Lat. *Colliget*). Insofar as medicine aspires to be a science, it, too, has to set about the business of discovering essential causes for essential effects and ignore the contingent circumstances that sometimes prevent such regularities from obtaining. Consequently, Averroes, like Avicenna, conceives of medicine both as a science and as an art; although the latter predominates in the practice of the discipline, as well it should, medicine must for its advancement ultimately rely on the soundness of the former.

Notably, Averroes did not rest easy with the received notion of demonstration as a scientific tool perfectly aligned with Aristotelian syllogistic (proving that he did not take it lightly either, or use it as a smokescreen to mask private doubts about the philosophers’ claims to certitude). All the way up to the very late *Questions on Logic*, Averroes pursued the meaning especially of essential predication, a crucial aspect of Aristotelian philosophy of science that proved surprisingly difficult to pin down. In his questions, Averroes introduces a distinction between accidental and essential necessity which ended up influencing Latin discussions. What is noteworthy about Averroes’ own treatment of the issue is that while the discussion is of a technical character, its aims are markedly ontological, having to

do with how the syllogistic moods can be deployed in sorting out corporeal reality.

## Psychology

Averroes’ contributions to natural philosophy are many, as he distilled much of the anterior tradition into his commentaries and produced critical assessments of several key issues. For the purposes of this survey, it is sufficient to concentrate on a single aspect of one key area of study – Averroes’ views on psychology and specifically the intellect – as long as it is understood that similarly intricate stories could be told concerning his explorations of many of the contested issues of Aristotelian physics (see now Glasner 2009).

In keeping with Averroes’ Aristotelian project, the Commentator’s cognitive psychology builds on the notion of abstraction (*tajrīd*), taking on form without the matter. Instead of the higher cognitive functions opening up to a more exalted supernal realm, as al-Kindī’s school had intimated, what Averroes envisions is an unfolding of the essential and formal properties of the corporeal reality all about us. This distaste for mystical leanings of any kind marks Averroes out in the post-Avicennian phase of Arabic philosophy. At the same time, Averroes’ commitment to the abstractionist view makes acute for him all the associated problems. For instance, Averroes considered the vexed question (since antiquity) of how the sensible form of a thing carries in a medium. Averroes’ answer was to evoke the notion of “spiritual intentions,” a mechanism that seems to have involved some kind of subtle matter on the lines of either Galenic spirits or the *rūḥ* of Islamic speculative theology.

Averroes’ greatest efforts were expended in clarifying the ontological status and epistemological role of the material intellect, a topic on which Averroes changed his mind several times during his career (Davidson 1992; Ivry 1997; Taylor 2009). In the early *Compendium*, the material intellect is tied to the imaginative faculty, making of it a truly individual phenomenon, but also a perishable one. In the *Explication*, and in a separate small treatise discussing the nature of human

conjunction (*ittiṣāl*) with the separate Agent Intellect, Averroes comes closest to hitting upon a formulation that would guarantee personal immortality: here, the individual material intellect develops through its contact with the active (still separate, still impersonal) intellectual principle. Yet it is the position spelled out in the *Commentary*, extant only in the Latin except for some fragments, for which Averroes became notorious. Now, both the Agent and the Material Intellects are separate and eternal principles in which humans come to share temporarily but which enjoy a life of their own; individual immortality no longer figures in any philosophical conception of human life; while the cogitative faculty is entrusted with the task of providing the link between individual intentions and the intellectual acts that are of a truly universal character. Averroes seems to have been moved to this uniquely austere view of intellection through a hard-nosed decision to follow through on some general epistemological and ontological commitments. He acknowledges that the whole question is exceedingly difficult, and indicates that without Aristotle it might never have found its resolution (*Commentary on De anima*, bk. 3, comm. 14).

## Cosmology and Metaphysics

Based on the early *Compendium of the Metaphysics* (155–156 Amīn), Averroes originally subscribed to an emanationist cosmology and metaphysics, complete with a Giver of Forms and a staggered procession of the many from the One. al-Ġazālī's trenchant criticism seems to have forced a rethink and, beginning with the *Incoherence of the Incoherence*, Averroes rejects one by one several key Avicennian doctrines. Among these are emanation as an explanatory model (see Kogan 1981); Avicenna's metaphysical proof for God's existence; the attendant modal framework of contingency; the way that Avicenna conceives of the relation between the heavens and the immaterial domain; and the way that providence is supposed to flow from this arrangement. As in psychology, Averroes took his project to be that of uncovering the original Aristotelian

teaching, which he believed would happily coincide both with the philosophical truth and with the demands of revealed religion. The results, again similarly to psychology, look more satisfying seen from a Hellenic philosophical point of view than from the standpoint of traditional Islamic orthodoxy.

Already in the *Compendium* (8–11 Amīn), Averroes rejects the notion that existence could be treated as an accident. Mirroring al-Fārābī's criticism of al-Kindī (see Menn 2008), Averroes says that to take existence for a real accident is to mistake a secondary intelligible for a primary one. To speak of being univocally is to talk of "being as truth" (Aristotle, *Met.* 5.7.1017a31–35); but this is a second-order term. Being in the primary sense, meanwhile, falls directly under one of the ten categories and is thus subject to *pros hen* equivocity, just as Aristotle had outlined. Accordingly, the being of beings is in reality indistinguishable from their essence, meaning that Avicenna's essence–existence distinction fails as well. (Later on in the *Commentary* Averroes develops his own interpretation of *Metaphysics* Zeta, arguing that essence is to be equated with form).

These critical remarks give Averroes the necessary tools to address anew coming-to-be in the sublunary realm. Starting with the *Incoherence* (179ff. Bouyges) Averroes sees the doctrine of emanation for the later accretion it is, essentially Platonic in spirit (407 Bouyges), and jettisons it in favor of a theory that sticks to the established four Aristotelian causes and a fully immanent model of sublunary causation. This leads to a rejection of Avicenna's attempts at equating efficient causality (agency) with granting existence, for the reason that this comes too close to the unacceptably arbitrary theology of creation *ex nihilo*. In a famous passage in the *Commentary* (bk. 12, comm. 18, 3:1497–1505 Bouyges) Averroes sets forth his own mature theory of generation, which is the same as Aristotle's, namely that coming-to-be is nothing other than the education into actuality of what potentially exists in the subject, and this either through efficient or final causality or (as is the rule in nature) through both. Placing a great deal of weight on Aristotle's words



to the effect that “man and the sun together generate man” (*Phys.* 2.2.194b13), Averroes traces the lines of generation in natural processes to the chains of parents and offspring, on the one hand (these he nominates accidental causes), and to the push and pull exerted by the various heavenly bodies on the elements, on the other (these he calls essential, seeing as how they fix the occurrence of a given sublunary form within the larger cosmic system: see the *Commentary on the Physics*, bk. 8, comms. 15 and 47; *Incoherence*, 20–23 Bouyges). These two are the only agencies needed to explain coming-to-be and passing-away, meaning that the emanationist framework is superfluous in addition to being open to the charges brought up by al-Ġazālī (cf. *Incoherence*, 184ff. Bouyges).

The celestial rotations, with their need for a mover with infinite power, are sufficient to bridge corporeal reality with what lies beyond it. Thus, Aristotle’s promise of nature pointing beyond itself is fulfilled, and the threat of physics becoming first philosophy is deflected (see *Phys.* 2.7.198a26–31 together with Averroes’ comments *ad loc.*; also *Met.* 6.1 and comments). Avicenna was therefore mistaken in initiating his supposedly metaphysical proof for God’s existence. Since no science is able to demonstrate its own first principles, it is only as an Unmoved Mover that God is scientifically proved to exist. Metaphysics then takes over this notion and further clarifies the immaterial substances’ mode of being and causality.

As regards modal metaphysics, Averroes heaps scorn on Avicenna’s notion of something possible in itself, necessary through another. For Avicenna’s who subscribed to a temporal and statistical interpretation of the modal terms, this is simply a contradiction in terms: the necessary just denotes the eternal, and vice versa (see Kukkonen 2000). Because Averroes takes Avicenna’s concept to refer to the celestial bodies – an interpretation shared by key post-Avicennian thinkers in the East – he perceives it also as doing irrevocable damage to Aristotle’s cosmological proof for an immaterial mover. In an effort to rectify the situation, he goes through the option of treating the heavenly motions as

being contingent in themselves, yet necessary through another (*Commentary on the Metaphysics*, bk. 12, comm. 41, 3:1632–1636 Bouyges), before settling on the view that the whole cosmic system is unequivocally necessary in and of itself (*Questions in Physics*, q. 9).

This is a truly radical view, yet Averroes does not shy away from the implications. The reason the world needs an Unmoved Mover is that every motion requires a mover, and in the case of an eternal motion only an immaterial mover will fit the description. This does not imply any contingency in the world order: to the contrary, it assures its necessary character through and through. Averroes seems to have grasped the fundamentally nonnegotiable nature of Aristotelian essentialism for the functioning of a robust Aristotelian science and to have accepted the consequence that worldly processes of generation and corruption are of a piece in their unassailable character, leaving no space, for example, for miracles. In Averroes’ estimation, Avicenna went several steps too far in accommodating the Ash’arite theologians’ insistence on divine voluntarism and direct creation (Kogan 1985; Leaman 1988: 42–81). Conventional or sentimental notions of how divinity must relate to the world have no place in a scientific worldview such as the one Averroes is after.

A similar sense of detachment informs Averroes’ understanding of divine knowledge and providence. The Commentator contends that the First Mover knows other things not as universal or particular, but through being the cause of their being (*Commentary on the Metaphysics*, bk. 12, comm. 51; *Decisive Treatise*, 13.8–14.9 Butterworth). It is unclear whether this amounts to anything more than the knowledge a perfectly actual principle potentially has of the varying degrees of potentiality and actuality. Like Alexander before him, Averroes contends that providence can only extend so far as the perpetuation of the species: unlike Alexander, Averroes has a detailed story to show how this occurs, and why it speaks in favor of monotheism. According to the Peripatetic doctrine transmitted through Alexander and al-Kindī’s school, the rotations of the heavenly spheres are responsible for sublunary



cycles of generation and corruption. Averroes seizes the question of how these motions are coordinated and why. Because the higher cannot as a matter of principle care for the lower – all of nature is teleologically oriented and strives for individual perfection – it is inconceivable that the heavenly spheres should actually wish to benefit what lies beneath them. So why do the providential effects nonetheless accrue? Averroes' answer is that the inner hierarchy of the heavenly movers, whose possibility has been established in philosophical psychology (see Taylor 1998), is arranged according to a hierarchy of knowing, and that each of the heavenly intellects has an incomplete share of the full intellectual perfection enjoyed by the First Mover. It is because all of these intellects (in some hard-to-describe fashion) coincide in the First that the motions they produce likewise come together in a harmonious whole. This is the gloss Averroes puts on the Aristotelian dictum that the order of the universe, like the order of the army, is found both in the arrangement of the whole and in its leader, but primarily in the latter (*Commentary on the Metaphysics*, bk. 12, comms. 52 and 58; *Incoherence*, 185–193; see Kukkonen 2002).

## Cross-References

- ▶ [Arabic Texts: Natural Philosophy, Latin Translations of](#)
- ▶ [Arabic Texts: Philosophy, Latin Translations of](#)
- ▶ [Aristotle, Arabic](#)
- ▶ [al-Ġazālī, Abū Ḥāmid Muḥammad](#)
- ▶ [Ibn Rushd \(Averroes\), Latin Translations of](#)
- ▶ [Ibn Sīnā, Abū 'Alī \(Avicenna\)](#)
- ▶ [Philosophy, Arabic](#)

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## Ibn Sabʿīn, ʿAbd al-Ḥaqq

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### Abstract

ʿAbd al-Ḥaqq ibn Sabʿīn was born in the Ricote Valley, near Cieza, in the Kingdom of Murcia sometimes between the year 613 and 614 of the Hegira (1216 or 1217 CE). He studied Arabic, Andalusī literature, logic and philosophy, medicine, alchemy, white magic, and the “Science of Names and Letters.” At that time Ibn Khalāṣ was the *qāḍī* of Ceuta. He chose Ibn Sabʿīn to answer the philosophical questions sent by the emperor Frederick II of Hohenstaufen. It has been contended that Ibn Sabʿīn was forced to leave his new hometown after answering the emperor's arguments. What seems more likely, however, is that his Sufi ideas were not very popular with the political chief of the town. The time spent in Maghreb was, nonetheless, lively and productive: Ibn Sabʿīn wrote his most important works and many people shared his ideas. Ibn Sabʿīn was instead rejected in Egypt: his mystical thoughts, based only on some obscure philosophical arguments, were difficult for the Egyptian audience to master. Ibn Sabʿīn fled to Mecca and his settlement in this town lasted several years: in that place he finally found peace and rest. The majority of his biographers believe that Ibn Sabʿīn died in 669 h. (1270 CE).

ʿAbd al-Ḥaqq b. Ibrāhīm b. Muḥammad b. Naṣr al-ʿAkkī al-Mursī, Abū Muḥammad Quṭb al-Dīn

ibn Sabʿīn was born in the Ricote Valley, near Cieza, in the Kingdom of Murcia sometimes between the year 613 and 614 of the Hegira (1216 or 1217 CE.). There is no clear evidence about his birth, because biographers disagree on Ibn Sabʿīn's date of birth and death. Ibn Shākir, for example, asserts that Ibn Sabʿīn died the 20 *shawwāl* of the year 668 of the Hegira, at the age of 55. Therefore, he must have been born in the year 613. Among modern scholars, this theory is embraced by E. Lator, C. M. Hernández, and D. Cabanellas. However, al-Maqqarī was of a different opinion, affirming that Ibn Sabʿīn died in Mecca in the year 669 h., at the age of nearly 50. If so, it may be concluded that Ibn Sabʿīn was born around the year 619 h. Al-Maqqarī also agreed with al-Maqqarī's theory. A third bit of evidence is found in al-Shaʿrānī, who wrote that Ibn Sabʿīn died in 667 h. at the age of 55; consequently he would have been born in the year 612 of the Hegira. Finally, other biographers, such as al-Dhahabī, Ibn Kathīr, al-Fāsī – championed more recently by Amari and Taftāzānī – believe that Ibn Sabʿīn was born in 614 h.

There is, however, general agreement about Ibn Sabʿīn birth's place. He was known as al-Andalusī, al-Mursī, or al-Riqūṭī (i.e., the town of Riqūṭa in the Mursia region). People referred to him also as al-Ishbilī or al-Qaṣṭallānī, after another location in the Andalusian region known as al-Qaṣṭallata; in the East he was known as Quṭb al-Dīn. However, his biographers used to refer to him as *Ibn Sabʿīn* ("son" or "who belongs" to the 70). Some sources refer to the fact that Ibn Sabʿīn used to draw a circle next to his own name. In the culture of some religious groups of the Maghreb, the circle (*al-dāra*) was indeed a symbol for the number 70, in Arabic *sabʿīn*. It is believed that the same was done by his followers. For this reason, Ibn Sabʿīn was also known as Ibn Dāra. Moreover, the first letter of Ibn Sabʿīn's name (that is ʿAbd) is the *ʿayn*, which in the Kabala coincides with number 70.

Ibn Sabʿīn was also known as *shaykh al-sabʿīniyya*, the name given to the Sufi *ṭarīqa* that grew up around him. For others he was *al-ʿAkkī*, after the tribes of *ʿAkk al-Ġaḥiqiyyūn al-Andalusiyūn* that lived in the area north of

Cordoba and in the surroundings of Seville. Finally, his followers called him "*qurshī*" out of the great consideration that they had for their master. However, Ibn Sabʿīn did not belong to the Quraysh family (i.e., the family of the Prophet Muḥammad) as someone has asserted. Al-Fāsī, one of his biographers, on this matter wrote: "[Ibn Sabʿīn's] companions brought discredit to him when they stupidly maintained in front of the wise men that he [Ibn Sabʿīn] belonged to the "*qurshī*". They made fools of themselves, because it was not as they believed."

Very little is known about Ibn Sabʿīn's family. We know that his father's name was Ibrāhīm b. Muḥammad b. Naṣr b. Muḥammad. He was the local administrator of his town, and he belonged to one of the most prestigious Moroccan families. Also Ibn Sabʿīn's grandfather was an influential person and member of the upper class of his time. Ibn Sabʿīn's brother, Abū Ṭālib, was for a while the ambassador of the prince ʿAbd Allāh b. Hūd to the Pope in Rome, and was sent to resolve a broken agreement between "the king of the Christians" and the Muslims.

Ibn Sabʿīn grew up spoiled in a wealthy environment. He was good looking, of royal aspect and with a noble soul. In his youth, he received the usual literary and scholastic education of the theologians. He studied Arabic, Andalusī literature, logic and philosophy. In religious matters he chose the *sharīʿa* and Sufism. He also studied medicine, alchemy, white magic, and the "Science of Names and Letters" (*ʿilm al-asmāʾ wa-l-ḥurūf*). A tradition holds that Ibn Sabʿīn had three teachers while he was still a young man: Ibn Dahhāq, al-Būnī, and al-Ḥurānī. However, according to their biographical notes none of them could have known Ibn Sabʿīn in life, because he was born after the three masters' deaths. Ibn Dahhāq, also known as Ibn al-Marʿa, lived in Malaga for a long period. He was expert in the Science of *kalām* (apologetic theology), and also a scholar of history, law, and *tafsīr* (Qurʾānic exegesis). He died in 611 h. (1214–1215 CE), exiled in Murcia. Al-Būnī, who taught the "Science of Names and Letters," was born in Bunia, in Algeria, and died in 622 h. (1225 CE). Finally, al-Ḥurānī, who was also al-Būnī's teacher, died in 538 h. (1143 CE).

It seems that Ibn Sabʿīn spent the years of his youth in Andalusia away from entertainments and distractions, being seriously focused on his scientific education. Ibn Sabʿīn's pupil, Yahyā b. Aḥmad, said that his master wrote the *Budd al-ʿarīf* at the age of 15. In 640 h. (1242 CE) Ibn Sabʿīn left Murcia together with a number of pupils. He was probably forced to move after disagreements with the local *fuqahāʾ* (judges, *qāḍī*), who had started to persecute him for his Sufi theories that were considered to be clearly heretical and not in line with the orthodoxy of Islam. Ibn al-Khaṭīb tells that Ibn Sabʿīn passed through Granada with a group of mendicant disciples and ended his journey in the city of Ceuta. There he lived with his followers, teaching them his Sufi *ṭarīqa*. He also married a wealthy woman, who looked after all his needs. She also built a house for him that included a *zāwiya* (a religious and spiritual building erected next to the tomb of a saint) where the philosopher stayed.

At that time Ibn Khalāṣ was the *qāḍī* of Ceuta. He chose Ibn Sabʿīn to answer the philosophical questions sent by the emperor Frederick II of Hohenstaufen. It has been contended that Ibn Sabʿīn was forced to leave his new hometown after answering the emperor's arguments. What seems more likely, however, is that his Sufi ideas were not very popular with the political chief of the town. From Ceuta he went to ʿAdwa, and from there to Bājjā (Bugía), where he stayed for a while. The time spent in Maghreb was, nonetheless, lively and productive: Ibn Sabʿīn wrote his most important works, and his ideas were shared by a large number of people. However, his stop in Bājjā did not last long because Abū Bakr b. Khalīl al-Sakūnī, head of the *fuqahāʾ* of Tunis, organized a campaign against him. Khalīl al-Sakūnī had accused the Sufi philosopher of impiety, and in 652 h. (1254 d.C.) Ibn Sabʿīn was forced to escape toward the East. He stopped in Cairo, but the North-African *fuqahāʾ* sent a messenger to Egypt to alert the population there against his impiety. This is what Ibn Shākir wrote:

When Ibn Sabʿīn left his country he was thirty, and a group of fellows – which included some elderly people – was with him. After ten days he entered a public bath to clean himself. His fellows went along

to look after him. A worker in the bath started washing Ibn Sabʿīn's feet and, realizing that he was a foreigner, the man asked the country of origin of the traveler. Ibn Sabʿīn replied that he was from Murcia, and then the workman said: 'So you come from the same country as the heretic Ibn Abī Sabʿīn!' Ibn Sabʿīn indicated to his friends to be silent and answered positively to the man's question. Then the bath attendant started to insult the philosopher, and to curse him. Although Ibn Sabʿīn had asked the attendant to concentrate on his job [hoping to] distract [him from] his diatribe, the attendant did not stop insulting the Andalusī philosopher. After a while one of Ibn Sabʿīn's companions could not stop himself from speaking to the man saying: 'Heaven help you! God had chosen to make you a servant of the very man whose feet you are washing. You will be at his service like a boy.' The attendant turning scarlet with shame said: 'I beg God's pardon.'

The sources only vaguely refer to the period spent by Ibn Sabʿīn in Egypt. However, it is certain that the friendly Egyptian environment allowed a flourishing of Sufi schools at the time in which Ibn Sabʿīn visited the country. The Andalusian Sufi was accepted, thanks to the devotion that the Sufi expressed toward the Qurʾān and the Sunna. Nevertheless, Ibn Sabʿīn was rejected even in Egypt: his mystic thoughts, based only on some obscure philosophical arguments, were difficult for the Egyptian people to master. The *shaykh* Quṭb al-Dīn Qaṣṭallānī was among his rivals, and it is believed that he also forced Ibn Sabʿīn's departure from Egypt toward Mecca (652 h.–1254 CE). Ibn Sabʿīn fled to Mecca not only because of the persistent hate that the *fuqahāʾ* showed against him, but also for political reasons. He was in fact accused of being a Shīʿite, a follower of the Fatimids and of the Alids. The presence of the Shīʿite group in Egypt had been strongly opposed since the time of the sultan Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn Ayyubī, and all evidence of Shīʿite doctrine had been persecuted.

Ibn Sabʿīn asked for protection from Abū Numayy Muḥammad I (652–701 h./1254–1301 CE), the Fatimid governor of Mecca. Also the king of Yemen, al-Malik al-Muẓaffar Shams al-Dīn Yūsuf I (642 h./1249 CE–694 h./1294 CE), offered his support. On the other hand, the king of Egypt, al-Zāhir Baybars, who ruled from 658 to 676 h. (1259–1277 CE) detested Ibn

Sabʿīn, according to what the biographer al-Fāṣī reveals. He described in his chronicle that once Baybars, the king of Egypt, had decided to arrest Ibn Sabʿīn’s son after hearing some of the father’s speeches. Later, when Baybars went to Mecca in 667 h. (1268 CE) for the pilgrimage, he had tried to meet Ibn Sabʿīn, who however avoided the Egyptian king.

Ibn Sabʿīn’s settlement in Mecca lasted several years: in that place he had finally found peace and rest. The local governor had a high opinion of him, particularly after Ibn Sabʿīn had treated his wounded head by making a special hat. The Meccan years passed safely, and Ibn Sabʿīn enjoyed all comforts. The Sufi philosopher spent this time writing some important works, and practicing Sufism. Many scholars asked to meet him during their pilgrimage to Mecca. The biographer Ibn Shākir tells that the *shaykh* Ṣafī al-Dīn al-Hindī was among the ‘*ulamā*’ that had met Ibn Sabʿīn:

In the year 666 h. I participated in the pilgrimage [to Mecca] and while there I spoke about philosophy to Ibn Sabʿīn. He asked me: ‘Should you not live in Mecca?’ And I replied: ‘Why do you live here?’ He answered: ‘I have been destined to stay. The king demands that I stay here because of my lineage from the noble Meccans. The king of Yemen follows my teachings, but his vizīr is a *hashwīyy*, and he hates me.’

However, the chronicles also portray negative images of Ibn Sabʿīn relating peculiar stories of his time in Mecca. Ibn Kathīr, in one story, tells that once Ibn Sabʿīn referring to some pilgrims going around the *kaʿba* said: “They are like donkeys that go around a pit”. He continued saying that the pilgrims would have done better service if they had circled around him instead of going around that holy place. The same biographer related also that the Sufi philosopher had a great influence on Abū Numayy. From the same source it is known that Ibn Sabʿīn spent some time in the cave of the Hira Mountain while he was waiting for revelation (a similar experience happened to the prophet Muḥammad). Ibn Sabʿīn, in fact, believed that the prophecy could be obtained by those who had a pure intellect. It was probably Ibn Sabʿīn’s ego that made Ibn Kathīr conclude his account saying that “Ibn Sabʿīn had collected only ignominy both in this world and in the next

world.” Other stories tell that Ibn Sabʿīn avoided going to Medina for fear of the emir of the city; or that when the philosopher visited the tomb of the Prophet “blood flowed from him like menstruation.” Al-Fāṣī wrote about Ibn Sabʿīn practicing white magic saying that when Ibn Sabʿīn and his friend Abū Numayy used to go out during the night far from the city, men and horses appeared in the valley. Abū Numayy was always frightened by this vision, but this made Ibn Sabʿīn even greater in his eyes. Finally, some other biographers describe Ibn Sabʿīn as a forger. It is told that he used to forge banknotes to supply all his needs. Once he bought a sheep using forged banknotes. When the shepherd realized these were paper and not dinars, he came back to him. He found Ibn Sabʿīn asleep in his tent, but when the shepherd tried to wake him up by shaking his arm, it came off in the shepherd’s hand. The man ran away in terror.

In the year 667 h. (1268 CE), Ibn Sabʿīn, forced by the continuous persecutions by the Meccan *fuqahā*, had even planned to migrate to India. But, this idea was never realized. During his last days, Ibn Sabʿīn tried to return to Maghreb using diplomatic efforts. He tried to influence the governor of Mecca, through the sultan Muḥammad al-Mustanṣir bi-llāh of ḥafṣide lineage. He hoped that the sultan of Maghreb would have invited him to return to his homeland. Unfortunately, Ibn Sabʿīn did not succeed in his attempt, and the philosopher remained in Mecca until his death.

As is the case with Ibn Sabʿīn’s birth, different dates are proposed also for his death. Al-Shaʿrānī, for example, claimed that Ibn Sabʿīn died in 667 h. (1268 CE). Ibn Shākir wrote instead that he died on the 28<sup>th</sup> of *shawwāl* of 668 h. (1269 CE); Lator and Cruz Hernández also agreed with him. However, the majority of his biographers – and among those al-Dhahābī, Al-Maqqarī, Amari, Massignon, Taftāzānī, and Brockelmann – believe that Ibn Sabʿīn died in 669 h. (1270 CE). Ibn al-Khaṭīb and al-Ġubrīnī had identified the exact day as the 9<sup>th</sup> of *shawwāl* of the year 669. Al-Fāṣī has quoted other biographers – of which he does not refer the names – who have identified Ibn Sabʿīn’s death on the 18<sup>th</sup> of *shawwāl* of 669. More

generally, others simply report that Ibn Sabʿīn died at the age of 55.

As for the cause of his death, al-Dhahābī and Ibn Shākir wrote that he committed suicide cutting his wrists. Some of his enemies have commented that if he really had committed suicide, this would be another proof of his impiety, which has already taken him to the Gehenna. According to another version, Ibn Sabʿīn was poisoned by the king of Yemen al-Muẓaffar, who did not approve of his conduct of living. However, the majority of his biographers, with few exceptions, say that Ibn Sabʿīn died by natural death. The theory of his suicide has no foundation, because it is based on the sort of reports (*qīla*) often used by his enemies to bring discredit upon him. In conclusion, the historical sources describe a conflicting image of Ibn Sabʿīn. He has been loved and exalted or, on the contrary, despised and vilified. Ibn al-Khaṭīb, one of his biographers, wrote: “This man aroused different opinions in people, far from any form of moderation. Some people believed he was impious, some others thought he was an excellent man. Ibn Sabʿīn was able to find the extreme in each faction”. Ibn Sabʿīn remains one of the most controversial personalities of Andalusian Islam.

### The Cultural Environment and Intellectual Development of Ibn Sabʿīn

As can be seen from his biography, the *fuqahāʾ* environment was quite hostile toward Sufism. In general, the history of Islamic spirituality is characterized by a great debate between the Sufi and the *fuqarāʾ* (the pious of God).

Preserving Islamic law from contamination, and supervising spiritual practices were two fundamental aims of the *fuqarāʾ*. They were the official representatives of the *ṭarīqa*, and to them can be credited a number of persecutions against Sufi and rationalist thinkers. The censure was soon turned into action. The Sufis experienced a kind of inquisition, and a number of anathemas were hurled against them because of their beliefs. Several *ṭuruq* reacted with great caution, practicing their spirituality in secret. Although the Sufis

were acknowledged by Muslim communities, they experienced the hostility of some schools of thought, which were based on more rationalistic views (Muʿtazilites and *falāsifa*). The political authorities were another source of pressure. Even if officially the existence of the Sufi *ṭuruq* was allowed, the extremism of the Sufi doctrine kept the Palace alerted. It is in this social and cultural environment that the life and works of Ibn Sabʿīn should be seen. On the one hand, the philosopher experienced the rigidity of certain orthodox views; on the other hand, his way of life was hostile even to some representatives of Sufism.

Ibn Sabʿīn’s philosophical studies were based on the works of scholars such as Ibn Bājja, Ibn Ṭufayl, Ibn Rushd, al-Fārābī, Ibn Sīnā. However, he also criticized those authors deeply. In his opinion, his fellow Muslim philosophers had accepted Aristotle’s thought, and in particular the theory on soul and intellect, without criticism. Ibn Sabʿīn was himself influenced by the Neoplatonist school of thought and by the *Letters* of the Ikhwān al-Ṣafāʾ. From reading Ibn Sabʿīn’s works, it can be argued that he knew Ibn Masarra, Ibn Qasī, Ibn Barraĵān, as well as Ḥallāj and Suhrawardī *al-maqtūl*. However, he believed that the theories of these scholars were not sufficiently well supported to reach spiritual enlightenment. Ibn Sabʿīn was keen on the new arguments that had grown up within Islamic Law, and in his works he was very critical against the Ashʿarites. He was always well informed on the religious schools, both Islamic and not. From his *Risāla al-nūriyya (Letter on the Illumination)*, we deduce that Ibn Sabʿīn had read the Gospel, that he had some information about the Pope, that he had a certain notion of the Jewish doctrine, Indi, Brahmanic and Persian religious schools. Ibn al-Khaṭīb and Ibn Taymiyya report that Ibn Sabʿīn had acquired *taḥqīq* (his spiritual accomplishment) from Ibn Dahhāq, and that he distinguished himself in the *ṭarīqa shūdhīyya*.

This doctrine was quite peculiar, because it brought together Hellenistic philosophy and Sufism, however several examples lead us to believe that the teaching of al-Shūdhī was not easy to understand. A proof is the fact that in the



*silsila* (the initiation chain) of the *ṭarīqa sabʿīniyya* – traditionally referred to as comprised of Hermes Trismegistus, Socrates, Plato, Aristotle, Alexander the Great, Ibn Sīnā, Ibn Rushd, Suhrawardī – al-Shūdhī is placed among the “slaves of love”. Unfortunately, very few sources are available to recreate the basic elements that represent the core of Ibn Sabʿīn’s mystic work up to now. As it already has been said, many of his contemporaries did not even bother to refer to his doctrine. What is certain is that his doctrine was known as *al-shūdhīyya* or *al-sabʿīniyya*. According to Ibn al-Khaṭīb, those thinkers, unlike other Sufis, did not affirm that everything comes from the One, but they believed that there is nothing else but God: the Creator is the totality of what is shown and of what is hidden. What is characterized by plurality or diversity is nothing else but illusion coming from the knowledge of conscience, because actually there is nothing outside of that. When these illusions will vanish – and therefore the entire world – everything will be the One and the One is God. The expression that summarizes the doctrine of Ibn Sabʿīn’s *al-waḥdat al-muṭlaqa* (Absolute Unicity) is certainly *Allāhu faqat*, “Only God” or “There is nothing else than the Being, and He is He”.

In the concept of Absolute Unicity, there is no space for the difference of multiplicity, as well for any kind of concept that divides: everything that is divided in parts is the consequence of *wahm*, illusion or imagination; what it is real, *al-Ḥaqq*, is the One. According to the theory of the Absolute Unicity, men are human beings that exist through the emanation of God: an entity that is made of body and spirit and which assembles what is found in the Creation. Human beings are, however, distinct in mass and elite. The mass ignores the reality of the being, it is subject to illusion; the elite, on the contrary, is formed by those who look at the Truth and firmly believe in it.

As it is easy to imagine, these theories were quite far from the orthodox view that divides the essence of the Creator from that of the created. Many mistakes and misunderstandings, in fact, were generated by these theories. Those who followed *al-waḥda al-muṭlaqa* were accused of departing from the *sharīʿa* and of invalidating

the duties of the Muslims. However, it seems true that this accusation is not in line with the recommendations that Ibn Sabʿīn himself made to his followers. In one of his letters, he asked them to regret their sins, and to perform Good through noble deeds. He also asked them to follow the *sunna*, and to be in agreement with their campaigns. He even wrote that *sharīʿa* (The Law) and *ḥaqīqa* (Spiritual Accomplishment) are synonymous.

The destiny of the *ṭarīqa al-sabʿīniyya* was no happier. Among Ibn Sabʿīn’s successors there is al-Shushtarī (born in 610 h.–1212 CE), one of his disciples known for his mystic poems, which he used to sing in the *sūq* playing a small drum (*bendīr*).

L. Massignon refers of a group of mystic authors, that he named “the Sabʿīns of Damascus”, among which three of them are better known. The first is the emir Badr al-Dīn Ḥasan Ibn Hūd (633–699 h./1236–1300 CE), belonging to an important Andalusī family; he was the “chief of the Sabʿīns of Damascus”, and a friend of Ibn ʿArabī. The second is the *shaykh* al-Kāshānī al-Fargānī, who died in Damascus in 1300 CE; he also was a pupil of Ṣadr al-Dīn al-Qūnawī (606–672 h./1209 to 1210–1274 CE), and commentator of the famous *Tāʿīyya* written by the Egyptian mystic writer ʿUmar Ibn al-Fāriḍ (576–632 h./1181–1235 CE). The last one is the mystic poet ʿAfīf al-Dīn Sulaymān al-Tilimsānī, who arrived in Damascus from the extreme corner of the western world, and met Ibn Sabʿīn in Cairo.

## The Works and Style of Ibn Sabʿīn

The style used by Ibn Sabʿīn in his works is quite obscure: the author used symbols and allusions to introduce esoteric meanings behind his arguments. Reading Ibn Sabʿīn, it is easy to find Qurʾānic, mystical, or historical references, as well as quotations referring to the Cabala or to metaphysical science. The language is full of expressions that are not easy to translate. Ibn Sabʿīn’s passion for science and white magic prompted him to use extremely peculiar sentences. Often the logic of his arguments is interrupted by

Sufi concepts that were not always understood by his contemporaries.

In order to fully understand the complexity of Ibn Sabʿīn's writings, the reader is forced to acquire information not only from the classical texts of Islamic culture, but also from the fundamental texts of Jewish, Christian, Persian, and Hellenic thought. On the one hand, the difficulties in understanding Ibn Sabʿīn's style as well as the several accusations of heresies explain the reason why Ibn Sabʿīn's works were not very popular among scholars. On the other hand, Ibn Sabʿīn's aim was not to write popular philosophical works, rather the contrary.

According to his biographers, Ibn Sabʿīn's written production was quite substantial, and it was probably the fruit of his Maghrebian stay. Unfortunately, many of the manuscripts attributed to him have not yet been the object of investigation. However, thanks to the information reported it is possible to list the titles of Ibn Sabʿīn's main works:

#### 1. Mystical and philosophical works

*Budd al-ʿarif; Rasāʿil; Al-masāʿil al-ṣiqillīyya* ms. Hunt. 534; *Risāla al-fath al-mushtarik* or *Miftāḥ budd al-ʿarif; Risāla al-iḥāṭa; Fī l-jawhar, Kitāb al-kadd; Risāla al-ʾahad; Risāla al-nūriyya, Risāla al-faqīriyya; Kitāb al-safar; Duʿāʾ ḥarf al-qāf.*

#### 2. Works on ʿilm al-ḥurūf

*Kitāb al-daraj; Al-durra al-muḍīʾa wa-l-khaṭīya al-shamsiyya; Lisān al-falak al-nāṭiq ʾan wajh al-ḥaqāʾiq; Risāla fī asrār al-kawākib; Kitāb Idrīs, Lamḥa al-ḥurūf.*

### Cross-References

- ▶ [Alexandrian Tradition into Arabic: Philosophy](#)
- ▶ [Aristotle, Arabic](#)
- ▶ [Categories](#)
- ▶ [Ibn ʿArabī, Abū Bakr Muḥammad Muḥyiddīn](#)
- ▶ [Ibn Bājja, Abū Bakr ibn al-Sāʿig \(Avempace\)](#)
- ▶ [Ibn Masarra, Muḥammad ibn ʿAbdallāh](#)
- ▶ [Ibn Rushd, Muḥammad ibn Aḥmad al-Ḥafīd \(Averroes\)](#)
- ▶ [Ibn Ṭufayl, Abū Bakr \(Abubacer\)](#)

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## Ibn Sīnā (Avicenna), Latin Translations of

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### Abstract

Several parts of Avicenna’s major philosophical encyclopedia *al-Shifā’* were translated into Latin, mainly in Toledo at the end of the twelfth century and in Burgos at the end of the thirteenth century. In addition, a partial translation of his medical treatise *On Cardiac Drugs* was incorporated into the translation of the *De anima*. Not without philosophical significance was also the translation by Gerard of Cremona of Avicenna’s major medical encyclopedia, that is, *Canon of Medicine*. Finally, Michael Scot offered the translation of an abbreviated version of the *On Animals*. It was only in the Renaissance that the physician Andreas Alpago elaborated the translation of a few minor philosophical treatises. A major event in the Renaissance was the Venice 1508 edition of Avicenna’s *Opera philosophica*. The Avicenna Latinus includes also several pseudographical writings, the attribution of which to Avicenna had sometimes originated in the Latin tradition, but not always. The spread of the Toledan translations had a major impact on the Scholastic thought of the thirteenth century and later on. First the *De anima*, later also the *Metaphysics*, received great attention and influenced in several respects a wide range of thinkers. Although one cannot speak in the proper sense of any real current of Avicennism, one could say that in some sense William of Auvergne incorporates a Latin Avicennism, while different Scholastics adhere to an Avicennized Augustinianism. Gundissalinus and Denys of Ryckel (Dionysius Cartusienensis), in their turn, propose a kind of, respectively, Avicennized Boethianism and Avicennized

Dionysianism. But whatever the case, Avicenna constituted undoubtedly for all Scholastics an important “auctoritas” and through them had an everlasting effect on the history of western thought.

### Translations and Editions of Authentic Works (Medieval and Renaissance)

In the second half of the twelfth century, several parts of Avicenna’s major philosophical work *al-Shifā’*, known in the Latin world as *Sufficientia*, that is, the *Preface*, the almost complete *Isagoge* (mostly quoted as *Logica Avicennae*), a chapter of the *Posterior Analytics*, the *Physics* (more precisely books 1 and 2, as well as a small part of book 3 – generally referred to as *Sufficientia*, the title of the whole work), the *Psychology* (*Liber de anima seu sextus de naturalibus*, generally referred to in the later tradition as *Sextus de Naturalibus*), and the *Metaphysics* (*Liber de philosophia prima sive scientia divina*, most of the time evoked as *Metaphysica*) were translated in Toledo into Latin. According to the majority of available manuscripts Avendeuth, which is almost certainly the Latinized form of the name of the Jewish scholar Ibn Da’ūd, made the translation of the *Preface*, the *De anima* and one chapter of the *Isagoge*, that is, Chap. 11, entitled in the majority of the manuscripts *De universalibus*, which corresponds to Chap. 12 of part one of the Arabic text (Di Vincenzo 2012, pp. 441–443). Avendeuth always worked with the assistance of a Latin scholar. In the dedicatory letter, which precedes the translation of the *De anima*, the name of the Latin scholar is specified as Dominicus, who is usually identified with Dominicus Gundissalinus. This latter may have been involved in the translations of the other parts of the *Shifā’* as well, but there is no totally compelling external evidence in this respect. The translation of Chap. 7 of part two of the *Posterior Analytics* is certainly the work of Gundissalinus, once again in collaboration with someone else. It was only conserved in the former’s *De divisione*

*philosophiae* as *Summa Avicenne de convenientia et de differentia scientiarum*. Thus far there is no evidence that a complete translation of Avicenna’s *Posterior Analytics* existed, as suggested by Grignaschi (1972; Janssens 1999, p. 8, 2013, pp. 243–256). A partial translation of Avicenna’s medical work *al-Adwiya al-qalbiyya*, *De medicinis cordialibus*, also called *De viribus cordis*, figures in all manuscripts of the *De anima*, between Chaps. 4 and 5. Notwithstanding an apparent difference in style, it was almost certainly the work of Gundissalinus and Avendeuth. Of all these translations, the only one that can be precisely dated is that of the *De anima*. Based on the name of the archbishop that is present in the dedicatory formula, that is, Iohannes, it can be fixed between 1152 and 1166.

Once again in Toledo, during approximately the same period, somewhere between 1170 and 1180, Avicenna’s major medical encyclopedia *al-Qānūn fī l-ṭibb*, *Canon Medicinae*, was rendered into Latin. This translation is due to Gerard of Cremona.

Together with these translations of genuine Avicennian texts, the translation of al-Ġazālī’s *Maqāṣid* needs to be mentioned, since this latter work turns out to be a slightly reworked version of Avicenna’s Persian work *Dānesh-Nāmeḥ* (Janssens 2006, VII). This translation also belongs to the Toledo milieu and it resulted from a collaboration, namely, between Gundissalinus and John of Spain.

Either in Spain or in England, Alfred of Shareshill translated near the end of the twelfth or in the beginning of the thirteenth century two chapters of the *Meteorology*, that is, I, 1 (partially) and 5, of *al-Shifā’*. The translation is paraphrastic and is known as *Liber de mineralibus*. It is also designated with the title *De congelatione et conglutinatione lapidum*. It comprises three parts, since it subdivides the first chapter of the Arabic text into two sections. It was believed to be part of Aristotle’s text, although Alfred himself was almost certainly aware of its Avicennian origin. Albert the Great rediscovered its authentic origin (Mandosio and Di Martino 2006, p. 416). Another



chapter of Avicenna's *Meteorology*, that is, II, 6 was anonymously translated into Latin, in all likelihood at approximately the same period. It circulated as the independent treatise *De diluviis*.

Around 1230, Michael Scot translated another part of Avicenna's philosophical encyclopedia *al-Shifā'*, that is, *De animalibus*. Scot's translation is mostly designated as *Abbrevatio Avicennae*. Compared to the original Arabic text, the translation shows both minor and major omissions without offering any explicit indication thereof. Hence, Scot based his translation, dedicated to the Emperor Frederick II, probably on an anonymous Arabic compendium of Avicenna's work (Van Oppenraay 1999).

About 1240 Hermannus Alemannus, in his turn, translated two passages of the *Rhetoric* of *al-Shifā'*, that is, the final part of II, 2 (pp. 73, 7–75 of the Arabic edition) and the second half of IV, 1 (pp. 206, 8–212 of the Arabic edition). He inserted them in his Latin translation of the Arabic version of Aristotle's *Rhetoric*. Worthwhile to note is that he uses both paraphrasing and literal translation (Celli 2012, pp. 486–493).

During the late 1270s, the translation of the *Physics* was continued at Burgos by Johannes Gonsalvus, in collaboration with a certain Salomon: it started where the old translation had abruptly stopped. But also this time, the text was not completely translated: the translators omitted the last four chapters of book 3 as well as the entire book 4. In all likelihood, the same scholars also provided the translation of other natural parts of the *Shifā'*, that is, *De caelo*, *De generatione et corruptione*, *De actionibus et passionibus*, and *Meteorologica*. The inventory catalogue of the Sorbonne of 1338 mentions an anonymous Latin translation of the seventh natural part, that is, *De vegetabilibus* (*The Plants*), but up to now no trace of it has been found.

Very small fragments of Avicenna's *al-Ishārāt wa-l-tanbīhāt*, *Pointers and Reminders*, and *al-Najāt*, *Salvation* are present in Latin translation in Raimundus Marti's *Pugio fidei*, a work he wrote in 1278.

In 1306, Arnold of Villanova made in Barcelona a complete translation of Avicenna's *Treatise on Cardiac Drugs*, *De viribus cordis*.

The first printed editions of Avicennian works are to be dated at the end of the fifteenth century. Regarding philosophical texts, the earliest is that of the *De anima*, published at Venice, c. 1485. Ten years later, once more at Venice, the *Metaphysics* followed, and some 5 years later the *De animalibus* was published. The famous *Opera Philosophica*, including the translations of *Isagoge*, *Physics* (old translation), *De anima*, *De animalibus*, and *Metaphysics* (besides that of two pseudo-Avicennian treatises, that is, *De caelo* and *De substantiis primis et secundis*, and the treatise *De intellectu* attributed explicitly to al-Fatṭrī), were edited by the Augustinian monks at Venice in 1508.

Finally, Andreas Alpago (d. 1522) translated for the first time into Latin several philosophical treatises of Avicenna, that is, *Compendium de anima*, *Libellus de Almahad* (on resurrection), *De definitionibus*, and *De divisione scientiarum*, and moreover, fragments of the *Notes* (*Ta'liqāt*), entitled *Aphorismi de anima* and of an *Answer to Ten Questions Posed by al-Bīrūnī*, entitled *Quaesita accepta ex libello Avicennae de quaesitis*. These translations influenced later authors, as for example John Dee (Burnett 2008, p. 50; Michot 2009), but more research is needed to determine the precise nature of this influence.

## Pseudo-Avicenna

Probably in the twelfth or early in the thirteenth century an alchemical treatise, entitled *De anima (in arte alchemiae)*, was translated, in all likelihood directly from Arabic into Latin (Moreau 2016, Vol. I, pp. 50–54). The work did not remain unnoticed, maybe because of its (false) attribution to Avicenna: both Vincent of Beauvais and Roger Bacon quoted it. In the Renaissance, it was published at Basel in 1572, although under a different title, that is, *Artis chemicae principes, Avicenna atque Geber*. Another alchemical treatise, entitled *Epistola ad Hasen Regem de re recta*, certainly constitutes a direct translation from an Arabic source. However, the attribution to Avicenna is extremely doubtful (Strohmaier 2002, p. 45). The translation dates to before the middle

of the thirteenth century, since it is quoted by Vincent of Beauvais. It must be emphasized that alchemy, just as medicine, was considered in the Latin Middle Ages as a conveyer of philosophical ideas (Burnett 2005, p. 384).

To Gundissalinus, in collaboration with John of Spain, is attributed the translation of the *Liber celi et mundi*, which turns out to be a paraphrase on Aristotle's *De caelo*. The style of the translation conforms to that of other Toledan translations of the second half of the twelfth century. Initially transmitted as anonymous, it was later believed to be a genuine Aristotelian work and finally, in all likelihood after 1240, it was attributed to Avicenna (Gutman 2003, pp. XVII–XXI). Under the latter's name, it was included in the Renaissance edition of his *Opera philosophica*. Also included in this edition is the treatise *De causis primis et secundis et de fluxu qui consequitur eas*, a Latin work written in the first half of the thirteenth century.

## Doctrinal Influences

Concerning the translated parts of the *Shifā'*, it is obvious that the psychological and the metaphysical parts had a major influence. They already play a significant role in the personal works of Gundissalinus, who, as mentioned above, was involved in some of the translations. In these works, the doctrines of Boethius and Avicenna are combined in such a way that one may speak of an Avicennized Boethianism (Fidora 2009, p. 120). But in the first period of its reception, Avicenna's *De anima* was of particular importance (Hasse 2000). It was used by John Blund and Michael Scot. Alexander Nequam and Alfred of Shreshill were also familiar with the work, although the former of the two maybe indirectly. Therefore, it may reasonably be stated that Avicenna's *De anima* circulated outside Toledo, that is, in Paris and in Oxford, at the very beginning of the thirteenth century. Robert Grosseteste also quotes it, although only once. He refers, moreover, to Avicenna's *Metaphysics*, *Physics*, and *Canon*, although in a limited way. A similar remark is valid with respect to Roland of

Cremona, but he takes into account the *Isagoge* while omitting the *Physics*. Moreover, Roland several times mentions "Algazel" together with Avicenna, so that it is obvious that already at his time al-Ġazālī was considered to be a scholar whose thought followed a line similar to Avicenna's. William of Auvergne appears to be the first thinker who not only referred to both Avicenna's *De anima* and *Metaphysics*, but also elaborated a synthesis inspired by Avicennian ideas. He may be considered as a representative of a Latin Avicennism, although this latter designation has to be understood rather vaguely, and certainly not as the expression of a very precise current of thought (Teske 2006, pp. 217–237). John of La Rochelle, in his turn, presented a different kind of synthesis. He dealt with both the *Canon* and the *De anima*. However, he is, above all, the first exponent of an Avicennized Augustinianism, which identifies the agent intellect with God. After 1260, Roger Bacon (in his later works), John Pecham, Roger Marston, and Vital du Four adhered to this kind of Avicennized Augustinianism (Hasse 2000, pp. 203–223).

Around the middle of the thirteenth century, we have to deal with three of the major figures of Scholastic thought: Roger Bacon, Albert the Great, and Thomas Aquinas. Bacon held Avicenna in high esteem, since he qualifies him as *praecipuus imitator et expositor Aristotelis*, notwithstanding his clear rejection of some of Avicenna's ideas. It is a well-known fact that he was familiar with the *Preface* to the *Shifā'* as well as with Scot's translation of the *De animalibus*. Moreover, it is remarkable that in his *Moralis philosophia* he pays special attention to the tenth book of Avicenna's *Metaphysics* to which he attributes an independent title, that is, *Radices moralium*. Albert the Great deals with all Avicennian texts, sometimes accepting the views of Avicenna and other times rejecting them. As one might expect, he uses both the *De anima* and the *Metaphysics* extensively. However, in addition to these works, he appears to be the only Scholastic author who refers in a systematic manner to the translations of the *Isagoge*, the *Physics*, and the *Animals*. His commentaries on these

works exhibit a wide range of more or less literal quotations derived from the different chapters. He also refers to the *Canon*, book 1. Generally speaking, Albert cannot be considered as an Avicennizing thinker, but he is critically dealing with Avicenna's writings in a most exemplary way. With respect to Thomas Aquinas, things become more complicated. He is not very systematic in quoting names; hence, there can always be much greater influence of Avicenna than appears at first glance. Traditionally, scholars put an excessive emphasis on the essence–existence distinction, as if Avicenna only influenced Thomas on this particular, although important, point. In fact, an Avicennian inspiration comes to the fore in other of Thomas' doctrines (Taylor 2014; Steel 2002).

Two late thirteenth-century authors who deserve special attention concerning the reception of Avicenna's thought are Henry of Ghent and Duns Scotus. Henry, in his two major works, that is, the *Quodlibeta* and the *Summa*, quotes Avicenna's *Metaphysics*, and no other works. He does this even in relation to typically psychological problems, as for example, the unity of the soul (Janssens 2006, p. XVI). More specifically, the number of quotations is not great, but they always have a major impact on Henry's thought. Insofar as his major objective consists in offering a real integration of genuine Avicennian ideas within a profound Augustinian framework, he may be characterized as a follower of an Avicennized Augustinianism, although in a way clearly different from that of John of La Rochelle. As to Duns Scotus, Avicenna's conception of metaphysics as being primarily an ontology, not a theology, formed an important source for his own view on metaphysics (Counet 2002). He also paid great attention to other elements of Avicenna's thought, especially in the field of metaphysics, as for instance, Avicenna's notion of the indifference of essences with respect to existence. But he is clearly not representing any kind of Avicennism. Avicenna's *Metaphysics* has eclipsed in this period his *De anima*, although John Pecham, in his *Tractatus de anima*, and Witelo, in his treatise *De natura daemonum*, still make extensive use of the latter work.

From the fourteenth century on, a direct and systematic examination of Avicenna's philosophical writings is at first glance missing. In this respect, one may note that the translations realized at the end of the thirteenth century only reached us in one single manuscript, that is, Vat. Urb. 186. Nevertheless, Avicenna's thought undoubtedly remained influential, but now in an indirect way, that is, through the mediation of the works of the major Scholastics. Their interpretations of Avicenna's doctrines were, however, not always unconditionally accepted. This is well illustrated by an author like Nicholas of Lyra, who rejected Duns Scotus' understanding of Avicenna's theory of the univocity of being (Brown 1991). Of special significance is Francis Exeimenis' use of elements taken from Avicenna's *Metaphysics*, X, in the elaboration of his own political theory (Lindgren 1980). In the fifteenth century, Avicenna constituted a major source of inspiration for Denys of Ryckel. Although Denys does not agree with all of Avicenna's ideas, his system can be qualified as an Avicennized Dionysianism (Emery 1988). In Italy, there was still interest in Avicenna's philosophical writings, especially in circles of physicians, as is demonstrated by a number of most valuable manuscripts of Italian origin and dated between the fourteenth century and the sixteenth century (Siraisi 1987; d'Alverny 1993, p. XVI). This tradition seems to have started already with Pietro d'Abano (d. c. 1316). As a physician, he wrote also a work on astronomy and astrology, that is, *Lucidator dubitabilium astronomiae-astrologiae*, which was largely inspired by several ideas derived from Avicenna's *Metaphysics*. But, above all, Ugo Benzi (fifteenth century), who explicitly presented Avicenna's doctrine of the internal senses as articulated in the *De anima*, and Andrea Cattani (sixteenth century), who many times, even in magical matters, evoked Avicenna's authority, are major examples of this attitude (Zambelli 1985, pp. 203–204). To these names, one has undoubtedly to add that of Andreas Alpago, who translated both medical and philosophical treatises of Avicenna. However, also pure philosophers continued to study Avicenna's works in sixteenth-century Italy. In this respect, one may mention the names of

Marsilio Ficino (Vasoli 2002) and Thomas of Vio (Cajetan).

The influence of the Avicenna Latinus on western philosophy has been extraordinary. Several of Avicenna's ideas received major attention in western thought. Certainly, in the field of ethics, his thought had almost no impact, whereas in physics its influence was limited to few aspects, that is, a realist conception of time and the idea that the elements keep their substantial form when being part of a mixture. As to Avicenna's logic, it played an important role in Albert the Great's elaboration of the doctrine of the three states of the universal, that is, *ante rem*, *in re*, and *post rem* (de Libera 1996, p. 253), which was extremely significant for the later discussions on the specific status of the universal. However, a major direct influence comes to the fore in the disciplines of psychology and metaphysics. With regard to psychology, this was the case with Avicenna's conception of the inner senses, especially those of estimation and imagination, and with his theory of the intellect. Moreover, his treatment of the outer senses, and between them most eminently touch and vision, was highly influential. Finally, the famous Flying Man argument, by which he primarily wanted to demonstrate the existence of soul independently of the body, constituted an important object of critical examination. With regard to metaphysics, Avicenna's famous essence–existence distinction and, related to it, the idea of the indifference of the quiddity with respect to existence had a profound impact on Scholastic thought and through it all later western metaphysical thought. Moreover, his conception of metaphysics as being essentially an ontology, but integrating at once a theology and an archeology, that is, the study of the principles of the sciences, had a deep impact. Nevertheless, other of his metaphysical ideas were strongly rejected. Following Averroes' criticisms, many Scholastics considered that Avicenna had formulated the problematic idea of the accidentality of existence, and accused him also of having confused the numerical and the ontological "one." Probably only Henry of Ghent among the Scholastics seriously questioned the validity of these criticisms. In his view, they result from a mistaken interpretation of Avicenna's genuine thought. Of

course, for all aspects of Avicenna's thought, one finds divergent interpretations among Latin thinkers. In any case, it is obvious that the Latin Scholasticism cannot be fully understood without the input of the Avicenna Latinus and that Avicenna had an enduring influence on late medieval and Renaissance thought.

As shown above, the Latin translations of Avicenna's philosophical treatises received not only the attention of professional philosophers, but also of physicians. Moreover, they were largely quoted by encyclopedists as, for example, Vincent of Beauvais and Henricus Bate, and, in at least one case, one also finds an influence in poetry. Indeed, in Piers Plowman's famous B-text, his idea of the *ymaginatif* can be traced back to Avicenna's *De anima* (Kaulbach 1993).

Finally, it is obvious that the Latin translations of Avicenna (and al-Ġazālī) gave rise to the creation of a new vocabulary. In some cases, for instance, with regard to the notion of *intentio*, this even opened up an entirely new problematic in the history of western philosophy.

## Cross-References

- ▶ [Albert the Great](#)
- ▶ [Alchemy in the Latin World](#)
- ▶ [Arabic Texts: Natural Philosophy, Latin Translations of](#)
- ▶ [Arabic Texts: Philosophy, Latin Translations of](#)
- ▶ [Arnaldus de Villanova](#)
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- ▶ [Essence and Existence](#)
- ▶ [al-Ghazālī's Maqāṣid al-Falāsifa, Latin Translation of](#)
- ▶ [Henry of Ghent](#)
- ▶ [Ibn Rushd, Muḥammad ibn Aḥmad al-Ḥafīd \(Averroes\)](#)
- ▶ [Ibn Sīnā, Abū 'Alī \(Avicenna\)](#)
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- ▶ Robert Grosseteste
- ▶ Roger Bacon
- ▶ Thomas Aquinas
- ▶ Thomas of Vio (Cajetan)
- ▶ William of Auvergne

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## Ibn Sīnā, Abū 'Alī (Avicenna)

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### Abstract

One of the most significant philosophers of the Arabic and Persian East, Avicenna (c. 980–1037) also had an enormous influence upon the Latin West. He combined the various philosophical traditions of his time – ranging from Aristotle and his commentators, through Neoplatonic writings deriving from Plotinus and Proclus, to his immediate Arabic predecessors (particularly al-Fārābī) – and developed his own philosophy. His writings stand out for their originality and comprehensiveness, covering nearly all scientific fields, including logic, natural philosophy, metaphysics, and medicine. In current research, Avicenna is



primarily appreciated for a number of theories, which were specifically influential upon later intellectual history. In the field of logic, they include his considerations regarding the subject matter of logic (second intentions) and his distinction between “conception” (*taṣawwur*) and “assent” (*taṣdīq*), which brings logic considerably closer to epistemology. In the field of psychology, he is renowned for his theories of abstraction and intellectual intuition, as well as for his doctrine of the five internal senses. And lastly, in the field of metaphysics, he is known both for his cosmology, which (by means of his theory of separate intellects) bridges the gap between ontology and noetics, and his famous distinction of essence and existence, which underlies many of his arguments and theories, such as his proof of the existence of God, and theory of universals.

## Biographical Information

Abū ‘Alī I-Ḥusayn ibn ‘Abdallāh ibn Sīnā, known as Avicenna in the Latin West, was born c. 980 CE or earlier in Afshana, in the vicinity of Bukhārā (today: Uzbekistan). Some years later, the family moved to Bukhārā, where he received his education, first in the religious sciences of Islam, the Qur’ān, Arabic literature (*adab*) and Islamic jurisprudence, and then in philosophy. Whereas several teachers are mentioned in connection with his Islamic studies, the situation is different with regard to his study of the philosophical disciplines. Although his father went to the trouble of hiring his son a teacher, Avicenna himself insists that he acquired his knowledge in these fields more or less autodidactically.

At this point a remark concerning the biographical information available on Avicenna is in order. Although at first glance we seem to be well-equipped in this regard, as we possess an autobiography recorded by his disciple al-Jūzjānī under his supervision (and later expanded into a biography by the latter), we are faced with the problem that especially the part concerning his education is styled in a programmatic manner, and is designed to defend a certain curriculum

and particular theory of knowledge rather than to depict his upbringing with historical accuracy (Gutas 1988: 149–159). However this may be, according to Avicenna’s account, he studied logic and mathematics partly on his own and partly under the instruction of his teacher, whereas natural philosophy and metaphysics he studied entirely by himself. To these sciences, which correspond neatly with the Peripatetic curriculum, he added medicine, which ranks as an applied science within such an Aristotelian framework.

By the age of eighteen his education was complete and he was already working as a physician for his father’s employer, Nūḥ ibn Manṣūr. Some years later he also attained a position as a political administrator, and he continued to practice these two professions for the rest of his life. In this respect his biography is typical of eastern philosophers, who were customarily employed at princely courts. Although this granted them a relative independence from the religious sphere, it also made them much more dependent upon the goodwill of their employer and subject to the contingencies of political circumstance. It is most likely for this reason that Avicenna changed his employer several times. In 1024 however, he finally settled in Iṣfahān under the employ of ‘Alā’ al-Dawla, whom he accompanied on trips and military campaigns. He died in 1037 during a trip to Hamadhān, where he was buried.

## Philosophy

### General Remarks

Despite his restless lifestyle, Avicenna produced an enormous philosophical oeuvre, of which about 130 titles are today considered authentic. His writings cover all fields of philosophy; however, they particularly excel in the areas of logic, natural philosophy (including psychology), and metaphysics. Apart from numerous short treatises focusing on individual topics, his oeuvre consists of comprehensive summas, such as the *Book of the Healing* (*Kitāb al-Shifā’*), *Eastern Philosophy* (*al-Ḥikma al-mashriqiyya*), and *Pointers and Reminders* (*al-Ishārāt wa-l-tanbīhāt*). In addition to philosophy, he is also renowned for his

achievements in the field of medicine, and several of his medical writings have survived (cf. in particular his *Qānūn*, Lat. *Canon medicinae*). Regarding philosophical orientation, Avicenna belongs primarily to the Aristotelian tradition, as is already apparent from his autobiography. Apart from Aristotle himself, his commentators, such as Alexander of Aphrodisias, had a great influence upon Avicenna's thought. His philosophy is however also marked by a strong Neoplatonic strain, as well as by the thoughts of his Arabic predecessors, the first and foremost being al-Fārābī.

His debt to Aristotle finds expression not only in doctrinal features, but also in his division of philosophy and in the structure of his works. In addition to his autobiography we might refer to Avicenna's *On the Division of the Intellectual Sciences* (*Risāla fī aqsām al-'ulūm al-'aqliyya*), where he develops a classification of the sciences that corresponds to the curriculum created by the Alexandrian scholars of late Antiquity. A further piece of evidence is provided by the arrangement of his major philosophical works, particularly his *Book of the Healing*, which is divided into treatises according to the Alexandrian grouping of Aristotle's writings, i.e., it is introduced by an *organon* (embracing reworkings of Porphyry's *Isagoge* and Aristotle's logical writings, *Rhetoric* and *Poetics*), followed by three treatises dedicated to the main parts of theoretical philosophy, namely, natural philosophy, mathematics, and metaphysics. Ethics, by contrast, is entirely absent from his oeuvre, and political philosophy treated only in scattered chapters.

With respect to the continuity of Avicenna's thought, there are certainly changes in several of his positions, so that it is impossible to speak of the philosophical system of our author. However, there is no complete rupture which would justify the distinction between an "Aristotelian" and a "mystical" Avicenna, or an "exoteric" and an "esoteric" Avicenna, as has repeatedly been defended by some scholars, such as A.F. Mehren, H. Corbin, or S.H. Nasr. Rather, these changes must be characterized as gradual developments, often provoked by systematic problems detected by Avicenna's students and necessitating his reworking of the concerned

issues, as is the case, e.g., with his theory of intuition and thinking (see Gutas 2001). Furthermore, the differences between his allegedly exoteric Aristotelian works and supposedly esoteric, which is to say, mystical thought, particularly ascribed to his *Eastern Philosophy*, have been shown to be stylistic, and not with regard to content. Those parts of the *Eastern Philosophy* which are extant are in fact in neat doctrinal accordance with Avicenna's most "Aristotelian" work, the *Book of the Healing* (see Gutas 2000).

Since it is impossible in the space of a short article to adequately discuss the intellectual developments of this philosopher, we will instead focus upon Avicenna's *Book of the Healing*, and this for three reasons: first, it is his most comprehensive and detailed summa, covering all branches of philosophy (including logic). Second, it is probably the most accessible of Avicenna's works, both with respect to availability of editions and translations, and with regard to the amount of research done upon it, thereby facilitating its study considerably. Third, of his philosophical works, this is the one that earned the broadest reception, spreading not only throughout the Arabic East, but also through the Latin West, owing to the great impact of its twelfth century translation on medieval thinkers. In this book, we will furthermore concentrate upon certain issues which – in the light of current research – must be considered Avicenna's major achievements. These belong to the fields of (1) logic, (2) psychology, and (3) metaphysics.

### Logic

There are several aspects in which logic plays a central role in the thought of Avicenna. According to him, logic is the method necessary for man to proceed from the known to the unknown. Since the attainment of knowledge is, in turn, identified as man's ultimate goal, logic is indispensable for the achievement of perfection. Hence, it functions quite naturally as an instrument in all the philosophical sciences. These general considerations – developed in the introductory chapters of Avicenna's *Isagoge* (*Madkhal*) to the *Healing* – are echoed in his own procedure: he consistently applies logic in his writings, and particularly falls back upon the demonstrative method derived

from Aristotle's *Posterior Analytics* (cf. for example, his *Metaphysics*; Bertolacci 2006: 213–263). In addition, he contributed considerably to the development of logic at a more technical level, most notably in the field of modal logic (Street 2004, 2005).

Apart from these programmatic and technical points, Avicenna also elaborated certain key conceptual considerations within the field of logic. One of these concerns its subject matter, which he identifies as second intentions (*al-ma'ānī l-ma'qūla al-thāniya, intentiones secundae*). Without yet using this term (which he only introduces in his *Metaphysics*, I ii:10.17; Lat.:10.73–74), he nonetheless develops the concept in the *Isagoge* (*Isagoge*, II:15.9–16.12; Lat.:2rB–2vA). The concept, as it is explained there, refers to states and accidents of things in conception (*fī l-taṣawwur*). As an explanation for his claim that the things concerned are “in conception,” he points out that things are either known or unknown in relation to our mind. Consequently, in order to attain knowledge about them, it is necessary for us to have knowledge of these states and accidents. “This kind of reflection,” concludes Avicenna, “is called the science of logic,” and its task consists in the examination of the respective states and accidents “inasmuch as they lead to making the unknown known” (*Isagoge*, II:16.10–12; Lat.:2vA; trans. Marmura 1980: 250). Examples of these states and accidents are “being a subject, predication, [...] universality and particularity in predication, essentiality and accidentality in predication” (*Isagoge*, II:15.5–6; Lat.:2rB; trans. Marmura 1980: 247). In sum, second intentions embrace a particular kind of entity, namely states and accidents, both occurring to things in conception and suitable for leading one from the known to the unknown.

In this connection, a further distinction is worth noting. Whereas the subject matter of logic is, as just said, second intentions, the discipline itself is divided into two parts, dealing with *taṣawwur* (*intellectus*) and *taṣdīq* (*credulitas*) respectively (*Isagoge*, III:17.7–17; Lat.:2vA). In accordance with Avicenna's notion of science, these must be the goals of logic. Nevertheless, *taṣawwur*,

according to the explanations of our author, can be best described as a simple conception in one's mind, which is neither true nor false. *Taṣdīq*, by contrast, should be translated as assent, or belief, since it designates an attitude toward a piece of knowledge (and hence presupposes the presence of at least one simple *taṣawwur*). *Taṣdīq*, accordingly, “occurs when there takes place in the mind a relating (*nisba*) of this form (*ṣūra*) to the things themselves as being in accordance with them” (*Isagoge*, III:17.16–17; Lat.:2vA; trans. Sabra 1980: 760). This relating and the resulting attitude can then be expressed in propositions, including simple assertions. Accordingly, only at this stage does the question of truth or falsehood, and hence the question of knowledge in the strict sense of the term (cognition of the causes), come into play. With these characteristics, however, *taṣawwur* and *taṣdīq* are primarily kinds of knowledge in the human mind; in short, they are epistemological notions. Every piece of human knowledge, says Avicenna, is either *taṣawwur* or *taṣdīq* (*Isagoge*, III:17.7–8 and 10–12; Lat.:2vA). Against this background, his conviction that logic must embrace corresponding parts throws a revealing light on his notion of logic: according to him, logic is not just a useful “external” tool we can apply in our attempt to attain knowledge. Rather, it must be identified with thinking or grasping itself, i.e., with what is going on in man's mind when he is actually in the process of acquiring knowledge. In this case, logic as a science, i.e., as the science dealing with *taṣawwur* and *taṣdīq*, is in fact epistemology.

### Psychology

These considerations lead us to the question of what precisely cognition is, and hence into the realm of psychology or rather, the theory of the rational soul. The fullest account of this topic can be found in Avicenna's *On the Soul* (*Fī l-naḥs*). It involves two aspects, namely his concept of intuition, and his notion of abstraction, the crucial relationship of which remains a matter of controversy. To discuss these two aspects, some general remarks on Avicenna's concept of the soul are required. First, there is his distinction of supralunar and sub-lunar souls, where the former

belong to the spheres of the planets and stars and are therefore discussed in the context of cosmology (in particular, *Metaphysics*, IX). It is the latter, however, which are at issue here. Sub-lunar souls are of three different kinds, corresponding to the hierarchy of animate beings: plants possess vegetative souls, animals, sensible souls, and humans, rational souls. These kinds of sub-lunar souls are nevertheless related, insofar as the “higher” kind possesses all the faculties of the “lower.” As a result an animal, e.g., is not only gifted with senses such as smell, hearing and vision, but also with vegetative functions, namely, growing, nutrition, and aging. Consequently, any “higher” soul, although it will simply be called a “sensible soul” or “rational soul,” enfoldes not only its “own” faculties but also the “lower” ones. The highest faculty obtainable in the sub-lunar world is the human intellect, and this is precisely the entity which is able to acquire knowledge.

In the fifth book of his *On the Soul*, Avicenna addresses the question of how man can attain knowledge. As mentioned above, he interprets cognition as a movement from the known to the unknown, which however presupposes something known as the starting point of the whole enterprise. This problem is resolved by Avicenna’s theory of the four stages of the human intellect, which he introduces in the first book (*On the Soul*, I v:48–50; Lat.:96.37–99.78; cf. Hasse 1999: 28–40). There he distinguishes between (1) the material intellect (*‘aql hayūlānī*; *intellectus materialis*), (2) the intellect in habit (*‘aql bi-l-malaka*; *intellectus in habitu*), (3) the intellect in effect (*‘aql bi-l-fi’l*; *intellectus in effectu*), and (4) the acquired intellect (*‘aql mustafād*; *intellectus accomodatus*). Accordingly, at a very early stage of life, man’s intellect (which is at that time the material intellect) is endowed with the so-called primary concepts and primary principles (it remains unclear from where these primary intelligibles derive; usually their origin is assumed to be the external active intellect; for this latter, see below). Whereas primary concepts are notions such as the existent, the one, the thing, etc. (i.e., *transcendentalia*), primary principles are first axioms such as “the whole is bigger than its part,” or “ $\neg(p \wedge \neg p)$ .” Both these concepts and

principles are required to obtain further concepts, the so-called secondary intelligibles, and to draw conclusions. Once the human intellect has acquired these first concepts and principles, it can begin the process of learning. At this stage, the human intellect is called “intellect in habit,” which merely designates its capacity to acquire further knowledge. The remaining stages – the intellect in effect and the acquired intellect – do not strictly refer to evolutionary phases, but rather to the intellect’s actual state: whether it has already acquired secondary intelligibles (intellect in effect), and whether it actually intelligizes, as well as to what extent it still requires support from the lower faculties of the soul in order to get in contact with the active intellect (acquired intellect).

For man to cognize (i.e., cognition of the causes), he must be able to find syllogisms to verify newly obtained pieces of knowledge. Since the latter, according to Avicenna, form the conclusions of such syllogisms, man’s primary task consists in finding the appropriate middle terms. On the one hand, this model clearly reveals the strong connection between logic and the process of acquiring knowledge mentioned above; it also explains the abundance of logical procedures in Avicenna’s writings. On the other hand it leads us to the core of his theories of intuition and abstraction. To detect the middle terms of syllogisms, our intellects, according to Avicenna, must come into contact with the active intellect mentioned earlier, which is the lowest of the cosmological intellects. This cosmological entity in turn bestows the human intellect with the secondary intelligibles it seeks, a process also described in terms of emanation and influx. It is precisely this form of knowledge acquisition to which Avicenna refers when he speaks of intuition (particularly, *On the Soul*, V vi; Gutas 1988: 159–176).

However this is only one side of the schema introduced above. For since Avicenna interprets the acquisition of knowledge as the detection of the causes of a piece of knowledge, this process must in fact take the conclusion (of a syllogism) as its starting-point and then proceed with the search for a middle term. It is at this point that Avicenna’s theory of abstraction comes into play

(particularly, *On the Soul*, I v:44–45; Lat.:87.19–90.60). In contrast to intuition, this is a bottom-up procedure, which typically begins with sense-data and is accomplished in concert with the five internal senses, which belong to the sensible faculty of the soul. In the human soul, these internal senses (a doctrine that clearly originates with Avicenna) differ from those of animals in that one of them possesses additional capacities. More precisely, whereas both animals and humans share common sense, estimation, imagination (which is, rather different from what the term implies, a mere storage place for “images” of perceived things), and memory, they differ in that the imaginative faculty (the faculty for producing new “images”) in human souls is further endowed with a cogitative function. By virtue of this sense, man is able to compose and divide individual forms or intentions perceived by either the external senses or the estimation, as well as reveal similarities and differences or, more generally, detect the relationships between these forms. In so doing, the cogitative faculty transforms individually perceived forms or intentions into particular forms (i.e., forms abstracted from certain material accidents adhering to individual forms), which must however be sharply distinguished from universal concepts (i.e., completely abstract forms, or universals). Meanwhile, these particular forms are precisely that missing link which man requires at the outset to produce syllogisms and thus attain knowledge.

Hence, despite the ongoing debate regarding the exact nature of the relationship between this “emanative” intuition and “empirical” abstraction, we may read Avicenna as follows: knowledge has as its starting point the sensory perceptible world. From this world are abstracted particular forms or intentions, which in the first instance are simple conceptions. To attain knowledge in the strict sense, we must now find a syllogism. As we already possess the primary concepts and principles, our task thus consists in revealing the necessary middle terms. However, these middle terms, according to Avicenna’s description, are received from the active intellect through influx. Meanwhile, for such an influx to occur, man, by virtue of his cogitative faculty,

must present the particular form mentioned earlier to the active intellect. If the particular form is “exposed in the right way” (i.e., *muqābil*; *recte opposito*; *On the Soul*, V v:235; Lat.:128.61) to the active intellect, then the latter is like a source of light shining upon it, such that the human intellect is able to grasp the corresponding universal form. Hence, taken as a whole, the acquisition of knowledge appears to be the result of the collaboration of two processes. It is characterized by a bottom-up abstraction of particular forms by the human soul, and the top-down emanation of universal concepts by the active intellect, at the interface of which cogitation is located and performs its activity, i.e., abstracting particular forms and exposing them in the correct way. Only at a later stage of human life, when one has already acquired a sufficient number of intelligibles, can one dispense with abstraction and concentrate upon construing syllogisms that consist exclusively of universal concepts (i.e., with the conclusion included).

### Metaphysics

Having already broached the subject of the active intellect and supra-lunar souls, some remarks on cosmology are now in order. Whereas the majority of issues discussed so far are clearly indebted to the Aristotelian tradition, this aspect of Avicenna’s philosophy is heavily influenced by his Neoplatonic predecessors as well as by al-Fārābī. Although from a modern point of view this type of speculation might seem strange, it is nevertheless a cornerstone of his thought, as it connects ontology with epistemology and provides the basis from which to argue for the cognizability of the world. It furthermore explains the traditional claim that man strives for knowledge for his specific good, and develops a philosophical standpoint with respect to the afterlife.

Highest in the cosmological hierarchy, according to Avicenna, is the necessary existent (*wājib al-wujūd*), or God, who is unique and simple. This necessary existent, moreover, must be the first cause of all other existing things. However, because the first thing proceeding from the first cause must be one in number (owing to the first principle’s simplicity), it is

impossible to conceive of an act of causation according to which the necessary existent would have immediately created a multiplicitous reality such as we have: “For you have known that from the one inasmuch as it is one, only one proceeds” (*Metaphysics*, IX iv:405; Lat.:481.51–52; trans. Avicenna 2005: 330.2–3). Consequently, its coming into being must be otherwise explained. In this connection, Avicenna falls back upon the cosmological schema al-Fārābī developed in his *Perfect State* (*Mabādi’ ārā’ ahl al-madīna al-fāḍila*). Accordingly, he interprets the necessary existent as a purely intellectual being, possessing no material attributes. As a result, that which is brought into existence from it is itself a pure intellect, which emerges as the first separate intellect in a whole sequence of separate intellects. For this intellect performs, as it were, three activities: first, it contemplates that necessary being – an action marking the inception of a second separate intellect. Second, it contemplates itself as potential and, third, as necessary, thus effecting the emergence of the outermost celestial sphere (sphere of day and night) and its perfection, which is the first celestial soul.

This process is then repeated: the second separate intellect contemplates both the necessary being and itself (both as potential and necessary), thereby producing a further separate intellect and another celestial sphere (sphere of the fixed stars) with a second celestial soul. The third intellect, in its turn, reflects upon the first cause and itself, and so forth, until we reach the level of the tenth separate intellect “that governs our selves” (*Metaphysics*, IX iv:407; Lat.:484.99; trans. Avicenna 2005: 331.22). There is no essential reason why this process should stop here; however, because to Avicenna and his contemporaries, there are no more than nine celestial spheres (the ninth coming into being parallel to the tenth separate intellect), it evidently does end here. Nevertheless, the tenth separate intellect and the sphere of the moon along with its soul, also have their activities: it is this intellect which is the bestower of the forms of reality (the so-called *wājib al-ṣuwar, dator formarum*) and is also the active intellect, and hence the source of the influx of universal concepts (which neatly correspond to

the forms of reality) into the human intellect. Furthermore, it is by virtue of the activities of the cosmological intellects and souls that some men have foreknowledge of future contingents (infused into their imaginative faculty, e.g., through dreams), or an extraordinary capacity for coming into contact with the active intellect and intelligizing (i.e., finding the middle-terms of syllogisms, cf. Avicenna’s theory of prophecy).

Despite its comprehensiveness, Avicenna’s cosmology has certain implications which bring it into conflict with Islamic doctrine, and which were consequently rejected by the majority of his successors. First, there is the problem that, according to his theory, God, i.e., the necessary existent, does not create reality all at once, but only brings forth the first intellect by means of which all further coming into being is realized. Moreover, this process of coming into being is something which evolves of necessity and is eternal. This however conflicts with the Islamic conviction that God can arbitrarily intervene in his creation, and contradicts the Islamic rejection of the eternity of the world. A further point concerns the relation of body and soul, and the afterlife of man. For, according to Avicenna, the human soul comes into being precisely at the same time as the body to which it corresponds, and remains connected throughout one’s lifetime. In contrast to the body, however, the soul does not perish with bodily death but continues to exist. Not so for the body: in Avicenna’s theory there is no place for bodily resurrection in the hereafter, which is instead populated exclusively by souls, enduring either pain or happiness, depending upon their former life.

At this point, however, it might be in order to return to an aspect touched upon previously and examine it more closely. This is Avicenna’s famous distinction between essence and existence, which underlies the concept of the necessary existent. Although, according to Avicenna, metaphysics culminates in theology and, hence, in an inquiry into the nature of God as first principle, it must be addressed as an ontology. For, according to him, the subject matter of metaphysics is the existent insofar as it is existent (*al-mawjūd min ḥaithu huwa mawjūd*), whereas



its species (the categories), properties (the universal–particular, oneness–multiplicity, the necessary–the possible–the impossible), and ultimate principles and causes (the four Aristotelian causes and God) are the things which are sought (Bertolacci 2006: 111–211). In this connection, the first book of his *Metaphysics* is of particular interest, as it programmatically introduces the subject matter, and discusses its relation to extensionally cognate notions such as the thing, or the necessary – all of which, according to him, are primary concepts. It is in this part of the work that he introduces the distinction between essence and existence, which gained notoriety in the Middle Ages (*Metaphysics*, I v).

The starting point of his considerations is the concept of the existent, which he had already singled out as the subject matter of metaphysics in previous chapters (particularly *Metaphysics*, I ii). Existence (*wujūd*), says Avicenna, may be divided into affirmative existence and proper existence. The latter can be identified with the true nature (*ḥaqīqa*) of things, or their essence (*māhiyya*). Affirmative existence, by contrast, refers to the fact that a thing exists. On this basis he turns toward the distinction between thing and existent. Although these notions turn out to be co-extensive, they have different intentions: for if we speak of a thing, explains our author, we wish to emphasize what it is; if we speak of an existent, however, we wish to emphasize that it is. Though he does not specify the term, from the way in which he uses “existent” here, it becomes clear that he is referring to affirmative existence and not to proper existence. Proper existence, or essence, is by contrast involved in his attempt to clarify the proper meaning of “thing.” According to the above, the linguistic expression “thing” emphasizes the “what-ness” (*māhiyya*) of an existent. However, this does not mean that a thing is an essence. Rather it means that it is an existent which has an essence, or put otherwise: every thing has both an essence and exists: “... each thing has a reality (*ḥaqīqa*) proper to it – namely, its quiddity (*māhiyya*). [...]. The necessary concomitance of the meaning of existence (*ma‘nā l-wujūd*) never separates from it at all [...]. If (this) were not the case, it would not be a thing”

(*Metaphysics*, I v:31–32; Lat.:35.63–64 and 36.79–80; trans. Avicenna 2005: 24.25–26 and 25.10–14).

What might appear as a word-game, in reality reflects a peculiarity present in most of Avicenna’s writings, namely his careful distinction of an ontological and epistemological perspective of the same phenomena. Accordingly, he sharply distinguishes between the ways in which things can exist and the manner in which these things can be considered (e.g., in the sciences). For things can exist either in extra-mental reality (*fī a‘yān al-ashyā’*) or intra-mentally as concepts (*fī l-taṣawwur*). However they may be considered as particular things partaking of accidents (physics), conceptions of things under abstraction of certain accidents (mathematics), or as things in themselves, that is to say, essences (*māhiyya*), regarded independently of their mode of existence or accidents (metaphysics). These distinctions are crucial not only because of the subtle connection that Avicenna thus establishes between ontology and noetics, but also because they underlie his theory of universals (see particularly *Metaphysics*, V i–ii). For on these grounds he is able to claim that, e.g., “horseness inasmuch as it is horseness” (and therefore as an object of metaphysics) is neither particular nor universal, but one single (and simple) meaning (*ma‘nā, intentio*). Hence, it is something to which universality or particularity may attach extrinsically: “For ‘horseness’ has a definition that is in no need of the definition of universality, but is (something) to which universality accidentally occurs” (*Metaphysics*, V i:196; Lat.:228.31–32; trans. Avicenna 2005: 149.19–21). In this connection he leaves no doubt whatsoever that, ontologically speaking, universals such as “horseness” do not exist at all, except along with accidents (e.g., existence, oneness). As such, however, they belong properly to the realm of noetics and hence to the sphere of consideration.

Let us however return to Avicenna’s notion of “thing” and his distinction between the ontological and epistemological perspectives. Although the distinctions between thing–existent, and essence–existence are related, they do not precisely correspond (for a different view see Wisnovsky 2005: 105–113): whereas the

linguistic expressions “essence” and “existence” are epistemological notions referring to conceptions that we as “scientists” use to analyze things; “thing” and “existent” are ontological notions referring to things. Both things and existents have an essence and exist; however, as introduced above, we use the linguistic expressions “thing” and “existent” in order to evoke different aspects, namely, the essence of the respective entity in the first instance, and its existence in the second. These fundamental distinctions are at the basis of some of Avicenna’s central concepts, to which we may only allude here: e.g., the distinction between the necessary existent in itself, the necessary existent through another, and the possible existent in itself (which is at the basis of his metaphysical proof of the existence of God); and his determination of the respective subject matters of logic and the theoretical sciences of philosophy.

## Concluding Remarks

Considered as a whole, Avicenna’s philosophy is extraordinarily rich and has only begun to be comprehensively explored. The broad synthesis he provided, which brought together all the various philosophical trends of his day, and the new shape he gave to philosophy as a whole, contributed decisively to the central role he was to play henceforth. In the Arabic and Persian world, he inherited a position comparable to that which in the Latin West was held by Aristotle. Though overshadowed by the latter in the Latin world, his influence upon Thomas Aquinas, Henry of Ghent, and Duns Scotus, to name but a few, was substantial. These trends, however, are only some indications of his impact – owing not only to the inherent limitations of a brief article, but also, and perhaps even more so, to the fact that the exploration of Arabic philosophy, and its concrete legacy in both the East and West, is still in its infancy.

## Cross-References

- ▶ [Alexander of Aphrodisias and Arabic Aristotelianism](#)
- ▶ [Alexandrian Tradition into Arabic: Philosophy](#)

- ▶ [Arabic Texts: Philosophy, Latin Translations of](#)
- ▶ [Aristotle, Arabic](#)
- ▶ [Being](#)
- ▶ [Epistemology](#)
- ▶ [Essence and Existence](#)
- ▶ [al-Fārābī, Abū Naṣr](#)
- ▶ [Henry of Ghent](#)
- ▶ [Ibn Sīnā \(Avicenna\), Latin Translations of](#)
- ▶ [Intention, Primary and Secondary](#)
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- ▶ [Intuitive and Abstractive Cognition](#)
- ▶ [John Duns Scotus](#)
- ▶ [Logic, Arabic, in the Latin Middle Ages](#)
- ▶ [Logic in the Arabic and Islamic World](#)
- ▶ [Medicine in the Arab World](#)
- ▶ [Metaphysics](#)
- ▶ [Modal Theories and Modal Logic](#)
- ▶ [Natural Philosophy, Arabic](#)
- ▶ [Philosophical Psychology, Jewish Tradition](#)
- ▶ [Philosophy, Arabic](#)
- ▶ [Plotinus, Arabic](#)
- ▶ [Proclus, Arabic](#)
- ▶ [Proofs of the Existence of God](#)
- ▶ [Syllogism, Theories of](#)
- ▶ [Theology Versus Philosophy in the Arab World](#)
- ▶ [Thomas Aquinas](#)
- ▶ [Universals](#)

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## Ibn Suwār (Ibn al-Khammār)

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### Abstract

Ibn Suwār was a Nestorian Christian of the tenth century Baghdad circle, proficient translator from Syriac into Arabic and physician.

Abū l-Khayr al-Ḥasan ibn Suwār ibn Bābā ibn Bahrām ibn al-Khammār was a Nestorian Christian. He was born in Baghdad in 942 and died in 1017. In the MS Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale, ar. 2346, which reproduces Ibn Suwār ibn al-Khammār's copy of Yaḥyā b. 'Adī's autograph of the *Organon*, we find the text of Aristotle's logical works together with the exegesis of the Baghdad teachers in form of scholia. These include Ibn Suwār ibn al-Khammār's ones. He was a proficient translator from Syriac into Arabic and translated Theophrastus' *Meteorologica* and *Questions*, *On Ethics*, the *Book of Allīnūs*, *On the Four Books of Logic* (including *Isagoge*, *Categories*, *De interpretatione*, and *Prior Analytics*), and partially Porphyry's *History of Philosophy*. He wrote many original works on philosophy and philosophical life, Christian theology, ethics, medicine, and meteorology.

He was respected also as a physician: according to 'Alī b. Riḍwān, a well-known physician from Cairo, Ibn Suwār ibn al-Khammār was so respected in this field of knowledge that

sultan Maḥmūd of Ghazna kissed the ground before him to show him his respect. Ibn Abī Uṣaybi'a counts him among the surgeons of the 'Aḥūdī hospital in Baghdad. He was the teacher of the Christian Abū l-Faraj ibn al-Ṭayyib and of the Muslim Abū l-Faraj ibn Hindū. In one of his treatises Ibn Sīnā mentions his intention to meet him, but apparently he never realized it. In his old age, Ibn Suwār left Baghdad to Khawārizm and then to Ghazna, where, according to al-Bayhaqī, he converted to Islam after having seen the Prophet in a dream (Kraemer 1986: 124–125).

## Cross-References

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- ▶ Ibn Sīnā, Abū 'Alī (Avicenna)
- ▶ Ibn al-Ṭayyib
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- ▶ Yaḥyā ibn 'Adī

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## Ibn Ṭufayl, Abū Bakr (Abubacer)

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### Abstract

Abū Bakr ibn Ṭufayl al-Qaysī (c. 504/1109–581/1185) was born in Guadix, near Grenada, and died in Marrakesh. He was a physician and belonged to the inner circle of the Almohad prince Abū Y'aqūb Yūsuf (r. 1163–1184). The only complete work still extant by him is a *qiṣṣa*, i.e., a tale, entitled *Risāla Ḥayy b. Yaḡzān*.

The tale is introduced by few allusive pages in which the author places his work within the philosophical and literary traditions of Sufism and Arab philosophy.

The story itself is divided into two main parts. In the first one, the author describes how an infant named “Alive, Son of Awake”, grows up in a desert island and progresses solitary into the knowledge, without any help of revelation, starting from the comprehension of the simplest things until he reaches the degree of the absorption into the pure intuition of real being, passing through the discovery of practical arts, physics, astronomy, and theology. The second part is devoted to the encounter between Ḥayy and a wise man, named Asāl, who arrives in the island seeking the inner truth of the Qur'ān. Asāl understands that Ḥayy has discovered what he was himself hoping to learn. Both men decide to emigrate to Asāl's country and to teach its inhabitants the secrets of the true wisdom, but they fail and return to the desert island to spend the rest of their lives in mystical happiness.

What does Ibn Ṭufayl's aim to teach exactly by narrating such a tale? The question is controversial. From the point of view of this article's author, Ibn Ṭufayl's does not want to show that the only possible choice for the wise is solitude, but, on the contrary, that the accomplishment of philosophy is necessarily political. Indeed, Ibn Ṭufayl's treatise could provide *e contrario* evidence of al-Fārābī's theses in political philosophy: Ibn Ṭufayl's plot and its outcome could be read as an illustration of the analysis included in the second part of al-Fārābī's *Book of Letters*.

Very little is known of the life of Ibn Ṭufayl (Abū Bakr Muḥammad b. 'Abd al-Malik b. Muḥammad b. Muḥammad b. Ṭufayl al-Qaysī, c. 504/1109–581/1185). He was born in Guadix, near Grenada, and died in Marrakesh. According to Averroes, whose account was recorded by al-Marrākushī, Ibn Ṭufayl was a physician and belonged to the inner circle of the Almohad prince Abū Y'aqūb Yūsuf (1163–1184) whom he served as a counsellor. Averroes says that Ibn Ṭufayl, who had been charged with the task of writing a commentary on Aristotle, transferred the responsibility to him. The only complete work still

extant by Ibn Ṭufayl is a *qiṣṣa*, a tale embedded within an epistolary frame narrative entitled *Risāla Ḥayy b. Yaḳẓān*. Léon Gauthier's critical edition of the work was published in Algiers in 1900, and remains the authoritative edition. A second edition was published in Beyrouth in 1936 with an accurate, even elegant, French translation, under the title *Ḥayy Ben Yaḳḏhān, roman philosophique d'Ibn Thofayl*. The subtitle reveals the influence of the European rationalists and empiricists who welcomed first the Latin translation by Edward Pocock in 1671, and then the English translation from the Arabic by Simon Ockley in 1711. The name given by Ibn Ṭufayl to the main character in his story is *Ḥayy b. Yaḳẓān*, "Alive, Son of Awake" – borrowed from Avicenna, who had given the name to the allegorical incarnation of the Active Intellect, the last emanating Intellect in charge of the sublunar world. In fact, the characters imagined by Avicenna and Ibn Ṭufayl have nothing in common, apart from their name. Ibn Ṭufayl paid allegiance to Avicenna, as is apparent in the letter that introduces the story, a few subtle and allusive pages in which the author places his work squarely within the philosophical and literary traditions of Sufism and Arabic philosophy and draws up a detailed inventory of his debts to Avicenna, al-Fārābī, Ibn Bājjā, and al-Ġazālī.

The tale itself is well constructed and the style is fluent. There are two parts, each carefully subdivided. An infant named Ḥayy arrives in a desert island. Whether he has been abandoned by his mother – a secretly married princess who places her baby in a basket that she then sets afloat – and has been carried to the shores of the island by strong currents and winds, or he was born by spontaneous generation, is a matter of some dispute. The author never provides an answer. When the infant calls for help, a gazelle that has lost her fawn takes care of him until she dies, by which time the child is 7 years old and already knows the meaning of both shame and modesty. He dissects his mother's dead body and understands that she once had a soul and that the soul has departed from her body. He then uses the next 14 years to become a great naturalist and to acquire the practical arts. He spends yet another 7 years becoming

an expert in the physical sciences. His knowledge progresses till he reaches the frontiers of the intelligible world and then, between the ages of 28 and 35, still progressing, he finally arrives at the conclusion that a cause of causes, an author of all things, necessarily exists. Ḥayy now aspires to the intuitive vision of the incommensurable perfection of this being and turns away from the physical world and speculative knowledge in order to devote all of his time to spiritual exercises that lead him in the end to the "disappearance of self awareness, to absorption into the pure intuition of the real being" (*al-fanā' 'an nafsihi wa-l-ikhhlāṣ fī mushāhadat al-ḥaqq*) and real oneness (*ḥaqīqat al-wuṣūl*). The second (much shorter) part of the narrative tells the story of a man called Asāl who lives on a neighboring island, where the prince, called Salāmān, professes a literal and political understanding of religion. Suspecting that there is a secret meaning to be discovered in the Revelation, Asāl, in his hope to find a desert place to meditate the Qur'ān comes to Ḥayy's island. Asāl soon runs into Ḥayy and learns how to speak to him. Ḥayy then shares with Asāl all his knowledge and explains how did he reach it on his own, until he reached Oneness. Thanks to Ḥayy's teaching, Asāl at last finds what he had been hoping to discover – the inner truth of the Qur'ān. Ḥayy, for his part, can see nothing in Asāl's religion that contradicts his own discoveries. Thus, in the lessons they teach each other, reason and revelation are united. However, in spite of his wisdom, Ḥayy cannot understand why the truths that are so familiar to him are hidden, or why, according to Asāl's religion, they are presented in allegorical form or, finally, why the perishable and unsubstantial things of earthly life are so present in Asāl's religion. He wants to leave for Salāmān's island immediately to instruct its wise men and show them the true meaning of their virtuous religion. A vessel suddenly appears on the horizon and carries the two men to the island of Salāmān. As soon as he lands, Ḥayy begins to teach the best inhabitants the secrets of true wisdom. Although they aspire to goodness and truth, the wise men turn away from their new teacher, preferring "the way of authority" (*tarīq al-rijāl*) to the unveiling of the truth.



Ḥayy realizes that he will not convince them, sees that his efforts are in vain, and understands that the revealed law suits the animal natures of the great majority of those – unencumbered by reason – for whom it is destined. He retracts, apologizes to Salāmān and his companions, recommends that they follow the revealed truth literally, and goes back with Asāl to worship God on the island where he grew up.

What is “the Principal Subject of Ibn Ṭufayl’s Ḥayy ibn Yaqzān”? – such is the title of a major article by George F. Hourani. Is it an attempt to demonstrate that reason is all-powerful? or to demonstrate the importance of experience in the acquisition of knowledge? or perhaps the scope of natural theology? or the superfluity of Revelation? Is it an attempt to demonstrate the continuity between rational speculation and mystical ecstasy? or the unity of philosophy and revealed law? Is it a praise of the solitary life? or, finally, could it be a dismissal of political philosophy? All these interpretations and other less obvious ones have had their proponents. The fact that Ḥayy needs no one’s help to learn so much and that in the end he chooses exile over political life, appears to show that the only possible choice for the wise is solitude! Yet this interpretation leaves a number of aspects of the narrative unexplained. Why, for example, does it not end with Ḥayy’s accession to mystical beatitude? Why does Ḥayy insist on teaching the wisdom he has acquired? Why does Asāl fail to persuade him not to? Why do they both have to experience the vanity of their efforts? And what have they learned in the end, when they return to their point of departure? Paradoxically, it is impossible to answer these questions without placing the treatise within the field of political philosophy. Ḥayy is political by nature: “full of compassion for his fellow men and ardently wishing to save them, he decided to go to them . . .”. Asāl too is naturally political: “He hoped that through [Ḥayy ibn Yaqzān], God would direct a few men he knew who were willing to let themselves be guided and who were closer to salvation than others.” The first lesson of this puzzling treatise is that both men make the mistake which al-Fārābī had warned against: they wish to replace religion with philosophy – a mistake that Socrates had already made, or so his

accusers insinuated. The second lesson of the treatise is the cause of the mistake. Because of his solitude, Ḥayy knows nothing of rhetoric, dialectics, or poetics, all of which regulate the relations between the wise and the ignorant in the city, since they are the means by which the wise may address the ignorant, protect themselves from their anger, attempt to alter their opinions and reform their behavior. The accomplishment of philosophy is necessarily political and the exercise of politics is religious. Ḥayy fails twice because he believes his knowledge is complete, whereas, in fact, it is his alone, and he expects it to replace religion. From this point of view, there is a close relation between Ibn Ṭufayl’s letter and al-Fārābī’s political philosophy. Indeed, Ibn Ṭufayl’s treatise provides *e contrario* evidence for al-Fārābī’s theses. The analyses included in the second part of al-Fārābī’s *Book of Letters* are illustrated by Ibn Ṭufayl’s plot and its outcome.

## Cross-References

- ▶ al-Fārābī, Abū Naṣr
- ▶ Ibn Bājja, Abū Bakr ibn al-Sā’ig (Avempace)
- ▶ Ibn Rushd, Muḥammad ibn Aḥmad al-Ḥafid (Averroes)
- ▶ Ibn Sīnā, Abū ‘Alī (Avicenna)

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## Ibn Ṭumlūs

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### Abstract

The Andalusian logician and physician Ibn Ṭumlūs (c. 1150–1156 until 1223 or 1224), about whose biography very little is known, is a rare testimony to the afterlife of Ibn Rushd's philosophy in the Islamic world. His only known substantial philosophical work, the *Introduction to the Art of Logic*, offers a brief account of the intellectual history of al-Andalus. He highlights the importance of logic, which is required for any systematic presentation of ideas. There is nothing in logic, which is opposed to religion. While Ibn Ṭumlūs dismisses al-Ġazālī's logic, which harmonizes the Greek tradition with Islamic scholarship, al-Fārābī receives only moderate

praise, but remains inferior compared to Aristotle. Ibn Ṭumlūs read his works with the help of commentaries, presumably by Ibn Rushd. Ibn Ṭumlūs' failure to mention the name of Ibn Rushd, who was his teacher, has attracted attention as possible evidence for an anti-philosophical *Zeitgeist* in Almohad Spain. The general structure of the *Introduction* follows the model of al-Fārābī, in particular his *Enumeration of the Sciences*. The ten books of the *Organon* according to the Arabic tradition are all represented. While the *Categories* are based on al-Fārābī, Ibn Rushd's *Middle Commentaries* influenced the *Rhetoric* and *Poetics*. Ibn Ṭumlūs detaches rhetoric from its traditional political context and emphasizes its use in medicine and for discussing Islamic ideas. The only medical work of Ibn Ṭumlūs, which is preserved, is a commentary on Avicenna's didactic poem.

## Biographical Information

Little is known about the biography of Abū l-Ḥajjāj Yūsuf ibn Muḥammad Ibn Ṭumlūs. Born in c. 1150–1156 in Alcira near Valencia, he became a disciple of Ibn Rushd and probably also studied Islamic sciences and Arabic grammar. He served the Almohad caliph al-Nāṣir (r. 1199–1213) as a physician and died in 1223 or 1224 in Alcira.

## Ibn Ṭumlūs' Thought and Philosophy

Ibn Ṭumlūs' only known substantial philosophical work is the *Introduction to the Art of Logic* (*Madkhal li-ṣinā'at al-mantiq*), beginning with a prologue in which Ibn Ṭumlūs presents a brief account of the intellectual history of al-Andalus. While numerous books have been written about the Islamic and ancient sciences, it is only logic which – according to Ibn Ṭumlūs – has not received the attention it deserves. Even though they have no knowledge of it, the “people of his time,” that is, the traditional Muslim scholars, associate logic with heresy, thereby violating their own principles of investigation. Ibn Ṭumlūs

traces this phenomenon back to the establishment of Islam in al-Andalus when the legal scholars monopolized the very concept of science and rejected any form of scholarship, which reached them from the main lands of the Islamic world, only to accept it later. The same happened with al-Ġazālī's books, which became allowed and popular only under Almohad rule. Ibn Ṭumlūs dismisses al-Ġazālī's logic, which adapts the technical terms to an Islamic environment, as inferior to that of al-Fārābī. The works of the latter, however, among which he mentions *The Great Abridgement* (*al-Mukhtaṣar al-kabīr*; see Elamrani-Jamal 1997: 476–481 for this text) are inferior to those of Aristotle. Ibn Ṭumlūs explains that he studied both al-Fārābī and Aristotle with the help of commentaries, presumably those by Ibn Rushd, although he does not mention his name.

Ibn Ṭumlūs proceeds in his preface by saying that nothing in logic is opposed to religion. Following al-Fārābī's *Enumeration of the Sciences* (*Kitāb Iḥṣā' al-'ulūm*), Ibn Ṭumlūs compares logic to language and grammar and points out that it is indispensable for reaching sound judgments instead of mere opinions about any subject and for presenting conclusions in a systematic way. It allows us to test potential authorities for their veracity. Ibn Ṭumlūs distinguishes with al-Fārābī eight parts of the logic associated with the individual books of the *Organon*. The three syllogisms include the simple intelligibles (*Categories*), simple statements (*On Interpretation*), and syllogisms (*Prior Analytics*). In addition to these, we find the five disciplines in which the five types of syllogisms are used: demonstrative (*Posterior Analytics*), dialectical (*Topics*), sophistic (*On Sophistical Refutations*), rhetorical (*Rhetoric*), and poetic (*Poetics*).

The preface to the *Introduction* is a rare witness to the intellectual landscape in late Almohad Spain, although none of the philosophical authors hailing from this region is mentioned. In particular, Ibn Ṭumlūs' failure to mention his teacher Ibn Rushd by name has attracted attention. It has been interpreted as reflecting an intellectual climate in late Almohad Spain, which may have turned hostile to philosophy as became obvious in the

banning of philosophical books in 1196. Ibn Rushd himself had been exposed to an inquisitorial prosecution (*miḥna*) and banished for a brief period from the Almohad court in 1197. The description of earlier opposition against “foreign” sciences put up by the traditional scholars of al-Andalus may be simply an account of Ibn Ṭumlūs' own time. However, in his medical work, Ibn Ṭumlūs uses Ibn Rushd's *Colliget* and praises its author as “the most eminent sage and most virtuous scholar” (Ibn Sharīfa 1999: 308). It has been suggested that Ibn Ṭumlūs expected the Andalusians to react to Ibn Rushd in the same way as they had done with previous new tendencies, that is, to reject them first and endorse them later. The interpretation of Ibn Ṭumlūs' attitude to his teacher also affects the dating of the *Introduction*. If the absence of Ibn Rushd's name is considered a reflection of the persecution, it is likely to have been written in the late 1190s. If not, an earlier date is just as plausible.

The main part of Ibn Ṭumlūs' *Introduction* follows the order of the ten books of the *Organon*, adding – in harmony with the Arabic tradition – two to the list above: *Isagoge*, *Categories*, *On Interpretation*, *Prior Analytics*, *Analysis*, *Posterior Analytics*, *On Sophistical Refutations*, *Topics*, *Rhetoric*, and *Poetics*. The *Analysis* (*Kitāb al-Taḥlīl*), an innovation of al-Fārābī, comprises parts of *Prior Analytics* and *Topics*. In terms of length of treatment, particular attention is granted to the *Rhetoric*, which may reflect Ibn Ṭumlūs' personal interest in the subject.

Even though a thorough analysis of the whole text of the *Introduction* and its sources remains a desideratum, preliminary studies have identified al-Fārābī as the main source of the first part. His *Enumeration of the Sciences* was used in the prologue to the *Introduction* (the end, use, object, name, and parts of logic), and in his discussion of the *Categories*, Ibn Ṭumlūs follows closely al-Fārābī's *Book on the Categories* (presumably a part of the text Ibn Ṭumlūs refers to as *al-Mukhtaṣar al-kabīr*). This reflects the high prestige of al-Fārābī's logical works in al-Andalus. Aouad's analysis of the *Rhetoric* has shown that Ibn Ṭumlūs does not use the Arabic translation of Aristotle's text, but paraphrases Ibn

Rushd's corresponding *Middle Commentary* and supplements it with passages from Ibn Rushd's *Short Commentary*, al-Fārābī's *Book on Rhetoric*, and the *Rhetoric* from Avicenna's *Kitāb al-Shifā'* (Aouad 2006: ix). Rather than merely compiling excerpts from these sources, Ibn Ṭumlūs presents his own approach to the *Rhetoric*. The nature of the text is propedeutic, its aim to introduce the reader to the oratorical art and prepare him for the study of further, more detailed texts. While Ibn Ṭumlūs follows by and large the structure of Ibn Rushd's *Middle Commentary*, he sometimes imposes his own principle, namely to proceed from the general to the particular, and introduces further changes in structure (such as the creation of thematic units), which lead to an exposition that is more systematic than previous approaches to the topic (Aouad 2006: xiii). Compared with Ibn Rushd, Ibn Ṭumlūs emphasizes the universal applicability of rhetoric, an art that enables the communication of the results of all practical arts to a general audience. Unlike other texts belonging to the same Arabic tradition of the *Rhetoric*, Ibn Ṭumlūs' *Introduction* does not include a discussion of its political utility, which he regards as beyond the purpose of an introduction. Examples from the political realm, which appear in Ibn Rushd's *Middle Commentary* are omitted by Ibn Ṭumlūs or substituted for medical ones, and in the rare examples he displays a negative view of political life. According to Aouad's analysis, the author thus detached rhetoric from its political context and rather outlines its benefits in medicine when talking to patients or for discussing metaphysical ideas. The Islamic religion, in particular its law and ethics, are also prominent, and Ibn Ṭumlūs identifies various philosophical concepts with parallels in an Islamic context.

A similar relationship to Ibn Rushd's corresponding *Middle Commentary* characterizes the part on the *Poetics* of the *Introduction* in which Ibn Ṭumlūs borrows terms and examples from his teacher, but contributes his own elements. Possibly inspired by the model of Avicenna, Ibn Ṭumlūs gives the example of a poetic syllogism in the second figure, which is formally invalid – being a second-figure syllogism with two affirmative premises and an affirmative

conclusion – which depends on the invalid conversion of a universal affirmative proposition as a universal affirmative. This is a theory not mentioned by al-Fārābī and rejected by Ibn Rushd (Aouad 2004). In this part of the *Introduction* too, Ibn Ṭumlūs expresses a certain reservation regarding human nature, highlighting the pitfalls resulting from an intuitive grasping of apparent meanings.

In a short *quaesitum* preserved only in a Latin translation based on a now lost Hebrew version, Ibn Ṭumlūs addresses a problem of modal syllogistic, which figures in the *Prior Analytics* of his *Introduction* under the heading *Qawl fī l-maqāyīs al-mukhtaliṭa min al-darūriyya wa-l-wujūdiyya* (*About the Syllogisms Which Combine a Necessary and Existent Premise*). He follows Ibn Rushd in his discussion of the third figure with a necessary and an existential (*de inesse*) premise. Both authors suggest that the syllogism can be reduced to the first figure. In the *Prior Analytics* of the *Introduction* Ibn Ṭumlūs mentions another short treatise in which he refutes Avicenna's view that the universal negative *de inesse* proposition does not convert. This treatise has not been preserved.

In addition to his logical works, Ibn Ṭumlūs wrote a commentary on Avicenna's didactic medical poem *al-Urjūza fī l-ṭibb* (for a list of manuscripts see Puig 2007). He dedicated the commentary to a certain Abū Yaḥyā ibn Abī Ya'qūb Yūsuf ibn Sulaymān, a son of the Almohad Mahdi Ibn Tūmart's companions who – according to Ibn Ṭumlūs – was also held in high esteem by Ibn Rushd. The dedication suggests that the commentary was written between 1179 and 1185 (Elamrani-Jamal 1997: 468–469). Biographies of Ibn Ṭumlūs include fragments of classical love poetry and attribute a book on the Arabic language to him, which is not preserved.

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- ▶ al-Fārābī, Abū Naṣr
- ▶ al-Ġazālī, Abū Ḥāmid Muḥammad

- ▶ [Ibn Rushd, Muḥammad ibn Aḥmad al-Ḥafīd \(Averroes\)](#)
- ▶ [Ibn Sīnā, Abū 'Alī \(Avicenna\)](#)
- ▶ [Logic in the Arabic and Islamic World](#)
- ▶ [Medicine in the Arab World](#)

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## Ibn Zur'a, 'Īsā ibn Ishāq

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### Abstract

'Īsā ibn Zur'a was a Jacobite Christian of the tenth-century Baghdad. He was a famous translator from Syriac into Arabic of several Aristotelian works of zoology and logic.

Abū 'Alī 'Īsā ibn Ishāq ibn Zur'a was born in Baghdad in 943. He was a Jacobite Christian and studied philosophy and Christian theology under the guide of Yaḥyā b. 'Adī (d. 974). Even though he did not practice medicine, he was acquainted with some doctors of al-'Aḍudī hospital in Baghdad: Ibn Bakkūs, a translator of medical treatises, Abū l-Ḥusayn Ibn Kaṣkarāyā, and Abū Maṣṣūr Ṣā'id ibn Biṣr 'Abdūs. From Abū Ḥayyān al-Tawḥīdī (d.1023), we know that he was a merchant in trade with Byzantium; for this reason, he was



suspected of having plotted intrigues with the Byzantines, and he was judged faulty and lost his properties. He died in Baghdad in 1008. Ibn Zur'a was the most prominent student of Yahyā Ibn 'Adī, and like his teacher, he was a Christian theologian and apologist.

He was also a good translator from Syriac into Arabic of several Aristotelian works. His Arabic translation of the *Sophistici elenchi* (*Kitāb Sūfistīqā naql Abī 'Alī 'Īsā ibn Ishāq Ibn Zur'a min al-suryānī bi-naql Aṭānis min al-yūnānī*) was based on the Syriac version by Athanasius of Balad, and it improved Yahyā Ibn 'Adī's earlier Arabic translation with additional Syriac material by Theophilus of Edessa. In the MS Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale, ar. 2346, the *Sophistici elenchi* in all likelihood are copied from Ibn al-Samḥ's copy of 'Īsā ibn Zur'a's autograph. Ibn Zur'a attributed to this Aristotelian treatise a very important role in the debate between philosophy and theology (Badawī 'Abd al-Raḥmān. [1980]; 'Īsā ibn Ishāq ibn Zur'a. [1994]).

In the *Fihrist* Ibn al-Nadīm (d. 990) writes that Yahyā Ibn 'Adī composed an epitome of Nicolaus Damascenus' *Book of Animals* (*Kitāb al-Ḥayawān*) and that 'Īsā ibn Zur'a begun to translate it (*Fihrist*, 251. 23 Flügel). Then Ibn al-Nadīm credits him also with the translation of *Five treatises* from Nicolaus' book *On Aristotle's Philosophy* and the translation of Aristotle's *Book of Animals* (*Kitāb al-Ḥayawān*). Ibn al-Nadīm mentions also a version by 'Īsā ibn Zur'a of an anonymous work on ethics (*Maqāla fī l-Akhlāq*). It may refer to the Arabic original version of the *Summa Alexandrinorum*, which came down to us only in Latin. According to Ibn Zur'a, ethical thought – as described by Plato and Aristotle – reaches perfection in Christian ethics. The positive law of religion is, in fact, an instrument to guide on the right way those who are unable to deduce the good according to the law of reason: the Mosaic law proposed a law of equality or justice, which was replaced by Christ's overflowing of grace. Further Arabic versions of ancient works attested by Ibn al-Nadīm are the

following: the version of the commentary by Proclus on Plato's *Phaedo*, of the commentaries by John Philoponus (or *John of Alexandria*?) of the versions of Galen's *To Glaucon*, of *The Elements according to Hippocrates*, of the *Anatomical procedures*, and of *The Function of the Parts of the Body*. In the manuscript Cairo, Dār al-kutub, Taymūr ahlāq 290, the Arabic version of Themistius' *Letter to Julian on Governance* is attributed to Ibn Zur'a, while in the manuscript Istanbul, Köprülü, it is attributed to Abū 'Uṭmān al-Dimashqī (d. after 914; Cheikho, L. [1920–1923]; Shahid, I. [1974]).

Ibn Zur'a was also the author of philosophical treatises, among which the one entitled *A Demonstration Exonerating Those Who Cultivate the Sciences of Logic and Philosophy from being Considered Irreligious* (*Maqāla yubayyin fihā barā'at al-nāzirīn fī l-manṭiq wa-l-falsafa mimmā yu'rafūna min fasād al-dīn*) quoted by al-Bayhaqī. Religion law and rational sciences cannot be considered in conflict: religion itself tries to avoid fallacies. So, to demonstrate the truth of religion, miracles are not enough; reason is required. In particular logic is the tool to distinguish the possible from the impossible according to the laws of nature and hence to recognize when the divine miracle occurs (Rescher, N. [1963]; Haddad, C. [1971]). Another treatise is *The Aims of Aristotelian Logic* (*Āgrād Aristūṭālīs al-manṭiqiyya*), an epitome of the *Organon* where Ibn Zur'a uses the eight Alexandrian *kephalaia* and in particular epitomizes Porphyry's *Isagoge*, Aristotle's *De Interpretatione*, and Aristotle's *Prior and Posterior Analytics* ('Īsā ibn Ishāq ibn Zur'a. [1994]). The list of Ibn Zur'a's works reported in the *Fihrist* counts other original works: an abridgment of an allegedly Aristotelian treatise on the inhabited parts of the earth entitled *Epitome of Aristotle's Book on the Oikumene* (*Ikhtīṣār kitāb al-Ma'mūr min al-arḍ*) and an interpretation of a part of Aristotle's *De caelo* III 5, 306b3-8, concerning regular polyhedra. Ibn Abī Uṣaybī'a records a treatise, no longer extant, entitled *On the Reason why the Stars [as opposed to the spheres] are Luminous, even though both they and the spheres that carry them consist of the same simple substance* (*Kitāb fī 'Illat istinārat*



*al-kawākib ma'a annahā wa-l-kurāt al-ḥāmila lahā min jawhar wāḥid basīṭ*).

Ibn Zur'a was also a Christian theologian and apologist. He wrote the treatise *On the Concept 'Father' and on Its Being Composite [Dream Concerning the Intellect]* (*Maqāla fī Ma'nā l-ab wa-annah murakkab [Ru'yā fī amr al-'aql]*; Sbath, P. [1929]; Haddad, C. [1971]; Starr, P. J. [2000]), where he states to have seen his teacher, Yaḥyā Ibn 'Adī, in a dream, and his teacher invited Ibn Zur'a to write on this topic. According to Ibn Zur'a, the hypostases of the Christian Trinity can be interpreted, on the teaching of Yaḥyā Ibn 'Adī, as Intellect, intellecting, and intelligible (*'aql, 'āqil, ma'qūl*). Another of Ibn Zur'a's treatises in defense of Christian doctrine is entitled *On Topic about Which He had been Asked by a Friend* (*Risāla šannaḥāh fī ma'ānī sa'alahu 'anhā ba'd iḥwānihi*), and it concerns the unicity of the Creator and the Trinity of the divine attributes (*ṣifāt*), which can be established by logical necessity (Sbath, P. [1929]). According to Ibn Zur'a, who was inspired by the Islamic kalām, the hypostases of the Trinity are attributes of the divine essence and states (*aḥwāl*) – or essentially concomitant accident – of the divine substance. He employs also in this writing the intellect analogy for Trinity: the Father is composed from the substance of the divine essence and the fatherhood, i.e., the power of intellectual representation. Ibn Zur'a justifies the symbolic expression that occurs in Christian Doctrine and states that any attribute that the mankind predicates of the divine being (e.g., the traditional epithets of benevolent, wise, and powerful to indicate the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, but even the intellect analogy) is limited according to human reason and language and cannot be completely appropriate. Ibn Zur'a wrote other treatises on Christian Dogmatics and Apologetics such as the *On the Four Scientific Questions applied to the Union [of the Three hypostases] in which the Christians believe* (*Maqāla fī l-Mabāḥiṭ al-arba'a 'an al-itihād alladhī yaqūlu bihi l-naṣārā*) where he uses the four types of inquiry of the Alexandrian commentary tradition “whether,” “what,” “which,” “why,” for the union of two essences in Christ, and he presents the various doctrines of Nestorians,

Melkites, and Jacobites (Starr, P. J. [2000]); the *Epistle to the Jew Bišr ibn Pinḥās* (*Maqāla 'amilahā ilā Bishr ibn Pinḥās*) to convince the Jew of the truth of the Christian doctrine (Starr, P. J. [2000]); the *Reply to the Refutation of the Christian Doctrine in the Book Awā'il al-adilla di Abū l-Qāsim 'Abd Allāh ibn Aḥmad al-Balkhī*, (*al-Ijāba 'an radd Abī l-Qāsim 'Abd Allāh ibn Aḥmad al-Balkhī 'alā l-naṣārā fī kitābihi al-musammā Awā'il al-adilla*) one of the most important Mu'tazilī in Ibn Zur'a's age; and the *Answer to 12 Questions from Abū Ḥakīm Yūsuf Ibn al-Buḥayrī*.

## Cross-References

- ▶ [al-Tawḥīdī, Abū Ḥayyān](#)
- ▶ [Translations from Greek into Arabic](#)
- ▶ [Yaḥyā ibn 'Adī](#)

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## Ikhwān al-Ṣafāʾ, Encyclopedia of

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### Abstract

“Ikhwān al-Ṣafāʾ” – the “Brethren of Purity” – is the name of a philosophical brotherhood that produced in the tenth century the most complete medieval encyclopedia of sciences, at least two centuries before the best-known encyclopedias in the Latin world. It is a collection of 52 treatises or epistles in Arabic, divided into 4 sections – introduction and the natural, psycho-rational, and metaphysical-theological sciences; 2 additional Epistles, the “Comprehensive” (*Risāla al-Jāmiʿa*) and the “Supercomprehensive” (*Risāla Jāmiʿat al-jāmiʿa*), complete the work, which assembles all the available knowledge of the sciences, philosophy of Greek origin, and religious and gnostic Muslim doctrines. The Ikhwān al-Ṣafāʾ are linked to Shīʿism and often associated with an Ismāʿīlī milieu. The treatises are based on a wide variety of materials but focus on Greek philosophy and science. The Epistles, which are addressed to disciples at an early stage of their apprenticeship, contain a core of technical teachings and a conclusion regarding their inner meaning. The first topics addressed are arithmetic, geometry, astronomy, geography, music, and logic. The overall epistemological framework is sketched in a special treatise; utilitarian activities are addressed in a complementary epistle. As a consequence of the eclectic character of the whole work, the first seven treatises of the second section, which are devoted to the natural sciences, follow Aristotle's works on physics; but the treatise on nature introduces a Neoplatonic conception to explain the religious tenets of creationism from the philosophical point of view. The

encyclopedia deals with the major Muslim religious issues, and Qur'anic quotations often support ancient doctrines. Overall, the work represents a solution to the problem of reconciling reason and faith. The political vision developed in it may identify the authors as supporters of a strictly 'Alid conception of the Imamate.

## Biographical Information on the Authors

The Ikhwān al-Ṣafā' – the “Brethren of Purity” – are the authors of the most complete medieval encyclopedia of sciences, at least two centuries before the best-known encyclopedias in the Latin world by Alexander Neckam, Thomas de Cantimpré, Vincent de Beauvais, and Bartholomaeus Anglicus. It is a collection of 52 treatises or epistles in Arabic, divided into 4 sections – propaedeutical, natural, psycho-rational, and metaphysical-theological sciences; 2 additional Epistles, the “Comprehensive” and the “Supercomprehensive,” complete the work.

The literary scholar Abū Ḥayyān al-Tawḥīdī (d. 1023), following his master Abū Sulaymān al-Sijistānī al-Mantiqī (d. 985 c.), and the Mu'tazilite theologian 'Abd al-Jabbār al-Hamadhānī (d. 1025) identify as the authors of the encyclopedia the *qāḍī* (“judge”) Abū l-Ḥasan al-Zanjānī and his friends Abū Sulaymān al-Bustī, called al-Maqḍīsī, Abū Aḥmad al-Nahrajūrī and al-'Awfī, all from Baṣra and linked to the Chancellery secretary Zayd b. Rifā'a. According to Ignaz Goldziher, their common denomination as Ikhwān al-Ṣafā' could have been borrowed from the famous Indo-Persian collection of fables *Kalila wa-Dimna* to indicate a group of loyal friends. The most convincing hypothesis, however, relates it to the contents and goals of the encyclopedia – knowledge as a means of purification and salvation. Perhaps, their name is a pseudonym hiding their true identity (Poonawala 2015, p. 264 and 272).

The abovementioned sources locate the *Rasā'il* at the second half of the tenth century. Recent studies on the correct date of the introduction of the encyclopedia in al-Andalus, however – on the

line of a seminal article by Fierro (1996) – have radically changed this view. As ascertained by de Callataÿ (2013), Kacimi (2014a, b), de Callataÿ, and Moureau (2015), the personage in question would be Maslama al-Qūrtubī (d. 964), previously confused with the scientist Maslama al-Majrīfī (d. 1007; however, the one who introduced in Spain the work as a whole is still to be considered to be Abu al-Ḥakam al-Kirmānī, d. 1066). Because of this new discovery, the timing of the *Rasā'il* has been anticipated of several decades at least. Maslama al-Qūrtubī has been recognized as the author of *Rutbat al-ḥakīm* (*The level of the wise man*) and *Ghāyat al-ḥakīm* (*The goal of the wise man*; this work being known in Latin as *Picatrix*), two important works on occult sciences that are now both to be reported to the first half of the tenth century. Scholars have also emphasized the impact of the Ikhwānian encyclopedia on *Rutba* and *Ghāya*, and it was even hypothesized Maslama to be one of the authors of the epistles (Carusi 2000). In the light of this new chronology, de Callataÿ 2014 examines the possible influence of the Ikhwān on Ibn Masarra (d. 931), a much debated thought, considering several issues all related to cosmology. Ibn Masarra is reported to the Andalusī *bāṭinī* context of the first half of the tenth century; hence, the hypothesis of him as a follower of the so-called pseudo-Empedocles is confirmed to be a “blind alley.” If the epistles were circulating in al-Andalus already before 950 CE, and their compilation must have begun some time before in the East, another consequence is that the Ikhwān influenced al-Fārābī and not vice versa, as believed so far (Hamdani 2011).

Depending on the hypothesis of an Ismā'īlī affiliation of the authors, however, it is also assumed that the encyclopedia was assembled between CE 870 and about CE 950. Their link with the Shī'a is widely recognized. The history of early Islam and politics are also approached from a Shī'ite perspective. In spite of scattered negative references to the “hidden” Imam (at different periods of its history, the Shī'a introduced the idea of an Imam in concealment who, though withdrawn by God from the eyes of men, continues to live miraculously on earth to fulfill the

essential functions of the Imamate), several Ismāʿīlī elements can be found, for example, the hierarchical structure of the universe and of “teaching,” references to septenary cycles, and the distinction between the elect and the masses. But some non-Ismāʿīlī ideas such as the invitation to celibacy proper to Sufism and the mention of feasts linked to Ṣābian rituals are also recognizable in the encyclopedia. Various scholars (such as Corbin, Marquet, and Baffioni) have related them to Ismāʿīlism, the radical branch of Shīʿism. Recently, a possible Ismāʿīlī commitment of the Ikhwān has been documented in onto-cosmology (Baffioni 2010–2011, 2011a, 2013a, c, 2014a, 2016b) and politics (Baffioni 2011b). The manuscripts examined for the new edition of the encyclopedia launched by the Institute of Ismaili Studies, London, have revealed the intervention of copyists of Ismāʿīlī persuasion (Baffioni 2016a). Some scholars (Marquet, Hamdani) bring the Ikhwān to the Fāṭimid or pre-Fāṭimid milieu, against Stern’s and Madelung’s older opinions that identified them with Qarmats (Poonawala 2015, p. 280 and 287, n 61).

Besides the attribution to Maslama al-Majrīṭī, the tradition ascribes the *Comprehensive* and *Supercomprehensive* Epistles to Aḥmad, the second of the three “veiled” Imams who came between Muḥammad b. Ismāʿīlī, the appointed successor of Jaʿfar al-Ṣādiq according to the Shīʿa, and ʿAbdallāh/ʿUbaydallāh al-Mahdī (d. 934), the founder of the Fāṭimid dynasty in 909. While one cannot deny formal and substantial relationship between the encyclopedia and the *Comprehensive* Epistle, the *Supercomprehensive* Epistle is never cited in the *Rasāʾil*, and it has been recognized by Kacimi (2015, p. 331) as the result of the Islamization of the Ikhwānian corpus.

But the questions of the identity and ideology of the Ikhwān al-Ṣafāʾ still remain unsolved. In recent times, Kacimi 2016 has come back to the relationship between the Ikhwān and the Sufi thought.

In 1150, the Sunni caliph al-Mustanjid sent the work to be burnt. Yet it survived and was translated into Persian and Turkish. Ismāʿīlīs have quoted extensively from the encyclopedia since the twelfth century, but testimonies from the

eleventh century such as that of the Persian philosopher and writer Nāṣir-i Khusraw, who copied large parts of the encyclopedia, have recently been identified as proof of much earlier diffusion of the work in Ismāʿīlī circles and hence of the Ismāʿīlī commitment of the authors.

A new hypothesis on the real author of the *Rasāʾil* has been formulated in Guillaume de Vault d’Arcy’s doctoral dissertation (discussed in 2016 at the Sorbonne University), titled *Les Épîtres des Frères en Pureté (Rasāʾil Iḥwān aṣ-ṣafā) une pensée de la totalité. Etablissement de la paternité historique et commentaire philosophique de l’ouvrage*, in 2 vols. The author tries to demonstrate that Aḥmad b. al-Ṭayyib al-Sarakhsī composed the whole encyclopedia in about 894 CE, grounding himself on the works of the Ikhwān, “héritage social du ‘cercle d’al-Kindī’.” This hypothesis should substitute, in its authors’ intention, every other previous hypothesis about the authorship and the commitment of the encyclopedia.

Rather than continuing on the line of minimizing the direct impact of the encyclopedia on the Latin Middle Ages in favor of an indirect influence, recent studies (Cordonnier 2012) have demonstrated the presence of the *Rasāʾil* in Zaragoza during the twelfth century. Manuscript research has brought new data in this field as well. MS *Parisinus Arabicus 213* (beginning of the seventeenth century) includes passages deriving from Epistle 26 *On Man as Microcosm* and Epistle 18 *On Meteorology*.

Scholars have tried to show the actuality of the Ikhwān’s thought in the contemporary world vision, hoping that the holistic perspective of the encyclopedia is shared again, for the sake of mankind and of nature (Quintern 2011; Darraz 2012).

## Thought

The encyclopedia of the Ikhwān al-Ṣafāʾ in the form we have now opens the mature stage of Muslim philosophy, the tenth and eleventh centuries. Foreign sciences are no longer a collection of subjects valuable in themselves – though modified according to the needs of the new faith, as in the

scientific writings of the “first Arabic philosopher,” Abū Ya‘qūb al-Kindī (d. 870 c.) – but an organic whole that constitutes a unitary introduction to supreme knowledge, that of God.

The treatises are based on very heterogeneous materials: Babylonian, Indian, and Iranian astrology, Indian and Persian narrative, biblical quotations and cabbalistic influences, references to the New Testament, and Christian gnosis. Most attention is paid to Greek philosophy and science. In some cases, the Ikhwān al-Ṣafā' have preserved the only Arabic fragments of Greek authors known to us, such as the story of Giges from Plato's *Republic* in Epistle 52 *On Magic*.

The ultimate goal of knowledge – the attainment of happiness that coincides with divine knowledge – is never forgotten. Purification following the abandonment of worldly pleasures cannot be attained only through esoteric religious experience but also through reason. Qur'ānic quotations often support ancient doctrines, and the encyclopedia deals with the major religious issues of Muslim faith: the unity, uniqueness, and attributes of God, the origin of the world, angels, human destiny, good and evil, theodicy, and resurrection. The Ikhwān al-Ṣafā' seem to consider prophetic messages, both esoteric and exoteric, as the second necessary means of human salvation and happiness. Hence, the science of the esoteric interpretation of the Qur'ān is emphasized as the highest divine gift.

Each Epistle states its aim; all contain a core of technical teachings and a conclusion regarding their inner meaning. Doctrines are clearly expounded, with repetitions as required by the didactic function of the treatises, which frequently urge the “beginners” to research knowledge in order to be awakened “from the sleep of matter and the negligence of ignorance” and to pray for “the assistance (*ta'yid*) of a spirit coming by God.”

The first topics addressed are arithmetic, geometry, astronomy, geography, and music. The main sources are Euclid, Nicomachus, Archimedes, Ptolemy, and the Pythagoreans. In the first section, the Ikhwān al-Ṣafā' also deal with the “universal” form of language – logic – on the basis of the contents of the first five books of the *Organon*

according to the Hellenistic asset (Porphyry's *Isagoge* and Aristotle's *Categories*, *De interpretatione*, *Prior and Posterior Analytics*). Their epistemological vision is sketched in a treatise devoted to the theoretical arts. In the complementary treatise on the practical arts, utilitarian activities are approached: these were held in high esteem in Ismā'īlism, which reinforces the hypothesis of the Ismā'īlī commitment of the Ikhwān al-Ṣafā'. Epistle 9 describes the ideal of the wise man, with Sufi positions emphasized: moral behavior – a “pure heart” – is the *conditio sine qua non* of perfect attainment of knowledge.

The eclectic character of the whole is even more evident in the other three sections. In the second section, Epistles 15–22 follow the Hellenistic arrangement of Aristotle's physical works from *Physics* to *Meteorology*. The treatises also reflect the influence of works on mineralogy, botany, and agriculture. Although the Aristotelian zoological *corpus* reached Islam, Epistle 22 *On Animals* places the subject in a metaphysical dispute on the superiority of man over animals. Epistle 20 *On Nature*, on the other hand, deviates from Aristotelianism by introducing a Neoplatonic conception of nature and an angelology.

The Ikhwān al-Ṣafā' never mention Plotinus explicitly, but the “conceptual” reading of creationism is Neoplatonic emanationism merged with neo-Pythagoreanism. The third section opens with two treatises representing the whole of reality from a numerological perspective, which demonstrates that the “Pure Brethren” are true Muslim Pythagoreans, to prove that the cosmos is organized according to quantitative models. The world is at the same time wholly dependent on God, Who is the principle of everything as the number one is the root of each number and not a number itself. The world is considered as emanated from God through the intermediary of the two first emanated entities, the Active Intellect and the Universal Soul. The knowledge of the whole encyclopedia leads step by step to the knowledge of God.

Another important feature of the encyclopedia is the conception of man as a microcosm and as the most perfect of the beings in the sublunar world, the link between earth and heaven.



The twofold approach to the issue of the attainment of human salvation and happiness fully legitimizes the ancient sciences, considered by orthodox theologians to be vehicles of heresy and even atheism. So the encyclopedia represents a possible solution to the problem of reconciling reason and faith, philosophy and religion.

The political vision of the Ikhwān al-Ṣafāʾ could clarify their ideological commitment. They consider the debate on the identity of the messenger's deputy as the main cause of division in the *umma* (the Muslim community) until their time. The Ikhwān al-Ṣafāʾ do not state clearly their idea as to who the deputy should be, but a political target of one of the authors might have been the ninth-century 'Abbāsīd caliph al-Ma'mūn. Hence the Ikhwān al-Ṣafāʾ could be identified with the supporters of a 'Alid conception of the imamate, according to which the family of the Prophet in the strict sense only are the guarantors of the true tradition concerning succession in the caliphate. A "perfect city" (*al-madīna al-fāḍila*) is featured by the Ikhwān al-Ṣafāʾ, less known but not less worthy than that proposed by their contemporary al-Fārābī, in which mutual love is the basis and the ultimate goal of the community. The authors often foreshadow the defeat of "evil dynasties": even though their presentation of such a city does not help us to ascertain whether they had in mind a spiritual rule or a true government such as that of the Fāṭimid caliph (Hamdani 1999, p. 81), scholars have supposed that the Ikhwān al-Ṣafāʾ foretold the fall of the 'Abbāsīds (Tibawi 1955, p. 37) or were opponents of the Buyid regime (Farhan 1999, pp. 30–31). Their political vision also explains their sharp words against wars of religion.

## Cross-References

- ▶ Abū Sulaymān al-Sijistānī al-Mantiqī
- ▶ al-Fārābī, Abū Naṣr
- ▶ al-Kindī, Abū Yūsuf Ya'qūb ibn Ishāq
- ▶ al-Tawḥīdī, Abū Ḥayyān
- ▶ Ismā'īlī Philosophical Tradition
- ▶ Natural Philosophy, Arabic
- ▶ Plotinus, Arabic

- ▶ Political Philosophy, Arabic
- ▶ Porphyry, Arabic
- ▶ Theology Versus Philosophy in the Arab World
- ▶ Translations from Greek into Arabic

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## Impetus

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### Abstract

In the Latin West, the concept of impetus was fully developed in the fourteenth century. John Buridan was the first to use this term in order to describe the projectile motion, the free fall, and the motion of the heavenly spheres. The discussion started with Aristotelian theory of projectile motion presented in his *Physics*. Aristotle claims that each violent motion, such as projectile one and freely falling body, need a constant presence of a mover, and therefore when a mobile is no more in touch with its mover, a medium takes its role. Later, Greek and Arabic commentators of Aristotle noticed that a medium resists rather than promotes motion. Thus, they offer an alternative theory, that a mobile is moved thanks to a force impressed by the mover. This theory was developed in the Middle Ages, and finally it became a kind of an "official" technical concept of medieval mechanics. The medieval different concepts of impetus finally lead to formulate proper definitions of violent and natural motions and to replace the whole Aristotelian system. Although ontologically different, impetus is analogous to Galileo's early use of *impeto* and Newton's "quantity of motion."

From antiquity, the motion of projectile was one of the main points of criticism of Aristotelian theory of motion. On the ground of Aristotle's theory, such motion was difficult to explain, for a projectile motion, as a violent one, demanded a distinct mover which continuously has to be in contact with the thing moved. In Book Seven of the *Physics*, Aristotle (384–322 BCE) formulated two principles concerning the cause of violent motion: first, that “anything which is moved is moved by something,” and, second, that “a ‘proximate’ mover . . . is correlative to what it moves.” To explain a continuity of projectile motion, Aristotle supposed that the original force transmitted the power of motion to the air. In his Book Eight of the *Physics*, he described two theories. The first, so-called theory of *antiperistasis* (in the sixth century CE developed by Simplicius), which he probably took from Plato (*Timaeus*, 79–80), that is, of mutual replacement of the air by the projectile so that the air comes around behind to push the mobile, is rejected by Aristotle. The second theory is his own solution and states that the air is not only moved by the original mover but it also receives a power or force to act as a mover; this power is transmitted to the next air, which acts as a mover. Thus, a projectile is successively pushed in the direction, which the original motor intended. When the transmission ceases, the projectile falls down. In antiquity, Hipparchus (second century BCE) rejected Aristotelian assertion that it was the air that provided the motive force responsible for violent motion of a body. The next step was taken by John Philoponus (sixth century CE), who, on the grounds of both reason and experiment, was looking for an alternative explanation. He concluded that there must be an incorporeal motive force that is absorbed by the projectile and causes its motion until it is spent by resistance. The concept of incorporeal force explains also natural motion such as free fall of a body and the motion of the heavens. In Philoponus' opinion, gravity and levity are forces impressed by the Creator; God also impressed an incorporeal force in the spheres of the heavens moving them ever since. Philoponus, however, never fully developed the reason why it should be as he thought; it seemed to him an elementary fact.

Philoponus' commentary on the *Physics* survived only in parts and was probably translated into Latin in the sixteenth century. But his views seem to be of considerable influence among the Arabic commentators of Aristotle, who probably knew at least some of Philoponus' remarks in Book Four. They used the theory in critiques of Aristotle's account of motion. To describe the violent motion, al-Fārābī (c. 870–950) uses the term *mail qasrī* as a substitute for impressed force. The famous physician and philosopher Avicenna (980–1037) discussed the problem of motion in his *Kitāb-al-Shifā'* (*Book of the Healing of the Soul*, which is his commentary on the works of Aristotle). He rejected both ancient Greek theories and also that of Philoponus. Avicenna supported a theory of a *mail* - an inclination, which is transferred by the original projector to the projectile. This inclination, however, is not a force itself but rather an instrument of the force of the mover to communicate its action to the thing moved. The *mail* is something permanent but destructible. Avicenna distinguished a “natural *mail*” (*mail tabī'ī*), which is the cause of natural motion of falling bodies and a “violent *mail*” (*mail qasrī*), the cause of projectile motion. If there were no resistance to the *mail*, for example, in a void, it would persist infinitely like the motion it generates. Abu'l-Barakāt (d. c. 1164) modified Avicenna's theory and stated that the *mail qasrī* is self-expending, so there could be a violent motion in a void, which would come to an end without external resistance.

Although none of the aforementioned ideas appeared in translation in Latin West, thirteenth century authors considered the impetus theory and they either rejected it as contrary to Aristotle's learning or supported it as much more satisfactory solution of the problem of projectile motion. Roger Bacon (c. 1214–1292) rejected the influence of the power of the projector in projectile, since there would be no contact of the mover and the moved, which is necessary for motion. On the other hand, Richard Rufus of Cornwall (d. c. 1260) suggested that the projector makes an “impression” on the projectile proportional to the weight of the object. Thomas Aquinas presented both solutions of the problem: in his

*Physics* and *De caelo* he supported Aristotelian explanation, while in his *Quaestiones disputatae* he seriously considered the influence of an agent by means of an instrument.

In the fourteenth century, thinkers developed two theories of impetus explaining the projectile motions, acceleration of falling bodies, and the uniform motions of celestial bodies. The first theory suggests that impetus is a self-expending force; the second one states that it is permanent. In his commentary on the *Sentences*, Franciscus de Marchia (d. c. 1344) used the first concept of impetus as an illustration for the continued action of the sacraments. In his opinion the motion of a projectile is continued by an exhaustible “force left behind” (a *virtus derelicta*) in the projectile. The same kind of force is impressed by intelligences in the heavens, which would continue their motion for some time. Also Nicholas Oresme, (c. 1320–1382), who used the concept of impetus mostly in a context of free fall, asserted that it does not have a permanent nature and it arises from initial acceleration and then acts further to accelerate the speed. The theory of permanent impetus was elaborated by John Buridan (d. 1361) and accepted by other Parisian masters like Albert of Saxony (c. 1316–1390) and Marsilius of Inghen (c. 1340–1396). In their opinion impetus is a not self-expending quality, and it can be only diminished by resistance. In the case of projectile motion impetus is the same as the force impressed by the mover, and its quantity depends on a primary matter. If there is more matter, a greater force can be impressed. In a case of free fall, impetus is a cause of acceleration of a heavy body. In the case of motion of celestial bodies, impetus is the force impressed by God, which causes their everlasting circular motion. This concept of impetus helps to describe all types of motion: terrestrial, violent, and natural motion of heavy bodies as well as motion of celestial, nonmaterial bodies. The two Aristotelian principles of motion, however, remain untouched: a thing moved demands a constant action of the mover.

In the sixteenth century, many authors, especially the Italians, accepted an impressed force as a cause of the continuation of projectile motion. In the discussions the concept of impetus was

clarified and led Giovanni Battista Benedetti (1530–1590) to assert that a body moved by an impressed force would move on a rectilinear, not a curved line. Benedetti accepted that the increase of speed in motion is the result of a continual action of the force, although he concluded that impetus decreases continuously. Galileo Galilei (1564–1642) in his *Two New Sciences* (1638) finally approached the modern conception of momentum. He characterized impetus as an effect and measure of motion and treated as a function of weight and speed. Also René Descartes (1596–1650) defined “quantity of motion” or momentum as the product of quantity of matter and speed. The final step was taken by Isaac Newton (1642–1727), who in his *Principia* (1687) formulated the modern conception of impetus understood as kinetic energy, that is, as the energy of an inertial mass in motion and of momentum as the product of inertia mass and velocity leaving medieval theories behind.

## Cross-References

- ▶ [Abū l-Barakāt al-Baġdādī](#)
- ▶ [Albert of Saxony](#)
- ▶ [Aristotelianism in the Greek, Latin, Syriac, Arabic, and Hebrew Traditions](#)
- ▶ [al-Fārābī, Abū Naṣr](#)
- ▶ [Francis of Marchia](#)
- ▶ [Ibn Sīnā, Abū ‘Alī \(Avicenna\)](#)
- ▶ [John Philoponus](#)
- ▶ [Marsilius of Inghen](#)
- ▶ [Natural Philosophy, Arabic](#)
- ▶ [Nicholas Oresme](#)
- ▶ [Richard Rufus of Cornwall](#)
- ▶ [Roger Bacon](#)
- ▶ [Thomas Aquinas](#)

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## Induction

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### Abstract

Induction is a form of non-demonstrative reasoning which proceeds by enumerations of singular cases in order to form a universal proposition which subsumes all of these cases. The problem of induction as a scientific method lies in the jump from the particular to the universal. The problem can be distinguished threefold. (1) What is the logical form of such an argument? (How many observations are needed? If the enumeration is not complete, how is this incompleteness supplemented?) (2) Upon what does the nomological regularity rest that is the basis of the inductive approach? (3) What type of certainty can provide a rationale for induction if it cannot claim to be necessary?

The medieval reflection on the status of induction inherits the Aristotelian definition of induction as a progression from the individual to the universal (*Topics* I, 12; *Prior Analytics*, II, 21–22; *Posterior Analytics*, II, 19). Induction is a reasoning that goes from what is most known, the most known for us, to what is more known in itself, by uncovering the properties of things. Aristotle

does not directly raise the issue of justification of induction, but he makes it possible indirectly by distinguishing a complete induction from an incomplete induction. The complete induction described in the *Prior Analytics* proceeds from an exhaustive enumeration of the particular cases and allows a reduction of induction to a syllogistic form. This will be constantly reaffirmed in the Middle Ages: to make an evident induction, it must be reduced to a syllogism. However, such a reduction is not possible when the complete count of cases exceeds our capacity, as in the enumeration of individuals in the sublunary world.

A first medieval solution to this problem, a solution greatly influenced by Neoplatonism, is found in Robert Grosseteste's commentary on the *Posterior Analytics*. The conjunction of repeated observations, and of the work of memory on these observations enables reason to form a universal proposition from the singulars to the extent that such a process is backed by a theory of divine illumination (inspired by St. Augustine)—what is known in potency, wrapped in the sensible is unveiled and known in actuality (see his *Commentary on the Posterior Analytics*, II, 6, p. 403ss). All sensible knowledge is tentative and fallible as long as it has not been guaranteed and transformed by the inner light (see *De veritate*, p. 142). Induction is therefore an important element of science insofar as it can awaken the soul.

The second solution incorporates the distinction between power and act, but freed from its Platonic baggage. Hence, Thomas Aquinas places the theory of the universal potency in individual things, at the basis of induction (see *Exposition of the Posterior Analytics*, I, lect. 62 & II, lect. 20). Induction is extended to a form of intellectual abstraction. This process of observing the universal in the particulars is a grasping of a universal content in the particulars. There is thus in the individual a set of properties that are tendencies or inclinations and that tend to produce certain effects.

Duns Scotus is critical of this type of solution that defends the apodictic dimension of the inductive generalization with its foundation in the universality of natural species and genera in that



induction only uncovers a nature common to all experienced singulars. To base induction on the presence of a common nature which inheres in the singulars largely begs the question insofar as such a nature can be known by induction on these singulars. Therefore, this solution does not solve one of the main difficulties linked to induction, namely to guarantee that the singulars that have not been experienced behave the same way as those who already have (see *Questions on the Metaphysics*, I, q. 4).

Duns Scotus considers the case of experimental knowledge and induction as part of a broader debate about the certainty of knowledge (see *Commentary on the Sentences*, I, d. 3, p. 1, q. 4). Inductive knowledge is clearly based on two parameters: (a) the frequency of an event and (b) the addition of a causal principle. The challenge of these two parameters is to ensure that if a repeated experience reveals a constant reaction on the part of the natural agents, then one can conclude with infallible certainty that the effect is specific to this agent and that it will always produce the same effect. The problem is to immediately supplement the incompleteness of observation, and thus preserve the dual conditions of science that are subjective certainty (the firmness) and evidentness (the exclusion of error). The transition from the simple frequency of something empirically confirmed to the universality and the necessity required by science depends on a causal principle, known *per se* according to Duns Scotus, and which states that the effect that follows from a non-free cause often is the natural effect of this cause. The strategy of justification of induction is based on a conception of epistemic justification whereby the principles known by the intellect itself provide the foundation and guarantee for the whole system of our knowledge, including the sensitive. Indeed, what matters in this new version of the theory of induction is that the causal principle is presented as an analytic principle known to be evident by the intellect when it grasps the nominal definitions of the concepts of cause and effect. Induction is thus based on a set of observational premises, to which it adds a necessary premise, known *per se*, namely the causal principle. Duns Scotus nevertheless insists on the necessity to repeat the observations and to

vary the circumstances in order to identify the concomitance between a nature and an accident. However, what permits the jump from the concomitance to the natural causal law is that the causal principle is a principle known *per se*. By definition, a natural cause produces a single effect and will always do so. The frequency hence allows the application of the principle of causality. The certainty of the intellect thus stems, on the one hand, from the consideration of a part of a non-free cause, and, on the other, from a consideration of a part of the effect. The concept of frequency permits the exclusion of any cases of hazardous causalities. An induction that concludes from the start of several effects passed from the repetition of these effects to the future draws its certainty from the causal principle which guarantees the uniformity of nature. Reduced to its skeleton, the approach to induction proposed by Duns Scotus is: (1) let  $p$  be the report of the observation  $O$  at time  $t$ , then “ $x$  is with  $y$  at  $t$ ”; (2) let  $p_1, p_2,$  and  $p_n$  be the report of  $O$  at  $t + 1, t + 2,$   $t + n$ , then “ $x$  is with  $y$  at  $t + 1,$ ” “ $x$  is with  $y$  at  $t + 2,$ ” and “ $x$  is with  $y$  at  $t + n$ ”; (3) the conjunction of  $p_1, p_2,$  and  $p_n$  permits of a deduction in a uniform manner of  $x$  and  $y$  at all times; (4) the application of the causal principle to “ $x$  with  $y$  is at  $t + n$ ” permits of a deduction in a necessary manner to “ $x$  is always with  $y,$ ” therefore; (5) “it is necessary that  $x$  is always with  $y$ ” is a law of nature. Duns Scotus stresses that induction provides the lowest degree of scientific knowledge, even if it is evident and infallible. Indeed, induction rests on a necessary premise (the principle of causality) and one contingent principle (the repeated observation of similar events). Only a syllogistic reduction would necessitate induction, that is to say, the transition from knowledge *quia* to knowledge *propter quid*. Since it is impossible to demonstrate *a priori* that such a property belongs to such a subject, induction does not give us knowledge of the fact, but only its possibility.

Scotus’ position gives rise to a larger question about the concept of causality, and is object to two types of criticism. One can distinguish a critique on the level of logic, about the status of causal inferences, and another on the level of epistemology about the justification of scientific statements. This double critique is put forward by Nicholas of

Autrecourt. In fact, Nicholas ascertains the impossibility of inductive reasoning to establish the evidentness. For sensible knowledge to be evident it should be based on a complete appearance of the thing. However, since an immediate experience does not provide us with a complete appearance about the singulars, an induction seeking to grasp a universal, a whole, which is necessarily not known, is only known partially due to the limits of our senses and cannot meet the criteria of an evident perception. Nicholas of Autrecourt strengthens this dimension of probability of induction by showing that the principle of causality does not compensate for the incompleteness of the enumeration. It addresses on this occasion the question of prediction. Nicholas criticizes the idea that repetition of an event is sufficient for us to ensure its evidence in the future (see *Exigit ordo*, p. 119). If I have repeatedly observed that the administration of rhubarb can purge bile, then may I conclude that the proposition “rhubarb treats bile” is a scientifically valid principle at any time and any place? From an empirical point of view, we, first of all, have no evident perception of the causes nor, secondly, about the fact of causation. In fact, enumeration of the causes is impossible, so we do not avail ourselves of a complete appearance. It is theoretically impossible, then, to ensure that no unknown cause has not acted upon the phenomenon observed. Most importantly, we have no clear perception of a necessary connection between cause and effect, we perceive a rapport of spatiotemporal contiguity between two things, but nothing entitles us to say it will always happen in any situation. We therefore perceive no causal necessity, but only conjunctions of events that repeat themselves. From this the critique follows logically by showing that the necessity is not deductive. Indeed, for Nicholas A and B are two absolute things, different, and in no way does one signify the inclusion in the other, which is a necessary condition of the validity of an inference. We can, if we want to add a premise for this reason that “the course of nature is uniform or not suspended,” or that “the cause is not prevented.” These are premises, which guarantee induction against extraordinary situations as a divine deception and Nicholas accepts them as probable, but they do nothing to solve the problem

of induction. All we can claim to have is a *habitus conjecturativus*, a disposition to speculate on the future based upon the observation of several similar past events: the repetition of the same event produces a habit and expectations of the future. What is meant by the concept of *habitus conjecturativus*? Without a doubt we have a natural tendency to engage in inductive generalizations. The *habitus conjecturativus* then combines the result to an idea. This is the principle of induction.

## Cross-References

- ▶ [Causality](#)
- ▶ [Epistemology](#)
- ▶ [John Buridan](#)
- ▶ [John Duns Scotus](#)
- ▶ [Nicholas of Autrecourt](#)
- ▶ [Posterior Analytics, Commentaries on Aristotle's](#)
- ▶ [Robert Grosseteste](#)
- ▶ [Skepticism](#)
- ▶ [Syllogism, Theories of](#)

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juridical procedure in comparison to other forms of procedure: *accusatio* and *denuntiatio*. The entry then describes the use of the procedure in episcopal law courts that tried clerics and others charged with an ecclesiastical crime, its value in overcoming formidable rules favoring clerical defendants, and its prominence in the Fourth Lateran Council of 1215 and subsequent influence on secular courts as well. It then moves on to the history of the criminal prosecution of heresy, the emergence of the Mendicant Orders and the pastoral concerns for penance, the papal commissioning of Dominicans as inquisitors of heretical depravity (*inquisitio hereticae pravitatis*) in the 1230s.

The earliest inquisitors followed the *ordo iudiciarius*, the formal legal procedure of canon and civil law (*ius commune*) that was developed through the twelfth century, but they also added variations when special circumstances warranted them. There is a description of an inquisitorial trial for heresy and a consideration of the emergence of a technology and instructional guidebooks for inquisitors. The entry concludes with a discussion of the relatively limited use of inquisitors of heretical depravity in matters touching professionally privileged corporate groups like faculties of theology and universities and the adoption of inquisitions of heretical depravity in early modern states.

Inquisition, from the Latin substantive *inquisitio* (pl. *inquisitiones*, from *quaerere* “search,” and by extension “inquiry,” “investigation” – in a Roman legal sense, “a search for proofs”), functioned in medieval Latin in one general and several particular senses. It might mean a general inquiry commanded by someone in power in response to information, complaint, *clamor*, or appeal; e.g., Charlemagne’s charges to clerical and lay investigators, *missi dominici*, to investigate regional irregularities in his empire or to bishops charged with searching out residual pagan practices or clerical misbehavior. William the Conqueror designated the investigations of property rights that resulted in Domesday Book

## Inquisition

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### Abstract

The entry begins with a consideration of the different general and particular meanings of the term *inquisition*, first focusing on its sense as a term of legal procedure in the late twelfth century and its later specialized meaning in the criminal prosecution of heresy. The entry continues with a brief history of the

as *inquisitiones*. Several twelfth-century popes instructed bishops to carry out an *inquisitio veritatis*, “inquiry as to the truth,” of various disputed legal matters, including doctrinal dissent, within their dioceses. Bishops had always been responsible for the spiritual life of their dioceses, charged with the responsibility for personal visitations on a regular schedule, and they were judges ordinary for serious ecclesiastical offenses and in some cases secular ones as well. Their visitations and formal inquiries were two vehicles for obtaining information and initiating further hearings, in most cases responding to *clamor*, public denunciation. Such episcopal inquiries and the later and more precise inquisition of heretical depravity were later justified by citing God’s response to the outcry against Sodom and Gomorrah in Genesis 18: 21 and the parable of the rich man who sought an accounting from his steward in Luke 16: 1–7. God’s inquest in Eden (Genesis 3: 8–13) was frequently cited by jurists and apologists in the same context.

The most widely known particular sense of the word designates a form of legal procedure of a kind followed in some instances in Roman law in which a single magistrate responding to a public complaint in certain matters handled an entire case from initial investigation to final judgment. But the practice largely ceased in the West after the sixth century, surviving only in occasional ecclesiastical circumstances, notably church councils and in matters touching the ruler’s person, obligations, and property.

One of the outcomes of Carolingian ecclesiastical vigilance in the eighth and ninth centuries (750–950) was the protected legal status of the clergy, laid out in a number of canon law collections (all of them local in origin and limited in authority), the most famous of which was the ninth-century partially forged collection of disciplinary texts known as Pseudo-Isidore. Such canonical collections, as well as the actions of church councils and episcopal visitations, created a more or less common ecclesiastical procedural culture in western Europe before the emergence of learned law, the *Ius commune*, in the twelfth century. That culture distinguished between lay persons and clergy, generally regarded the

operation of law as a form of dispute settlement that was based on several forms of action: *denunciatio/compurgatio* and *accusatio*. The former was based on Matthew 18:15 and required a *denunciatio evangelica*, a denunciation by local laymen of good reputation – synodal witnesses – that was intended to lead the person denounced to penance and what was called “charitable correction” of his spiritual fault. Its purpose was the reintegration of the accused into society. It also often entailed compurgation – the testimony by respectable witnesses to the character of the accused. The other was *accusatio*, in which a party claiming injury or damage had to accuse the person responsible before a competent local court, prosecute his own case, and, if he failed, to suffer the same penalties that the accused would have received. The *accusatio* process might also entail the judicial combat or the ordeal. Both procedures generally satisfied the relatively limited legal needs of an agro-literate, small-scale warrior/peasant society.

The beginnings of the transformation of that society in the late tenth- and eleventh-century reform movement led to a more precisely articulated community, a sharper distinction between laity and clergy, and the gradual centralizing of ecclesiastical authority in the papal office. Reformers also identified two clerical faults – sexual activity on the part of clergy and misuse of ecclesiastical property by clergy and laity – that they designated and misnamed as heresies – Nicolaitism and Simony. Their term *haeresis* was drawn from much earlier heresiological texts from the second through the eighth centuries, and their use of it also began to be applied to various movements among both clergy and laity that had begun as rejections of and demands for further reform and had turned into dissent from increasingly articulated theological doctrines. Such dissent was handled by the traditional methods of local episcopal synods or provincial or general church councils, appeals to the popes, or voluntary self-censorship. But in cases of wider diffusion of dissent traditional methods proved cumbersome and often encountered widespread opposition. Individual bishops themselves adopted varying attitudes and policies toward

such dissent, never consistently and often inefficiently, ignorantly, or indifferently. Even the most widely used and most influential collection of classical canon law, the two recensions of the *Decretum* of Gratian (1139–1140, 1140–1150) although they said much about heresy, said little of the criminal prosecution of heretics.

Although several well-attended church councils in the early twelfth century (Second Lateran, 1139; Reims, 1157, and Tours, 1163) identified and denounced several devotional movements as heresies and declared their adherents excommunicated and their property confiscated, much depended on individual regions and the energy and interests of their ecclesiastical and lay rulers. The popes' chief early response was to launch preaching missions into areas said to contain heretics and to urge secular authorities to aid in their discovery and disciplining.

The new problem of criminous clergy and lay dissent required a new form of imposing ecclesiastical discipline, since the older forms proved more and more cumbersome in effecting clerical reform. That new form was the inquisitorial procedure developed in the twelfth century and finalized in the thirteenth. The procedure was re-established initially by papal decision in canon law in episcopal courts around the turn of the thirteenth century, primarily for the trials of clerics charged with serious offenses. Its primary engineer was Pope Innocent III (1198–1216), a graduate of the new theology schools at Paris and a prelate with considerable experience of the law. In December 1199, Innocent issued the decretal *Licet Heli* which is, with several other Innocentian decretals of the period 1199–1207, considered the starting-point for the extensive adoption of *inquisitio* procedure in ecclesiastical courts. It was greatly elaborated upon by the same pope in canon 8 of the Fourth Lateran Council of 1215, *Qualiter et quando*. Initially devised as a solution to the procedural difficulties of prosecuting criminous clergy, the *inquisitio* procedure gradually spread to secular courts.

*Inquisitio* procedure came to predominate in ecclesiastical courts, but it also gradually reduced, but did not eliminate in secular law, the main

earlier form, that of *accusatio* with its attendant ordeals, trials by combat, and dispute settlement. *Inquisitio* procedure, on the other hand, was in the hands of a judge (a bishop or someone appointed by episcopal or papal authority or papal legatine authority) from the beginning of a case until the end. From the bishop's responsibility to determine whether or not a crime had been committed to the final verdict and sentencing of a convicted offender, the judge governed the course of the search for evidence and the trial. The notoriety of the offense (*clamosa insinuatio*) or the ill-fame of the accused (*mala fama*) was said to act in place of the accuser. In addition, the importance of witnesses, written documents, more frequent auricular confession, and the theology of penance had grown considerably in importance during the twelfth century. In addition, the accumulation of a literature of criminal procedure had grown up in the twelfth century and was consulted in the *ordo iudiciarius*, a body of procedural rules that had grown up through the twelfth century that greatly helped to standardize both canon and secular law over the course of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. The trial of a cleric by inquisitorial procedure could now be more deliberate, better organized and unequivocally decided according to the recently formulated *ordo iudiciarius*, descriptions of proper judicial procedure from the beginning of a trial to the final disposition of a case. The *ordo iudiciarius* itself had already been insisted on in ecclesiastical proceedings by Alexander III (r. 1159–1181) and later twelfth-century canonists. Innocent III emphasized the importance of the *inquisitio* procedure and the responsibilities of episcopal visitation in the eighth canon of the Fourth Lateran Council of 1215, *Qualiter et quando*. He also supported canon 8 by two other canons: canon 18 prohibited clerics from participating in the judicial ritual of ordeal, and canon 38 required the ecclesiastical judge to retain a scribe whose written record of every trial could be accurately reviewed upon appeal. The council also required all baptized Christians to make annual confession of their sins (canon 21) to their parish priest. By reintroducing and then standardizing inquisitorial procedure in criminal cases involving

clerics, Innocent III contributed a new component to criminal legal procedure that eventually went far beyond the disciplining of erring clergy and was adopted widely by many secular courts. Innocent III's institution of the *inquisitio* procedure was intended to facilitate such prosecutions when other forms proved inadequate or, as in the case of the ordeal, became virtually prohibited. The *inquisitio* procedure was also largely adopted by secular criminal procedure by the fourteenth century. The legal reforms of Innocent III reflect both the emergence of the legal theory of papal *plenitudo potestatis* and the later doctrine that disobedience to papal authority was itself a serious crime, indeed, heresy.

A second particular term, derived from and often confused with the first, *inquisitio haereticae pravitatis*, "the inquiry into heretical depravity," and its agent, the "inquisitor of heretical depravity," came into existence by papal command during the second quarter of the thirteenth century during the pontificate of Gregory IX (1227–1241) to regulate the criminal prosecution of heresy by appointing papal judges delegate or sub-delegate using the *inquisitio* legal procedure to seek out heretics in particular regions for particular periods, thus adding a papally-commissioned official to the existing cadre of episcopal officials and sometimes to the staffs of papal legates to whom they might be attached. Such specialized judicial officials had no greater power than the bishop or legate they served, but their specific focus and, eventually, their greater experience in their specialty meant that they often took the matter of heresy out of the hands of episcopal or legatine officials.

The *inquisitio haereticae pravitatis* is most usefully considered both in terms of the history of ecclesiastical legal procedure and in those of the history of the criminal prosecution of heresy, since focusing exclusively on the latter has often led scholars to neglect its original rootedness in the former.

The extensive literature on heresy in the early church and in the criminal laws of the later Roman Empire were revived in the disputes of the eleventh- and early twelfth-century reform movement, and the term *haeresis* was applied to the

most prominent instances of clerical misconduct, Simony and Nicolaitism – respectively the lay bestowal of ecclesiastical office or property or the buying and selling of ecclesiastical office or property, and clerical marriage. The term "heresy" then began to be applied to various movements among the clergy and laity that appeared to dissent from increasingly articulated theological doctrines. In the cases of such academic thinkers as Berengar of Tours, Peter Abelard, or Gilbert of Poitiers, such dissent, which usually reached only small and learned publics and was often highly technical, was handled by local episcopal synods or provincial or general church councils, papal appeals, local ecclesiastical superiors, or voluntary self-censorship. But in the case of movements of any wider diffusion conventional methods of ecclesiastical prosecution proved cumbersome and often encountered widespread opposition. Individual bishops themselves adopted varying attitudes and policies toward such dissent, never consistently and often inefficiently or indifferently. Although several church councils in the early twelfth century (Second Lateran, 1139; Reims, 1157, and Tours, 1163) identified and denounced different devotional movements as heresies and declared their adherents excommunicated and their property confiscated, the popes' chief response was to launch preaching missions into areas thought to contain heretics and to urge secular authorities to aid in their discovery and prosecution. Even the most widely used collection of systematic canon law, the two recensions of the *Decretum* of Gratian (1139–1140 and 1140–1150) said much about heresy, but little about the criminal prosecution of heretics.

Only during the pontificate of Alexander III (1159–1181) did popes begin to urge regular episcopal visitations within ecclesiastical provinces and dioceses to inquire after heretics and employ the *ordo iudiciarius*. The Third Lateran Council of 1179 (c. 27) laid out stiff penalties for heretics and their supporters as well as urging the secular powers to prosecute them to the fullest. In 1184 Pope Lucius III (1181–1185) issued the decretal *Ad abolendam*, legally defining heretics, characterizing different groups of heretics, specifying penalties for clerics and laity convicted of heresy,



condemning negligent prelates, repeating Alexander III's call for regular episcopal visitations to places where heresy had been reported, and spelling out the necessity of lay rulers to assist in the extirpation of heresy. The widened scope of concern for heresy led in 1199 to another decretal of Innocent III, *Vergentis in senium*, which identified heresy as treason to God, and therefore a public crime. In his decretal *Cum ex officii nostri* of 1207 Innocent III precisely specified the criminal punishments for convicted heretics. The appearance of *Vergentis* in the same year as Innocent's *Licet Heli* indicates that methods of legal procedure and the criminal characterization of heresy were moving on tracks that might soon converge. The treatment of both topics in the canons of the Fourth Lateran Council of 1215 (cc. 3, 8, 18, 21, 38) drew them even closer.

The Council was held during the course of the Albigensian Crusade (1208–1229), a military enterprise in Languedoc commissioned by Innocent III, directed against Christians, and furnished with all the privileges that had been given for crusades in the east. The Crusade was followed by the triumphalist Council of Toulouse in 1229 and the Council of Bourges in 1235, whose canons ordered that in certain places one priest and three laymen were to inquire diligently concerning heretics in hiding, that secular lords do the same, that repentant heretics wear distinguishing crosses, that no layperson possess any text of scripture except for the Psalter, the Holy Office, and the Hours of the Virgin, as well as other disciplinary measures. The measures of this and later councils and popes were taken to conserve a now-articulated system of belief and behavior across Latin Christian Europe. Conciliar legislation of this kind was paralleled by the legislation of secular rulers, notably the king-emperor Frederick II, whose legislation between 1220 and 1239 was the first substantial secular legislation of its kind since the later Roman Empire. It was quickly followed by the statute of Annibaldi, the Senator of Rome, in 1231.

The pastoral and disciplinary functions of councils were significantly strengthened by the establishment of the Mendicant Orders – the Order of Preachers (founded by St. Dominic)

and the Order of Friars Minor (founded by St. Francis of Assisi) – in the years just after the Fourth Lateran Council, their approval by popes Innocent III and Honorius III (1216–1227), and their direct and loyal subjection to the popes and the curia by means of Cardinal-Protectors. The Order of Preachers in particular devoted itself to enthusiastic preaching in Languedoc, insisting that its preachers be well trained (as they were also in hearing confessions, since most of them entered the Order from university circles) and eventually organized under an elected Master who governed the order with an annual General Chapter, consisting of the priors of the provinces into which the Order was divided. The articulated organization and intellectual discipline of the Order of Preachers, as well as their humble material way of life, their effective preaching techniques, their mobility, and their lack of local ties or sympathies made them far more effective preachers against heresy than their twelfth-century monastic (usually Cistercian) predecessors. In the wake of the Fourth Lateran Council, the Albigensian Crusade, and the heightened ecclesiastical concerns about heresy in the Languedoc and elsewhere, Pope Gregory IX found yet another use for the new Orders.

In 1227 he commissioned a Dominican of Cologne, Conrad of Marburg, with two colleagues to investigate heretics in the Middle Rhine region. In 1231 he did the same with the prior and brothers of the Dominican convents in Regensburg, Friesach, and Strasbourg, and in 1233 he commissioned Robert le Bougre to act in the same role in the kingdom of France. In the same year Gregory IX wrote to the provincial priors of the Dominican Order commanding them to select appropriate brothers to be sent to Languedoc in order to assist episcopal inquisitions. He simultaneously wrote to the bishops of Bourges, Bordeaux, Narbonne, and Auch that he was sending friars preachers to assist them in discovering and extirpating heresy from their dioceses. This territorial mandate was continued by assignments of later inquisitors that centered their activities on dioceses, provinces, cities, and kingdoms. The first inquisitors of heretical depravity entered Languedoc in 1234.

Because their brief was narrow and specific and their training largely theological, the early inquisitors were constrained by the legal procedures used in episcopal courts, that is, the standard procedural rules of the *ordo iudiciarius*, often obtaining professional advice from jurists. Local bishops and papal legates also pressed secular magistrates to cooperate with the inquisitors. But the inquisitors' special mandate, the seriousness of the offences with which they dealt, and procedural problems raised by crimes of thought led to several variations on conventional procedure.

When inquisitors and their assistants entered an area, they summoned the population to an assembly at which they read aloud their official credentials, preached a sermon on the dangers of heresy and the obligation of all Christians to discover and denounce it, and announced a period of grace (a legal innovation by the inquisitors of heretical depravity), usually 2–4 weeks, during which any heretics or sympathizers might confess voluntarily and receive a light penance. Others were urged to identify those they suspected of heresy. At the same time, the inquisitors received reports of concealed heretics, searched for witnesses, and began gathering evidence against those accused. This part of the procedure later came to be called the *inquisitio generalis*. At the end of the period of grace, those accused of heresy were arrested and the charges against them read and explained. They were imprisoned, and their interrogations begun on the basis of evidence collected so far. The accused were also forced to enter a plea and to swear an oath to testify truthfully concerning themselves and others, thus risking a charge of perjury if they were found to have lied under oath. The accused were required to be present during the proceedings. If they were not present, their absence was either permitted or condemned as contumacious. All proceedings were recorded in writing – in Latin, although the local vernacular was used in the hearings. This part of the procedure was later termed the *inquisitio specialis*.

Since the use of torture had come in the *ordo iudiciarius* to be a legal instrument of the *inquisitio* procedure when other evidence proved

insufficient for conviction, torture could also be employed in certain instances in cases of heresy, although there was considerable sensitivity to the problem of torture and often criticism of its too frequent use. Torture was first permitted in trials for heresy (although not administered by clerics) by the decretal *Ad extirpanda* issued by Pope Innocent IV (1243–1254) in 1252. Inquisitors who participated in torture sessions were permitted to dispense each other in the later decretal *Ut negotium* of Pope Alexander IV (1254–1261) in 1256.

At the end of their stay in a particular place, the inquisitors pronounced sentences at a public meeting with a sermon and saw to the administration of punishments – most frequently the penitential wearing of yellow crosses, expiatory pilgrimages, fines, or some form of imprisonment (inquisitorial prisons were the earliest form of punitive imprisonment in Europe), but occasionally death for relapsed heretics, which entailed their being “relaxed” to the “secular arm,” since clerics were prohibited from shedding blood. Throughout the entire process, it is clear that the success or failure of a particular mission depended greatly on the degree of local cooperation it received, from that of the local bishop to that of the secular authorities. Local resistance often proved extremely effective when such cooperation was not forthcoming. Individual inquisitors might be insulted, assaulted, murdered, or dismissed. A spectacular instance of such resistance is the case of the Franciscan Bernard Délicieux in Languedoc between 1299 and 1306, but there were also many others. Unwary inquisitors might also be manipulated by local interests against local enemies.

At the end of a visitation, an inquisitor might be sent to another place to do the same thing, or he might be relieved of the role of inquisitor entirely, since his original commission had been specific to a time and place, dependent on the charge of a living pope, and expiring on the death of that pope. In the decretal *Turbato corde* of 1267, however, Pope Clement IV (1265–1268) created permanent inquisitor status. Clement IV had earlier, as a prominent lay jurist, compiled a treatise on procedural questions, a *consilium*, of 1235–1243,

which had a long influence on inquisitorial procedure.

In the decades following 1234, the work of the inquisitors of heretical depravity became increasingly specialized and, with considerable regional variations, standardized. In some instances – e.g., the period of grace cited above – their procedures began to diverge from those of the *ordo iudiciarius*. Juristic thought had always allowed for exceptions to the *ordo iudiciarius* in cases of particularly heinous or notorious offenses. If an inquisitor thought that witnesses were in personal danger, for example, he withheld the witnesses' names from the accused. In some instances, testimony from otherwise tainted witnesses was accepted. Because the accused were required to testify “concerning themselves and others,” they were bound by oath to denounce fellow heretics. In the case of the conviction of relapsed heretics, legal counsel was routinely denied. Not only the seriousness of the offense of heresy, but also the mandate to correct it where possible drove many of these variations. The pastoral role of the inquisitors of heretical depravity was essentially one of conversion: ideally, the heretic should be identified, instructed as to his or her error, experience contrition, make confession, abjure error, and perform suitable penance – that is, return to the Church. Those who refused outright to be instructed or, having abjured, relapsed into heresy, were to be abruptly cut off from the community, lest divine wrath descend upon it.

Besides variations on conventional legal procedure, the inquisitors also developed distinctive and effective means of recording and controlling information. Records of testimony and trials were carefully preserved, recopied, and centralized, permitting later analysis and comparing names encountered in other contexts – creating, in short, a regional data-bank of information in conveniently retrievable form, including alphabetization, that could be consulted and employed in later investigations. Specialized forms of citation, sample interrogatories of witnesses and accused, forms of oath, methods of summons, and forms of reconciliation and penance soon developed. In 1248 or 1249 Pope Innocent IV (1243–1254) ordered the inquisitors of Narbonne,

Bernard de Caux, and Jean de St. Pierre, to prepare a guidebook of inquisitorial procedure and models of standard forms for the assistance of other inquisitors solicited by a pope. Their work, the *Processus inquisitionis*, was the first of many manuals of inquisitorial procedure, the most notable of which are those of Bernard Gui, the *Practica inquisitionis heretice pravitatis* of c.1323 and the immense manual of Nicolau Eymeric of 1376, the *Directorium Inquisitorum*, the first such work to be printed.

Regardless of the emergence and definition of the *inquisitio hereticae pravitatis* and the *inquisitor hereticae pravitatis* with a staff and other associates as a specialized office and professional career, there was never a central administrative or supervisory institution in Rome or anywhere else – there was no “medieval Inquisition” in the sense that institutional inquisitions appeared in Spain in 1478 and Rome in 1542. There were only inquisitors whose area of responsibility might be an entire kingdom like France or an immense metropolitan province like Mainz, in which there were two inquisitorial provinces, or a city-republic like Florence. There were inquisitors who were enormously conscientious like Bernard Gui and Eymeric, and there were inquisitors who also had distinguished careers outside of their office of *inquisitor* proper – also like Gui. Groups of inquisitors came out of a common Dominican or Franciscan educational cohort and worked within a Dominican or Franciscan ecclesiological network, although eventually even within the Mendicant Orders inquisitors of heretical depravity were often regarded as specialists and not always in accord with the other pastoral functions of the orders.

The surviving records of the early inquisitors of heretical depravity are relatively slender and local – sometimes at the time or later deliberately destroyed by inquisitors or their enemies, sometimes simply lost or thrown out. The largest single record of the early period is that of the inquisition carried out at Narbonne by Bernard de Caux and Jean de St. Pierre, later the basis for their primitive manual for inquisitors. The best known records are those conducted in the diocese of Pamiers, particularly in the village of Montaignou, between

1318 and 1325 by its bishop, Jacques Fournier (later Pope Benedict XII), or the two trials of Joan of Arc in 1429–1431. Thus, a comprehensive history of medieval inquisitions of heretical depravity must always be partial and localized.

Jacques Fournier was also consulted by Pope John XXII (1316–1334) in the cases of suspect teaching by Meister Eckhardt, William of Ockham, and Peter Olivi and went on to become Pope Benedict XII (1334–1342). His role in these affairs at the papal court reveals another feature of thirteenth- and fourteenth-century ecclesiastical discipline: the emergence of self-policing, semi-autonomous institutions that were capable of dealing with dissent internally because of the specialized character of their work. Such were faculties within universities (particularly theology faculties) and universities as corporate entities. Such also were the mendicant orders. Since the later twelfth century, faculties of theology had become professionalized and corporatized. Initially, they were not the publics for which inquisitors of heretical depravity had first been constituted.

On occasion, however, disputed positions within the schools might be preached outside them. Such was the case with a group of scholar-preachers around Paris, followers of Master Amalric of Bène, who were condemned at a council in Paris in 1210 and burned at the stake in the same year. Later interventions in intra-university disputes usually took place on the authority of the bishop (as at Paris in 1277) or his chancellor, or in the cases of individual thinkers like Ockham or Olivi a special papal commission. The professional self-awareness of thirteenth- and fourteenth-century academics was often scornful of the qualifications of inquisitors to deal with highly technical and philosophical matters. Until the fifteenth century, internal university discipline, episcopal commissions, and papal authority were used more frequently in the affairs of the learned than inquisitors of heretical depravity.

By the late fifteenth century, inquisitions of heretical depravity had acquired a long history and proved able, in a new age of state control, to become the institutions that continued in many parts of Europe and the Americas until the nineteenth century.

## Cross-References

- ▶ [Canon Law](#)
- ▶ [Civil \(Roman\) Law](#)
- ▶ [Heresy](#)
- ▶ [Parisian Condemnation of 1277](#)
- ▶ [Universities and Philosophy](#)

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## Insolubles

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### Abstract

Medieval discussions of insolubles, or the Liar's paradox and its cognates were put in a practical context. The paradigm case was thus Socrates saying "Socrates says something false." A plurality of different versions of the self-referential paradoxes were developed and discussed. Medieval authors presented many different solutions, and many of them seem to have been discussed with an implicit or even explicit recognition that the solution is not satisfactory. Thomas Bradwardine composed the best worked out medieval solution in the early 1320s, and John Buridan's solution, which develops Bradwardine's idea further had the most lasting influence into the Renaissance. In both of these solutions, the basic idea is that when Socrates says "Socrates says something false," the sentence signifies its own truth in addition to signifying its own falsehood. Thus, what Socrates says is inconsistent and can be judged to be unambiguously false, while other people around can truthfully assert their own tokens of the sentence "Socrates says something false."

### Early Solutions

In the Middle Ages, the Liar paradox (e.g., "this sentence is false") and its cognates were known as the insolubles (*insolubilia*), with some authors explicitly admitting that no solution is

forthcoming. It is not known how the discussion entered Latin medieval thought, but occasional late ancient and Arabic analysis of the problems involved in self-referential paradoxes are known, although they are not at very high level of sophistication. Aristotle mentions in his *Sophistical Refutations* (180a27–180b7) a person who swears that he will break his oath, but it seems very improbable that this text would have been the historical origin of the medieval discussion of the paradox. It was, nevertheless, often mentioned in the discussions.

Insolubles were usually presented as sentences uttered in some supposed context, calling for an evaluation. The paradigmatic example was “Socrates says something false” assumed to be uttered by Socrates in a situation where he utters nothing else. Other versions were also produced, and often in ways that differ in interesting logical ways. For example, imagine a situation where A says that “What B says is false,” while B says “What A says is true.”

One early solution to the basic paradox was to claim that Socrates somehow fails to formulate a proposition carrying a truth value. In the version of the solution, given in the anonymous *Insolubilia monacensia*, it is simply claimed that despite uttering something, Socrates says nothing. The idea relies somehow on making a distinction between asserting and uttering, which are to be conceived as two elements of making a claim successfully. In the insoluble case, the two elements do not work properly together. One should thus respond “you are not saying anything.” The solution was called cancellation (*cassatio*).

According to the solution known as the theory of “*transcasus*,” the insoluble sentence fails to refer to itself, and instead refers to something else. For example, the claim “Socrates says something false” as said by Socrates turns out to refer to something he said immediately before the sentence. An associated theory makes a distinction between exercised act and signified act, thus making it possible to undo the self-referential relation. John Duns Scotus gave this solution to the paradox.

A more general kind of solution was to prohibit self-reference from language, claiming either that

no expression in a language is able to refer to itself, or more specifically that the semantic predicates “true” and “false” cannot refer to the wholes they are parts of. As an obvious objection, medieval logicians considered the above-mentioned case where A says that B speaks the truth while B says that A lies. The reference here is not self-reflexive, but circular, and it seems completely arbitrary to simply prohibit such structures. William Ockham resorts to a version of this solution in his *Summa logicae*.

### The Sentence Signifying Its Own Truth

Thomas Bradwardine formulated the most ingenious and influential medieval solution of the paradox. He applied token-based semantics, claiming that what Socrates says (when he says “Socrates says something false”) is false, but an outsider uttering the same sentence would speak the truth. The controversial part of Bradwardine’s solution was his claim that when put forward by Socrates, the insoluble sentence signifies and asserts its own truth – and is false for that reason.

After Bradwardine, logicians closely scrutinized the relation of a proposition with the claim that the proposition is true. Do propositions signify their own truth? Is truth a thing such that it can be signified, as Richard Kilvington asks? Bradwardine’s claim was that the truth of the sentence is signified only in special cases like in the insolubles, and Heytesbury developed the solution with the idea that one should never specify what the rejected insoluble sentence exactly signifies. As Heytesbury admits this really amounts only to advice how to deal with the paradox in an actual disputation; it is not a genuine solution. According to Heytesbury, no genuine solution has been found nor is any forthcoming. Interestingly enough, he did not seem to think that this would amount to a major problem to any logical system.

John Buridan extended Bradwardine’s theory by claiming that all propositions assert their own truth, and offered a logically very elaborate solution to the insolubles without some of Bradwardine’s problems, although it remains



obscure how exactly the claim that all sentences assert their own truth should be understood. Given the later fame of Buridan's logic, it is natural that his high-quality solution was well-known later in the Renaissance, finding its way even to Miguel Cervantes' *Don Quijote*.

## Cross-References

- ▶ [John Buridan](#)
- ▶ [John Duns Scotus](#)
- ▶ [Richard Kilvington](#)
- ▶ [Thomas Bradwardine](#)
- ▶ [William Heytesbury](#)
- ▶ [William of Ockham](#)

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## Intension and Remission of Forms

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### Abstract

From the time of Aristotle until the time of the Enlightenment, intension and remission of forms was mostly considered as a problem of change of a specific type of accidental forms (qualities). The problem appeared in various disciplines such as theology (the infusion of charity), philosophy of nature (changes in qualities), medicine (the problem of proportion of elements in the body and the compounding of drug effects), optics (the intensification of light), and methodology and mathematics (the representation of change). During the fourteenth century, the intension and remission of forms became one of the central issues of philosophical debate. Various theories offered by a group of Oxonian thinkers, the so-called Oxford Calculators, contributed to the development of mathematical physics. The most elaborate and influential theory of geometrical representation of the configurations of qualities and motion, however, was presented, by the French natural philosopher – Nicholas Oresme.

Like many other issues pondered over in the Middle Ages, the question of intension and remission of forms may also be traced back to Aristotle.

Although he himself did not pay much attention to the problem, he raised the question whether such a virtue as justice or such a condition as health admits of more and less. In *Categories* (8.10b26–30), Aristotle says, “qualification admits more and less; for one thing is called more pale or less pale than another, and more just than another. Moreover, it itself sustains increase (for what is pale can still become paler) – not in all cases though, but in most.” He does not specify whether one justice is justice more than another or whether one person is more just than another, that is, has more justice than another one. In other words, Aristotle does not decide whether a form (quality) increases or decreases in intensity or whether the subject, in which qualities inhere, is more or less qualified by different forms existing in it successively. On the other hand, in his *Physics* (5.2.226b) Aristotle defines alteration as a change or motion, which occurs between two extremes, that is, between two different intensities of the same quality. This particular paragraph from Aristotle’s *Physics* was a starting point for intense discussions in the fourteenth century, when such terms as “latitude” and “degree” of forms played the main role.

The topic of intension and remission of forms first appeared in Latin West thanks to commentaries on *Categories* written by Neoplatonists – Porphyry and Boethius. In the thirteenth century, a commentary by another Neoplatonist – Simplicius, was introduced to the Latin speakers (Thomas Aquinas made a broad use of the Latin translation of Simplicius’ commentary). The Neoplatonists were of the opinion that it was the subject and not the quality that admits of more or less and that qualities do not differ with respect to more or less.

An additional problem, which was raised later, concerned the possible changes of elementary forms of simple bodies: earth, water, air, and fire. While substantial forms such as the rational soul of a human being cannot admit more and less, because one human being cannot be more human than another, primary qualities of elements, that is, heat and cold and humidity and dryness can admit more and less. The adherents of this opinion were Arabic philosophers – al-Kindī

and Avicenna. While Aristotle believed that an elementary form (a quality) of a simple body is always in its maximum degree, that is, fire is the hottest and earth is the coldest, Avicenna thought that an element’s qualities can vary within a latitude, so they do not have to be in a maximum degree of a quality. Avicenna’s conception is closely linked to Galen’s medical theory. Galen, in his *Microtegni* Book II, was the first to introduce the term “latitude” to explain the states of health and illness. The latitude of health can be divided into three parts: the latitude of health, the latitude of neither health nor sickness, and the latitude of sickness. Thus, as Edith Sylla claims (Sylla 1973: 227–228), the latitude of health can be represented by a line divided into three parts, with two extremes, one of the optimal state of health and the other of a serious illness, the middle part being neutral. Avicenna used the concept of “latitude” to introduce an idea of the human *complexio*, which is not a result of a proportion of elements in a body, but the result of intensities of variable qualities of elements. Averroes was in accord with Avicenna with regard to the theory of *complexio*, but rejected the idea that elementary bodies can have varying degrees of qualities. Averroes was convinced that whenever water is heated part of it is changed into air, because opposing qualities can coexist in the same subject (admixture theory).

In the twelfth century, the predominant view was based on the Aristotelian definition of substantial forms and held that the form is a simple and invariable essence of a substance. This view was represented, for instance, by the anonymous author of the *Liber de sex principiis* and by Peter Abelard. What admits more or less are qualities, which should be described as more or less “pure,” for example, more or less white. Abelard claims that only habits and dispositions treated as accidents can admit more or less and can be compared. The essential parts of substances like, for example, human rationality or risibility, are not comparable and they cannot undergo intension or remission. The only motion which can be described as intense or remiss is the motion of alteration, since it occurs between two extremes, for example, between more and less white or

between white and black. Peter Lombard introduced the problem of intension and remission of forms into the theological context. In his *Sentences* (lib. I, dist. 17, cap. 5), he raised the question whether charity of man increases or decreases. Lombard limits himself to a short statement that the Holy Spirit, that is, charity as such (*in se*), is immutable and does not admit of more or less, but in an individual human being (*in homine*) a charity can increase or decrease. Hence intension and remission depends on varying dispositions of a subject.

The thirteenth century saw a significant growth of interest in the problem of intension and remission. For Thomas Aquinas charity is a quality or an accident, and

its being has to be in something. So that an essential increase of charity means nothing else but that it is yet more in its subject (...) Hence charity increases essentially, not by beginning anew, or ceasing to be in its subject, (...) but by beginning to be more and more in its subject... (*Summa theologiae* II-II, q. 24, art. 4).

In Thomas' opinion, intension and remission can be examined from a point of view either of a specific form or the subject in which qualities inhere. Only corporal qualities, which are divisible in their essence, like health or motion can undergo intension and remission in their forms. Those qualities increase by the addition of parts. The indivisible qualities, like color or heat can undergo intension and remission only with respect to their subject. They do not increase by addition of parts, but by "the varying participation of a subject in a given, unchanged quality" (*Summa theologiae* I-II, q. 52, art. 1, 2). Therefore, intensive increase in quality results from the disposition of a subject for a species of a quality. This theory was also held by Giles of Rome.

Henry of Ghent presents a contrary opinion. He claims that intensive increase of a qualitative form takes place in its specific form (with no reference to its subject), which is not simple but a divisible extension (latitude). The quality has different intensive parts (degrees). Since any lesser degree contains potentially all greater degrees (except a maximum degree), the actual intension of quality is caused by an extraction of a

new part from potentiality to act. Henry asserts that a quality has a potentiality for change "in virtue of its nature and essence," and not in the subject it belongs to.

The third opinion is associated with Godfrey of Fontaines. His theory is labeled as the "succession of forms theory" or recently as the "replacement theory" (Dumont 2009: 41). Godfrey believes, against Aquinas and Ghent, that all specific forms are indivisible and invariable, and as such they cannot change in degree. Consequently, they cannot admit more or less in themselves. Since individual forms are numerically distinct, they are successively replaced in the subject.

The fourth theory was an addition theory, usually connected with the name of John Duns Scotus. In the opinion of M. Clagett (Clagett 1950: 136) it was Richard Middleton who influenced Scotus' addition theory. Middleton claims that intensity or quantity of force (which he calls a virtual quantity of power) can be increased by addition in a manner similar to increase in quantity of mass (which he calls corporal quantity). Thus Middleton is convinced that the addition of one degree of a quantity of force to a preexisting one produces something greater in force. Scotus holds that any degree of a quality contains, as its homogeneous parts, lower degrees. Therefore, a change in degree can be explained by addition or subtraction of homogeneous parts of a quality. For example, if something gets hotter without gaining any additional extended parts, then the increase in heat is caused by addition of degrees of heat. The unquestionable value of Scotus' theory is its quantitative account of qualities, since some sort of numerical value can be assigned to qualitative intensities.

In the fourteenth century there were three dominant theories explaining the problem: admixture, succession, and addition ones. The last of them had many adherents, such as William of Ockham, Joannes de Bassolis, Henry of Harclay, Peter Auriol, John Baconthorpe, Thomas Wylton, and Gregory of Rimini.

The main admirer of the succession theory was Walter Burley. According to Burley, there are two types of forms: indivisible (e.g., the maximum degree of hot, 3 ft in length), and divisible ones,

which have latitude of degrees (e.g., heat and cold, whiteness and blackness). The former are destroyed by any change of degree, while the latter remain in the same species even if their degrees change. Burley's succession theory is founded on an analogy between motion of alteration and local motion. In local motion – says Burley – the moved body occupies a different place in any instant of time; in motion of alteration, a totally new and indivisible degree of form is induced in each moment and the whole preceding form is destroyed. Thus the whole process of intension or remission can be described as replacement of successive forms. In such a process, a whole series of new, distinct forms is involved. Since any change of degree causes a change in an individual existing quality, latitude of degrees is relevant only to species of forms and not to an individual form. “The latitude itself” – as Sylla points out (Sylla 1973: 234) – “while it describes the range within which the degrees of the species may fall, has no separate existence aside from the individuals of the species.”

The succession theory has much in common with the addition theory; both, like Aquinas' theory, accept the notion that it is not an individual quality that increases or decreases intensively, but a subject in which qualities inhere is qualified more or less thanks to the latitude of a specific qualitative form. Both theories also take a Scotist view that a change of the degree of a quality leads to a change of an individual quality. The addition theory has also something in common with the admixture theory, namely, they both accept the notion that qualitative forms are intensively divisible.

In the fourteenth century, the admixture theory was held by Michael of Massa, Walter Charlton, John Buridan, and Roger Swineshead, one of the Oxford Calculators, among others. Swineshead maintains that two contrary qualities of the same pair, like coldness and heat, can exist simultaneously with various intensity in the same subject. The sum of degrees of intensity of both qualities, however, must be constant. Thus in the qualitative change such as heating, when heat increases, coldness simultaneously decreases in the same degree. A qualitative change is then a process of “freeing

from admixture” of the opposite quality. While explaining his theory, Roger makes a broad use of the concept of abstract latitudes for measuring alteration and local motion. He talks about latitude of quality and latitudes of motion of alteration of different types which, in modern terms, correspond to latitude of acceleration and deceleration.

Most of the Oxford Calculators, such as Thomas Bradwardine, William Heytesbury, John Dumbleton, and Richard Swineshead were enthusiasts of the addition theory. John Dumbleton and Richard Swineshead broadly discussed issues of possible “measurement” of such a quality as speed in different types of motion by using a conception of latitudes and degrees significantly different from those employed by earlier Oxford Calculators. In the addition theory, qualities may be treated quantitatively, so the fundamental question was how to measure the alteration in the intensity of qualitative forms or the alteration of speed in local motion. Dumbleton and Swineshead believe that latitude and degree are identical and that they are both divisible. In their opinion, any degree of a quality contains all the more remiss degrees. For both philosophers, a latitude is a homogenous continuum, which can be presented as a line, on which the only differences are differences in length. This theory provides – as Sylla points out – “a better physical basis for quantification of qualities because the latitude corresponds to the intensity or degree of a quality at a point of the body or in an instant of time and not only to some variation of the quality over its extension or over time. (...) The latitude of velocity is imagined as a line (...). Equal parts of the latitude of velocity correspond to equal differences of velocity” (Sylla 1973: 263).

The theory of latitude of forms was fully developed by Nicholas Oresme, for whom latitudes are an intensive measure of particular qualities. Oresme's configuration theory allows him to build a representation of different types of qualitative changes by geometrical figures. He distinguishes between the *longitudo* which represents time, and *latitudo* which represents speed of motion. When units measuring the *longitudo* and *latitudo* vary, they form figures of different shapes. He shows that geometrical properties of such

figures correspond to a property of the form itself when the property remains constant, while the units measuring the *longitudo* and *latitudo* vary.

Although Oresme's achievement in quantification of qualitative changes is undeniable, it is not the result of his acceptance of the addition theory. Oresme develops his own theory of intension and remission of forms, which Kirschner calls the "succession-of-*conditiones*-theory" (Kirschner 2000: 274). According to this theory, in every moment of intension or remission there is a new *tale esse*, that is, a new condition or mode of a substance, which is called a quality. The quantity of the substance is its *tantum esse*, that is, a mode of being so and so large. In the process of intension or remission, a substance has a new *tale esse* in every moment, but not a new accidental form, as Burley held. Oresme claims that since a substance has a different mode in every moment, it cannot be properly said that the quality is intensified. Such an expression is used only for the sake of brevity of speech.

Recent research shows that contrary to the claims of many earlier historians of science, many different theories, besides the addition theory, led to the development of a system for measuring and quantifying qualities and motions of alteration and local motion in the fourteenth century. There is no doubt that Oxford Calculators' and Oresme's theories of quantitative approach to qualities, such as the Mean Speed Theorem, gave an impulse for the proper theories of motion, which were the significant accomplishments of seventeenth-century natural philosophers, such as Descartes or Galileo. The Mean Speed Theorem states that a uniformly accelerated motion corresponds to its mean degree of speed, which means that a given latitude of motion uniformly gained in a given time always makes a mobile traverse a space equal to that which would be traversed if the body moved with the middle degree of the latitude for the whole time. The first, arithmetical, proof of this theorem was presented by William Heytesbury. The most original geometrical proof and elaborated application of the mean-degree measure of speed in motion was formulated by Oresme. The theorem was later used by Galileo in his proof of the theory of

accelerate motion. The problem of intension and remission of forms was extensively debated in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries in many fields of scientific inquiry. Funkenstein sees also an influence of *latitudo formarum* notion on Leibniz and Kant (Funkenstein 1986: 352).

## Cross-References

- ▶ [al-Fārābī, Abū Naṣr](#)
- ▶ [Giles of Rome, Political Thought](#)
- ▶ [Godfrey of Fontaines](#)
- ▶ [Ibn Sīnā, Abū 'Alī \(Avicenna\)](#)
- ▶ [John Duns Scotus](#)
- ▶ [Michael of Massa](#)
- ▶ [Nicholas Oresme](#)
- ▶ [Oxford Calculators](#)
- ▶ [Peter Abelard](#)
- ▶ [Peter Lombard](#)
- ▶ [Thomas Aquinas](#)
- ▶ [Walter Burley](#)
- ▶ [Walter Chatton](#)
- ▶ [William Heytesbury](#)
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## Intention, Primary and Secondary

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### Abstract

The term “intention” was introduced into the philosophical vocabulary, with the meaning we nowadays attribute to it, during the twelfth century as the term used to translate each of two Arabic words. In most cases, medieval philosophers use “intention” as synonymous with “concept,” so that the answer that a philosopher gives to the question of an intention’s ontological status follows from his resolution of the nature of a concept. Some philosophers take intentions as distinct from the acts of cognition that originate them, while some others prefer to equate intentions to those

acts. The distinction between first and second intentions traces back to Avicenna, who speaks of logic as a science dealing with second intentions as applied to first intentions. Roughly speaking, first intentions are concepts of extramental things (for example, man), while second intentions are concepts of concepts (for example, species). During the thirteenth century, such a distinction is paired up with the grammatical distinction between names of first and second imposition (such as “man” and “name,” respectively), which has its roots in Priscian, while later on the distinction between first and second intentions overlaps with that between abstract and concrete intentions. By “concrete intentions” most medieval philosophers refer to things qua cognized, while by “abstract intentions” they either refer to the mind’s cognitive acts of cognizing things or to the cognitive relation things bear to the mind. Thus, at the beginning of fourteenth century the picture is more complicated and raises different questions according to whether first or second intentions are discussed. High medieval philosophers focus on these different kinds of intentions and deal with two major issues: first, the foundation of first and second intentions and second, the order of causality and predication holding between first and second intentions.

The concrete term “intention” (*intentio*) makes its appearance in the western philosophy, with the philosophical meaning we nowadays attribute to it, during the twelfth century, as translating each of two Arabic words (*ma‘na*, *ma‘qul*). The abstract term “intentionality,” instead, is employed only at the end of thirteenth century. At the beginning of fourteenth century, we encounter the first treatises expressly devoted to intentions (*Treatises on First and Second Intentions*), such as those of the Dominican Theologian Hervaeus Natalis (c. 1315) and the Franciscan Theologian Gerard Odonis (c. 1320).

Most medieval philosophers use the term “intention” simply as synonymous with the term “concept,” while they use “intentionality”



to indicate the symmetrical or asymmetrical relationship that the mind, immediately or through an intention, bears to the external world. Generally speaking, an intention is seen as the conceptual content that can be associated with a thing. Two intentions can be derived from two things or even from one and the same thing, just like from Socrates we can extract the specific intention of “man” and the generic intention of “animal.” In this latter case, many philosophers, following in particular a suggestion of Henry of Ghent, speak of intentions as items that are intentionally distinct from each other.

Every intention exhibits a special mode of being called intentional being (*esse intentionale*) and such being indicates the mode of existence in the mind of an intention. Expressions synonymous with “intentional being” are “incorporeal, immaterial, apparent, objective, or spiritual being.” The relationship that the mind bears to an external thing is seen as that in virtue of which that thing may be characterized as an intention and therefore be endowed with intentional being in the mind. This means that intentional being expresses an accidental mode of being of the thing, since a thing, such as a man, becomes an intention only when it relates to the mind, and to be related to the mind obviously is accidental to a man’s essence. Primarily, by “intentional being” some medieval philosophers therefore want to indicate the mode of being of a thing, which exists as a concept in the mind. But, secondarily, “intentional being” is also used to indicate a mode of being, which is of intentional kind. In this sense, a thing’s intentional being is the being of a thing that is able to refer to something else (i.e., “being intentional”). According to this second meaning, not only mental items such as concepts, but also extramental items such as pictures, images, natural signs, and any other thing that can refer to something else can be said to have intentional being. Confining our attention to mental cases alone, though, the identification between intentions and concepts entails that the answer that a philosopher gives to the ontological status of intentions follows from his response to the ontological status of concepts.

Until now we have spoken of things that become intentions, but not all medieval philosophers agree on that a concept is a thing qua cognized, that is, a thing qua related to the mind. Since medieval philosophers elaborated fundamentally three ways of accounting for a concept, that is, (i) as something identical to the act of cognition, (ii) as something different from the act of cognition and existing ‘subjectively’ in the mind, and (iii) as something different from the act of cognition but existing ‘objectively’ in the mind – it follows that we would encounter fundamentally three ways of accounting for an intention. Thus, some medieval philosophers prefer to describe an intention as the act of cognizing rather than as a cognized thing or as a concept representing a thing.

After Aquinas, intentions are usually divided into first and second intentions. This distinction can be traced back to Avicenna, who speaks of logic as a science dealing with second intentions as applied to first intentions. Roughly speaking, a first intention is the concept of an extramental thing, event, or state of affairs, while a second intention is the concept of a concept. The concept of “man” is a typical example of a first intention, while the concept of “species” an example of a second intention. This distinction is usually associated with the grammatical distinction of names into names of first and second imposition, which harkens back to Priscian. A name of first imposition is a name that designates an extralinguistic item, while a name of second imposition is a name that designates another linguistic item. The term “man,” for instance, is a name of first imposition, while the term “name” is a name of second imposition. These distinctions, between first and second intentions, on the one hand, and between names of first and second impositions, on the other, do not perfectly overlap, and when medieval philosophers approach directly the problem of the epistemic value of intentions, they tend to abandon the grammatical distinction. The first/second intention distinction does not occur explicitly before Aquinas nor even in Aquinas, who simply speaks of things cognized in the first instance (*prima intellecta*) and things cognized

in the second instance (*secunda intellecta*). Things primarily cognized are extramental things, such as a man, while things secondarily cognized are mental things, such as the concept of “man.” When the mind reflects on its cognition and the elements involved in it, the mind discovers some intentional properties such as being universal, being a species, and so on – which result from the acts by means of which the mind compares a cognized thing to other cognized things or to the things outside the mind – and then the mind attaches such intentional properties to the firstly cognized things. Intentional properties are therefore accidental to the essence of cognized things (Questions on God’s Potency, 7.9; *De ente et essentia*, 3). Later philosophers inherit Aquinas’ explanation, although it is variously modified according to whether a philosopher is more inclined to refer the first/second intention distinction (A) to things firstly and secondly cognized or (B) to acts of cognition, and, in this latter case, (B1) to acts of cognition of the same kind or (B2) to different kinds of acts of cognition. John Duns Scotus, Hervaeus Natalis, and Peter Auriol, for instance, endorse (A), while Durand of St. Pourçain and William Ockham opt for (B2) by interpreting the first/second intention distinction in terms of the distinction between a direct and a reflexive act of cognition (*actus rectus/reflexus*). Simon of Faversham and Radulphus Brito, who flourished at the end of thirteenth century, finally opt for (B1) by relating such a distinction to that between an absolute and a relative direct act of cognition (*actus absolutus/respectivus*). In the later Middle Ages one may encounter many sophisticated variants of this schema (particularly significant is that of John Buridan), but all of them follow the basic choice that a philosopher makes concerning the ontological status of an intention. Two points nonetheless stay unchanged across time. First, philosophers agree that first intentions have a mind-independent foundation to a certain degree, while second intentions (regardless of how they are explained) have a mind-dependent foundation. Second, they also agree that second intentions can be predicated of first intentions (for instance,

when stating “man is a species”) and such a predication gives rise, for most philosophers, to a denominative proposition.

Toward the end of thirteenth century the distinction between first and second intentions is combined with another distinction, that is, that between concrete (or material) and abstract (or formal) intentions. Their intersection generates four classes of intentions:

1. Concrete first intentions
2. Abstract first intentions
3. Concrete second intentions
4. Abstract second intentions

Not all philosophers think of such a classification as possible or needed. Some of them argue that no abstract intention must be introduced. Philosophers who allow for such a classification explain it in different ways. Hervaeus Natalis, for example, in his extensive treatise on second intentions records that the dominant philosophical position at the beginning of fourteenth century identifies every concrete intention with the thing cognized, abstract first intentions with the acts of absolute cognition of a thing and abstract second intentions with the acts of relative or comparative cognition of things. Hervaeus, however, prefers a different explanation. According to him, a concrete first intention is the thing primarily cognized, for example an external individual man. An abstract first intention is the symmetrical relation of intentionality that an individual man bears to the mind and the mind to that man. In virtue of such a relation, an external man can be called a first intention. Such a relation coincides with a mind’s specific mode of cognizing and a man’s specific mode of being cognized, namely, that expressed by the term “universality.” A concrete second intention is the same thing as secondarily cognized, for example, the cognized man. An abstract second intention is in turn the symmetrical relation of intentionality that the cognized man bears to the mind and the mind to the cognized man. In virtue of such a relation, a cognized man can be called a second intention. Such a relation again coincides with a mind’s specific mode of

cognizing and a cognized man's specific mode of being further cognized, namely, that expressed by the term "species." This machinery can be extended on indefinitely. In short, for Hervaeus, both an abstract first and second intention designates a mind–world bidirectional relation which is formally expressed by the general term "intentionality." Concrete first and second intentions instead designate things qua primarily or secondarily cognized; or, with respect to the cognizing mind, degrees of increasingly abstract conceivability of an external thing.

Such machinery raised considerable criticism. Peter Auriol and Gerard Odonis, among others, cast many doubts about the need for postulating a world-to-mind direction of intentionality in order to account for the thing's property of being an intention. Moreover, they disputed the possibility of distinguishing the property of being an intention or of being universal from the cognized thing itself. Discussions about first and second intentions do not end with Auriol's and Odonis' criticism of Hervaeus' explanation of intentionality, but continue throughout all the later Middle Ages, becoming more and more elaborate. Scotus, Hervaeus, Ockham, and Auriol are the main sources for understanding the fifteenth- and seventeenth-century treatments of first and second intentions.

## Cross-References

- ▶ [Durand of St. Pourçain](#)
- ▶ [Gerald Odonis](#)
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## Intentionality

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### Abstract

Only during the thirteenth century, were the word “intentionality” and its cognates employed with the philosophical meaning that we nowadays attribute to them. At the beginning of the fourteenth century, moreover, we encounter the first treatises expressly devoted to intentionality. As the Latin etymology of the word indicates (in-tendere), by “intentionality” medieval philosophers mean to express the idea of a directedness or tendency of our mind toward a target. During the Middle Ages, the term was used to characterize the directness of both the mind and the will, although, across time, the term has taken on different meanings and its use has been restricted to the epistemic side alone. In the Middle Ages, intentionality is strictly connected to the explanation of the process of intellectual cognition and concept formation. Since medieval philosophers distinguish between first and second intentions (roughly, concepts of things and concepts of concepts), two major topics have been associated with intentionality: first, the explanation of the nature, the formation, and the foundation of natural-kind concepts, from which the question of the existence of intentional or intramental objects stems, and, second, the predication of intentional or second-order properties with respect to first-order concepts. Generally speaking, the different medieval treatments of intentionality depend on whether a philosopher is more inclined to regard the mind’s intentionality as a special kind of action or rather as a kind of relation from which issue different

accounts of the mode of intentional inexistence. In the late Middle Ages, the theory of intentionality is seen as the clue to solve the question of universals.

In an often-quoted text of his *Psychology from an Empirical Standpoint*, Franz Brentano summarizes the features that are traditionally associated with intentionality as follows:

every mental phenomenon is characterized by what the Scholastics of the Middle Ages called the intentional (or mental) inexistence of an object, and what we might call, though not wholly unambiguously, reference to a content, direction toward an object (which is not to be understood here as meaning a thing), or immanent objectivity. Every mental phenomenon includes something as object within itself, although they do not do so in the same way. . . . This intentional inexistence is characteristic exclusively of mental phenomena. No physical phenomenon exhibits anything like it. We can, therefore, define mental phenomena by saying that they are those phenomena which contain an object intentionally within themselves. (Brentano 1973: 88–89)

Brentano's words correctly pick out some major features of medieval accounts of intentionality. On the one hand, although most medieval philosophers endorse the Aristotelian way of explaining knowledge as a process of "passive reception" of an external thing's form, they consider nonetheless intentionality as the distinctive mark of the mental. In fact, as the Latin etymology of the word shows (in-tendere, or intus-tendere, according to the etymology proposed by Henry of Ghent in his *Quodlibet* 5.6), they use the terms "intention" (intentio) and "intentionality" (intentionalitas) to characterize a particular "activity" of both the mind and the will; since cognitive and volitional operations are usually regarded as the only two operations properly pertaining to the human soul, intentionality turns to be seen as a fundamental and primitively active capacity of our soul. On the other hand, the term across time took on different meanings and, as Brentano opportunely pointed out, was employed to refer to at least three items: (1) first, to the mind's or will's act of attending or pointing toward a thing, (2) to the thing toward which the mind or the will is actually turned, and (3) to the mode of being (i.e., intentional, spiritual,

or objective being) that the thing acquires when it actually relates to the mind or the will actually pointing to it; such a mode of being coincides with the thing's acquired capacity to represent or to refer to something else. Leaving aside the use of the word "intention" in ethical or pragmatic contexts, medieval discussions of intentionality mainly focus on these three aspects with respect to knowledge. Nonconceptual mental states usually are not taken into account (for the reasons illustrated in King 2007). Nor can one find some extensive discussion of intentionality as applied to conventional language, natural signs, physical information devices, or nonhuman contexts, in which contemporary philosophers instead show to have a particular theoretical interest. Since medieval discussions of intentionality focus especially on the explanation of the nature of intellectual cognition, the preferred way of approaching intentionality is metaphysical and epistemic rather than logic or linguistic, for intentionality investigations are made by way of an accurate analysis of the elements involved in the phenomenon of knowledge. This can be regarded as a fundamental difference from contemporary discussions of intentionality in analytic philosophy, where instead there is a certain tendency to approach intentionality in terms of philosophy of language. In general, medieval discussions are more sympathetic with discussions as developed in the phenomenological tradition. Nonetheless, in the Middle Ages as well, discussions of intentionality can emerge from logical or linguistic contexts, especially from those dealing with the practice of sophisms.

The story of intentionality in Latin medieval philosophy begins with Augustine. In Book XI and XV of *On the Trinity*, an often-quoted text, Augustine qualifies the meaning of "intention" by connecting the ordinary notion of intention to the analysis of knowledge. On the one hand, Augustine equates intentions to the inner words that are uttered by the mind at the end of the process of cognition; such inner words are said not to belong to any historical language but to be natural and common to all men. On the other hand, Augustine takes "intention" as indicating the active capacity of every faculty of the soul to direct itself toward a

thing. Augustine compares such a capacity to the role played by the Holy Spirit in mediating between the Father and the Son, while the inner word is compared to the Divine Word. Three points of Augustine's account have influenced medieval discussions. First, medieval philosophers maintain the tendency to describe the process of human cognition as mirroring the divine process of cognition or emanation, and this parallelism plays a decisive role when they explain the ontological status of the mental word and the structure of human thought. Second, Augustine connects intentions to concepts and such a connection is pivotal for the accounts of intentionality that follow. In order to understand what an intention is and how it works, it is necessary to understand what a concept is and how it works. Third, Augustine requires that both perception and cognition be a certain type of activity, and such an activity appears to be the hallmark of any cognitive state of the human soul: when we see or cognize, for instance, we always see or cognize something, and when we think, we always think about something.

The identification between intention and conception enables medieval philosophers to attempt a reconciliation of Augustine's views with some other sources. Three sources in particular are worth mentioning here. The first source is given by the starting lines of Aristotle's *On Interpretation*, transmitted to medieval philosophers by Boethius' translation and commentaries. Aristotle states that written and uttered words are a symbol (in Boethius' translation, a note) of soul's affections and these latter are said to be likeness of external things and common to all men. According to the standard interpretation of this text, while mental items (affections, i.e., concepts) are endowed naturally with an intentional value and hence turn out to be able to refer directly and immediately (or primarily) to external things, written and uttered words are endowed with an intentional value only in consequence of the relation they bear to their mental supports; therefore, they can refer to external things only in an indirect and mediate (or secondary) way. The second source is Aristotle's *On the Soul*, which began to circulate in the Latin West in the second half of the

twelfth century. Of particular significance for the topic of intentionality, is the treatment of the machinery of abstraction that Aristotle gives in the third book. Medieval philosophers usually condense this source by citing Aristotle's dictum that it is not the stone but the species of stone that is present to the mind. Such a dictum seems to relate the explanation of the nature of intentionality to representationalism in epistemology. Finally, the third source is the account of essence that Avicenna elaborated in the metaphysical section of his *Book of Healing*. According to Avicenna, the essence of any object of ordinary experience is "indifferent" to the property of being singular and being universal. Such an essence becomes singular once it is realized outside the mind, while it becomes universal once it is realized in the mind. What is relevant for the topic of intentionality is the idea that it is one and the same essence that passes from outside to inside the mind through the process of abstraction. Avicenna's account of essence seems to make the nature of intentionality more compatible with direct realism in epistemology.

Besides Aristotle and Augustine, Avicenna plays a decisive role in shaping the medievals' understanding of intentionality. Avicenna takes two fundamental steps. First, he more strongly relates the term "intention" to the conceptual content that can be associated with a thing and characterizes as intentionally distinct those intentions that express two conceptual contents that can be associated with one and the same thing. Second, Avicenna introduces the crucial distinction between first and second intentions. Roughly speaking, first intentions are concepts of external things, while second intentions are concepts of concepts. The concept of "man" is a typical example of first intention, the concept of "species," an example of second intention. From such a distinction, medieval discussions of intentionality follow different paths according to whether philosophers deal with first or second intentions. In the first case, to account for intentionality amounts to accounting for the formation, the foundation, and the function of natural-kind concepts. In the second case, two other points of speculation are introduced, namely, that of the foundation of



second-order concepts and that of the explanation of the mechanisms of intentional predication, which occurs when second intentions are predicated of first intentions. Viewed in a different light, such a distinction leads Avicenna to change the standard way of looking at logic. Avicenna defines logic as the science dealing with second intentions as applied to first intentions. In this way, he stresses the conceptual and properly mental-focused nature of logic. On Avicenna's doctrine, the object of logic is no longer the syllogism but the being of reason (*ens rationis*), that is, the class of the concepts of concepts, such as "species" or "universal," and of second-order or intentional predications, such as "man is a species" or "man is universal."

Given such presuppositions, it turns out to be particularly difficult to isolate in the Middle Ages, before the appearance of specialized treatises, a distinct area of discussion expressly reserved to intentionality. On the one hand, intuitions and considerations about intentionality mainly emerge from the analysis of the mechanisms of cognition, as we said. Thus, commentaries on the soul are the privileged sources. But on the other hand, in other, disparate contexts one can find interesting developments of the notion of (mental) existence: for example, in those discussions concerning the Anselmian "ontological" argument for proving the existence of God (on which see King 1984); in the logical and sophistical discussions of non-existent objects (like the chimera), negative properties, and states of affairs; and in the theological discussions about God's omnipotence or in those concerning the meaning of "person" or the metaphysical status of the light. The treatises on first and second intentions of the fourteenth century try to bring together such scattered considerations, by giving a unified and all-inclusive explanation of the phenomenon of intentionality. In many respects, medieval discussions of intentionality are indistinguishable from discussions concerning knowledge. But the distinction between first and second intentions permits the identification of the hallmark of the medieval discussions of intentionality. It relies upon second intentions and consists in a double understanding: first, that of the mechanisms by way of which our mind arrives at

attaching to an external thing some philosophically significant intentional properties (such as being an intention, being universal, being a species, and the like) and second, that of the mechanisms of intentional predication. At the end of the day, the main question raised by medieval discussions of intentionality seems to be as follows: how can the mechanisms of predication that Aristotle describes in the *Categories* be applied to the sphere of the mental in order to account for both intentional properties and mental predication?

Medieval philosophers' answers to this question can be distributed into two general groups according to whether a philosopher is more willing to think that the operation of cognition belongs to the category of Action or to the category of Relation. Take for instance the concrete case of the cognition of a table.

(A) If one classifies the cognition of an external table among actions, she can regard the intention of table as the same as the act of cognizing that table or as different from such an act and posterior to it. (A1) In the first case, the intention of table is reduced to the act of cognizing that table and cognition is seen as a special case of immanent or intransitive action, since it completely achieves itself in cognizing that table without producing anything else. (A2) In the second case, instead, cognition can be seen as a sort of transitive action, consequently the intention of table is open to be treated in a twofold way: either (A2.1) as something produced by the act of cognizing and existing "subjectively" in the mind, that is, according to a psychological mode of being, such as that of a trace or a modification (which usually is classified into the category of Quality) left on the mind by the act of cognizing, or (A2.2) as an item existing "objectively" in the mind, that is, according to a special kind of intramental existence or mental inexistence (this item is normally called "object," *obiectum*, and is understood as the mental correlate or the immanent content of a concept, *conceptus*). In this final case, she can further regard the table provided with an objective existence either (A2.2.1) as a mental replacement of the external table or (A2.2.2) as the external table itself endowed with a new mode of existence.

By contrast, if one opts for counting the cognition of a table among relations, she has two possibilities: either (B1) she can describe cognition as an asymmetrical relation, only involving what contemporary philosophers of mind call a mind-to-world direction of fit, or (B2) she can describe it as a symmetrical relation, involving both mind-to-world and world-to-mind directions of fit. In the first case, she does not depart too much from those who advocate the action theory. But the second case seems to fit much better with the standard medieval theory of relations, since according to such a theory every relation must be explained as the conjunction of a relation and its converse relation. Thus, if we cognitively relate to a table, there must be a relation that goes from us to the table and a converse relation that goes from the table to us. In virtue of the first relation, we can be said to be cognizing that table, while in virtue of the second relation, the table can be said to be cognized by us. With respect to this twofold direction, supporters of B2 hold that the mind-to-world direction of fit is a real relation, while the world-to-mind direction of fit is a relation of reason (which sounds as very close to what Brentano called a “quasi-relation”). On this proposal, a table can be said to be an intention or to be intended in virtue of the relation of intentionality (or being passively cognized) that it bears to our mind, while our mind can be said to be intending that table in virtue of the relation of cognition (or being actively cognizing) that it bears to the table.

These different proposals entail different degrees of metaphysical involvement. Who adopts B2 or A2.2 usually is more tolerant with internalism and hence more disposed to postulating the existence of a third type of objects, such as the universal table or the table qua cognized (called *res intellecta* or *res ut intellecta*). A supporter of B2 thinks that it is necessary to do so in order to preserve both the generality and the continuity of cognition across time. Nonetheless she is careful in avoiding any ontological commitment of a Platonic kind, for she denies that the table qua cognized is something essentially universal and hence essentially different from the external singular table (which is labeled as *res*

*extra* or *res ut existens*). The table in the mind is exactly the same nature of table exhibited by the extramental singular table; but now the table is in such a condition (i.e., abstracted from singularity and depurated of matter) as the mind can attach to it the properties of being universal, being an intention, being a species, and the like, all of which remain therefore accidental to a table’s essence. This postulation permits accounting for universal predication in a proper way and reconciling strong epistemological realism with a certain metaphysical parsimony. The domain of what can be thought is normally more extended than the domain of what can exist; nonetheless whatever can be thought can be said to be real insofar as it meets two conditions: (1) first, it is able to end an act of cognizing or thinking, and (2) second, it can be considered as distinct from the psychological act of its cognition or thought, since the act goes out of existence once it is over, while the cognized or thought thing gets maintained. Accordingly, not only extramental real objects but also negations and fictions can be said to be epistemologically real.

The advocates of B1 or A1-A2.1, by contrast, consider such an explanation metaphysically too heavy and incapable of avoiding any duplication of the objects of thought, especially when acts of cognizing bear on singular extramental things. At the same time, they think that it is possible to preserve equally well all the conditions required for universal cognition and predication by referring to items only existing subjectively in the mind, items such as acts of cognition, the mind’s qualitative modifications, and habits tasked with storing knowledge. In general, supporters of this line are more willing to endorse an externalist account of intentionality.

In the Middle Ages, the majority of philosophers seem to be oriented toward externalist explanations of intentionality. Thomas Aquinas, for instance, although he does not pay much attention to intentionality, in an often-quoted passage of his *Questions on Potency* (7.9) connects acts of first and second intention to direct and reflexive acts of cognition. By an act of cognition of first intention, the mind gets acquainted with the external world, while by an act of cognition of second

intention, the mind reflects on its own cognition. Aquinas' position is nuanced, for he does not go into any detail concerning the machinery of intentionality. This is the reason why scholars still disagree on Aquinas' final word, if any, on the nature of intentionality (see Brower-Toland 2008). In any case, the connection established by Aquinas between kinds of intentions and kinds of acts of knowledge becomes standard in the generation after Aquinas, and it is stressed in different ways. Peter of Auvergne, Simon of Faversham, and Radulphus Brito, for example, clearly endorse the explanation of intentionality as a mind-to-world direction of fit, although the philosophers of the generation after Aquinas tend to complicate the picture insofar as they cross the first/second intention distinction with the concrete/abstract intention distinction. (For details on this, see the entry *Intention, Primary and Secondary* in this volume). During the fourteenth century, some thinkers such as Durand of Saint-Pourçain, Walter Chatton, and William Ockham once more stress the reduction of intentionality to the mind's active attending toward an extramental thing while rejecting the idea that there can exist in the mind things endowed with objective or intentional existence. Ockham, in a special way, puts particular emphasis on accounting for intentions as natural signs of the mind, that is, as natural acts that the mind, causally stimulated by the external singular thing with which it is faced, spontaneously emits in order to variously refer back to that thing, and explicitly calls intentions to serve the function of atomic or molecular components of mental language. But some other thinkers, following the general systematization given to this matter by Henry of Ghent and John Duns Scotus, and expanding on a suggestion of Aquinas (*Summa theologiae*, 1.85.2.ad 2), opt for a more internalist interpretation of intentionality. The most significant example of this attitude is given by Hervaeus Natalis. Hervaeus' main idea is that when we are to explain a complex mental state (for instance, the knowledge that a table exists) or a simple mental concept (for instance, the concept of a table), we must distinguish two things: (1) first, the propositional or simple content of an act from the act itself and (2) second, the underlying

subject of the intentional properties from the intentional properties themselves. Since by "intentionality" Hervaeus means the relationship that an extramental thing bears to the mind actually cognizing that thing, it is such a relation that enables the mind to attach to the thing the passive property of being cognized, that is, of being objectively existing in the mind or being an intention. The relationship that the mind bears to the table is not sufficient for attaching such a property to the thing. Predications such as "table is an intention," therefore, are assessed as cases of denominative predication. According to Hervaeus, no duplication of objects is entailed at all by the ordinary process of intellectual cognition of extramental things. When the mind turns to a singular table, the external table is the primary target of its act of pointing to, but it is only the starting point of the intentional process. Every intentional process ends with a universal concept, which primarily refers to a universal object, and such a universal object, which can exist only in the mind, is what is primarily correlated to an act of cognition stemming from an external thing. Thus, it is not unreasonable for Hervaeus to say that when we cognize or think of a table, we are actually cognizing or thinking of something mind-dependent about something mind-independent, that is, we are thinking of a table about a singular table or we are knowing that the singular table is a table.

Things are obviously more complicated in the case of complex mental states such as beliefs, false cognitions, and thoughts of fictitious, abstract, or nonexistent beings. Hervaeus' theory of intentionality does not seem to work in such cases, and this is the reason why this and similar explanations were strongly attacked by many philosophers, such as Peter Auriol, Gerard Odonis, and William Alnwick. They tried to mitigate the strong internalism entailed by proposals such as that of Hervaeus by proving first that in the case of singular thoughts, considered by Hervaeus simply as mental objects obtained by reasoning from universal objects, the mind gets directly in touch with the world; second that, following Scotus' doctrine, in the case of universal thoughts, there is no ground for distinguishing in a sharp way the underlying nature (e.g., table) from the intentional

properties (e.g., being universal); and third that the relation of active cognizing is a sufficient condition for attaching the property of being an intention to a cognized thing.

Medieval discussions of intentionality do not end here, but continue during all the fourteenth century by assuming many other forms. John Buridan, for instance, tends to modify the understanding of what a second intention is according to a more linguistic pattern. But the basic issues and the vocabulary stay unchanged. The medieval legacy to contemporary discussions is the three-fold intentionality thesis relaunched by Brentano toward the end of the eighteenth century.

## Cross-References

- ▶ [Augustine](#)
- ▶ [Boethius](#)
- ▶ [Durand of St. Pourçain](#)
- ▶ [Gerald Odonis](#)
- ▶ [Henry of Ghent](#)
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## Internal Senses

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### Abstract

The internal senses are a class of cognitive faculties that were posited to exist between external sense perception and the intellectual soul. The notion of internal senses was developed in the Arabic philosophy of the Middle Ages on the basis of certain ancient philosophical ideas. The classical list of five internal senses was provided by Avicenna: common sense, retentive imagination, compositive imagination, estimative power, and memory. He also localized these faculties in the three ventricles of the brain. According to Avicenna, the function of common sense is to receive and relate the perceptions of the external senses. The retentive imagination stores the forms of these perceptions, and the compositive imagination processes these forms. Furthermore, estimative power grasps the “intentions” of the perceived objects, such as hostility or pleasantness, which the external senses do not perceive. The intentions are finally stored in memory. Averroes’ position was critical of Avicenna’s view, and both accounts had a remarkable influence in medieval Latin philosophy. Avicenna’s view dominated throughout the Middle Ages, although it was challenged and modified with help of other authorities. Albert the Great adhered to Avicenna in general outline but incorporated some of the views of Averroes, John Damascene, and Qusṭ;ā ibn Lūqā. Thomas Aquinas followed the same

lines but further modified the view. There were also constantly differing positions concerning whether the brain or the heart is the primary organ of the internal senses. Peter John Olivi and John Duns Scotus presented a novel reading of the estimative function, which gave up the Avicennian notion of intentions as the objects of the estimative faculty. John Buridan reduced the number of internal senses to two: common sense and memory. His view was adopted by some later authors but rejected by others.

The notion of internal senses emerged in medieval philosophy to describe a class of cognitive functions that did not belong to the realm of external perception in the strict sense but at the same time could not be attributed to the intellectual soul. These included functions that were thought to be closely connected to corporeal organs, such as imagination and dreaming, and some post-sensory cognitive capacities, which are found in animals, such as instinctual responses and rudimentary capabilities of reasoning.

In ancient philosophy, there were some precursors of the notion of the internal senses. In the late fourth century, Nemesius of Emesa located the organs of some mental faculties in distinct ventricles of the brain. During the fifth century, Augustine used the expression “internal sense” and also noted that some contemporary medical writers located cognitive functions to the ventricles of the brain. Augustine did not, however, mention the internal senses in connection with the brain. Augustine’s localization of the different faculties does not resemble later localizations. To the contrary, Nemesius’ account persisted in medieval discussions: partly because the work was falsely attributed to church father Gregory of Nyssa and partly through long citations in John Damascene’s *De fide orthodoxa*. Both Augustine and Nemesius seem to be influenced by the Galenist medical tradition.

The concept of internal senses appears in a developed form in medieval Arabic philosophy. The classical formulation of the theory is found in Avicenna’s *De anima*, where the author divides the cognitive faculties of the sensory soul into five



external and five internal senses. Each internal sense has its own organ in different parts of the cerebral ventricles.

Avicenna's account remained influential until early modern times, as his *De anima* and *Canon of Medicine* were continuously read but also criticized and modified by later authors. Avicenna posited two faculties in the foremost ventricle: common sense and retentive imagination. The function of common sense is to unify the sensations, which it receives from the external senses. Later Latin authors also added the perception that one perceives to the functions of the common sense. Retentive or formative imagination retains the sensory forms that common sense receives.

The middle ventricle hosts two faculties. The first of these, compositive imagination, also deals with imagination, but its function is not to store the forms but rather actively process them by combining and dividing. This faculty is, according to Avicenna, different in humans than in other animals. Another faculty in the middle ventricle is estimative power. It grasps qualities that are not perceived by the external senses, such as hostility or pleasantness. Avicenna calls these qualities "intentions." Furthermore, estimation is responsible for incidental perception, as in the case when an animal recognizes that a yellow thing is also sweet. There are also other functions, which Avicenna seems to attribute to estimation, some of which are unique to human beings, who also possess this faculty. Estimation seems to be for Avicenna the highest faculty of the sensory soul with a capability of judgment, which in human beings leads to a potential conflict with the judgment of reason. The intentions apprehended by estimation are stored in the rear ventricle of the brain, which is the seat of the fifth internal sense, sensory memory.

Avicenna's classification of these five post-sensory faculties rests on three principles: firstly, there are specific faculties devoted to sensible forms (common sense and imagination) and intentions (estimation and memory); secondly, there are different faculties for receiving (common sense and estimation) and for storing (imagination and memory) both kinds of objects; and finally, there must be a distinct faculty for

active processing of the objects, which is for sensible forms the compositive imagination.

The first major revision of the Avicennian system of the internal senses was carried out by Averroes. In particular, Averroes considered the faculty of estimation as superfluous. According to him, animal behavior can be explained by the Aristotelian notion of imagination, and he attributed human estimative functions to the faculty he called cogitation. He also fused the two Avicennian faculties of imagination into one. The result was a reduction of human internal senses to four: common sense, imagination, cogitative faculty, and memory.

The cogitative faculty differs from Avicenna's faculty of estimation in that it does not grasp the intentions, but rather actively abstracts them from the sensible forms and presents them to the memory. Moreover, Averroes does not describe intentions as bearing affectual connotations as Avicenna did, but rather they represent the individual objects as individuals. The abstraction of intentions presupposes for Averroes a close relationship of cogitation to the intellect. Memory is then the faculty responsible for both reception and the storage of intentions abstracted by cogitation.

It is not clear whether Averroes considered common sense an internal sense at all or rather as one of the external senses. Unlike Avicenna, he considered the Aristotelian common sensibles as its proper objects.

Before the breakthrough of Avicennian ideas, many Latin authors discussed imagination and other cognitive faculties distinct from but closely related to sense perception. In addition to Augustine, Nemesius, and John Damascene, they were influenced by Boethius, the medical compendium *Pantegni* and by Qusṭ;ā ibn Lūqā's *On the Difference Between Spirit and the Soul*.

After becoming available, Avicenna's classification of the internal senses was consequently repeated by several authors such as Dominic Gundissalinus (the translator of Avicenna), John Blund, John of La Rochelle, and Peter of Spain. There are also several early thirteenth century authors who provided different kinds of accounts of the number and functions of the internal senses.

Albert the Great included a thorough discussion on the internal senses in his works on natural philosophy, which are based on Avicenna but also incorporated other views such as those of Averroes. In particular, his view of the objects of the estimative faculty combines Avicennian conception with Averroes' notion of incidental perception and individuality. Albert also tries to harmonize Avicenna's localizations of the internal senses with John Damascene and Qusṭ;ā ibn Lūqā, unlike his contemporary John of La Rochelle, who clearly distinguishes different views. A similar harmonizing tendency appears later in the tradition of the Augustinian Hermits represented by Giles of Rome and Alfonso Vargas, who discussed the problem of the conflicting localizations of Avicenna and Augustine.

Although Albert changed some of his views between the earlier *Summa de creaturis* and later *De anima*, he developed certain insights that persisted through both works. One was the view of compositive imagination and estimation as animal counterparts of speculative and practical intellects. Albert's influence on later natural philosophers was strong, and also his views on internal senses were more or less endorsed by numerous writers.

Another influential figure in the later discussion was Thomas Aquinas. Aquinas adopted the general Avicennian framework as his teacher Albert had done, but he further modified it by incorporating some additional elements from Averroes. Aquinas considers the system of the internal senses from the viewpoint of the teleology of nature, so that their specific functions in the whole are derived from the need of animal to maintain its life. Aquinas does not reject the Avicennian estimative faculty, but attributes it only to animals. Like Averroes, he posits a cogitative power in humans and rejects a separate faculty of compositive imagination. For Aquinas, estimation is a faculty responsible for the self-preservation of animals. Estimative judgment is more than a mere apprehension of the agreeable or repulsive features of the objects: sheep do not flee from wolves because they are repulsive, but since they are their natural predators. Aquinas finds it particularly important that animal estimations are

based on instinctual reactions, whereas human cogitation judges intentions by collation, inquiry, and deliberation, analogous to the operations of the intellect. Cogitation, which Aquinas calls *ratio particularis*, differs from the intellect mainly in its ability to handle only individual intentions, while the intellect operates with universal concepts.

As soon as the form of disputed questions became established in the *De anima* commentaries, the discussion on internal senses usually concerned a couple of questions of the second book. The theme was occasionally dealt with also in the *Sentences* commentaries. In the late thirteenth century and early fourteenth century, Peter John Olivi and John Duns Scotus brought new insights into the discussion on estimative power in their *Sentences* commentaries. Their view was that no intentions exist as separate objects of estimative power, but that estimative judgments are activated by certain combinations of perceptual properties, which are in a particular relation (e.g., offensive or convenient) to the perceiver. Furthermore, Olivi did not consider estimation as a separate faculty, since according to him, there is only one internal sense, the common sense, and the acts traditionally attributed to other internal senses can be explained as functions of that faculty.

John of Jandun, who was active in early fourteenth century, developed his understanding of the internal senses based on Avicenna, Averroes, and Albert the Great. Unlike many earlier writers, Averroes was particularly important for his thought, which in many respects, however, was based on Albert's mostly Avicennian framework. During the same period, Walter Burley was focusing on the principles of various traditional classifications. This led Burley to incorporate a fourfold division (with only one faculty of imagination) of the internal senses into the traditional Avicennian fivefold division and to combine this with the Avicennian–Averroistic idea of abstraction.

John Buridan, however, preferred a classification where there are only two faculties: common sense and memory. The former is responsible for processing and the latter for storing both forms and intentions. The rest of the internal senses are

merely names for certain functions of these two senses. According to Buridan, they have two corresponding organs in the brain: the organ of common sense in the forebrain and the organ of memory between the last two cerebral ventricles in the hindbrain. Moreover, Buridan stressed that the primary organ of common sense is the heart (which he understood to be Aristotle's position) and consequently explained the apparent contradiction with the idea of cerebral organs by suggesting that there are special nerves connecting the two cerebral organs with the heart. He thought that his explanation was able to incorporate the various traditional views and sufficiently explain the diverse phenomena connected to these faculties.

Many late fourteenth century *De anima* commentaries were in their general outline heavily influenced by Buridan. This did not, however, always show up in their discussions of internal senses. Several authors did not share Buridan's heart-centered view, but located the internal senses in the brain. Neither did they all share Buridan's reduction of the internal senses into common sense and memory. For example, Nicholas Oresme spoke about four or five internal senses, attributing cogitative power to humans and estimation only to animals. He based the fourfold division on the argument that there must be different faculties for forms and intentions and explicitly rejects the twofold classification with reference to the traditional Galenic observation that injuries to the rear part of the brain affect only memory, not imagination.

Peter of Ailly discusses the internal senses in his *Tractatus de anima* using both Buridan and a compendium called *Summa naturalium* written by Albert of Orlamünde as his sources. Peter distinguishes five internal senses, but no longer follows the Avicennian scheme, which sharply distinguishes between the faculties that deal with forms and those that handle intentions. Consequently he agrees with Buridan that memory stores both forms and intentions. Furthermore, as regards the problem of heart versus brain, he agrees with Buridan but localizes the cerebral organs of the individual internal senses in the ventricles of the brain. Still later, at the end of

the fourteenth century, Henry Totting of Oyta presents the internal senses in a manner that closely follows Buridan.

During the fifteenth century, new interest was aroused in Aquinas' philosophy and consequently even in his view of the internal senses. In his commentary on *De anima*, for example, Henry of Gorkum presents the same fourfold division and same principles as Aquinas in the *Summa theologiae*. Similar to Aquinas, Henry shows only minor interest in the problem of the physiological location of the internal senses but thinks that their organs are situated primarily in the brain. He explains the role of the heart using the expressions of the Avicennian–Averroistic medical tradition and describes the heart as the origin of sensory functions, with perceptions actually taking place in the brain.

## Cross-References

- ▶ [Albert the Great](#)
- ▶ [Augustine](#)
- ▶ [Ibn Rushd, Muḥammad ibn Aḥmad al-Ḥafid \(Averroes\)](#)
- ▶ [Ibn Sīnā, Abū 'Alī \(Avicenna\)](#)
- ▶ [John Buridan](#)
- ▶ [John Duns Scotus](#)
- ▶ [John of La Rochelle](#)
- ▶ [Medicine and Philosophy](#)
- ▶ [Parva naturalia, Commentaries on Aristotle's](#)
- ▶ [Peter John Olivi](#)
- ▶ [Sense Perception, Theories of](#)
- ▶ [Species: Sensible and Intelligible](#)
- ▶ [Thomas Aquinas](#)
- ▶ [Walter Burley](#)

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## Intuitive and Abstractive Cognition

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### Abstract

The theory of intuitive and abstractive cognition was developed by John Duns Scotus in the late thirteenth century, and it dominated the discussion about cognition from the fourteenth to the sixteenth century. The theory was changed and debated by the major philosophers of the time including William of Ockham, Peter Auriol, Gregory of Rimini, and Peter of Ailly.

The theory of intuitive and abstractive cognition is not simply a rehashing of the problem of abstraction, as it developed in the Middle Ages. In line with the texts of Aristotle and Alexander of Aphrodisias, abstraction was the process of separation of a form. It was either the gathering of similarities to constitute a universal concept or the extraction, the stripping off of the material and singular conditions of the form. In these cases, abstraction was based on the act of the intellect, which is the only faculty able to grasp the abstracted or universal form, whereas the senses grasp the singular together with all its concrete and material conditions. The Peripatetic saying that only the intellect knows the universal does not necessarily mean that it has no access to

the singular, since the form could be present in a certain mode of being in the individual substance itself. But it was difficult to hold that the intellect knows directly the singular as such. Faith certainly implies that the divine intellect knows the singulars directly, at least in the case of humans since some are to be saved while others damned. But it was generally thought that this capacity is restricted to the divine intellect. In the thirteenth century, as far as human cognition is concerned, there were conflicting views between those that supported the view that intellection is exclusively of universals such as Robert Grosseteste, Alexander of Hales, and Albert the Great and those, notably Thomas Aquinas, that supported the view that intellection is indirectly of singulars, in a dematerialized form, but proper to the singular.

The theory of intuitive and abstractive cognition, on the other hand, is linked to the emergence of the idea that a singular can be grasped directly by the intellect itself. It was in the Franciscan, anti-Thomist, tradition that this theory was developed. Perhaps the theory of perception developed in the *Perspectiva* of Roger Bacon contributes to change the idea of the direct cognition of an object. In the *Correctorium fratris Thome* of William de la Mare, which was adopted in 1282 as an official position of the Franciscan order, Aquinas was criticized for having maintained that the intellect does not cognize singulars. Without a doubt, this is a simplification. But what is at stake is the possibility of a direct cognition of the singular. And it is from such a direct cognition that the idea of intuition or intuitive cognition is formed. In this sense, the theory is not truly formed until the last quarter of the thirteenth century and finds its canonical expression in Duns Scotus before becoming a central component of theories of cognition from the fourteenth until the sixteenth century.

The idea of intuition refers to vision. Since Augustine, the idea of vision has been applied not only to sensible vision, and not only to the inner vision of an image, but also to thought. Augustine generally used the term *visio* in this sense, but he introduces the verb *intueri* to describe the act of grasping the eternal reasons and calls *intuitus* this immediate act of the mind

(*De trinitate*, IX, vi, 9–11). The verb *intueri* and the adverb *intuitive* were first used in conjunction with singular cognition by Matthew of Aquasparta. We find them again used by Vital du Four, John Duns Scotus, and William of Ockham. The Augustinian origin is reinforced by the theory of vision, as it was received from the optics of Alhazen, where certain and direct vision by a straight ray is named *intuitio*.

As is well known, it was Duns Scotus that develops the standard theory of intuitive and abstractive cognition. The most explicit text is the *Quodlibetal Questions*. In question 6, Scotus is led to examine the beatific vision. He then examines the capacities of the human intellect itself. It is hence in his treatment of the intellect in relation to the beatific vision that he distinguishes two simple acts of apprehension (*Quaestiones quodlibetales*, VI, §§. 18–20). The essential distinguishing criterion takes into account the existence or nonexistence of the object. The first type of act is, in fact, indifferent to the object's existence or nonexistence or rather the presence or absence of the object. Scotus justifies the acceptance of such an act by our internal experience. He evokes the intellection of a universal, which is indifferent to its existence in a suppositum, and what happens in science, in which we know the conclusion of a demonstration, whether the signified objects either exist or not. This act is called "abstractive." One might ask why? The answer is because it abstracts from something, namely, primarily from the existence or nonexistence of the thing. Scotus, however, immediately changes this characterization by highlighting the indifference with respect to the presence or absence of the thing, since one thing can exist while being absent. The context of this description of the acts of cognition, namely, the question of the beatific vision, is important, since it implies a "face-to-face" vision. But it is here extended to a mode of cognition, generally characterized.

To this first type of simple act of the intellect, Scotus contrasts another one that relies uniquely on the object as present and existing. He admits that we do not experience this with much certainty, but he justifies it with reasoning. We can draw an

analogy with sense, since it grasps a present object, and that act is implicitly considered a greater perfection. Hence, the intellect would be less perfect than the sense if it did not grasp the object in itself, but only in a derived image.

There are several other expositions of this theory in Scotus' works, but none of them changes this pattern. Certain passages emphasize more than others the fact that an intuitive cognition grasps the thing as it is in itself, *in se*, while abstractive cognition captures only a *similitudo* or a species (*Reportata parisiensa*). This way of presenting the contrast will find its way into many texts of the fourteenth century, as we shall see.

One issue raised by some of Scotus' texts is whether or not we truly have an intuitive cognition in this life or if it is a capacity of our intellect that is only realized after death. A text from the *Questions on the Metaphysics* (Book II, q. 3) seems to exclude it from this life. However, a text of the *Quodlibetal Questions* does not deny this possibility. Scotus says only that we do not experience it with certainty, and in the *Opus oxoniense* (dist. 3, q. IX), he says that we do have an intuitive cognition *pro statu isto*.

An objection that will be dealt with by Scotus' successors is caused by the fact that on his view, two distinct acts can have the same object. But on Scotus' theory of cognition, we can say that the same object is known by different formal reasons.

On the model of an intuitive cognition as a vision face to face, it is necessary that its object exists and is present. Yet from another point of view, it is important for Scotus to differentiate what actually exists, on the one hand, from what is simply possible (and therefore may not even exist) or what is necessary and what can perhaps be thought independently of its actuality. Scotus, therefore, introduces a surprising distinction, which was taken over by his successors, between a perfect intuitive cognition, which presents something real and given to the intellect, and an imperfect intuitive cognition. The latter type accounts for memory as well as for vision of the future in the case of prophetic vision.

The theory of intuitive and abstractive cognition is found in most theologians of the fourteenth century. Peter Auriol begins with the definition of

intuitive cognition as the cognition of a thing as present, whereas abstractive cognition is of the thing as absent. But he inserts this distinction in his analysis of experience and optical illusions. I can not only judge but also see something other than this. Hence, we must distinguish what he calls *esse apparens* from real being. *Esse apparens* is not as an intermediary entity, as William of Ockham believed or pretended to read into Auriol, but the very appearance of the thing to my intellect. The difference that arises in some cases (illusions) between this apparent or intentional being and real or subjective being leads one to think that my intellectual act terminates at this *esse apparens*. Consequently, an intuitive cognition terminates at the being as it appears. The difference is reformulated by highlighting the direct character of an intuitive cognition that makes the object appear as present in its *presentialitas*.

However, it was mainly Ockham's theory that stimulated discussion due to the modifications it introduces into Scotus' theory. William of Ockham is concerned with ensuring the epistemological realism of his theory of cognition, criticizing Auriol's theory, which he perceives as a skeptical threat. Intuitive cognition is the starting point for all intellectual activities, not by a process of drawing out a form, but through a series of acts, which, ultimately, depend on direct contact with the thing itself. This – at least in the mature theory where the concept is viewed as an act of intellection – causes the rise of the concept in the intellect, which in turn is viewed as a natural sign. Such a concept is at first singular, but it may be followed by a concept that abstracts either from the existence of the thing or from a particular feature, in order to form a universal concept, through a confused apprehension of a plurality of things bearing a certain resemblance. Ockham often insists on the fact that intuitive and abstractive cognitions do not differ in their objects and that both terminate in the same thing. Furthermore, things do not have different formalities (*formalitates*) within them that could be objects of different intellections, since Ockham only admits of real distinctions. These two acts are independent of one another, although in our actual state one presupposes the other.



It is clear that in Scotus, these cognitions are simple acts prior to any judgment. In a way this is still the case with Ockham, but the Ockhamist definition shifts to a characterization that bases this distinction on the types of judgments that these different acts allow.

Abstractive cognition has several meanings. In one sense, it means a cognition, which, given that it abstracts from certain traits of the thing, may be suitable for many singulars. In this sense, therefore, cognition allows for the formation of universal concepts through a joint apprehension of a plurality of singular things. But it is not this sense that identifies the abstraction to the universal, which is the most important here. In another sense, “we understand an abstractive cognition in the way in which it abstracts from existence or non-existence, and from other conditions that, in a contingent manner, happen to a thing or are predicated of it.” Up to this point, we are close to Scotus. But the main thing is that, on that basis, two relations to the thing are characterized, and these descriptions are immediately connected with the types of judgments possible. These are Ockham’s proper definition of intuitive and abstractive cognition. An intuitive cognition of a thing is a cognition such that, by it, I can know if the thing exists or not. In other words, the intellect, which perfectly captures these terms or signs, and also what they signify, is forced to assent to a proposition stating that the thing exists, if it exists. Consequently, such a cognition will also allow with certainty the formulation of judgments about contingent truths. Conversely, abstractive cognition is that by which I cannot judge whether an object exists or not and that does not permit me to have knowledge about contingent truths.

Ockham’s theory thus departs from Scotus’ position, although it depends on it, since the presence or absence of the thing is not the primary criterion for the definition of these two kinds of cognitions. Ockham pushes to the breaking point the idea that the very nature of the act alone should be the criterion, and these acts then are the basis of these two different types of judgments.

Ockham’s theory serves as a point of reference throughout the fourteenth century. However, it encountered resistance. Thus, in his *Lectures on*

*the Sentences* (Book I, dist. 3, q. 3, art. 1), Gregory of Rimini stays close to the Scotist view but develops it in several directions. First, he applies the distinction between intuitive and abstractive cognition as well to sensitive as to intellectual cognition. Although Scotus used the comparison with the senses, the problem was raised by him in the context of the beatific vision, which concerns the intellect alone. Gregory of Rimini defines an intuitive cognition as that by which “something is formally known in itself” and an abstractive cognition as that by which “something is formally known through some representation.” But he goes on to explicitly distinguish the real existence from the type of presence required here. An intuitive cognition does not have as a criterion that the object actually exists in reality or not; the difference is between the immediate presence of the thing and the presence of a representative intermediary. Consequently, an abstractive cognition does not abstract from real existence, but from what is named “the objective presence of the known thing.” In an intuitive cognition, it is the thing that is present “objectively” (*obiective*), that is, as something in front of the intellect and facing it directly – whether it exists, or that our cognition, by a natural or divine power, ends at an object that does not exist at all. Abstractive cognition, on the other hand, abstracts from such an “objective presence” and ends immediately at a “representation.”

These ideas are reflected in Peter of Ailly. In his *Commentary on the Sentences*, he begins by literally following Ockham’s presentation, claiming that an abstractive cognition does not allow me to judge whether something exists when it exists or does not exist, when it does not exist. But further, he insists on the fact that abstractive cognition gives us the object “in a representation” thereby restating, via Gregory of Rimini, certain Scotistic formulations. In the *Commentary on the Sentences* as well as in the *Treatise on the Soul*, the most appropriate formulation seems to be that “an intuitive cognition is a simple cognition by which some thing is formally known in itself in an immediate way, while an abstractive cognition is a simple cognition by which something is formally known by means of a representation.” Hence, abstractive cognition

does not, properly speaking, set aside the existence of the thing, but its *praesentialitas obiectiva*. The thing is not facing it as an object (i.e., what is placed in front of the intellect), but as “means” that is representative of this thing (either an image or another type of sign). Conversely, in the intuitive cognition, “the thing itself is the object for the cognizer, as immediately present to him.”

The modification that William of Ockham made to the definition of an intuitive cognition led him to formulate the hypothesis of an intuitive cognition of a nonexistent thing. This thesis has perplexed contemporaries, but it has also been overestimated and overly interpreted by many commentators. Ockham’s concern is mainly about the separation of the act, analyzed in itself and in its relations to other acts, from the thing at which it terminates. This real distinction implies that, perhaps not in the course of nature, at least according to the absolute power of God, we can conceive of one without the other, as is the case with all truly distinct things. This argument does not ruin in any way the fact that, in the ordained power of God, intuitive cognition supposes the presence of the thing. Moreover, his own definition has the consequence that has not always been emphasized (see *Quodlibet* V, q. 5) that if an intuitive cognition enables me to judge that something exists when it exists or does not exist when it does not exist, then in the supernatural case of an intuitive cognition of the nonexistent, I should judge that this thing does not exist! Of course, this is hardly conceivable in the normal course of events, but in any case, there would be no deception here, certainly not divine deception.

This hypothesis of an intuitive cognition of nonexistent objects, *de potentia absoluta*, was widely accepted after Ockham, though differently used. It demonstrates the widespread influence of the Ockhamist theses. Gregory of Rimini and Peter of Ailly both repeat it, without opening the door to skepticism. Indeed, Walter Chatton tried to infer skeptical consequences of Ockham’s theory: God could produce such a representation that I should formulate an existential judgment, in the absence of the thing. But for Ockham, this would be a belief, not an intuitive cognition. In

any case, it is true that this idea would supply some of Ockham’s successors (like Walter Chatton, Adam Wodeham, Richard Fitzralph, John Rodington in Oxford, and Peter of Ailly in Paris) with the hypothesis of Divine deception. This hypothesis had not been developed by itself, nor as a simple radicalization of demonic deceptions, but as part of a broader debate on the discussion of the relation of divine power to the course of nature, including what the natural process of cognition is concerned with. It does not in any way lead to a renouncement of epistemological realism. It was part of a development of certain conceptual tools and arguments allowing for a new way to think about the status of a concept and its object, as well as about the concept of evidence. In less than a century, the theory of intuitive and abstractive cognition challenged the traditional Aristotelian theory of abstraction, as well as the theory of divine illumination, and became one of the major elements in the transformation of the medieval theory of cognition.

## Cross-References

- ▶ [Adam Wodeham](#)
- ▶ [Albert the Great](#)
- ▶ [Alexander of Hales](#)
- ▶ [Certainty](#)
- ▶ [Epistemology](#)
- ▶ [Gregory of Rimini](#)
- ▶ [John Duns Scotus](#)
- ▶ [Peter Auriol](#)
- ▶ [Peter of Ailly](#)
- ▶ [Robert Grosseteste](#)
- ▶ [Thomas Aquinas](#)
- ▶ [William of Ockham](#)

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## Isaac Israeli

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### Abstract

With Ishāq ibn Sulaymān al-Israeli, generally known as Isaac Israeli, the philosophical season of the Jewish Middle Ages begins. Integrating, in Jewish thought, philosophical ideas drawn from Greek and Arabic sources, Isaac Israeli gives us the first, albeit not very original, testimony of Jewish Neoplatonism.

## Biographical Information

We have only indirect information about Isaac Israeli's life. The main sources are an Arab Andalusian biographer active in the second half of the tenth century, Abū Dāwūd Ibn Giulgiul, in his *Generations of the Physicians*, and, in the mid-eleventh century, Šā'id of Toledo, in his *Generations of the Nations*. Although the exact dates of his life remain unclear, we tend to assume that Isaac Israeli lived between 850 and 950 AD circa. ("an age of over a hundred," as we read in the biography by Giulgiul). He was a Jewish eye doctor born in Egypt, who emigrated to Qayrawān (in Tunisia) and entered the service of the local emir, Ziyādāt Allāh, and then his successor, 'Ubayd Allāh (founder of the Fatimid Ishmaelite dynasty), as their doctor.

Likewise, we still know little of how Israeli's philosophical formation came about. However, the influence of al-Kindī's original writings, as well as those of his circle, especially a Neoplatonic Arabic source of *The Theology of Aristotle* (the so-called Ibn Ḥasday's Neoplatonist), is undoubted: in Israeli there is basically the same synthesis as found earlier in al-Kindī's school between Platonic, Aristotelian, and strictly theological elements.

Originally written in Arabic, Israeli's treatises can be divided into two categories, which had different impacts. The medical treatises – of which are extant the *Book of Foodstuffs and Drugs*, the *Book of Fevers*, and the *Book of Urine* – were very popular throughout the Middle Ages in the Jewish world, as well as in Islamic and Christian circles. Recognizing their value, Israeli himself is supposed to have said that his memory would survive better through these books than through his progeny.

His reputation as a philosopher, on the other hand, was less widespread: Jewish philosophers made limited use of his philosophical writings, perhaps because in a well-known letter to Samuel ibn Tibbon (in which a veritable “canon” of the *authoritates* of Jewish thought is established), Maimonides held that he was “only a doctor.” Nevertheless, Israeli probably redacted his philosophical treatises in order to divulge Greco-Arab doctrines among the Jewish public. The following treatises are conserved:

- The *Kitāb al-Hudūd*, the *Book of Definitions*, extant both in an incomplete copy of the original Arabic text, and, in a complete version, in medieval Latin and Hebrew translations (transcribed, respectively, by Gherard of Cremona and Nissim ben Shelomoh), is a kind of philosophical dictionary that collects 57 terms from epistemology, logic, metaphysics, psychology, and theology. What is striking at this regard is that the work circulated in the Latin West as the ultimate source of the famous “*veritas est adaequatio rei et intellectus*,” of which Israeli did not make any mention.
- The *Kitāb al-Giawāhir*, the *Book of Substances*, of which large fragments of the Arabic text are extant, is a cosmological-metaphysical treatise inspired by *Aristotle's Theology*.
- *Sefer ha-ruah weha-nefesh*, the *Book on the Spirit and the Soul*, preserved in two Hebrew versions and only in a fragment of the Arabic original, is full of biblical references, as it combines philosophical doctrines of the soul with Jewish scriptural proof (regarding the belief in rewards and punishments of the soul).
- *Kitāb al-Uṣṭuṣāt*, the *Book on the Elements*, which like most of the other philosophical works exists in Hebrew and Latin translations, is a treatise on the quality and quantity of the elements, evidently based on Aristotle.
- *Pereq ha-yesodot*, the *Chapter on the Elements*, of which a single Hebrew manuscript exists (at the Biblioteca Comunale of Mantua), was once erroneously ascribed to Aristotle.

## Thought

Following a practice characteristic of medieval Arab, and later Jewish, Neoplatonists, in the best known of all his philosophical works, the *Book of Definitions*, Isaac Israeli proposes a reading of philosophy that combines Platonic and Aristotelian themes. The starting point is represented by the four philosophical questions introduced by Aristotle in his *Posterior Analytics* to define things: whether, what, which, and why, i.e., existence, quiddity, quality, and quantity. Philosophy – Israeli explains – is not included in a genus from which its definition could be composed: having no answer to the question “what,” we are only in the condition to describe philosophy through its name, property, and effect. The result is that philosophy is respectively the love of wisdom, the assimilation to the works of the Creator (i.e., to acquire the true knowledge of things and to do what corresponds to the truth), and man's knowledge of himself (by knowing himself in both his spirituality and corporeality, man knows the macrocosm in its spiritual and corporeal substance).

Yet apart from this aspect, which represents only a general introduction to Israeli's work, what actually characterizes his thought? There follows the definitions of the substances that are arranged between God (or God's perfection) and the imperfect lower world according to less and less pure ranks. In Israeli's hierarchically ordered universe – later repropounded with the same structure and the same terms in the *Fountain of Life* by Avicbron, who undoubtedly knew Israeli's work – God creates *ex nihilo* two simple

substances, matter and form, and if primary matter is described as the substratum of diversity or as the truly first genus, the first form is what, imprinting itself on this matter, establishes the nature of the intellect. From the intellect, which Israeli defines as the totality of forms, emanates the world of souls (the rational soul, the animal soul, and the vegetative soul) and so, in descending order, the world of the spheres and the sublunary world, with the four elements and their compounds. The reason for the differences between the various substances is that the light originating in the supernal world gradually diminishes, as it passes downward through the degrees of the emanation. In short, the further this light is from its source, the more it darkens and thickens, but without disappearing (if this were not so, the substantial unity and continuity of the universe would be compromised), and the more the substances are imperfect. As it is not difficult to see, what changes is not only the quality of the light, and consequently the nature of the substances, but also the manner in which the cosmological process occurs. The distinction is, succinctly, between:

- *Creatio ex nihilo* or innovation – the action with which God makes existent the first two simple substances from the nonexistent
- Emanation, which concerns the hypostases in the spiritual world (every substance flows from “the splendor and the brilliance” of the one that came before)
- Natural causality: the passing of corporeal substances from privation to existence

The theological motive behind this threefold distinction is quite obvious: introducing the concept of creation into the framework of an emanationist metaphysics, and the necessary procession that it implies, Isaac Israeli preserves God’s power, will, and wisdom.

## Cross-References

- ▶ [Avicbron](#)
- ▶ [Form and Matter](#)

- ▶ [al-Kindī, Latin Translations of](#)
- ▶ [Philosophy, Jewish](#)
- ▶ [Plotinus, Arabic](#)

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## Isidore of Seville

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### Abstract

Isidore of Seville was a teacher of liberal arts at the beginning of the Dark Ages, who was primarily known by his encyclopedic knowledge and his famous scholarly texts. Isidore tried fervently to fit all the secular knowledge available in his time into a Christian worldview, often with a great dose of eclecticism and hardly any criticism. Nevertheless, he provided the system educational of his day with classic and scientific knowledge and preserved this information for future medieval authors.

Isidore (c. 560–636), bishop of Seville, currently Patron Saint of the Internet, and primarily known as the author of *The Etymologies*, was an isolated thinker at the beginning of the Dark Ages. This historical setting bestowed upon Isidore the title of “the last candle” of classical wisdom. However, he can be evaluated in two different ways: as an erudite among the intellectual poverty where he lived, or as part of a decadent tradition in philosophy. The encyclopedic knowledge embodied in his works, such as *The Etymologies* or *De natura rerum*, cannot be denied. Yet, as a member of a ruined academic system, his job consisted here and there of restating, recapitulating, and sometimes simply transliterating both data and theories that lacked research and originality; further, there are no proper sources, explicit quotes, or clear references of the cited authors.

It would be unfair to judge this brilliant intellect outside the historical circumstances which led him to produce this kind of work, because Isidore also represents the survival of classical culture among the unreceptive and strict Christian civilization which destroyed the School of Alexandria and also the Athenian Academy. In this respect, his work is actually remarkable, especially if we

take into account the fact that there was no scientific community or current study of nature. Despite the lack of originality and the abundant eclecticism, his work was invaluable for forthcoming generations, because it preserved the classical impetus of Greek science and philosophy for later innovative times.

But Isidore did more than that. He was a Christian thinker, and his main objective was to conciliate Catholic theology with secular science. The issue, however, was not that secular knowledge had to be Christianized: it was that secular knowledge had to be understood within the framework of the revealed “Christian knowledge,” and thus fitted into the true scheme of the cosmos; the “pursuit of knowledge in itself” was abandoned in deference to this authoritative knowledge, which was sincerely believed to be true knowledge. Hence, his *The Differences* and *The Synonyms* were not only devoted to clarifying the meaning of the words, but also to elucidating many theological issues. All in all, the idea was to describe not an objective world, but the Christian world.

Because he never made explicit his own theory about language, Isidore is considered to be a compiler and transmitter as compared with original thinkers around his era, such as Boethius or Erigena. But, for Isidore, science consisted of recollection, discussion, and explanation of the given knowledge. Just like the last encyclopedists of the Roman Empire, Varro and the elder Piny, he only attempted to expose thoroughly all current knowledge, in order to offer scholars a manual for instruction. Hence, as was customary at the time, Isidore’s production is devoted to portraying ancient wisdom and, thus, says little about his own period. In *The Etymologies*, for instance, he deals first with the liberal arts and then goes on to expose everything that was considered to be science or knowledge in his time, from medicine and law, through natural history and human geography. Understandably, it was in his own time that *The Etymologies* was really appreciated as an instrument of instruction for monastic and ecclesiastic education, as the thousands of copies that existed throughout Europe give evidence.



Despite the fact that *The Etymologies* lacks the critical commentaries and theoretical innovation that characterize the later Middle Ages, the general idea that guided it can be found in the *Summae*: a comprehensive account of secular knowledge enlightened by a Christian understanding. Thus, philosophical activity remained imbibed, to a certain extent, in dialectics, grammar, and rhetoric. The main subject of Isidore's research was the field of grammar: he was a *grammaticus*, in the sense of the *Trivium's* teachers. With the apparent purpose of defining words correctly, Isidore followed the grammarian tradition developed from the Hellenic period as to Donatus and Priscian; but his linguistic analysis and the peculiar definitions do not correspond to what we would expect in relation to our modern understanding of linguistics and etymology. He did not intend to give historical and accurate meanings of the words; instead, he prescribed what they should mean. In a world in which philosophical problems were reduced to dialectics, in which peace or war, death or life, relied on the rhetoric of ambassadors and diplomats, the grammarian played a central role. Yet, a grammarian's activity takes place on a different field, namely, theology and natural science. The grammarian, as Isidore proved, was the "science man," the teacher, and the arbiter: he could explain what the words stand for. Provided that an erroneous interpretation of the world implied wrong terminology, heresies and wars followed from the words. The task of the grammarian consists in giving the true meaning of a word. In this fashion, Isidore began the tradition of rooting the meaning of words in reality, the *significatio*, as can be later appreciated in the terminist logicians and speculative grammarians of the high Middle Ages.

The frame of mind behind Isidore's production portrays the medieval condition of *Philosophia anchilla theologiae*, which opened the scholastic outlines of the later Middle Ages. There is no doubt that for him all secular knowledge could be explained inside the framework of Christian theology; indeed, this knowledge helped to construct the Catholic understanding of the world. As

a consequence, by accepting secular science, Isidore's scholastic point of view is actually closer to Anselm's rather than to Augustine's, even though his activity was more theological than dialectical. Along with his grammatical accounts of religious thought, we find the *Liber numerorum*, the *Allegorie*, and the *Sententiae*, in which he also used the tools of language for Biblical exegesis. In the enormous desolation of ideas that reigned in the seventh century, Isidore of Seville was definitely more than a candle: rather he was a torch.

## Cross-References

- ▶ [Boethius](#)
- ▶ [John Scottus Eriugena](#)

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## Ismā'īlī Philosophical Tradition

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### Abstract

Neoplatonic philosophy was introduced into Ismā'īlism, a major branch of Shī'ite Islam, as early as the beginning of the tenth century. Relying not only on the Arabic paraphrases of Plotinus (the so-called *Theology of Aristotle*) and Proclus (the *Liber de causis*), but also on Arabic philosophers such as al-Kindī and al-Fārābī, Ismā'īlī Neoplatonism has as its main concern the understanding of revelation through philosophical reflection and to establish religious doctrines on a rational basis. Although Abū Ya'qūb al-Sijistānī, the main representative of the so-called “Persian School” (tenth century), and al-Kirmānī, the most important Ismā'īlī philosopher of the Fatimid period in Egypt (eleventh century), have developed quite different systems, based, respectively, on the *Neoplatonica Arabica* and on al-Fārābī, they both try to harmonize the teachings of the Prophets and the Imams with an interpretation of Plato and Aristotle going back to late Antiquity. They established a close link between cosmology and noetics, in order to provide a rational foundation for the soteriological function of the Imam. As a part of the Universal Soul fallen into the material world, human soul has to be delivered from the body in which she is kept captive by the actualization of her intellectual faculty. To this end, she needs the instruction of the Prophets and the Imams, the incorporations of the cosmic Agent Intellect.

From the tenth century onward, Ismā'īlism, a major branch of Shī'ite Islam, developed a

specific form of Neoplatonic philosophy (known as “Ismā'īlī Neoplatonism”) in order to harmonize the teachings of the Prophets and the Imams – as they are reflected for instance in the Qur'ān – with an interpretation of Plato and Aristotle going back to late Antiquity. Moreover, out of the same concern to understand revelation through rational reflection and to establish religious doctrines on a rational basis, Ismā'īlīs also adopted and assimilated a set of notions and concepts from *falsafa*, the philosophical tradition in the Muslim world. After the foundation of Cairo in 969, the Ismā'īlī dynasty of the Fatimids, competing with the Sunni 'Abbāsids of Baghdad, attracted to their new capital philosophers, theologians, and scientists; libraries, hospitals, and observatories were founded, for instance the “House of Wisdom” (*Dār al-'ilm*) devoted to the study of sciences and philosophy.

The main sources of Ismā'īlī philosophy are the Arabic paraphrases of Plotinus (the so-called *Theology of Aristotle*) and Proclus (the *Liber de causis*), several Neoplatonic works written in Arabic (such as the *Doxography of Pseudo-Ammonius*), and texts attributed by the Arabic tradition to Empedocles (the Pseudo-Empedocles). Also, Ismā'īlī philosophers living in Iran and Transoxiana in the tenth century belonged to the same intellectual milieu as certain disciples of al-Kindī, such as Abū Zayd al-Balkhī, Ibn Farīgūn, Abū I-Ḥasan al-'Āmirī, Abū Sulaymān al-Sijistānī, and Abū Ḥayyān al-Tawḥīdī. In the eleventh century, Ismā'īlī thought was influenced by the “Epistles of the Pure Brethren” (*Rasā'il Ikhwān al-Ṣafā'*) and by *falāsifa* such as al-Fārābī. Moreover, Ismā'īlī Neoplatonism shows many similarities with contemporary Jewish Neoplatonism, in particular with Isaac Israeli, both traditions using the same philosophical sources.

Neoplatonic philosophy was probably introduced into Ismā'īlism by Muḥammad al-Nasāfī (d. c. 943), who formed with Abū Tammām, Abū Ḥātim al-Rāzī (d. 934), and Abū Ya'qūb al-Sijistānī (d. c. 971), the so-called “Persian School.” These Ismā'īlī thinkers worked in Iran and Transoxiana.

The best-known member of this “Persian School” is Abū Ya‘qūb al-Sijistānī, whose main philosophical works are the *Book of the Wellsprings* (*Kitāb al-Yanābī‘*), the *Unveiling of the Hidden* (*Kashf al-mahjūb*), and the *Book of the Keys* (*Kitāb al-Maqālīd*, still unpublished). Each of these works is built upon a triadic scheme, consisting of the three Plotinian hypostases of Intellect, Soul, and Nature. Plotinus’ first hypostasis, the One, is situated outside the system of the universe, and al-Sijistānī stresses its absolute transcendence: it is not a being, nor a substance, nor a cause, nor an essence; but at the same time it is not a non-being, nor a non-substance, nor a non-cause, nor a non-essence. Therefore, every attribute and its negation must be denied from the One (negative theology): only by means of a double negation the Ultimate Reality can be referred to. By his Word (*kalima*) or Command (*amr*), the transcendent One creates (*abda‘a*) the Intellect; out of the Intellect emanates (*inba‘atha*) the Soul, which generates (*kawwana*) the sensible world. Al-Sijistānī distinguishes, indeed, three modes of production: *ibdā‘*, which occurs out of any time; *inbi‘āth*, which produces time by the movement of the Soul; *takwīn*, which takes place in time. While Intellect, as the first created being, is eternal, perfect in act, and free of any movement, the Soul is perfect only in potency. This imperfection generates a double movement in the Soul: she aspires to attain the Intellect, the grasping of which enables her to become perfect in act; but at the same time, due to her imperfection, she is attracted downward to the physical world. Al-Sijistānī’s ample reflections on the Plotinian concept of the two sides of the Soul influenced *falāsifa* such as Avicenna (Ibn Sīnā). The Soul’s inclination toward matter causes the generation of the physical world and the fragmentation of the Soul into a multitude of parts mixed up with matter. These are the human souls: parts of the Universal Soul fallen into the corporeal world. The way down is paralleled with an upward one, leading human souls back to their celestial origin, along with the reversal of the entire creation toward its source, in accordance with the Neoplatonic cycle of *processio* and *reditus*. This way back necessitates the mediation

of the Prophets and the Imams, as earthly manifestations of the Intellect, whose instruction (*ta‘līm*) actualizes the human potential intellect, a necessary condition for the survival of the soul outside the body and her final return to the intelligible world.

The most important Ismā‘īlī philosopher of the Fatimid period, Ḥamīd al-Dīn al-Kirmānī, spent part of his life in Cairo, in the entourage of caliph al-Ḥākim. He finished his main work, the *Book of the Repose of the Intellect* (*Kitāb Rāḥat al-‘Aql*) in 1021, probably shortly before his death.

Conceived as a spiritual city, divided into seven “walls” (*aswār*) surrounding 56 “crossroads” (*mashāri‘*), the *Rāḥat al-‘Aql* develops a system of the universe based on the number ten. A perfect harmony reigns between the three “worlds” of which the universe is composed: the ten separated Intellects of the intelligible world, the ten celestial spheres governing the physical world, and the ten ranks of the *da‘wa* – the organization of the Ismā‘īlī community – which form the world of religion. The transcendent and unknown Creator (*Mubdi‘*) remains outside the universe. Al-Kirmānī describes him in the same terms as al-Sijistānī, stressing even more his transcendence. For al-Kirmānī, even the Intellect, the first created being, has no direct contact with its Creator, who remains outside the reach of his creatures for ever. Although he describes the Intellect in terms very close to the Ismā‘īlī Neoplatonism of his predecessors, al-Kirmānī introduces a lot of concepts that he borrowed from al-Fārābī’s *Principles of the Opinions of the Inhabitants of the Perfect State* (*Mabādi‘ ārā‘ ahl al-madīna al-fāḍila*). So he takes over al-Fārābī’s conception of the First Being as a self-thinking intellect, but he applies it to the Intellect, the first created being, thus introducing an ontological shift with respect to the First Principle of the *falāsifa*. Al-Kirmānī’s Intellect, although a created being, is to be identified with the God of the Qur’ān, of which it even bears the name: *Allāh*. Containing in its essence all the “forms” and being the “cause of causes” (*‘illat al-‘ilal*), the Intellect is the principle of emanation (*inbi‘āth*) of all subsequent beings. However, this emanation does not produce the Plotinian entities (Soul and Nature), as was the

case in tenth-century Ismā'īlism, but rather al-Fārābī's separated Intellects. In fact, al-Kirmānī introduced the Fārābian cosmology into Ismā'īlism; at the same moment, Avicenna gave it its classical form in his *Kitāb al-Shifā'*. Although relying directly on al-Fārābī, the scheme of emanation described by al-Kirmānī conserves some traces of the former Plotinian triad. The Intellect, as far as it is a thinking intellect ('*aql 'āqil*), produces an Intellect in act (the first emanated being, *al-munba'ath al-awwal*), the source of the emanation of seven other Intellects in act; but as far as it is an intellect thought by itself ('*aql ma'qūl*), it produces an Intellect in potency, composed of matter and form. This is the tenth and last Intellect: the demiurge, who forms the sublunary world in accordance with the patterns it receives from the first Intellect, through the eight Intellects in act. The first Intellect (or first created being), the second Intellect in act (or first emanated being), and the tenth Intellect in potency correspond, respectively, to the three hypostases of earlier Ismā'īlī Neoplatonism: Intellect, Soul, and Nature. Al-Kirmānī's theory of knowledge seems also very close to al-Fārābī's, as he borrows from him the main technical terms: the potential intellect (*al-'aql bi-l-qūwa*), the material intellect (*al-'aql al-hayūlānī*), the intellect in act (*al-'aql bi-l-fi'*), the acquired intellect (*al-'aql al-mustafād*), and the active intellect (*al-'aql al-fa"āl*). Following al-Fārābī, al-Kirmānī identifies the Agent Intellect with the tenth Intellect and assigns it, along with its main role in the creation of the physical world, both a noetical and a soteriological function, as far as it is the principle of the actualization of the rational faculty in man and, in consequence, the principle of his eternal happiness and survival. However, concerning the nature and activity of the Agent Intellect, al-Kirmānī, as an Ismā'īlī, departs widely from the *ḥaylasūf* al-Fārābī, by claiming that it exercises its action only through the instruction (*ta'līm*) of the Prophets and the Imams. At difference with the rational faculty of ordinary men, the Intellect of the Prophets and the Imams is perfect and always in act, without needing to pass from potency to actuality. They might therefore be considered as incorporations of the Agent

Intellect, a dangerous heterodox statement; hence, al-Kirmānī cautiously only hints at in his *Rāḥat al-'Aql*.

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- ▶ [al-'Āmirī, Abū l-Ḥasan](#)
- ▶ [al-Balkhī, Abū Zayd](#)
- ▶ [al-Fārābī, Abū Naṣr](#)
- ▶ [Ibn Farīḡūn](#)
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- ▶ [Ikhwān al-Ṣafā', Encyclopedia of](#)
- ▶ [Isaac Israeli](#)
- ▶ [al-Kindī, Abū Yūsuf Ya'qūb ibn Ishāq](#)
- ▶ [Philosophy, Arabic](#)
- ▶ [Plotinus, Arabic](#)
- ▶ [Presocratics in the Arab World](#)
- ▶ [Proclus, Arabic](#)
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## Jacques Almain

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### Abstract

Jacques Almain was one of the most prominent exponents of conciliarism in the early sixteenth century. He studied the arts and theology at the University of Paris, receiving his doctorate in 1512. Almain wrote extensively on issues of philosophy and ethics. When the Council of Pisa met in 1512, it tried to depose Pope Julius II (1503–1513); and when Cajetan attacked the council on the pope's behalf, the university chose Almain to reply. His arguments were grounded in the belief that the church was able to act in its own defense, even against its visible head, the pope. Cajetan replied, but Almain did not live to respond in turn. He died unexpectedly in 1515. John Mair, his teacher, answered Cajetan instead, advocating conciliar supremacy in the church.

### Life

Jacques Almain (c. 1480–1515) attained considerable prominence during his brief academic career. He was particularly important for his critique of papal claims to sovereignty over the church.

Born c. 1480 in the diocese of Sens, Almain probably studied the arts at the Collège de Montaigu of the University of Paris. During the years 1503–1512, he taught the arts at the Collège de Montaigu, Collège Sainte-Barbe, and Collège de Coqueret. In January 1503, Jan Standonck appealed to the Parlement of Paris to prevent Almain from moving his teaching away from Collège de Montaigu. Almain served as rector of the university in 1507 and as proctor of the French nation the following year, but he vainly sought a good benefice in the same period. During these years, Almain published works on logic, physics, and moral philosophy. Of these, the *Moralia* attained the widest diffusion.

Beginning in 1508, Almain studied theology with John Mair (1501–1518, 1525–1531) at the Collège de Navarre. He was a *boursier* in theology in 1508 at the college, but he still sought vainly to obtain a benefice. On January 26, 1512, Almain received the license in theology, ranking second among 23 students promoted. He was made a doctor of theology on March 31 of that year, but he was admitted to the consortium of the Faculty of Theology only after apologizing for not being fulsome enough in his gratitude to the senior doctors of sacred science. He taught theology and participated in the affairs of the faculty until his premature death at Auvillar in the south of France, where he was visiting Jean de la Mare, bishop of Condom. Almain died poor, but he was praised by former pupils and by printers as they circulated his writings.



Almain attained prominence in 1512 as the university intervened in the fight between Pope Julius II (1503–1513) and three dissident cardinals. These cardinals, with the support of King Louis XII of France and the Emperor Maximilian, summoned a council to meet at Pisa in 1511. Pope Julius responded with a council of his own, summoned to meet at the Lateran basilica in 1512, and with a propaganda offensive. The most noted critique of the Council of Pisa and its pretensions was *On the Comparison of the Power of Pope and Council* by the Dominican theologian Thomas of Vio, known as Cajetan. The University of Paris, by royal command, intervened on the council's behalf, choosing Almain as its spokesman. He may have been chosen because he had addressed, among other things, the power of the pope and of the council in a question disputed at Vespers in March of 1512, during the promotion of Louis Ber to the doctorate in theology. Almain's answer to Cajetan's tract, his *Book on the Authority of the Church*, appeared later in 1512. Cajetan answered with his *Apology* in 1514. Almain died without replying, but Mair, long after the failure of the Council of Pisa, defended his pupil's opinions in a section of his commentary on the Gospel of Matthew (1518). This response by Mair is contemporaneous with the posthumous publication of several of Almain's works.

Although, unlike Mair, Almain had no outstanding pupils, his reputation outlived him. The Gallicans invoked him, along with John Gerson and other luminaries, in critiques of papal pretensions. The *Book on the Authority of the Church*, the *Question at Vespers*, and a critique of the *Eight Questions of the Power of the Pope* by William of Ockham were diffused in the appendices to editions of Gerson by Edmond Richer and Louis Ellies du Pin. Apologists for the French monarchy, like Bishop Bossuet, and English polemicists of the Tudor and Stuart periods used Almain's authority in their criticisms of Rome.

## Teachings

Jacques Almain's teachings have not all received equally serious attention. His thought on political and ecclesiastical power has been studied

extensively, and some attention has been given to his *Moralia*. Less attention has been given to the more abstract writings, especially the *Embammata phisicalia*, a discussion of propositions based on the first and third books of Aristotle's *Physics*. One notes Almain's willingness to criticize the great names of the past. He can be found occasionally disagreeing with or qualifying the opinions of John Duns Scotus, William of Ockham, and Robert Holcot, even while basing his lectures on the *Sentences* upon them. Moreover, he rejected the teachings of Marsilius of Padua, who had denied the coercive power of the clergy. Almain was eclectic in his use of sources. He drew, among others, upon Thomas Aquinas, especially in his political writings.

Almain embraced, without detailed discussion or definition, the distinction between the absolute and ordained power of God. He used the distinction when discussing the theology of justification. Francis Oakley suggests that Almain leaned toward an "operationalized" understanding of the absolute power, contrasting what is possible by God's absolute power with what happens "regularly and by the ordained power. . .excluding a miracle." Almain, following Holcot, thought that God's foretelling of events was contingent, that is, able to turn out differently, but the believer could attain merit by trusting God's pronouncements as received. The present "dispensation" permitted faith to be meritorious through conformity to God's will, even under such circumstances. This made reward arbitrary – and punishment as well – in Almain's theology.

Almain's moral thought was rooted in Aristotelian ethics. He taught that virtue was a mean between extremes. He did, however, limit this to the virtues acquired by human effort, assigning the acquisition of the theological virtues, especially charity, to the spiritual realm, in which they were inspired by the Holy Spirit. His *Moralia* was popular, going through multiple editions. It was criticized, however, by Juan Luis Vives, who claimed that reading a single page of Seneca or Plutarch would instill a stronger desire to be virtuous than would digesting the whole of Almain's *Moralia*.

The political thought of Almain was also rooted in Aristotelian doctrine. It required obedience to duly constituted authority, sacred, or secular, but it placed limits on the exercise of power

by pope or prince. Law, whether natural or positive, as Almain described it in *De paenitentia*, derived from a legislator. Human positive law was enacted for the common good, and it could vary with changed circumstances. Positive law could not abrogate the natural rights of communities, although it could bind the unwilling individual. Thus natural law permitted any community, including a kingdom or the church, to act in its own defense against a bad ruler. Almain's argument drew parallels between a kingdom acting in self-defense by resisting a bad king and the church acting through a council against an erring pope. Cajetan was quick to deny this parallelism, arguing that Christ founded the church (but not lay regimes) as a monarchy. Both sides of this controversy survived the original controversialists.

## Cross-References

- ▶ [Conciliarism](#)
- ▶ [Ethics](#)
- ▶ [John Duns Scotus](#)
- ▶ [John Mair](#)
- ▶ [Marsilius of Padua](#)
- ▶ [Political Philosophy](#)
- ▶ [Robert Holcot](#)
- ▶ [Thomas of Vio \(Cajetan\)](#)
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## James of Metz

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### Abstract

James of Metz was a Dominican theologian active in the years surrounding 1300. His thought as found in various versions of his mostly unedited *Sentences* commentary is

eclectic, showing the influence of Godfrey of Fontaines and Henry of Ghent among others. On certain issues he breaks with the ideas of Thomas Aquinas, for which he was criticized by Dominican contemporaries. On the other hand, James had a discernible impact on slightly younger theologians, like Durand of St. Pourçain, and evidence of his influence can still be found late in the fourteenth century.

James of Metz was a Dominican theologian active around 1300. Despite a substantial amount of research over the last century into James and his works, until very recently we could say very little with any degree of surety about them. This is beginning to change. In a recent article, comprising a comprehensive reading of James' only surviving work, his unedited commentary on the *Sentences* of Peter Lombard, Chris Schabel has set the research onto a more firm footing (Schabel [forthcoming](#)). Thus, although we still do not know when James died or whether he ever became master of theology, Schabel gives us good reasons to accept that James was from Flanders, entered the Dominican Order at its convent in Metz (hence his name), and lectured on the *Sentences* twice, first at the order's *studium* in Reims in 1298–1299, and then in Paris in 1300–1301. There are 12 manuscripts that are known to contain James' *Sentences* commentary in whole or in part, but they contain a number of different versions, the relations between which have long eluded clear scholarly analysis. Schabel goes a long way toward sorting out the complex nature of the different versions of James' *Sentences* commentaries. Thus, for books II–IV of James' commentary, we can be certain that there were two versions, the one a *reportatio* (i.e., detailed lecture notes taken by a designated student *reportator*) of the Reims lectures, the other a text made either in preparation for or on the basis of the Paris lectures; nevertheless, for large parts of books II–IV a critical edition could be made with one basic Latin text, due to a combination of (a) the two versions being roughly identical or (b) the surviving manuscripts carrying exclusively the one or other of the versions. For book I the situation is more complicated, both

because in many places the two versions are significantly different and because in addition to these two basic versions there exist a series of "additions" (*additiones*) to book I, which seem to be the beginnings of yet another revision by James to his commentary. A critical edition of James' entire *Sentences* commentary might require some 1000 pages of text.

As the 12 manuscript copies of it would attest, James' *Sentences* commentary had some readers, especially in his own day. Thus, a short treatise exists that replies from a Thomistic point of view to many aspects of James' thought as found in his commentaries on I, II, and IV *Sentences*; this treatise was probably written in the first decade of the fourteenth century, although Olszewski has drawn into question earlier literature's attribution of it to Hervaeus Natalis (the text is found in MS Le Mans 231, ff. 150ra–175rb; see on it, e.g., Köhler 1971: 2–3, 9; Olszewski 2010: 314–315; Schabel 2014: 38–39, 46–47). Moreover, it has been demonstrated that James influenced several early fourteenth-century Dominican theologians (cf. e.g., Hödl 1956: 12, 135ff, 163ff, 257–260; Plotnik 1970: 56; Köhler 1971: 205–208; Bakker 1999: vol 1, 102–103, 221–223; Olszewski 2010: 16–17, 273–331). Most significantly, on quite a number of philosophical and theological issues he had a clear impact on his more famous confrere, Durand of St. Pourçain, although there is no evidence that James was ever Durand's official teacher (*pace* Koch 1929). Precisely because James was involved in the early fourteenth-century controversy surrounding the place of Thomas Aquinas and Thomism in the Dominican Order, his thought has received a good deal of attention from modern researchers, in spite of the textual difficulties associated with studying it. Indeed, modern scholarship has shown that James was no doctrinaire anti-Thomist, with James keeping very close to Aquinas' view on several topics, like predestination and the analogical predication between God and creatures (Decker 1967: 229–243, 116–124); on the eternity of the world, James not only defends the possibility of an eternal world, unusually for his day he makes in his treatment sophisticated use of Aquinas' opusculum *De aeternitate mundi* (Peck and Schabel

2015; Ullrich 1966: 102–158). Throughout his commentary on III *Sentences*, James relies heavily on Aquinas (Schabel [forthcoming](#), section 4.2). Nevertheless, on many philosophical and theological issues James did part ways with Thomas Aquinas, and for this reason it is probably best to characterize James as an eclectic thinker, influenced by Henry of Ghent, Peter of Auvergne, and Godfrey of Fontaines, among others. Thus, with regard to the category of relation, James, clearly under the influence of Henry of Ghent, held that a relation is not an accident with its own being that inheres in its foundation, but rather is merely a way that its foundation exists (a *modus essendi*); a relation, then, takes all of its being from its foundation and does not enter into composition with it (Decker 1967: 438–460). James also rejected Aquinas' position that matter or quantity is the principle of individuation, maintaining instead that this principle is the individual's form (Ullrich 1966: 266–271; Köhler 1971: 226–251, with text editions 515–522). On the subject of God's knowledge of future contingents, James explicitly rejected the Thomist solution relying on the presence of the future to God in his eternity, James opting instead for a solution based on God's perfect knowledge of all secondary causes, a solution reminiscent of Franciscan opponents of Aquinas like William de la Mare (Schabel 2014). On the topic of the latitude (intensification and remission) of forms, James was one of the very few medieval thinkers to adhere to Godfrey of Fontaines' "succession of forms" theory (Schabel [forthcoming](#); Solère [forthcoming](#)). In his cognitive theory, James held that a concept is the intellectual act, and not the product of that act as Aquinas had held (Decker 1967: 531–536; see also the study of angelic cognition in Ullrich 1966: 306–354). Moreover, in his theory of scientific knowledge, James lays a great deal of emphasis upon scientific knowledge being evident knowledge, here diverging significantly from the more Aristotelian emphasis upon scientific knowledge being knowledge of the cause or knowledge attained through syllogistic deduction. Linked with this, James holds that scientific knowledge is undergirded by "evidence of the thing in itself" (*evidentia rei in se*), privileging

thereby direct, empirical knowledge of singular things and events over indirect knowledge through causes or inference. Although James himself does not appeal to the distinction between intuitive and abstractive cognition, clearly his thought is leaning in that direction (Köhler 1974). While it is difficult to know whether James had much of a direct impact after the early fourteenth century, it can be shown that when dealing with divine foreknowledge the Cistercian James of Eltville, who read the *Sentences* at Paris in 1369–1370, quoted verbatim from James of Metz's treatment of the same issue (Schabel 2014: 47–48). All of this would seem to indicate that more study, and especially more text editing, is required before we have a clear picture of this significant figure's ideas and their role in the Scholastic discussion of the fourteenth century and later.

## Cross-References

- ▶ [Durand of St. Pourçain](#)
- ▶ [Godfrey of Fontaines](#)
- ▶ [Henry of Ghent](#)
- ▶ [Hervaeus Natalis](#)
- ▶ [Peter of Auvergne](#)
- ▶ [Thomas Aquinas](#)

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For published editions of substantial parts of James' *Sentences* commentaries, see De Rijk 2005, Hödl 2002, Köhler 1971, Martin 1930, Olszewski 2010, Olszewski [forthcoming](#), Ott 1972, Peck and Schabel 2015, Schabel 2014, Senko 1978, and Weber 1973. For a question list for all versions of James' commentary on I-IV *Sent.*, see Schabel [forthcoming](#).

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## James of Viterbo

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### Abstract

Bl. James of Viterbo, successively Archbishop of Benevento (1302) and Naples (1302–1307/1308), was a distinguished teacher, philosopher, and biblical scholar. He is now chiefly remembered for his treatise *De regimine Christiano*: a contribution, on the papal side, to the great conflict of 1301–1303 between Pope Boniface VIII and Philip, the Fair of France.

James of Viterbo (c. 1255–1307/1308), (Jacobus de Viterbio; Giacomo da Viterbo), surnamed Cappocci, was a member of the Augustinian Order of Hermits and a younger contemporary of Giles of Rome, by whom he was probably taught at the University of Paris. He succeeded Giles as Augustinian regent-master at Paris in 1293 and

remained there until he resigned in 1300 to take up a senior appointment in the order. On September 3, 1302 he became Archbishop of Benevento; three months later (December 12), at the request of King Charles II, he was transferred to the archbishopric of Naples. James was formally beatified by Pope Pius X on June 14, 1911, though he seems to have been known as *Beatus* for some time before that. He is known also by the scholastic honorifics of *Doctor graciosus*, *Doctor inventivus*, and *Doctor speculativus*.

James enjoyed a considerable reputation as a teacher and scriptural commentator, but his work has for the most part been neglected by scholars and much of it remains unpublished. He is remembered chiefly as the author of the treatise *De regimine Christiano*. The misleading description of this work as “*le plus ancien traité de l’église*” has been repeated often since it was coined by H.-X. Arquillière in 1926. Written at the height of the great conflict between Boniface VIII and Philip the Fair of France, *De regimine Christiano* is a spirited contribution to a contemporary political controversy. Its purpose is to promote a theory of papal *plenitudo potestatis* every bit as uncompromising as that advanced in Giles of Rome’s slightly earlier *De ecclesiastica potestate*, by which James is to an extent influenced. Very briefly stated, the argument of *De regimine Christiano* is as follows.

There are two chief powers in the world: royal and priestly. Elaborating to an extent on this Gelasian orthodoxy, James observes that royal power is in its essence a *potestas iurisdictionis*: a power to pronounce judgment. Priestly power, on the other hand, is the power to teach and administer the sacraments; as such, it does not include a power of judgment. By this rather remarkable *captatio benevolentiae*, James appears to concede to royalist opponents that there is a sense in which princes are indeed more powerful than priests. But there are, he goes on, two kinds or manifestations of royal power: *potestas regia temporalis* and *potestas regia spiritualis*. The former, the power to judge temporal things, belongs to kings; the latter, the power to judge spiritual things, to priests, and especially to the supreme pontiff. In its most obvious everyday occurrence, *potestas*

*regia spiritualis* is the jurisdictional power that the priest exercises in the confessional. But just as spiritual things are metaphysically higher than temporal things, so the power of spiritual judgment is superior to that of temporal judgment. Moreover, since all temporal things must be ordered to spiritual ends and must serve them, *potestas regia temporalis* is as it were contained within *potestas regia spiritualis*. The holder of the latter is, in effect, also the holder of the former, just as the art of architecture has authority over all the lesser arts that contribute to the completion of a building. It follows that the jurisdiction of the church, and especially of the supreme pontiff, extends to temporal as well as spiritual cases, and that kings, though ordinarily entrusted with a large measure of power, are ultimately subordinate to the church and answerable to the vicar of Christ.

*De regimine Christiano* repays detailed study by those interested in the perennial medieval literary disputes between *regnum* and *sacerdotium*. James’ argument is more elaborate and well crafted than a summary of it can allow it to seem, and he reaches predictable conclusions by means that are subtle and ingenious. Bringing together elements of Gelasian dualism, “political Augustinianism” and Aristotelian teleology, James makes the most comprehensive claims for papal supremacy in temporals while simultaneously appearing to give ample scope and consideration to the rights of kings. In this latter respect, *De regimine Christiano* strikes the reader as less harsh and more plausible than Giles of Rome’s *De ecclesiastica potestate*. Indeed, James is in some ways politely but clearly critical of Giles; it has to be said also that he writes a far less prolix and wearisome style. *De regimine Christiano* is an impressive contribution to the publicist literature produced in support of the papacy during the fateful years leading up to the “Babylonish captivity” in Avignon.

## Cross-References

- ▶ [Giles of Rome, Political Thought](#)



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## Jean Regis

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### Abstract

Jean Regis was a Franciscan theologian active at the Parisian Faculty of Theology in the early

1370s. We know that his lectures on Peter Lombard's *Sentences* started in 1369 and that he was licensed in theology in 1375–1375 (Glorieux, *Recherches de théologie ancienne et médiévale* 18:128–139, 1951). The *Chartularium* of the University of Paris informs us that on the 3rd of September 1375, Regis was questioned as regent master about the affair regarding the French translations of Marsilio of Padua and John of Jandun (*Chartularium*, III, p. 225–227). Regis is a lesser known historical figure, due to scarcity of information about his life and to his apparent lack of influence on posterity. The post-1370 *Sentences* commentaries edited so far never mention him, and ironically his own commentary was previously misattributed to Jean Gerson (Longspré 1930; Combes, *Archives d'histoire doctrinale et littéraire du Moyen Âge* 12:365–385, 1939). The confusion was cleared out eventually, giving way to the proper study of Jean Regis (Glorieux, *Recherches de théologie ancienne et médiévale* 18:128–139, 1951). Since the identification of his commentary, along with his principal questions, in Cod. Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France, lat. 15156, the research conducted on Regis' thought mainly dealt with his indebtedness to Nicholas of Autrecourt (Brinzei, Epilogue: *Sentences* commentaries in Paris around 1369. In: Brinzei M, Schabel C (eds.) *Philosophical psychology in late medieval commentaries on Peter Lombard's Sentences*. Actes of the XIVth annual symposium of the S.I.E.P.M. Nijmegen 28–30 Octobre 2009. Turnhout: Brepols, forthcoming) or as a part of the doctrinal developments regarding the Eucharistic presence in the later fourteenth century (Bakker, *La raison et le miracle. Les doctrines eucharistiques* (c. 1250–c. 1400). Contribution à l'étude des rapports entre philosophie et théologie. Selbstverl, Nijmegen, pp 227–231, 1999).

Regis asks 31 questions, 13 for Book I, 11 for Book II, 3 for Book III, and IV for Book IV (for a question list, see Combes, *Archives d'histoire doctrinale et littéraire du Moyen Âge* 12:365–385, 1939). His commentary exhibits common traits with *Sentences*

commentaries produced around the same time, as well as its peculiarities that separate it from those other theological productions. For example, Regis places an accent on the first book and the second book, without completely neglecting the third and the fourth. Such an emphasis on the first two books is a general tendency of the later fourteenth-century *Sentences* commentaries (Bakker, P. J. J. M., Schabel C. 2002). Regis' text is relatively small, given that it is comprised of 31 questions of the total length of 120 folios. Compared to other commentaries composed about the same period, it is quite peculiar in his lack of almost any explicit quotations of scholastic theologians, especially of those more recent than the early fourteenth century. Consequently, this absence of citations burdens the task of identifying Regis' influences.

More indicative of Regis' intellectual ambience are his principal questions, which were preserved at the beginning of his commentary. In fact, it is only through Regis' testimony from his *principia* that we know the date when several students incepted as bachelors in theology: Richard of Beaumont, Francois Christophori, Jean Textor, James of Eltville Ocist, Onofrius of Florence OESA, Jean Corbechon OESA, and Jean de Diadona (Regis also mentions a Dominican, yet he fails to write his name). These documents are all the more important since Regis engages in lively debates with these bachelors, thus recording their opinions and arguments, which would have been otherwise lost for us, given that for most of their *Sentences* commentaries are lost or have not been identified. A critical edition and study of Jean Regis' principal questions is in preparation by Monica Brinzei.

Regis seems to have been interested in epistemological themes, judging from the content of the Prologue and from some of the questions he addresses in the first book of his commentary. For instance, in the third question from Book I, he asks whether it is *per se notum* that is absolutely necessary that there is one God (Utrum per se notum sit unum Deum esse simpliciter necesse esse). In the second book,

Regis deals with problems of causality, eternity, movement of angels, and cosmology. The longest question from the entire commentary is in the third book, and it is concerned whether the Virgin Mary had a sinless nature from birth (f. 154v–163r). The fewest questions are located in the fourth book, where Regis treats the issues of baptism, Eucharist, indulgence, and Christ's reparation, respectively. The complexity of his *Sentences* commentary calls for further investigation. For now, in lack of a complete edition of his work, I will offer a sketch of his sole question on Peter Lombard's Prologue.

Regardless of its low impact on scholastic thought, Regis' commentary provides a useful insight into the Parisian intellectual milieu of the 1370s, a yet insufficiently covered period in the historiography of medieval philosophy. Although derivative of other authors' ideas, Regis' thought is quite interesting in its own right. His first question, in which Regis addresses the problem of compatibility between theological knowledge and the merit of faith, is divided into three main articles: the first article reveals a keen interest in epistemology, especially regarding the concept of evidence; in the second, Regis unfolds a discussion about the nature of theological discourse, while he dedicates the third article to determine whether evident knowledge of theological truth is compatible with faith.

## Epistemology

According to Regis, evident knowledge is manifold, for he distinguishes between three kinds of evidence: the evidence of *per se notae* propositions, the evidence obtained through demonstration, and the evidence of contingent truths. In order to illustrate the last kind of evidence, Regis drew from Augustine's *De Trinitate*. In Book XV of treatise, Augustine dismantles the arguments of the skeptics with regard to the impossibility of knowledge, showing that there are perceptions that one cannot ever doubt, namely, "I know that I live" (*De Trinitate*, 15, 12). It is notable that, following Augustine, Regis falls

in line with the other fourteenth-century theologians who employed the Augustine passage to expand the sphere of evident knowledge by encompassing some contingent truths (Brnzei 2008).

Another influence on Regis' thought, that deserves further investigation, is Nicholas of Autrecourt's and, more notably, Autrecourt's *socius* and addressee of his letters, Bernard of Arezzo. Regis adopts from Autrecourt the thesis that any evident consequence is reducible to the principle of noncontradiction, or the first principle (*primum principium*). For Autrecourt, the evidentness of any valid reasoning is grounded in the first principle, so that a consequence is evident only if what its consequent signifies is partially or totally identical with what the antecedent signifies. Such a theoretical constraint imparted on the validity of inferences is Autrecourt's basis for his critique of Aristotelian ontology, which according to Autrecourt does not pass the test of evidence, since it infers the existence of one thing from an entirely different one, i.e., the existence of substances from the existence of accidents. Following Autrecourt's logical criteria, such a consequence is not evidently valid, because substance and accident do not have an identical meaning; as a corollary, it does not entail a contradiction if one exists and the other does not. While Autrecourt's use of the principle of noncontradiction has disruptive effects on Aristotle's metaphysics and natural philosophy, Regis' use of it is more modest in scope: the Franciscan author wants to prove that many of the necessary truths, such as mathematical axioms, are demonstrable by being reducible to the first principle.

The point of disagreement between Regis and Autrecourt is the latter's thesis that it is impossible to infer the existence of one thing from the existence of completely different thing, since the existence of one and nonbeing of the other does not entail a contradiction. The formulation of this thesis and what follows from it was the bone of contention between Autrecourt and Bernard in the second letter that Autrecourt addressed to the Franciscan. Bernard's response to Autrecourt, noted by Regis, raises the objection that the

existence of a thing is evidently deducible from another, since the negation of one while the remainder persists contains nevertheless a virtual contradiction (*contradictio virtualis*), i.e., a kind of contradiction from which a formal one could be inferred (II, 12). Although Autrecourt does not expand on the concept of virtual contradiction, his rejection of Bernard's distinction between formal and virtual contradiction suggests that the latter is proved by deducing one or more consequents from both propositions of a consequence, until they will be proved to entail a formal contradiction (II, 14). While Autrecourt dismisses the distinction as ineffective, Regis goes on to support it by stating that are some middle terms that can reveal a formal contradiction when one of the terms of a relation is denied; for example, the terms "cause" and "effect" have the common middle term, "correlative being," so if one does not exist, neither the other. Thus, in the case of cause and effect, although they are different realities, the affirmation of one and the negation of the remainder would still give rise to a formal contradiction. We do not know whether or how Bernard responded to Autrecourt's counterargument, because none of his writings are extant, but if Regis somehow follows Bernard here, we might get an idea about Bernard's line of reasoning.

### The Theological Discourse and Its Relation to Faith

The second article is influenced by the Cistercian Gottschalk of Nepomuk conception of theology. Regis' copious borrowings from Nepomuk's *Sentences* commentary attest a relaxation of doctrinal barriers between the mendicant orders at Paris in the second half of the fourteenth century. The main thesis of Regis' second article is almost verbatim extracted from Nepomuk's commentary, and it states that the conclusions of theological discourse are to be inferred only from the propositions of the Bible, a thesis that is reminiscent of Rimini's model of deductive theology. Developing a carefully constructed criticism of Petrus Aureoli's conception of theology as a declarative habit, Rimini depicts theology as a *habitus*

essentially confined to the interpreting of Scripture. Rimini's view on theology was therefore adopted and expanded upon by numerous university theologians, one of them being the Cistercian Gottschalk of Nepomuk, who read the *Sentences* at Paris in the academic year 1366–1367. In the case of Regis, the influence of Rimini is mediated by Gottschalk, but undoubtedly present.

Finally, the Franciscan heritage is also present in Regis' treatment. In the last article of his question, in which Regis discusses the compatibility between faith and theological knowledge, he makes a selection of passages from the *Sentences* commentary of Peter of Navarre, a Franciscan Scotist theologian who was active at Barcelona around 1322. Regis uses Navarre's questions on Peter Lombard's Prologue in order to determine his own question in favor of a full compatibility between evident knowledge of theological truth and the merit of faith. Another thread of Regis' question, linked with the earlier themes, deals with the role of the will in producing assent toward articles of faith. It seems that Regis' concern with the roles of the will and the intellect in producing belief is linked with the earlier debates from the fourteenth century that addressed the part of will as the foundation of faith. While Ockham considered the will as the sole cause of religious assent, Holcot defended the opposite view, according to which belief in the articles of faith have a rational grounding in the intellect. Although not explicitly, it appears that Regis sides with Holcot in this aspect.

## Cross-References

- ▶ [Gottschalk of Nepomuk](#)
- ▶ [Gregory of Rimini](#)
- ▶ [Nicholas of Autrecourt](#)
- ▶ [William of Ockham](#)

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## Jerome of Prague

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### Abstract

Jerome of Prague (ca. 1378–30 May 1416) was a Czech philosopher at the forefront of a group of Bohemian masters in the University of

Prague who favorably received parts of the realist thought of the Oxford philosopher and theologian John Wyclif. After bachelor degree studies in Prague, Jerome received his master's degree in Paris in 1405. In 1406 he was accepted as a master at the universities of Cologne and Heidelberg: his stays at these universities were short lived, however, because he was regarded as excessively opinionated. From 1407, Jerome was among the Bohemian masters at the University of Prague, where he was involved in issuing the Decree of Kutná Hora, which favored the Bohemian nation above the three German nations. This action led to the departure of the German students and masters from Prague and the strengthening of other Central European universities. Jerome aroused indignation because of his adoption of realist opinions based on Wyclif's thought and his defense of Wyclif. As a consequence, he was put on trial for heresy in Vienna, from which he fled: he was excommunicated in his absence in 1411. In the last years of his life, Jerome traveled to Poland and Lithuania as a diplomatic representative of Bohemian nobles. In 1414, he decided to defend Jan Hus at the Council of Constance; however, he was taken into custody, tried, and sentenced to death as a heretic. Jerome was burned at the stake on 30 May 1416 and became a martyr to the reformation of the church. His realist thought is notable for his philosophical interpretation of certain theological topics and for his promotion of these topics in the faculty of arts. His main inspirations were Augustine, John Wyclif, Plato's *Timaeus*, and Calcidius' commentary on the *Timaeus*.

## Biography

It is generally agreed that Jerome of Prague was born in Prague between 1370 and 1380, and, based on his promotion to bachelor degree status in 1398 and on his later statements, he was probably born around 1378. It is highly likely that both his parents were Czech because during his later studies he was apparently awarded a scholarship,

established by Vojtěch Raňkův of Ježov (Adalbertus Ranconis de Ericinio), which was reserved for students who had two Czech parents. With the help of this scholarship, Jerome set out for Oxford in 1399, where he may have resided in Beam Hall or White Hall. The purpose of his journey was Jerome's desire to learn and also the interest of Czech university masters in the treatises of John Wyclif. In England, he also started to keep a notebook in which he continually recorded texts and authorities that might be cited in support of his views on the reality of universals. In March 1401 at the latest, Jerome returned to Bohemia, bringing with him copies of several of Wyclif's works, especially the *Dialogus* and the *Trialogus* (Šmahel 1970, 2010; Pavlíček 2017).

We know little about the course of Jerome's life between his return to Bohemia and April 1404. When, however, he was charged at the Council of Constance with defending the articles ascribed to Wyclif when they were condemned in his home city, he responded that at that time he was in Jerusalem. Wyclif's articles were condemned in Prague in 1403 as well as in 1408, so it is not clear when Jerome's possible visit to Jerusalem took place (Bartoš 1961; Šmahel 2010). In 1404 we find Jerome in Paris, where he matriculated in April as a bachelor in the faculty of arts, and as a member of the university's English nation. He obtained the degree of master of arts in 1405 (Šmahel 2010). In Paris, he studied, among other subjects, Wyclif's treatises on logic, and dispatched additional books to Prague (Klicman 1898). His stay there, during which he allegedly questioned the condemnation of Wyclif as a heretic, and praised him and presented opinions based on Wyclif's thought, ended with a disputation that so scandalized his audience that he was summoned before Jean Gerson, the university chancellor. Jerome avoided the encounter and instead set out on a journey to Cologne (Kałuza 1985; Herold 1995). There, he matriculated as a "respected master" in March 1406. As late as 1425, however, the local masters still remembered Jerome's stay at the university, when – at the request of the imperial electors – they explicitly condemned his teaching; their representatives were also present at the Council of Constance,



where they accused him of heresy (Herold 1989). Jerome's time in Cologne was clearly very turbulent, and he was again virtually forced to flee, this time to Heidelberg. He matriculated there as a master in April 1406, and participated in a disputation at which he performed "inappropriately and offensively." Because he refused to recant his views, his university membership was suspended, and an accusation against him of accepting four heretical or offensive articles was submitted to Matthew of Cracow, the Bishop of Worms. Rather than recant, Jerome fled once more, this time to Prague, where he arrived toward the end of 1406. Here, too, after meeting the university requirements, he was admitted as a master to the faculty of arts (Šmahel 2007).

In Prague, Jerome joined the struggle for the privileges of the Bohemian nation against the other three German nations and promoted philosophical thought based on John Wyclif's treatises. In 1409, he participated in the Prague disputation *de quolibet* of Matthias of Knin. On this occasion, he delivered the *Recommendatio artium liberalium*, in which he declared his allegiance to King Wenceslaus IV and defended the Czech nation, contributing to discussions on various aspects of Czech nationality. He also promoted the study of Wyclif's treatises and called on students to search for the vein of truth in Wyclif's writings. Partly thanks to his efforts, Wenceslaus IV was won over to the side of the Czech masters. The results of the struggle included the issuing of the so-called Decree of Kutná Hora in 1409. This edict assigned three votes to the Bohemian nation and only one to the three German nations, which led to the departure of the German students and masters from Prague. Afterward, Jerome began diplomatic travels. In 1410 he was in Buda, where he delivered an oration before King Sigismund. He then appeared in Vienna, where he was detained and subjected to a heresy trial. He managed to escape a heavy penalty by flight, but he was excommunicated for not appearing at his trial. Subsequently, we know that he was in Prague, where, in 1412, he participated in the quodlibetal debate of Michal of Malenice. More importantly, he contributed to the protests against the selling of indulgences in Bohemia in 1412 by organizing

student demonstrations in Prague. In 1411–1413 Jerome made at least one journey to Poland, where he was received at the court of King Wladislav Jagello in Cracow, and then at the court of the Lithuanian Duke Vitold in White Russia. According to Jerome's own words, Vitold wanted to know if it was indispensable to rebaptize his subjects, who were Orthodox Christians and were converting to the Roman Catholic church. Jerome advised him that it was not necessary for them to be rebaptized and that it was sufficient to instruct them about the Roman faith (Šmahel 2010).

Jerome's last journey led him to Constance, where he was preceded by the church reformer John Hus, who was defending his teaching before the conciliar convocation. Jerome appeared in Constance on April 4, 1415, but temporarily resided in nearby Überlingen. As early as April 7, declarations were posted around Constance in which Jerome asserted the illegitimacy of Hus' imprisonment and also requested a certificate of safe conduct and a public hearing. This effort was considered to be impertinent, and Jerome attempted to flee back to Bohemia on March 9. Detained near the Bohemian borders, however, he was returned to Constance on May 23, 1415. There he encountered enemies dating back to his student days. He was imprisoned, and on September 23, 1415, he distanced himself from Hus (executed in Constance in July 1415) and from Wyclif (posthumously condemned by the Council in May 1415) by declaring their articles to be heretical. When, however, Gerson delivered his oration *On Recantation in the Matters of Faith*, it dawned on Jerome that, although he had avoided the pyre, instead of liberty he had won a lifetime of imprisonment. Therefore, when summoned before the Council on May 23 and 26, 1416, he delivered an exceptionally powerful speech that dazzled even the Florentine humanist Poggio Bracciolini. In his statement, Jerome regretted his recantation, which had mostly harmed his own conscience, and revoked all the accusations he had leveled against Hus and Wyclif. Consequently, the Council at its twenty-first session on May 30, 1416, declared Jerome a heretic, excommunicated him, and handed him



over to the secular authorities, who proceeded to execute him without delay (Šmahel 2010; Fudge 2016).

## Thought

### Writings and Their Sources

Jerome's known and extant writings consist mainly of seven *quaestiones*, which he presented at the faculty of arts, six of them in Prague and one in Heidelberg. Doctrinally related to these *quaestiones* is his *Shield of Faith*, a triangular figure accompanied by a commentary, and part of a debate between him and Blasius Lupus that began at the 1409 Prague quodlibetal disputation. His *Recommendatio artium liberalium* comes from the same disputation. There are two further treatises connected to Jerome, although his authorship is not certain: the *Collecta de probationibus propositionum*, based largely on the logical treatises of Wyclif and Johannes Tarteys, and a preparation for a discussion of Jerome's *Quaestio de mundo archetypo*.

To understand the background to Jerome's thought and his method of work, it is vital to consider the sources he used when composing his writings. The most significant role belongs to the writings of Wyclif, above all his treatises *De dominio Divino*, *De ideis*, *De materia et forma*, *De universalibus*, and partly also his logical tracts and the treatise *Triologus*, from which Jerome carefully selected passages and combined them with other sources and his own interpretations. The most important among these are Calcidius' translation of and commentary on Plato's *Timaeus* and, particularly on the topic of the divine ideas, St. Augustine. It is noteworthy that Jerome borrowed some of the authorities and arguments he used from other authors, especially Wyclif, but also Robert Alyngton and others (Šmahel 2010; Šmahel and Silagi 2010; Pavlíček 2017, 2018a).

### Shield of Faith

Of Jerome's writings, his *Shield of Faith* (Fig. 1) is extant in the largest number of his manuscripts and can thus be regarded as his most famous work. It is a pictorial interpretation of Ephesians 6.16, based on an older tradition of representing God and the Trinity with which Jerome became

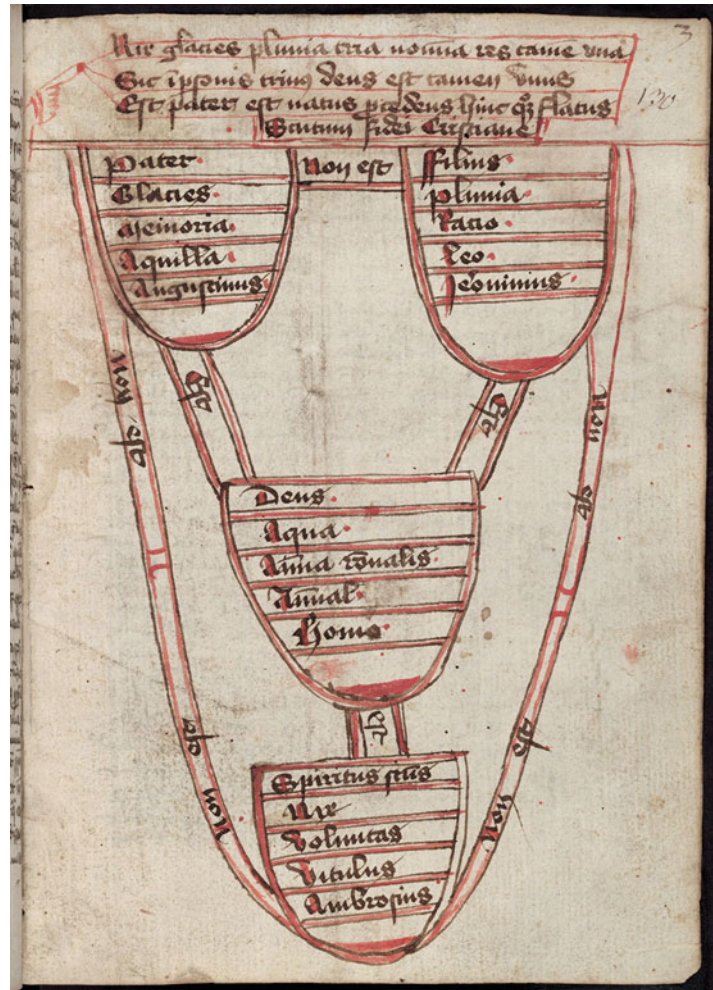
acquainted during his journey to England. The shape of the figure is close to that of an inverted isosceles triangle. Triads of terms are inscribed within the angles, and a concept common to them all is placed in the middle. The terms Father – Son – Holy Spirit are inscribed sequentially in the left angle, the right angle, and the lower angle of the triangle, and the word God is written in the middle. On the sides between the angles we find written "is not," and "is" is written on the lines connecting the angles to the center of the triangle. Concepts from the realm of the sensible world are placed in rows in the relevant places under the concepts connected to God and the Persons of the Trinity. A common term is found at the center and subordinate terms in the corners: for example, the triad memory – reason – will and the common term "rational soul," or the triad Augustine – Jerome – Ambrose and the common term "human." In his commentary on the figure, Jerome explains that there are close similarities between the relationships in the Trinity and those in the created triads. Similar to the way three Persons convene in the Godhead, although being mutually different, certain created entities that are mutually different convene, according to Jerome, in a common created entity. It follows, for Jerome, that this arrangement of created entities flows ("manat") from the arrangement of the Trinity. In one of his recantations in Constance, he said that he used the *Shield of Faith* to illustrate and support his opinion about the reality of universals when teaching young students: just as the divine Persons are one God, so, too, created singulars share a common universal. Although the topic of the created arrangement of created entities in a common entity based on uncreated arrangement of the Trinity links Jerome to the tradition of finding *vestigia Trinitatis* in the created world, the comparison between God and a universal is related to Peter Lombard's *Sentences*, book I, dist. 19, where Peter and the commentators on his *Sentences* dealt with precisely this topic (Šmahel 2003; Pavlíček 2014a, b, 2018a).

### God and the Divine Ideas

The multiplicity of divine ideas which, understood altogether, represent the archetypal intelligible world of the divine mind is one of the most

**Jerome of Prague,**

**Fig. 1** Jerome of Prague's *Shield of Faith*. MS Prague, Národní knihovna ČR, V E 28, f. 130r. Courtesy of the National Library of the Czech Republic



important elements of Jerome's thought. He maintained that the ideas which are the highest universals in the divine mind are essentially God, but they differ by means of a formal distinction. As the highest degree of being of every created and creatable thing, they precede potential being and the being in actual existence. This motif is linked to Jerome's view of the hierarchy of being, at the peak of which is situated God along with his ideas.

Jerome stressed that divine ideas are a necessary condition for wisdom, a claim he supported by referring to Plato (whom he calls "the king of pagan philosophers") and by citing passages from Aristotle and St. Augustine. As wisdom, according to Aristotle, is based on understanding first causes or principles, and because the ideas are

the first causes and principles of all created or creatable entities, no one can claim to understand something without knowledge of the ideas. Jerome also emphasized that Augustine, in his *Quaestio de ideis*, maintained that there is so much power in the ideas that no one can be wise without knowing them. As a follow-up, Jerome argued, on the basis of an etymological analysis of the Greek word "philosophus," that every philosopher, as a lover of wisdom, must be acquainted with the ideas. For this reason, the ideas are an appropriate topic for every true member of the faculty of arts and, in particular, for realist metaphysicians, to whom Jerome implicitly claimed allegiance. His contextualizing note, stating that the faculty of theology should not usurp the topic of ideas to the detriment of the faculty of arts,

reveals that at some medieval universities divine ideas were not regarded as a pertinent topic for the faculty of arts (Pavliček 2018b).

In Jerome's view, divine ideas understood as divine reasons are a prerequisite for the divine wisdom. Drawing on Augustine's *Retractationes*, he says that God created the universe on the basis of the intelligible world. Denying this opinion is equivalent to asserting that God acted thoughtlessly and did not know what he was doing, or that God created the universe either foolishly or accidentally. Because, however, God acts rationally, which is not possible without reasons, the divine mind has to include reasons by which God causes the universe. These reasons must be numerous because the species of human and the species of horse cannot be caused by the same reason and, thus, the number of eternal divine reasons corresponds to the number of species of created entities. Jerome's argument for the multiplicity of divine ideas understood as divine reasons comes once again from Augustine, this time from his *Quaestio de ideis*, although Jerome speaks about species and not individuals as Augustine had done (Herold 1989, 1990, 1995; Kažuža 1994, 1997; Pavliček 2018a).

### Theory of Creation

As just described, divine ideas have a crucial role in Jerome's theory of creation. In this role, he refers to the uncreated eternal ideas by many different terms, e.g.: co-causes, legitimate causes, or examples according to which God creates everything he creates outside his mind. Basing his views mainly on Augustine, the Bible, Calcidius, Plato, and Wyclif, Jerome maintained that, in the first instant of time, God created all temporal things; however, they were not created in their proper actual existence, but in their secondary causes, in genera and species, or in seminal reasons. In another *quaestio*, Jerome says that, in the first instant of time, God created the universal material nature (*universa natura corporea*), of which he formed one part in heaven and the other on the earth. Although the universal nature corresponds to the material essence that was created in the first instant of time by means of *creatio* solely on the basis of God's ideas, the formation of this

essence proceeds by means of *generatio* and requires the essence as its subject. In this context and as an allusion to the eternity of the universe maintained by Aristotle, Jerome argues that, in contrast to the eternal world of ideas, the created universe is not eternal.

The material essence before its formation corresponds, in Jerome's thought, to prime matter which contains the ability to receive any substantial or accidental form. The reception of forms gives rise to a compound, that is, a thing in its actual existence. Jerome maintained that the initial formation of prime matter corresponds to the production of the four elements in their pure quality. It is on the basis of these elements that more complex entities come into existence. Although God created prime matter, it cannot be annihilated, because, according to Jerome, it is proper for God to proceed by making what is better, whereas annihilation does not include any goodness. God's omnipotence consists in the power of freely making or not making, and not in the power of creating and destroying. Jerome offers another view on prime matter when considering the universe's essential ordering. In this context, the created universal essence corresponds to the analogical being, which is the first and most universal created entity. As all other entities participate in this most universal being, it contains everything else and is the highest created being on the essential scale. The theory of creation is a topic that connects other parts of Jerome's realist thought (Kažuža 1994, 1997; Pavliček 2017, 2018a).

### Created Universe: Harmony, Real Universals, Science, and Logic

Jerome was persuaded of the harmony of the sensible world, which is based on the harmonious arrangement of ideas in the divine mind. One of his arguments for created harmony is his account of the sufficiency of categories, that is, his division of Aristotle's categories, which he borrowed from Robert Alyngton. In this view, each of the nine accidents understood as the highest universals inheres in the substance in three possible ways (the way of form; the way of matter; the way of matter and form) and in

three possible modes (from inside; from outside; from inside and outside). Because each of the nine accidents has its own unique combination of the way and the mode of inherence, Jerome concluded that this inherence represents their “most beautiful harmony” and that therefore, for the harmony of the sensible world, it is necessary that universals really exist (Pavliček 2011).

As a realist philosopher strongly influenced by the realism of John Wyclif, Jerome maintained the real existence of created universals (genera and species), which, in his view, were really and essentially identical with singulars, on the one hand, and which differed by means of a formal distinction, on the other. At the same time, superordinate universals are understood as causes of subordinate entities and as their inner principles and components, which precede the subordinate entities through their natural priority. Thus, the existence of the subordinate entities is conditioned by the existence of the superordinate entities. One of Jerome’s interesting arguments in support of universals comes in an exegesis of the biblical account of creation. Although creation in the first instant of time corresponds to Genesis 1.1, a later passage, Genesis 1.21–25, which speaks about the production of living creatures in genera and species, testifies, according to Jerome, to the reality of universals. He stressed that those who hold that universals do not exist before they are produced by the human mind go against infallible Scripture. If this were the case, it would mean that, according to the Bible, God created living beings in human concepts or terms: in other words, that God did not create any real extra-mental living beings. Jerome concludes that holding such a position is a sign of madness (Pavliček 2014b, 2018a).

Several important aspects are connected to Jerome’s doctrine of universals, one of which is his theory of real (scientific) knowledge. In his realist interpretation of several of Aristotle’s claims, such as that knowledge is only of the universal and that [real] things do not exist in human souls, Jerome claimed that real knowledge of universals is conditioned by the existence of knowable universals, which are real

things, independent of any operation of human reason. He uses this argument to mount one of his criticisms of nominalism. If the nominalists say that universals exist only as terms or concepts, they have to admit that human knowledge is restricted to terms and concepts, which is wrong, as is nominalism itself. This criticism linked Jerome to other realist scholars, including Walter Burley and Heymeric of Camp, who argued that the nominalist approach to universals leads to the impossibility of real knowledge. In this context, Jerome used one of his mocking comparisons: the doctors of signs, that is, the nominalists, who believe that they can base knowledge on concepts, are similar to a hunter who intends to go hunting with dogs painted on a piece of paper (Pavliček 2018a).

Another important standpoint connected to Jerome’s realism is his approach to logic. Basing himself on Wyclif’s treatise *On universals*, Jerome divided predication into two main types: (1) predication of a term about a term and (2) real predication. According to Jerome, nominalism is limited to the first type of predication, which, however, is not a predication in the proper sense, but only a predication derived from the second type. In the case of real predication, every universal *in actu* is predicated of subordinated entities *in natura*. The expression of real predication is a real proposition of which the truth-value consists in the relationships between the primary significates, which are the real subject and the real predicate. For example, in the case of a proposition “man is [an] animal,” the propositional truth-value does not lie in the spoken or written words, but in the primary significate which is a real thing – the real universal human (or human nature), which belongs to the genera of animals. Propositions based on signs are based on real propositions, just as a painted man is based on a real man. Thus, Jerome’s main type of proposition corresponds to real things, on which real logic is also based. Because real universals are a necessary condition for real logic, Jerome concludes that whoever says that universals are mere signs is a heretic in dialectic, a judgment that he borrowed from Anselm of Canterbury (Kažuza 1997; Pavliček 2018a).



### Use of the Bible

Throughout his life, Jerome of Prague recorded important authorities and arguments – encountered in his studies at Oxford, Paris, and elsewhere – in a notebook especially acquired for that purpose. The texts he selected reveal a remarkable variety of references to both ancient and medieval authors. If we consult the index of Jerome’s writings and compare the number of references to Aristotle and the Bible, we find, on the one hand, that Jerome was far from the later Reformation principle of “sola Scriptura,” and, on the other hand, that Scripture occupied an appreciable role in Jerome’s writings, in which he sought to demonstrate that his ideas rested on scriptural authority, although he never studied at a faculty of theology where students were taught biblical exegesis.

According to Jerome’s own words in his speech *Recommendatio artium liberalium*, Scripture occupied the highest place among authorities, and thus its role was irreplaceable in the strategy of his argumentation. In the *Recommendatio* he explicitly affirmed that it would be foolish to adhere to everything that he read in the books of Wyclif and other doctors and to hold it as firmly as his Christian faith. According to him, on the other hand, if the Bible states that something is so, then it is the truth. This position is in harmony with his assertion in another treatise that Scripture is infallible. Given that Jerome supports his doctrinal standpoints with biblical authority, it follows from these passages that he was convinced of the harmony between those standpoints and the objective meaning of Scripture.

It is also remarkable that, when mentioning the authors of the biblical books, Jerome referred to them as philosophers. With regard to the divine ideas, the author of the book Sirach becomes “an ancient Hebrew philosopher,” John the Evangelist enjoys “the authority of a heavenly metaphysician,” and the Apostle Paul is “a heavenly philosopher.” While discussing the creation of the world, Jerome describes Moses as “the wisest philosopher of the Hebrews”; elsewhere, in connection with his realist interpretation of Genesis 1:24, he calls Moses “an extraordinary philosopher”; and, in connection with the analogical

predication of good to created things, he refers to the Evangelist Luke as “a philosopher.” It is probable that by designating biblical authors as philosophers Jerome intended to highlight the philosophical dimension of certain theological topics in Scripture, such as the creation of the universe. The background to this position might have been his effort to defend the right of philosophers to discuss these topics in the context of the faculty of arts. This conjecture would correspond to Jerome’s claim that it was appropriate for divine ideas to be discussed not only in the faculty of theology but also in the faculty of arts (Pavliček 2015, 2018a, b).

### Cross-References

- ▶ [Heymeric of Camp](#)
- ▶ [John Wyclif](#)
- ▶ [Realism](#)
- ▶ [Universals](#)
- ▶ [Walter Burley](#)

**Acknowledgments** Work on this article received financial support from the Czech Science Foundation (GA ČR) project “Philosophy at the University of Prague around 1409: Matěj of Knín’s *Quodlibet* as a Crossroads of European Medieval Knowledge,” grant agreement n. 19-16793S, carried out at the Institute of Philosophy of the Czech Academy of Sciences.

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## Jesuit Political Thought

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### Abstract

The Society of Jesus has always been a highly “political” religious order. The context for its political thought was its engagement with higher-level education, its antiheretical, pastoral, and missionary activities, and its close relationships with secular rulers. Although there was no single, cohesive, or exclusively Jesuit political doctrine its members shared some premises: the (Thomist) premise that reason and revelation are complementary; that prudence is a pre-eminent virtue in all practical activity; and that the principles of good order (organization) are the same for church, polity, and any other “body” or corporation (including the Society itself). Inferences could therefore be drawn from reason to revelation and from one kind of body to another. Reason and revelation concurred that the polity requires coordination of individuals to the common good by coercive authority, and therefore hierarchy and



headship, although that headship need not be monarchical. However, like most of their contemporaries, Jesuits regarded monarchy as the best form of government. Although authority as such is natural and necessary, the element of consent is the political community's freedom to choose its own form of government. The alterability of most laws implies an "absolute" ruler. However, the authority of any ruler or regime is limited by fundamental laws, natural and divine law, and the natural and legal rights of subjects, as well as the right or threat of tyrannicide. The Society's anti-heretical activities were centered on defending the ultimate authority of the papacy over the church, especially as supreme arbiter of controversies about faith and morals. Jesuit theologians defended the papal "indirect power" to intervene in secular government where the salvation of souls was involved. This could threaten the independent authority of secular rulers. However, the Society was normally highly sympathetic to the position of secular rulers; indeed Jesuit theologians and controversialists made substantial concessions to "reason of state."

Almost from the establishment of the Society of Jesus (1540), Jesuits have been involved with things political. The Society's founders, preeminent among them Ignatius Loyola, had not intended this. However, their placing the Society at the papacy's disposal, the remarkable gifts and educational attainments of its members, and its adaptability meant that even in the lifetime of the founding fathers (Ignatius died in 1563, Lainez his successor as superior general in 1565, and Salmerón, the last surviving founder, in 1586), its activities came to center on secondary- and tertiary-level education and antiheretical engagements, as well as retaining the original focus on foreign and domestic missions, and spiritual guidance. For all these activities, the Society needed patrons among prelates and secular rulers to fund and protect it, and in dealing with them it acquired a vast collective political experience, as well as political enemies. Its various engagements also demanded theoretical reflection about politics.

## The Place of Politics in the Jesuit Curriculum

There was no exclusively or peculiarly Jesuit political doctrine, still less a collective political theory. The *Ratio studiorum* of 1599, the Society's definitive curriculum for its entire educational establishment, did not mention the study of politics or even history. Thomism, which the *Ratio studiorum* made the touchstone of orthodoxy for the Society, did, however, have a place for reflection about *respublica* in the *de regimine principum* (mirrors for princes) tradition, and the parts of moral philosophy and theology (*ethica*) concerned with justice, law and right, and *dominium* (*de iustitia et iure*). Casuistry, the practical and speculative elaboration of the Society's specialism of the confessional, also treated some political matters. Moreover, "controversial theology," the Society's distinctive curricular innovation, centered on ecclesiology, and hence required consideration of the relationship between the church and the polity. In addition, Jesuits made notable contributions to "reason of state." Finally, the Society's activities and doctrines that were (sometimes gratuitously) attributed to it demanded political defences. Because of the approaches adopted by Jesuits, these genres and discussions did not remain entirely dispersed, but neither were they combined into a cohesive discipline, unlike the Protestant academies in the Holy Roman Empire and the Netherlands in the early seventeenth century, in which "politics" became a curricular topic. Adam Contzen S.J. did, however, produce an exemplary Catholic version of this kind of study, his *Politicorum libri decem* (Contzen 1621).

## The Premises of Jesuit Political Thought

Jesuits generally (like their Thomist predecessors and teachers) predicated their political reflection on two fundamental premises. The first was the complementarity of reason and revelation, so that although revelation might transcend what reason alone could attain to, it never contradicted it. "Reason" was a catchall term that meant reasonableness or common sense, the authority of

secular philosophers (in ethics and politics Aristotle and Cicero, in particular) and of Roman law, or inference from premises to conclusions, whether these premises were necessary truths, because they were true by definition or self-evident, or contingent and dependent on experience and prudence. Revelation meant not only Scripture, but also “positive theology”, which means the teachings of the church fathers, general councils of the church and authoritative theologians, and papal doctrinal pronouncements. These together were described generically as “tradition(s).”

Jesuits also derived from the “schools” (the medieval universities) the syllogistic ideal: reasoning should be from general principles (as major premises), through minor premises, to conclusions as certain and compelling as the principles from which they were derived. The active life that the Society emphatically embraced, even though many of its members were noted contemplatives, aimed at the practical realization of virtue and *pietas*. Here the certainty of the demonstrative sciences (including theology, although it took its first principles from revelation) was not always possible, however much moral theology and casuistry tried to narrow down the areas of uncertainty. General and incontrovertible principles of morality (such as that man ought to pursue the good and eschew what is evil; or that the greater evil is to be avoided), or natural right (or law) principles such as to harm no one, to give to each their due and to keep promises, were insufficient to guide conduct. What mattered was clarity about the means to the good, and about which goods to choose and evils to avoid, in particular circumstances. For this, the indispensable requirement was prudence, a virtue Jesuits greatly valued both in their own order and in politics, though not (as Aristotle had done) as the principal virtue: for Jesuits it could not outrank justice among the practical virtues, let alone the theological virtues of faith, hope, and charity.

### The Principles of Order

Given these presuppositions, it was right and proper to use “reason,” and to appropriate the findings of wise and prudent pagans where they

did not contradict revelation, not only in the conduct of practical life, but also in order to elucidate matters of faith and doctrine: the reformers could not endorse either of these positions without qualification. The most important of the principles relevant to the *respublica civilis*, the “commonwealth” (subsequently “state”) were a set of beliefs about good order so attuned to the common sense of the time and the philosophical orthodoxy over the ages that they were regarded as certain. Ignatius himself made clear, however, that the principles applied equally to the Society of Jesus, the church as a whole, the family, an army, or any other corporate association, private or public. The civil polity, like them, is not a mere aggregate but an “order” or “body,” with parts or “members” coordinated into a whole whose purposes override those of the parts. Subordination of individual utility to the common good is not natural to fallen man, whereas animal collectivities such as ant colonies and bee hives manage it effortlessly. It requires coordination and direction, and therefore rules or laws. Rules alone are, however, not enough, given their generality, the variability of circumstances, and because subjects do not always obey them. Coercive authority, and therefore hierarchy, relationships of super- and sub-ordination, command and obedience, are also needed. Authority and the hierarchy it entails are “natural” to the human condition, in the sense of being an unconditional requirement of the social existence natural to human beings. In addition, because God wills the preservation of the human race, he wills the necessary means that end demands. In that sense, and in no other, secular authority is by divine right. The same conclusion is confirmed by revelation, which teaches obedience to authority in the favorite proof-text of the age, *Romans 13*, and also I *Peter 2*, by salvation history, and by inference from the fourth commandment to honor one’s father and mother.

### The Authority of Specific Rulers and Regimes

Learning from Aquinas, either directly or through their Dominican teachers, notably Caietan, Vitoria, and Soto, Jesuit theologians, however,

recognized that theoretical cogency demanded a more precise account. Authority is necessary and natural, and coercive authority is necessary for fallen human nature. However, it does not follow that any particular political office or regime is natural or necessary. Again, hierarchy certainly entails headship; in the sixteenth century an acephalous association of human beings was inconceivable. Moreover, Jesuits collectively had no doubt that monarchy was the best form of government in any association (it was exemplified in their own), and normally wrote of government as *principatus* and of rulers as princes. However, they recognized the legitimacy of other, non-monarchical forms of headship. What is more, it is not God that has designated (say) France or England as monarchies, nor has he appointed a particular person or dynasty to occupy their thrones. Jesuit theologians, therefore, regarded the doctrine of the “divine (hereditary) right of kings” as simply erroneous, and for a time, following the lead of the papacy, some Jesuits denied the right of Henri of Navarre (subsequently, as Henri IV, a notable patron of the Society) and James VI of Scotland – whose partisans asserted divine right – to succeed to the French and English thrones, respectively.

### “Absolute” Authority

A more precise statement of the position (in Molina or Suárez for example) was that civil Society and political authority were coeval, and it was for each civil Society or “people” to determine its particular form of government. Whether, once a form of government was established, a people or its representatives might change it unilaterally was disputed. The relationship between officeholders and the collectivity of their subjects was often construed as a contract, treaty, or agreement (for example, philosophically by Suárez, polemically by Persons and Mariana), usually a pact made in some conjectural “primordial” past. Rulers could not unilaterally alter its terms, namely the laws specifying the manner and scope of their empowerment (*leges regiae*, latterly “fundamental laws”). It was, however, clear that

most laws were, in principle, alterable. Whoever was entitled to change the laws was by definition “absolute” (*legibus solutus*, absolved from obedience to law); Roman law and Jesuit working assumptions meant that this was likely to be a single ruler, a *princeps legibus solutus*. “Absolute” did not, of course, mean unlimited or unconditional authority.

### Tyranny and Tyrannicide

Rulers could be tyrants, misusing their power to create disorder. Academic tradition distinguished tyrants into rulers with legitimate titles who behaved tyrannically (*tyrannus ab exercitu*) and usurpers (*tyrannus absque titulo*). The hard line often adopted for preaching and catechetical purposes was that both sorts were divine punishment for sins, and the remedies were humility and suffering. Strictly, however, an usurper was not a ruler at all, but an aggressor who in principle might be resisted by anyone, according to the natural right of self-defence. However, Jesuit moral thought was consequentialist, and it was therefore relevant that most legitimate regimes had begun in usurpation or conquest, and that some sort of rule was better than none. With legitimate rulers behaving tyrannically, there was a “presumption in favour of authority”: such a ruler is still a ruler, and private individuals have no authority to judge or to punish their superiors. However, especially given contractualist assumptions, tyranny arguably causes the reversion of authority back to the commonwealth (or “the people”) from which it originates. The people collectively *is* the ruler’s superior and may therefore judge and punish him. An efficient tyrant would obviously prevent the meeting of bodies representing the commonwealth to eliminate such a possibility. In that event, anyone killing a usurper was arguably carrying out the presumptive sentence of the commonwealth. The anarchic potential of this doctrine was evident, especially given the assassinations of Henri III and Henri IV of France. A further orthodox argument, though there was no recent successful instance of its implementation, was that popes had the authority

to judge and to depose rulers, and had in the past done so (paradigmatically Zacharias' supposed deposition of Childeric); that excommunicated rulers were *eo ipso* deprived of their office; and that unless the popes had declared otherwise, anyone might carry out their sentence. However, Bellarmine, Suárez and Becanus, in the context of Oath of Allegiance Controversy with James I/VI pointed out that excommunication does not entail deposition, and deposition is not the same as a death sentence, least of all one to be executed by private individuals. As such, however, tyrannicide was a traditional scholastic doctrine. It was very equivocally endorsed by Juan de Mariana, with no mention of any papal role, and as a warning to princes rather than as something he advocated, in a treatise of 1599 written for the future Philip III, which aroused no controversy in Spain, but was condemned by the Paris *parlement* and the Sorbonne. Mariana's Jesuit defenders further attenuated it. Nevertheless, the doctrine was imputed to the whole Society by its enemies.

### The Papal *Potestas indirecta*

The papal power to depose secular rulers was an extreme extrapolation of a doctrine that as such was regarded as simple orthodoxy by the Society's leading theologians (though many Catholics resisted it), the so-called "indirect authority" of the papacy in temporal matters (*potestas indirecta in temporalibus*). This meant the papacy's right to intervene, with coercive means if necessary, in secular government when the salvation of souls required it. The doctrine brought into peculiarly sharp focus the intractable difficulties of the idea of a polity of Christians, subject not only to their secular rulers but also to a non-territorial, hierarchical church. The range of possible resolutions to this perplexity was familiar from the medieval "two swords," *sacerdotium/imperium* controversies. The Peace of Augsburg (1555) that ended the wars in the Holy Roman Empire between the emperor and the Protestants had (without using the expression) made *cuius regio eius religio* (the religion of the rulers determines the religion of the subject) the rule for the

whole of the Holy Roman Empire. The Tridentine church, and the Jesuits as its spearhead, rejected this settlement and the territorialization and denominationalization of Christianity it implied.

### The Church and the State

The "controversial theology" of the relationship between the church and secular authority, was honed to a fine edge by decades of confrontation between Jesuits, notably Gregorio de Valentia, Robert Bellarmine and later Francois Verron, and the "heretics of our time." In outline, the Jesuit (and Tridentine) argument was that: the complementarity of reason and revelation entailed that to be a real body, the "church militant," the collectivity of all living Christians, must have the same properties as any other body, corporation or order. It must be not only entirely "visible" (contrary to the Reformers), but it must also have a supreme "arbiter of disputes" concerning faith and morals. Christ cannot have left the church destitute of the means necessary to ensure the salvation of Christians. The failure of the heretics to agree even on essentials was due entirely to their rejection of the headship of Rome, attempting to establish a text in its place (*sola scriptura*). However, no text can interpret itself, there was a church before the Scriptures were written, and the scriptural canon (that is, what was authentically part of the Scriptures) was determined by the church and not vice versa. The church is, therefore, itself in every sense a "commonwealth," the *respublica Christiana*, requiring a visible head with supreme authority, *summa* (or *plena*) *potestas* and an order of super- and sub-ordination like any other *respublica*. A monarchical headship, as well as being naturally the best form, was instituted by Christ and conferred on the successors of St Peter, the Vicar of Rome. The role of general councils here remained ambiguous, although the Councils of Constance and Trent had been critical for the church's reformation and restoration. All the same, general councils could only be rare events, and for most purposes the papacy was the supreme head and arbiter of controversies.

Jesuits argued that the *potestas indirecta* was a “mediating” position between denying the papacy any authority in temporal matters, and assigning it supreme authority as *princeps mundi*, with secular rulers as its ministers. The latter idea was laughable, and arguably heretical (even though medieval hierocrats, including popes, had maintained it), in that it made rightful political authority dependent on grace or faith, whereas it depends on nature and (in some sense) consent, and exists among pagans, heretics, and schismatics. The *potestas indirecta*, so Jesuits argued, preserved the rightful independence of secular rulers in secular matters, while acknowledging the rightful authority of the church in what concerns the spiritual welfare of Christians. However, because it was the papacy that itself judged whether it should exercise its indirect power, its opponents complained that it conceded authority to secular rulers in form, while denying it in substance. The argument in any event relied on a distinction between temporal or secular matters (now being called “matters of state”), and spiritual or – even more equivocally – ecclesiastical matters that proved unworkable. Venice’s claim to political jurisdiction over clerics and ecclesiastical property (resulting in a papal Interdict of 1606–1607 and the expulsion of the Jesuits from Venice), the censorship of publications (over which the church claimed authority with its various *Indexes*), the scope of the obedience rulers could legitimately demand of their subjects (the bull *Regnans* of 1570 excommunicating Elizabeth of England and absolving subjects from their allegiance, the Oath of Allegiance controversy with James I/IV) were all both “spiritual” and “temporal” issues.

### Reason of State

In general, however, Jesuit political thinking was highly sympathetic to the difficulties attending the ruler’s office, in part no doubt because many senior Jesuits were confessors of princes. This is seen in the response of many Jesuit writers to “reason of state.” Although they denounced “Machiavellian” political practices as likely to

incur divine wrath, they too reasoned in terms of the demands of political success, rather than simply stipulating inflexible moral principles, and found ways of qualifying many moral imperatives binding on private persons, when the preservation or enhancement of the ruler’s position or the good of his subjects demanded it. For example, although they regarded religious toleration as both immoral and bad politics, associating it with “Machiavellian” debasement of religion into a mere instrument of statecraft, they allowed it if attempting to enforce religious uniformity undermined a ruler’s position, or as a *faute de mieux* to allow the survival of Catholic minorities in “heretical” countries. They equally allowed rulers to be concerned with their magnificence and reputation, to practice secrecy and deception short of outright lying, and to take emergency measures in violation of strict legality.

### Natural Law and Natural Rights

Because Thomism recognized the autonomous authority of reason, a good deal of Jesuit thinking about morality could be in largely secular terms, for natural law (which is the substance of such argument) does not even presuppose the existence of God, but is predicated upon “the nature of things”; that is, the conditions and requirements of human social existence. Subscription to natural law is a precondition for a law to bind in conscience, and it thus imposes limitations on the power of rulers, including prelates. Moreover, although the law of nations (*ius gentium*) had been opaquely related to natural law ever since Roman law, it was clear that there was some relationship (worked out with great sophistication by Suarez), and this too restricted the authority of rulers and their freedom of action, at least in principle. Again, natural law (generically *ius naturale*) reasoning did not distinguish sharply between law and rights, and liberty and equality were held to be natural rights, right by nature (in that no one is naturally the slave of anyone else). This allowed some Jesuits to assume the mantle of Bartolomé de las Casas as protectors

of the “Indians,” and opponents of slavery. The natural right of self-defence, and of due process, could justify both disobedience to persons in authority and defiance of law, for example the laws of property in times of dearth or starvation, or the authority of “heretics” and their laws prohibiting Catholic worship and publication. Jesuits (as has been seen) normally accommodated themselves easily to prevailing custom and practice, but equally have always exhibited a streak of radicalism. Thus, although Jesuit theologians (notably Martin del Rio) were counted among the most important proponents of witch-hunting, virulent at this time, it was also Jesuits (especially Friedrich von Spee and Adam Tanner) who at great personal risk opposed the practice.

## Cross-References

- ▶ [Political Philosophy](#)
- ▶ [Thomas Aquinas, Political Thought](#)

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## Jodocus Trutfetter

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### Abstract

Jodocus Trutfetter (also Trutfetter) was a philosopher and theologian of the *via moderna*, at the University of Erfurt, in the late fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries. His main works include a textbook on logic, the *Summule totius logice*, and another on natural philosophy, the *Summa in totam physicen*. As a proponent of the *via moderna*, Trutfetter stressed the importance of taking both ancient and modern authorities into account. In questions concerning universals, categories, and psychology, his views were close to those of John Buridan. On the relationship between theology and philosophy, he shared, for the most part, William of Ockham's position.

Jodocus Trutfetter, known as *Doctor Isennachensis* after his hometown Eisenach, matriculated at the University of Erfurt in the winter semester of 1476. In the spring of 1478, he became a Bachelor of Arts and then in 1484 a Master. He taught as a Master in the faculty of arts and was promoted Licentiate of Theology in 1493, after which he was elected for the first time as the dean of the faculty. Trutfetter held many in the academic life. In 1501, he became a member of the college of jurists and dean of the faculty of law and in the same year was elected as rector of the university. In 1504, he received a Doctorate in Theology. Between 1506 and 1510, he taught at the recently founded University of Wittenberg but returned to Erfurt where he taught theology and philosophy until his death in 1519.

Trutfetter's logical treatises are among the most important works of the late *via moderna* in Germany. He published his major work, the *Summule totius logice*, in 1501 and supplemented it with commentaries on Peter of Spain's

*Summulae* and other texts used in the teaching of logic. In 1514, Trutfetter also published an extensive textbook on natural philosophy entitled *Summa in totam physicen*.

As did all the secular masters and doctors at the University of Erfurt at that time, Trutfetter identified himself with the *via moderna* school. For him, this led to supporting some distinctive doctrinal notions as well as to a certain attitude toward authoritative writers. Among these doctrinal standpoints, the most prominent were (1) the denial of universality in the entities of the extramental world, that is, the view that universals are only universal concepts in the mind; (2) the view that all entities in the extramental world are included in the categories of substance and accident – other Aristotelian categories being based on the properties of the concepts – and (3) the view that the human soul is one intellectual form with no real distinction existing between the faculties of the soul or between the faculties and the essence of the soul. Trutfetter did, however, accept some positions of other schools. For example, he was ready to tolerate different views on universals, insofar as they did not imply a real communicability of universal natures, which according to him implied doctrinal heresy.

As a proponent of the *via moderna* Trutfetter argued for equal use of both old and more recent authorities. At the beginning of his major work on logic, he expressed his opposition to philosophers who relied only on older and saintly authors, by which he probably meant contemporary Thomist and Scotist philosophers. Although he himself based his works on writers like William of Ockham, John Buridan, Gregory of Rimini, Peter of Ailly, Marsilius of Inghen, and Gabriel Biel, he also referred to a number of authors from all periods down to his own times, without excluding some of the most important Thomists and Scotists of the fifteenth century.

In his major works, Trutfetter discusses individual topics by introducing the views of a variety of medieval authors on the question at hand and then providing his own solution, which most of the time conforms to the common view of the *via moderna*, as he understood it. He was well informed about the decrees issued by the Fifth Lateran Council in

1513 and provided an application of the council's recommendations concerning the teaching of theological truths in natural philosophy in his compendium of natural philosophy. In order to explain the phenomenon of the rainbow, Trutfetter used Theodor of Freiberg's advanced theory, which was not well known at that time.

Trutfetter's philosophy has not been thoroughly studied, and therefore it is possible to present only some aspects of his thought. Logic for Trutfetter is, in a very strong sense, a science of signs. At the beginning of his *Epitome seu breviarium logicae*, he quotes Augustine's dictum that all knowledge considers either things or signs. Logic is about the signs used in propositions. It does not convey knowledge of the extramental world but is still a necessary prerequisite for such knowledge in the natural sciences. Consequently, none of the Aristotelian categories denote diverse kinds of beings in the extramental world. The terms belonging to various categories all signify substances and qualities, but the categorial diversity is based on different connotations of the terms. A wide range of terms is therefore included among the connotative terms. Some connotative terms also have the peculiar property of *appellatio formae*.

Following John Gerson, Trutfetter argues against philosophers who in his nominalist view neglect a semantic analysis of terms and rush into positing many classes of entities in the extramental world, which could be sufficiently explained by distinctions in the mental concepts about these beings. If one looks at Trutfetter's discussions on movement or the soul, one notices that he, in fact, carries out a careful semantic analysis before presenting definitions of these key concepts of natural philosophy. Despite these metaphysical and methodological views, his discussion of the actual issues in natural philosophy does not always sharply contrast with the views of Thomist and Scotist writers.

The question of the relationship between philosophy and theology arises in Trutfetter's remarks on the immortality of the soul. He notes that the Christian view of immortality is expressed even in some of the writings of the ancient pagan philosophers, but he is clearly suspicious of Aristotle's view of the matter. In this context he mentions the problem of

harmonizing the view of the immortality of individual souls with Aristotelian doctrines of the eternity of the world and the denial of actual infinity. For Trutfetter, immortality is in the first place a truth of faith, and he did not consider purely philosophical arguments either for or against it very convincing. He even mentions Scotus' and Ockham's criticism of Thomas Aquinas' proofs. When applying the decree of the Fifth Lateran Council on immortality, Trutfetter did not so much defend the doctrine with proofs as refute the contrary views.

## Cross-References

- ▶ [Bartholomaeus Arnoldi de Usingen](#)
- ▶ [Gabriel Biel](#)
- ▶ [Gregory of Rimini](#)
- ▶ [John Buridan](#)
- ▶ [Marsilius of Inghen](#)
- ▶ [Peter of Ailly](#)
- ▶ [William of Ockham](#)

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## Johannes Brammart

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### Abstract

Johannes Brammart was a member of the Carmelite order, trained in theology at the University of Paris, who became one of the founders and first masters of theology of the University of Cologne. His work has been very little studied, and his commentary on the Sentences of Peter Lombard has not yet been edited. This entry will focus on two of the topics discussed in the prologue of his commentary on the first book of the Sentences: the problem of beatific vision and the object of science and belief.

### Biography

Johannes Brammart was born in the city of Aachen and began his theological training in Cologne, at the studium generale of the Carmelite order, which sent him to Paris to continue his

studies in 1378. His year as bachelor commenting on the Sentences happened to be in the time of the Papal Schism. As a consequence of the conflict with the Clementine Carmelites who dominated the Paris school at the time, the German Carmelites, who supported Pope Urban IV, were forced to leave Paris and move to Bologne. He was scheduled to lecture on the Sentence during the year 1381–1382, but we do not know with certainty whether he was able to complete his lecture in Paris before he left or he had to finish it in Bologne. Either way, in 1384 he was a master of theology. He began his teaching career at the University of Bologne, and from 1384 to 1404, he served as the provincial superior of the lower German province. In 1388, when he had already taught at the Carmelite studium generale for a number of years, he played an important role in the founding of the University of Cologne and became one of its first masters of theology (Lickteig 1981: 148–150; 171; 200; 224; 229).

Johannes Brammart composed a commentary on the Sentences of Peter Lombard, and he is also mentioned as the author of a number of sermons and theological questions, most likely written during his activity as a master of theology at Cologne. From his commentary on the Sentences, only Books I and IV were conserved (Stegmüller 1947: 196–197).

### The Prologue and Principium of Brammart's Commentary to the first book of the Sentences

Brammart's commentary to Book I opens, as customary, with a sermon in praise of Peter Lombard and the Book of the Sentences, followed by the discussion of a theological question (*quaestio collativa*) on a topic that the sermon had already called attention to. The sermon was usually constructed around a biblical passage that was somehow alluding to the name of the bachelor, and Brammart's makes no exception. The biblical passage he chooses, *verbum domini super Iohannem* (the word of God came unto John), mentions his first name, Iohannes, and announces the topic of his sermon: the role of the

divine word in the beatific experience of the human intellect. Typically, the discussion of the theological question was a chance for bachelors to address the arguments of the colleagues who had spoken before them and to defend their own position from the counterarguments that had been brought against them. Brammart's question is different in this respect because, as the Carmelite bachelor, he was the first to speak and therefore could not discuss the arguments of others.

Brammart's introductory question addresses a number of issues of great importance in fourteenth-century theological and philosophical debates: the role of intelligible species in human cognition; abstractive and intuitive knowledge; the representation of created things in the divine mind; God's knowledge of possible futures; the production of the Son as a Word by the divine mind; the nature and source of the "word" by means of which the human mind knows the divine essence.

### **Brammart on Mediated Knowledge and the Beatific Vision**

Brammart's main challenge is to explain beatific vision in the context of a theory that understands rational knowledge as mediated by signs. The Constitution issued by Pope Benedict XII in 1336 and the Determinations of the Council of Vienne promulgated in 1317 provided a number of important principles that no discussion of the beatific vision could disregard: beatific vision had to be understood as an intuitive, face-to-face vision of the divine essence; no intellectual being could obtain beatitude on its own, but required the light of glory (Denzinger 1911: 208; 216–217). These criteria posed a number of difficulties for a theologian who understood the contact of the human mind with the exterior reality as possible only through the mediation of signs or mental species.

Brammart argues that all rational knowledge is mediated by intelligible species and distinguishes the species from the actual knowledge. The species are caused by the exterior objects

acting upon a faculty and are the representations of these objects as retained in memory. The act of knowledge is generated from the memory species by means of a change or a movement caused by the memory species in the knowing faculty, which brings it from potentiality to actuality.

On the other hand, in order to be able to explain that a change occurs, there has to be a distinction between the faculty and the form that brings it to actuality, according to the Aristotelian model in which the process of knowledge involves an entity in a state of potentiality – the faculty – and an active principle (De anima 417a17). In the case of sensation, the active principle is the exterior object, but in the case of intellectual knowledge, Aristotle says that the object is universal and somehow within the soul (417b19). Brammart doesn't deal with the problem of universals here, but he does point out, in the context of rational knowledge, that the faculty's change from potentiality to actuality doesn't happen as a result of the mind receiving something new, but by means of something it already has, which is the memory species. It is an altogether internal process.

Along the same lines, Brammart wants to show that the human mind is a more important cause of knowledge than the extramental reality. Like Ockham and Auriol, he argues that even an act of intuitive knowledge (which is the closest and the most direct contact of the human mind with the extramental thing) can occur without the object being present or even existing. Brammart, like Ockham, mentions that this is only a logical possibility, pertaining to God's absolute power (*de potentia Dei absoluta*), which means it doesn't actually happen, but it shows that the relation between the presence of the extramental object and intuitive knowledge is contingent, not necessary (Courtenay 1985: 255). Ockham's purpose is to protect the immutability of scientific knowledge by isolating it from the changeable objects in the physical world (Tachau 1988: 121) by diminishing the causal role of the object and presenting the act of knowledge as an internal product of the human mind.

One of the consequences of the distance imposed by this model between the object and the cognitive act is that the certitude of knowledge

can no longer be guaranteed. But for Brammart, in the context of beatific vision, it posed an additional problem: viewing the act of intellectual knowledge as an “internal” product of the human mind could be seen as incompatible with the aforementioned determination of the Council of Vienne, which qualified as heretic of any implication that the created mind could be blessed in itself without the bestowal of the light of glory. Brammart had to explain the causal role of the divine essence in order to find a way to compensate for the distance imposed by this model between the object and the act of knowledge and to find a place in it for the light of glory.

The other problem he has to solve is linked to the definition of beatific vision as intuitive knowledge. According to Scotus, intuitive knowledge related to the existing thing as existing involves a direct contact of the faculty with the object. This made it incompatible with mediating species, which came into play only in the context of abstractive knowledge (Tachau 1988: 71). However, arguing with Ockham against Scotus, Brammart maintains that the difference between intuitive and abstractive cognition is not determined by the presence or absence of the object nor by the presence or absence of the mediating species. Moreover, he redefines intuitive knowledge to fit his model of mediated knowledge: following Francis of Marchia, who also defends the theory that beatific knowledge is mediated by species (Duba 2003/2004: 140), Brammart claims that a species can relate to an existing thing as existing, just like intuitive knowledge does, and it can represent the object without mediation, in its particular state and circumstances.

For Brammart, like for Marchia, the species is the result of a direct contact between the faculty and the object of knowledge, just like the intuitive knowledge is for Scotus. The difference is that the species is a representation or a sign, not an act of knowledge, nor the result of an act of knowledge. However, for Brammart, the species is also the content of the cognitive act it generates. He insists that the knowledge generated from the memory species is simple knowledge and cannot be preceded by any other cognition. As such, the content of the actual knowledge generated from the

species is the first cognitive content brought forth by the contact between the faculty and the object, as opposed to a mental representation generated from another mental representation. This means that the memory species from which it is generated should not be understood in any way as a kind of knowledge. Brammart needs to make these adjustments to the model of mediated knowledge in order to reduce the distance between the extramental object and the act of knowledge, while in the same time remaining within a model of mediated knowledge.

Scotus accepts that the memory species can be considered a form of knowledge – not knowledge in the proper sense, but “habitual knowledge,” because it contains virtually all the knowledge about the object it represents. He argues that the actual knowledge, which he also calls “mental word,” is formally the same mental content as the species in the memory from which it is generated (Scotus 1963: 241, ll. 9–17). Scotus is relying on Augustine’s famous psychological model from *On the Trinity*, Book XV, where he talks about the “hidden” knowledge in the memory and the word generated from it as being the same content. Augustine develops this model of the human mind as an analogy for explaining intratrinitarian relations: the Son as the word of God has to be the same essence as the Father, the only difference being that the Son is generated by the Father and from the Father’s knowledge, which is identical with his essence (Friedman 2013: 29–31). The idea of the memory content as knowledge (*scientia*) – as Augustine calls it – even if it is accepted by Scotus, is rejected by Brammart; still, he follows Scotus in arguing that the memory species and the cognitive act are one and the same mental content. This allows him to accept mediating species and in the same time to avoid a view of knowledge as a representation generated from another representation, a model that would deepen the gap between cognition and its object.

Even if he can argue that the intuitive knowledge of the divine essence is not incompatible with mediating species, Brammart, like Marchia, also needs to explain how it is possible for the infinite divine essence to be represented by

a limited created species. His solution to this difficulty comes from Scotus who says that angels have a natural knowledge of God which is mediated by species. However, this natural knowledge is distinct from the beatific knowledge, which is intuitive, and, according to his doctrine, incompatible with species. Brammart takes the arguments that Scotus develops to explain the natural knowledge of God by angels and uses them to justify mediation in beatific vision: he argues that it is possible for the divine essence to be represented by a limited species, because a relation of representation doesn't require an ontological likeness, and the representation needs to be proportionate to the faculty, not to the object.

Although a species is produced by an extramental object, it is a distinct entity both from the extramental thing it represents and from the faculty it informs. Moreover, once it is generated, its existence and ability to function as a sign are no longer dependent on the experience or object that caused it. No ontological conformity is necessary between a species and the things it represents: a species can represent more than it is (i.e., entities whose ontological perfection exceeds that of the species itself) and qualities it doesn't participate in.

## The Object of Knowledge and Belief

The object of knowledge and belief was a topic commonly discussed in the Prologue of Sentences commentaries and the subject of one of the most fervent fourteenth-century debates. The candidates for this role, as summarized at the beginning of the discussion by Brammart and many others, were three: the sign, be it complex (a sentence) or simple (a term), the thing signified by a non-complex sign, and the significate of the sentences, also referred to as *complexe significabile*.

Brammart develops his theory on this topic in his first question of his Prologue, and he does it in two steps. First, he argues, against Ockham, that the significate of the sentence is a better choice as the object of knowledge than the sentence or sign. Second, he takes into discussion some of the weaker points of the *complexe*

*significabile* theories and insists on the importance of the extramental things signified by the terms of the sentence as truth makers and objects of knowledge. He proves to be familiar with the ideas of Walter Chatton, Adam Wodeham, Gregory of Rimini, Hugolino of Orvieto, John Mirecourt, Denis de Montina, Richard Brinkley, Richard Ferrybridge, Nicholas Aston, John Buridan. Out of these, only Rimini and Aston are referred to by name. Rimini and Hugolino are quoted mostly in the second part, where Brammart argues against the *complexe significabile* theory and where their arguments are either being rejected or taken out of context and used support Brammart's own position. Aston is referred to by name only once, in a context where Brammart deviates from his position, but in spite of that he is Brammart's strongest source. In fact, the ones that play the most important part in shaping Brammart's position on this topic are, apart from John Buridan, the English theologians and logicians (Aston, Ferrybridge, Brinkley).

In the first part, Brammart rejects the sentence and the extramental thing as objects of knowledge, but he accepts the sentence as a truth-bearer. He treats any cognitive act, simple or complex, as a sign which can be said to be true or false. The criterion of truth or falsity is the correspondence between what the sign conveys and the way in which it signifies (*modus significandi*) on the one hand and the thing or state of the things (*habitus/habitus rerum*) on the other. This is easy to explain in the case of a categorical affirmative proposition, which can be said to be true if "however it signifies, so it is the case." The more difficult task is showing how this correspondence criterion of truth applies to propositions that refer to the past or the future and, even more difficult, how it applies to negative propositions.

Other fourteenth-century philosophers, like Peter of Ailly and John Buridan, also accept a correspondence theory of truth, but they deal with the difficulties posed by past, future, modal, and negative propositions in different ways (Spade 2002: 182–183). The question they need to answer is the following: What things or states of things in reality correspond to the significate of the aforementioned sentences? Buridan finds



the formulation of the correspondence criterion as “howsoever the sentence signifies, so is the case” (*qualitercumque propositio significat, ita est*) to be an insufficient explanation that does not cover the cases of past or future sentences and prefers to give a more elaborated set of rules of truth and falsity in terms of his supposition theory (Nuchelmans 1973: 246–247). Brinkley also criticizes this “common description” of the truth of sentences, as he finds it to be incorrect for all sentences except for the true, present, non-modal affirmatives. For all the others, he argues that there should be a specific description of what makes each of them true (Cesalli 2007: 239).

Brammart explains that the correspondence criterion also extends to past, future, and modal propositions, but it should not be interpreted in the sense of a presently existing thing or a state of things corresponding to a past or future proposition. What makes these propositions true is their correspondence with past or future things or events.

However, it is the case of negative propositions that stretch the correspondence theory of truth to its limits. The significate of a negative proposition corresponds to what we might call a negative state of things (*qualitercumque significat non esse, ita non est*). However, there is still a question of whether a negative state of things can be accepted as a valid referent for a sign or an act of knowledge, since it is not something that can be thought of as existing, not even to the degree to which a past or future proposition has as a referent past or future reality.

Brammart accepts that the object of knowledge and assent, in the case of a negative proposition, is “nothing,” in a sense similar to that in which Rimini admits that the total significate of a proposition is “not something” when “something” is understood to be an existing thing or entity (Rimini 1981: 9, ll. 20–23). However, his source for these developments is not Rimini, but Nicholas Aston. As we have seen before, Brammart believes, like Rimini, Ockham, and Auriol, that neither abstractive nor intuitive knowledge requires the object to be present or to exist. He argues that it is possible to have a valid act of knowledge, be it simple or complex, in

regard to something that does not exist, since the existence of a mental act or sign does not depend on a relation with an extramental existing entity. Just like before, in the discussion on beatific vision, Brammart relies on the idea that a relation of representation doesn’t require an ontological likeness or connection between the sign and the object.

In the second part of the discussion, Brammart considers the perspective of some of the theologians who criticized the idea of the object of knowledge understood as *complexe significabile* and presents the advantages of accepting the extramental thing as the object of knowledge. He discusses some situations in which the significate of the sentence as a whole can be identified with the individual entities signified by the terms of the sentence: the fact that God exists is signified both by the term “God” and by the sentence “God is,” and the same goes for any other sentence that simply states the existence of something. A statement like “God is God” (*A is A*) is another case in which the sentence as a whole doesn’t signify more than its categorematic terms. Brammart is arguing, against Rimini, that as long as the existence of an extra-mental thing is sufficient to make a proposition true or false, there is no point in postulating the existence of *complexe significabilia* as something distinct from the proposition or from the things signified by its categorematic terms. For a sentence like “*Deus est Deus*” to be true, the only thing required is the existence of God.

His arguments against the *complexe significabile* theory rely on an misinterpretation of Rimini’s doctrine, common among the Augustinian’s opponents, according to which *complexe significabilia* are to be understood as a kind of propositionally-structured extra-mental entities that act as referents and truth-makers in relation to sentences. Among the problems that arise from this interpretation are the questionable ontological status of such entities, especially in the case of past, future and negative propositions, and the consequence that they are co-eternal with God: if there is a presently existing state of affairs, a truth, an “it is so” (*ita est*) corresponding to the proposition “The Antichrist will be” (i.e. If

the Antichrist will be, it *is* true that the Antichrist will be), then such a truth exists from eternity, because this proposition would have been true even before creation, if it had been formed; also, since every entity and every truth that exists is a creation of God, where do these eternal truths fit in, since some of them arguably existed before God created anything? Apart from these, there are also the problems pointed out in the first part in regard to negative, past and future propositions, the significate of which cannot be identified with a presently existing entity or state of affairs.

Brammart's own answer to problem of the object of knowledge and faith is an ontologically realist position the development of which is influenced by Aston, Buridan and Ferrybridge. In the case of a true affirmative categorical proposition, he states, the significate and object of knowledge, which is also the referent and truth-maker, it is the extra-mental entity signified by the subject-term of the proposition. But Brammart also accept as a possible object of knowledge the state of the things (*rerum habitudo*), or, as his example suggest, "a thing in a certain state" (*res taliter se habens*). In a proposition like "Socrates sins", the significate is identical with Socrates, or with "Socrates sinning" (*Socrates peccans*), if the proposition is true. What he refers to as "a thing in a certain state" (*res taliter se habens*) is still centered around an individual existing entity, but it also allows for some degree of complexity. The advantage of this perspective, Brammart points out, is that it preserves the identity of the object of faith, at least in the articles that have God or Christ as a subject, which can be said to always have a presently existing entity corresponding to them in the extra-mental world, regardless of the tense of the sentences: a proposition referring to the past resurrection of Christ still has Christ, an eternally and therefore always presently existing entity, as a subject, and therefore as a referent and object of faith. In the case of all the other past, future and modal propositions, the object of faith can be said to be "nothing," in the sense discussed in the first part (i.e. not a presently existing entity). By the end, Brammart finds a way to combine a realist perspective that satisfies the Christian requirement for the object of faith to be the same

for all men and his preference for a theory of knowledge that allows a higher degree of independence of the intramental world of signs in relation to the extramental reality.

## Cross-References

- ▶ [Adam Wodeham](#)
- ▶ [Divine Power](#)
- ▶ [Francis of Marchia](#)
- ▶ [Gregory of Rimini](#)
- ▶ [Intuitive and Abstractive Cognition](#)
- ▶ [John Buridan](#)
- ▶ [John Duns Scotus](#)
- ▶ [Mental Language](#)
- ▶ [Mental Representation](#)
- ▶ [Mental Word/Concepts](#)
- ▶ [Peter of Ailly](#)
- ▶ [Richard Brinkley](#)
- ▶ [Species: Sensible and Intelligible](#)
- ▶ [Truth, Theories of](#)
- ▶ [William of Ockham](#)

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### Abstract

John of Mirecourt was born in the first part of the fourteenth century in a small region (Mirecourt) of Lorraine. He accomplished his formation in theology at Saint Bernard's College in Paris, where he was a colleague with the Augustinian Alfonsus Vargas Toletanus and the Carmelite Paul of Perugia. His only extant

work is the commentary on the *Sentences*, on which he lectured in the academic years 1344–1345. In 1347, a number of propositions extracted from his commentary were condemned by the Florentine Robert de Bardis, the then chancellor at University of Paris. After 1347 his trace was lost and the date of his death is not known with certainty.

His name can be found in different forms as follows: Iohannes de Mercuria, Iohannis de Miricuria, Petrus de Hercuria, Monachus Cisterciensis, Monachus Albus, Monachus, Johannes Murchort, Giovanni de Mirecuria, Jean d'Otrecourt, Jean de Méricour, Jean de Mirecourt, and John of Mirecourt.

John of Mirecourt was born between 1310 and 1315 and he probably died in 1348. Since a witness about the year of his birth cannot be found, the researchers had different opinions about it. Franzinelli suggested 1310 as the year of his birth (Franzinelli 1958, p. 319), and Tessier concluded in favor of the year 1315. Perhaps the year 1315 is the year of John's birth, since Tessier based his calculation following the *curricula* from the Faculty of Theology. By the time students lectured on their *Sentences* commentaries, they were around 30 years old (Tessier 1966, p. 7; Pantea 2017).

He originates from the small region Mirecourt of Lorraine (lat. Lotharingia), northeastern France, and he was a member of the Cistercian order. This information is certified by the manuscripts which contain his commentary on the *Sentences* and by the documents attesting his condemnation. For example, the manuscript Firenze, Biblioteca Laurenziana Acquisti e Doni, ms. 347 contains in the *explicit*: "Here ends the meaning of the articles from the monk that is Brother Murchort, bachelor formed in sacred Theology, from the Lorraine nation, of the Order of Saint Bernard. Amen."

John was a student at Saint Bernard's College in Paris, where he pursued his studies in the second quarter of the fourteenth century, and there his elder colleague was John of Mortemer (Tessier 1966, p. 7; Parodi 1977, 1978, p. 300).

His only major work is the commentary on the *Sentences*, on which he lectured in the academic years 1344–1345. Stegmüller identifies two variants in the Cistercian’s commentary (*recensio prior et longior, authentica*) (Stegmüller 1947, pp. 227–229). Courtenay questions the authenticity of John’s *Sentences* (Courtenay 1972, p. 242). This hypothesis cannot be sustainable, yet, first of all, an integral edition based on a complete collation of all the manuscript does not exist, and if John is reading his *Sentences* in the academic years 1344–1345 and is condemned in the year 1347, he probably had no time to write another version of his *lecture*. So, for now it has to be assumed that both variants were written by John during his time at Saint Bernard’s College.

The text comprises four books and is divided as follows: the first book has 44 questions, the second book 23 questions, the third book 12 questions, and the fourth book 2 questions (Tessier 1966, pp. 15–21). Each question is divided into articles, and all articles have conclusions (Courtenay 1972, p. 243; Calma 2012, p. 480).

The copies of his commentary can be found in approximately 20 copies. His texts survived in manuscripts spread around Europe, and this fact showcases the reach of his thought on the continent in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. Fortunately, ten of his surviving manuscripts contain his *Principia*. Among his *socii*, with whom John was disputing in his *Principia*, we can identify the Benedictine John Normannus, the only one he quotes during the whole principial debate.

His condemned propositions with the introductory statement of the Florentine Robert de Bardis, who was the then chancellor at University of Paris, can be found in approximately sixth manuscripts. Two manuscripts have been identified until now which do not contain the introductory statement of Robert de Bardis but only the condemned propositions. The introductory statement of Robert de Bardis is edited (Courtenay 1986, p. 191; Pantea 2017).

The year 1347 is for certain the moment when a number of propositions extracted from John’s commentary were condemned. There was a misunderstanding about the time of his condemnation, and the year 1346 was suggested for it

(Birkenmajer 1922, p. 110). This confusion was made because in 1346, Nicholas of Autrecourt’s commentary on the *Sentences* was condemned, and throughout the centuries, their names were linked (Pantea 2017). As a result of this, we can find their names compressed in the formula “Jean d’Otrecourt.” The *Chartularium Universitatis Parisiensis* is the proper source in support of the affirmation that 1347 was actually the year of John’s condemnation. Here is the mention in the cartulary: “The articles of John of Mirecourt, bachelor in Theology, from the Cistercian Order, and of others from Paris, condemned by 43 Masters in Theology as being erroneous, and which were collected in this short form by the venerable Master Hugolino, from the Augustinian Order, famous doctor in sacred Theology.” The document is signed in 1347 (CUP t. II 1891, n. 1147, 610).

Initially, a number of 63 propositions were put under examination. After this, John wrote two defenses called *Apologia*: the first one was named *excusatio* and is addressed to Pastor de Serrescuderio, archbishop of Embrun, and the second one was named *declaratio* and has no recipient. Both of the *Apologies* were edited at the beginning of the last century by Birkenmajer and Stegmüller (Birkenmajer 1922; Stegmüller 1933). Their studies on John’s *Apologies* were a starting point to bring attention to John’s thought, to which Michalski already gave a valuable contribution (Michalsky 1921).

Edited text: The edition of the first book of his commentary was initiated by Eugenio Randi, and Masimo Parodi took care of Randi’s edition, which can be found online: <http://filosofia.dipafilo.unimi.it/~mparodi/mirecourt/>. This edition also contains a part of his *Principia*. The questions 2 and 3 from Book 1 were edited by Anna Franzinelli in 1958. Massimo Parodi edited the questions 13, 14, 15, and 16 in 1977, 1978; the next three books and his *Principia* are under preparation.

A critical edition of John’s condemned propositions as they can be found in their original form is also in progress. Though his condemned propositions circulated among the centuries in printed books in different forms, none of them is kept

in their original form. The editions in which the condemned propositions can be found are *Magna Bibliotheca Veterum Patrum* (La Bigne, Hierat 1664, pp. 933–934), *Historia Universitatis Parisiensis, tomus quartus* (Du Boulay 1668, pp. 298–300), *Collectio judiciorum de novis erroribus* (d'Argentré 1724, pp. 343–345), *Chartularium Universitatis Parisiensis* (Denifle, Chatelain 1891, pp. 610–613), and *I più antichi statuti della Facoltà Teologica dell'Università di Bologna* (Ehrle 1932, pp. 69–73).

## Thought

His commentary on the *Sentences* is not extremely revolutionary, but from a historical point of view, it represents an important piece in our understanding of the doctrinal direction of the second half of the fourteenth century. Michalsky was one of the first to examine his thinking and ranked him among the skeptical thinkers of the fourteenth century. The Polish historian was interested to trace the lines between the intellectual formation of the students from Oxford and Paris in the fourteenth century, and he thought that John was part of the nominalist movement from that period (Michalski 1921, p. 21). A reevaluation of his analysis proves the contrary; R. J. Van Neste demonstrated that John was not a skeptic (Van Neste 1976, p. 28).

John was a student at time when the Parisian academic environment began to be strongly influenced by the influx of Oxford theology (Bakker and Schabel 2002, p. 426), and he was not an exception in this respect; on the contrary, his commentary on the *Sentences* is strongly influenced by it. The Faculty of Arts promulgated two statutes to forbid Ockham's circulation in Paris. The first statute dates from 25th of September 1339 and the second one from 29th of December 1340, and both stipulated that anyone who reads William Ockham's works will be excluded from the Faculty forever (Thijssen 1998, pp. 57–72). John was not labeled as an Ockhamist randomly, as in his commentary he is arguing Ockham's concepts which concern the two existing powers in God, the absolute power of God (*de potentia*

*Dei absoluta*) and the ordained power of God (*de potentia Dei ordinata*). The first power, the absolute one, is referring to the fact that God can “change his mind,” and the second one, the ordained power, is referring to the fact that “God is simple and his will is immutable” (Wood 1997, pp. 23–25). Courtenay's study about the two ordained powers in God remains until now the most relevant analysis on John's conception of the two types of power. Courtenay shows how the two powers are debated by the Cistercian, and he also traces his sources of inspiration which have their origins in the English theology, demonstrating that John is not saying different things from them and perhaps was not the right person to be condemned just because he debated about the two ordained powers in his commentary (Courtenay 1972, 1973).

The concepts of the two existing powers in God were not understood in Ockham's time in the full sense of the word, neither by those who condemned Ockham in the trial that took place in Avignon nor by John. Thus, John discusses about the two ordained powers as Ockham did, the difference between the two of them being the fact that John was not interested to employ them in a political context as Ockham did (Randi 1986).

John was familiar with Ockham's doctrine and concepts, but it is not yet clear whether he had direct access to the inceptor's works, since his name is not mentioned in John's commentary. It is also possible that he got in contact with Ockham by reading him through other authors. For example, the Cistercian had knowledge of Ockham's third distinction of his commentary on the *Sentences*, from Book 1, questions 9 and 10, questions which are concerned to give evidence on how the *vestigium* of the Trinity can exist in each creature, since in John's entire question 23, we can identify fragments imported from Ockham's *Sentences* (Pantea 2017). This is a relevant case study since the topic of the question was of crucial interest for the master's commenting *Sentences*, having almost the same importance as the whole commentary itself (Slotemaker 2013). Moreover in question 23, John debates the concept of the imperfect intuitive cognition and the imperfect abstractive cognition,



by implying the example of Hercules' statues, as Ockham did, in order to explain how the traces (*vestigia*) of Hercules can be recognized by the intellect. The imperfect intuitive cognition refers to the things which were known in the past; therefore they can be found in the memory. Thus, the imperfect intuitive cognition functions in correlation with the imperfect abstractive cognition, the last one producing a *habitus* together with the intellect; hence it can establish that a thing existed for real in the past (Van Neste 1976, pp. 11–12). Therefore whoever saw the statue of Hercules in the past will always recognize it in the future because its *habitus* is in their intellect. John also offers the example of the bull in order to explain the functions of the two acts of cognition. Who did not see Hercules in the past, but saw a bull instead? In a future moment, when they will observe the traces of the bull, due to the fact that they are having the *habitus* of it, they will be able to identify the traces of it, as belonging to the bull and not to another animal.

For the masters and the students of the Faculty of Theology from the fourteenth century, it was a usual practice to copy verbatim from other authors without mentioning the source (Bakker and Schabel 2002, p. 426). This technique, was also characterized as “bricolage textuel,” is constantly used by John during his argumentation (Calma 2011, p. 504; Calma 2012, p. 474). A very useful tool to hide passages from other authors seems to be, in John's case, the structure of his question. The division and subdivision in articles, sets of propositions, and corollaries seem to be a comfortable formula to recycle arguments from other masters. Besides Ockham, the list of English implicit sources used by John is completed by other names:

1. When he argued about the future contingent, he was influenced by Thomas Bradwardine, Adam Wodeham, Robert Halifax, Alexandre Langeley, Richard de Kilvington, and Thomas Buckingham. For example, one of the most well-known questions from his commentary is question 39, Book 1, where John argues about the future contingent, “That God can do in such manner that the world had never been,”

and in his demonstration of the question, he uses the arguments from this group of English authors (Vignaux and Genest 1988, pp. 293–301).

2. When he debated about the traces and the image of God, his other source besides Ockham is Adam Wodeham.
3. When he debates the problem of the sin, besides the authorities like Augustine and Anselm, his English source is Robert Holcot.

The propositions in which John is arguing about the future contingent are condemned, but he was not the only one on the continent who argued about the future contingent under the influence of the English theology. Gregory of Rimini was the first one to have knowledge about the works of Adam Wodeham (Courtenay 2008, p. 351). Also, Wodeham's name is linked to Ockham's name in quotations in Rimini's commentary and also in the commentary of the Cistercian James of Eltville as “Adam, Ockham.” The Franciscan Adam Wodeham was the disciple and friend of Ockham; his commentary on the *Sentences* influenced the Parisian theologians in the fourteenth century, and the history also remembers him as part of the Ockhamist movement, but he never considered himself an Ockhamist (Courtenay 1978, p. 60). Thus, the theses of Rimini were never condemned, even though he was reading his commentary on the *Sentences* a year before the Cistercian in 1343–1344. It was thought that he had a role in John's trial, but there is no proof, and Courtenay is debating the fact that the involvement of Rimini is almost impossible, since he is arguing about the two existing powers in God (Courtenay 1973, p. 157; Pantea 2017). In the second question of Book 1 of his commentary, “If the sensitive cognition is able to remain conserved and caused without object,” John copied passages from Rimini's commentary. Thus, in this question it can also be seen his indirect knowledge of Peter of Auriol's commentary, which was possible through Wodeham's texts (Calma 2012, p. 478).

Even if John chooses not to mention all his English sources, he quotes the authors that are commonly quoted by other colleagues. He quotes



Robert Grosseteste, Richard of Middleton, and Duns Scotus. Showing his erudition, he uses a reach selection of sources from antiquity until his contemporaries. For example, the oldest source can be found in question 10, “If the knowledge exceeds itself in a perfect way and is proportional to the excess of the objects,” where he implies one of the propositions from Euclid’s *Elements*: “because the contingency of the angle is towards the infinity sharper than the contingency of the rectilinear, as the geometer demonstratively proves, because any sharpest of the angles (...), as the 15th proposition of Euclid says.”

The fact that the most quoted source in Book 1 is Augustine is not surprising either, since one of the characteristics of the fourteenth century is the revival of Augustine, both in theology, in literature, and in scholastic philosophy. It has to be mentioned that John did not have access to the original texts of Augustine, as he attributed the treatise *De spiritu et anima* to the bishop of Hippo; this treatise was written in the twelfth century and is a pseudo-Augustinian treatise. Another clue to the fact that he did not have access to the complete corpus of Augustine is the fact that he wrongly misquoted another pseudo-Augustinian treatise, *Hyponosticon*, which is quoted by the White Monk as *Pronosticon*.

The sources implied by the White Monk allowed him to construct his own technical vocabulary. He often combines both a grammatical and a syllogistic argumentation and distinguished between the name of a word implied in a proposition and his grammatical role. When he wants to demonstrate the unicity of God and the relation between the persons of the Trinity, he also includes a grammatical analysis. The adjectives “eternal” and “singular” can be attributed to God himself and to each person of the Trinity, but when it is said that “God is the Father,” it cannot be said that all the three persons are the Father. The distribution of the adjectives can be possible only in the relation to the Trinity and not when the persons are singularly analyzed.

Also, John argues about the ampliative verbs and in what manner the conjugation of the verbs can be used, making the logical construction

easier. For example, the tenth condemned proposition says that God can do in such manner that he can make the humans sin willingly (CUP t. II 1891, n. 1147, 610). This proposition was qualified as heretical, but it has to be understood like a possibility of the name’s predication. The name of “God” is used in this proposition as a noun, and his attributes of being God are lacking, and the noun God can be replaced with another word. Actually, this proposition is not tenable, because, according to faith, God has only one substance, one essence, and his will cannot be changed not even by himself.

In his epistemological debate, John implies the fact that the external world can be known based on sensations. For example, the color white leaves a luminosity in the human eye if it is having a direct contact with it (Calma 2012, p. 474). Thus, this knowledge is produced empirically; considering this example, if an object producing whiteness was destroyed, the eye could no longer be affected by it, as the object cannot produce whiteness after the destruction. In this respect, the intellect cannot produce an a priori cognition of the object, in the sense that the functions he had before the destruction cannot be perceived by the intellect. Thus, the intellect can perceive that the object is destroyed. In John’s thought it is not possible for the intellect to perceive an external object which does not exist; therefore the knowledge based on sensations is the consequence of a cause (Calma 2012, p. 477). Besides, for the White Monk, the intellect is able to have knowledge of the first principle; this knowledge is based on special evidence, and the intellect can produce analytical judgments of the propositions which belong to it. John is offering as example the following propositions from which the first principle can be deduced: “if a man is, an animal is” and “if God is, God is” (Beuchot 2002, p. 378). The first principle also implies the principle of noncontradiction. For example, we have the next phrase from John’s question 6: “it is not evident that ‘God is,’ because now it follows evidently: God is, therefore the being in infinity is, and it is the most perfect.” Furthermore, John brings forth the principle of noncontradiction by saying that a different person, other than myself, can know that the existence of God is not evident,

but at the same time, it can be apparent to him that God is the most perfect being in the world, because he is the first cause, but it is not evident that each cause exists. Besides, my own intellect is capable of understanding the counterargument. Therefore for John the knowledge of the external and of the intelligible is produced in a subjective manner; even though the first principle undoubtedly exists, the knowledge of it is achieved differently by each intellect.

According to John, God cannot interfere in the rules of the analytical judgments; therefore he cannot make the same thing exist and not exist simultaneously. For example, God cannot make a thing which does not exist to be, because this means that he will create a new thing and the thing which does not exist will remain at the level of the nonexistent. God, using his absolute power, can make the nonexistent to be, but, using his ordained power, he cannot make possible a nonexistent; therefore those acts imply a contradiction.

In the same manner, John is arguing about the act of the sin by saying that God is the only one who can make the humans sin, because God is the only one who can make both evil and sin to be as a result of his volition, but as we have seen, this implies a contradiction. John's condemnation is rooted in his affirmations, but the theologians from Paris were not ready to assimilate or tolerate them.

After his condemnation his trace was lost, and it cannot be affirmed with certitude if he continued his career as a theologian at the abbey of Royaumont. Trapp assumes thus that his Cistercian confrere, Ceffons, named him Abbas Regalis Montis due to the fact that he identified a number of identical paragraphs from John's commentary in Ceffons (Trapp 1984, pp. 209–216).

John's thought is still under investigation; thus until now it can be said for sure that quotations from John's commentary are found in his later Cistercian fellows, like Peter Ceffons, Godescalc of Nepomuk, James of Eltville, and Conrad of Ebrach. Moreover, his argumentative method about the principle of noncontradiction and the fact that one can doubt about his existence is anticipating the Cartesian *cogito*.

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## John Baconthorpe

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### Abstract

John Baconthorpe (c. 1290–c. 1348) was *Doctor resolutus*, theologian and philosopher, English Carmelite friar, master at the University of Paris, author of *Sentences* commentary and three sets of *Quodlibeta*, Prior Provincial of England, taught at Cambridge and probably at Oxford, and an eclectic thinker who opposed key aspects of the philosophical thinking of both Thomas Aquinas and John Duns Scotus.

### Biographical Information

The best known of the early Carmelite scholastics, John Baconthorpe, was born in England around 1290. Traditionally, scholars have suggested that he read the *Sentences* at Paris before 1318. However, recent thinking proposes 1320–1321 as a more likely dating. Baconthorpe had incepted as master in the theology faculty at Paris by 1323. He edited his commentary on the *Sentences* around 1325. Baconthorpe's three sets of *Quaestiones quodlibetales* were disputed from 1323 to 1325 and in 1330: *Quodlibet I* (1323–1324), *Quodlibet*

II (1324–1325), and *Quodlibet* III (1330). He produced a second redaction of his commentary on book IV of the *Sentences* around 1340. Baconthorpe was Prior Provincial of the Carmelites in England from 1327 (possibly 1326) to 1333 and taught at Cambridge and probably at Oxford. He died around 1348 (possibly of Plague).

## Thought

Baconthorpe's teaching was so highly regarded in his order that both his *Sentences* commentary and his *Quodlibeta* were printed several times in the early modern era. Indeed, by the seventeenth century, he had effectively become the official theologian of the Carmelites with the publication of several manuals of philosophy and theology based on his work, intended to aid in the education of student friars. Key to his status as a preeminent Carmelite theologian was his defense of the doctrine of the Immaculate Conception and his writings concerning the history and spiritual tradition of his order and the importance of its rule. Baconthorpe's positions on the issue of the legitimacy of his Order's origins were vigorously disputed by his contemporary, the Dominican master, Robert Holcott.

In common with other early Carmelite scholastics, Baconthorpe reveals himself to be a consistent, if somewhat eclectic, thinker. His own thinking is most often developed in opposition to the thought of major figures such as Henry of Ghent, John Duns Scotus, and Peter Auriol. Baconthorpe frequently takes issue with Thomas Aquinas and both presents and criticizes key doctrines of Giles of Rome and Godfrey of Fontaines. Baconthorpe was an *opponens* of Thomas Bradwardine. An interesting aspect of his work is Baconthorpe's willingness to engage critically with the thought of other Carmelite scholastics such as Gerard of Bologna, Guido Terreni, and Robert Walsingham. Baconthorpe is always keen to establish his credentials as a true interpreter of Aristotle. Frequently, he is content to settle an argument *secundum philosophum* without much supporting theological discussion. Another characteristic of his thinking is his

tendency to conclude his arguments at key points with the aid of Averroes' commentaries. This led to his being given the rather exaggerated title *Princeps Averroistarum* by masters at the University of Padua in the sixteenth century in recognition of his skill in explaining the doctrine of Averroes concerning the unique intellect. Baconthorpe's undeniable eclecticism may deny to his works the last degree of originality; it does give rise to a strong positive commitment on his part to the meticulous presentation of the opinions of other scholastics in preparation for declaring his own position. For this reason, Baconthorpe's works are highly significant for the insight they afford into the state of philosophical and theological debate in the early fourteenth century. As *Doctor Resolutus*, Baconthorpe is not as reticent as the first Carmelite master at Paris, Gerard of Bologna, but one is constantly aware in reading his work of certain defensiveness with regard to the condemnations at Paris and Oxford in 1277.

The presence of the 1277 condemnations is most keenly felt in Baconthorpe's thinking concerning the status of the will, the substantial form of human beings, and angelology. In keeping with the anti-intellectualist line of the Parisian condemnations, Baconthorpe defends the active power of the will that can move itself without any prior cause and even against any object presented to it by the intellect. With an eye to the Oxford condemnations, the Carmelite master denies the unicity of substantial form. While not ultimately supporting Scotus' solution to the problem, Baconthorpe does insist on there being a corporeal form (*forma corporeitatis*) in addition to the intellectual soul and thereby counters the views of Aquinas concerning the soul as the unique substantial form in human beings. The issue of the substantial form in human beings provides an occasion for Baconthorpe to challenge the views of his Carmelite confrere Gerard of Bologna (d. 1317). Gerard suggests in his *Quodlibeta* that it is very difficult to demonstrate that the soul in human beings is not *accidentally* (per accidens) extended. His reluctance to settle the issue notwithstanding, Baconthorpe explicitly takes issue with his fellow Carmelite (whom

he names) and insists that the human soul is entirely spiritual and is extended neither in itself (*per se*) nor accidentally (*per accidens*). The lively debate concerning the soul and spatial extension is one of the more remarkable features of early fourteenth-century scholasticism. The early Carmelite scholastics were major contributors here along with the Dominican Hervaeus Natalis. Elsewhere in response to the condemnations at Paris, Baconthorpe insists that an angel's presence in the material world cannot be established by its activity; there is a need for a prior non-corporeal connection between the angel and the place where it brings about its effect.

Baconthorpe also seeks to counter Aquinas' insistence that there cannot be many angels in one species. The wider metaphysical problem of the principle of individuation is at issue here. In opposition to thinkers such as Aquinas and Hervaeus Natalis, Baconthorpe argues that the principle of individuation and the principle that accounts for the multiplication of individuals within the same species are not matter along with quantity (*materia signata*) but form. He also notes the opposing opinions of Giles of Rome and Godfrey of Fontaines. While Baconthorpe agrees broadly with the latter's insistence on form as the principle of individuation, he disagrees with the details of Godfrey's account. The Carmelite master's own position ultimately relies heavily on the account in Averroes' *Commentary* on Book II of Aristotle's *De anima*. There the Commentator insists that an individual is an individual only by means of its actualizing principle. Form is what realizes the actuality of an individual. Baconthorpe finds support for his position in Aristotle's own identification of the soul with actuality in *De anima* II. For Baconthorpe, actual distinction and multiplication of individuals within species require actual distinguishing principles, which can only be provided by distinct substantial forms. Neither matter understood as determined quantity nor matter understood as undetermined quantity is up to the task. Having dispensed with a key tenet of the Thomistic tradition, the Carmelite master also rejects Scotus' theory of individual difference (*haecceitas*). Common

essences do not have any being in themselves. Existing essences are individual instances of otherwise nonexistent common essences.

Baconthorpe asserts a real distinction between essence and existence in composite being. Such distinction, however, is to be articulated in terms of degrees of reality. In a version of the doctrine of divine ideas, Baconthorpe articulates his position with regard to the medieval debate concerning divine foreknowledge and future contingents: God's knowledge of future contingents comes from the free choices of his creatures who timelessly cause this knowledge in the divine mind. Creatures are known by God in the divine mind in virtue of their having eternal, ideal being, distinct from the divine essence.

The process of cognition is a major issue in Baconthorpe's *Quodlibeta* I and II. In his denial of any role for intelligible species in the act of intellection, Baconthorpe places himself in the company of earlier thinkers such as Peter John Olivi, James of Metz, Durand of Saint Pourçain, and Gerard of Bologna. For Baconthorpe, the act of intellection (*intelligere*) does not require any mediating species. Actual cognition results from the direct action of the agent intellect on the phantasm. While Thomas Aquinas is the usual target of most scholastics who wish to deny a role to intelligible species, it would seem that Baconthorpe has Scotus and his version of the species hypothesis in mind. Characteristically, he cleverly plays texts of Aristotle and Averroes against Scotus in order to prepare for the presentation of his own view. The act of cognition itself is an *actus rectus* for Baconthorpe. If there were mediating species, the act of cognition would become an *actus reflexus*, turned inward rather than toward the object. In common with most of those who deny the species hypothesis, Baconthorpe does face the charge of denying any real possibility of there being unconscious mechanisms contributing to the acquisition of knowledge in human beings.

Attention to the work of John Baconthorpe is rewarded by real insight into trends in early fourteenth-century thought. Baconthorpe's participation in debates concerning the soul and spatial extension and the process of cognition helps

to establish real lines of continuity and development between late medieval and early modern philosophizing. While some attention has been paid to the Carmelite master's *Sentences* commentary, his strongly philosophical *Quodlibeta* I and II await the further scrutiny of scholars.

## Cross-References

- ▶ [Consciousness](#)
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- ▶ [Species: Sensible and Intelligible](#)
- ▶ [Thomas Aquinas](#)
- ▶ [Thomas Bradwardine](#)

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## John Buridan

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### Abstract

John Buridan (c. 1300–1362) was “the great systematizer and legitimizer” of Ockhamist nominalism at the University of Paris in the first half of the fourteenth century. His ideas proved to have a lasting influence for centuries in all philosophical disciplines, not only directly, through his own works, but also indirectly, by becoming standard textbook material.

## Life, Influence, and Works

Buridan was born around 1300 somewhere in the diocese of Arras, in Picardy. He was probably of humble birth, which is indicated by the fact that we have no reliable record of his family, and by the circumstance that at the College of Cardinal Lemoine, where he completed his early education, he may have been a recipient of a stipend for needy students. If this is in fact the case, then his career is a testimony to the possibility of upward



social mobility in medieval academia through talent and hard work alone. He obtained his license to teach after 1320 at the Arts Faculty of the University of Paris, where he remained teaching for the rest of his life. The fact that he did not follow the usual career path of professors of his time, moving on to one of the “higher” Faculties of Medicine, Law, or Theology, may indicate a prudent choice on his part: staying at the Arts Faculty, he could work relatively undisturbed on his “quiet nominalist revolution,” without getting embroiled in the “ideologically charged” controversies of the Faculty of Theology. In any case, staying at the Faculty of Arts certainly did not hurt his professional stature. He served twice as rector of the university, and lived unusually well off for a university professor of his time, drawing income from at least three benefices till his death, sometime before 1362, when one of his benefices went to another person.

Buridan’s students and professional associates at Paris spread his ideas far and wide in Europe. (All this, however, need not mean that talk about a doctrinally homogenous “School of Buridan” at Paris is justified: see Thijssen 2004.) But besides his enormous indirect influence, we should note that his works themselves, both in manuscripts and later in early printed editions, became required reading at many “new” universities, such as Vienna, Prague, Krakow, Rostock, and Saint Andrews.

Buridan’s works are mostly the by-products of his teaching. As such, they mainly consist of commentaries on Aristotle, covering the entire Aristotelian corpus, ranging from logic to natural philosophy (including physics, biology, and the philosophy of the soul), to metaphysics, and to practical philosophy, including ethics and politics. Among the commentaries, there are running commentaries expounding Aristotle’s texts, but the more significant ones, where his originality shines, are the question commentaries (fitting in the established medieval genre), which, instead of merely expounding the author’s text, provide the opportunity of thorough discussion of the problems raised by the text. In fact, the commentary format suited his style so well that he wrote even his most original, systematic work,

*Summulae de dialectica* (see Buridan 2001) in the form of a running commentary on an authoritative text, in this case, the enormously influential *Summulae logicales* (or simply *Tractatus*) of Peter of Spain (see Peter of Spain 1972). Besides his major works, he produced a number of short treatises, the most important and original of which is the *Treatise on Consequences*, expounding his original, nominalist conception of logical validity. (For a detailed discussion of his genuinely original conception, see Klima 2009, c. 10; for more on his life and an excellent, historically “contextualized” discussion of his work, see Zupko 2003.)

## Logic

In medieval philosophy, logic was commonly regarded as a foundational philosophical discipline, as the universal intellectual tool (*Organon*) to be used in all areas of inquiry (the “art of arts,” *ars artium*; cf. Klima 1988:1–17), but it is particularly important for the nominalist Buridan, in whose hands it serves as the main analytical instrument in the nominalist program of “ontological reduction.” For Ockhamist nominalism, it does not merely consist in the denial of the existence of Platonic universals (which were generally rejected in the later medieval period for both philosophical and theological reasons anyway; see Klima 2008) but rather in the careful articulation of a semantic theory that allows the mapping of the category-rich syntactical structures of our language to a parsimoniously conceived ontology, containing only two or three distinct categories of entities. Thus, what is truly antithetical to Ockham’s or Buridan’s nominalism is not so much Platonic “extreme” realism but rather the “linguistic realism” of thirteenth-century modists (cf. *modistae*; Ebbesen 1998; Marmo 1999; Zupko 2008), and in general anyone before Ockham working in a conceptual framework endorsing the view that linguistic differences have to have some (more or less strictly) corresponding ontological differences, or else they are “vacuous” (cf. Scotus, Ord. II, d. 3, part 1, q. 1, n. 23; Spade 1994:62).

However, in Buridan's hand, the Ockhamist project of "ontological reduction" is no longer some controversial innovation bolstered by an equally controversial reinterpretation of much of contemporary logical theory, as it was initiated by Ockham, but rather a systematic implementation of Ockham's logical principles, showing a consistent alternative way of constructing logical theory *without* the ontological commitments of realist logic. Perhaps the best indication of this attitude is that in his *Summulae*, rather than confronting the doctrines of the realist master he was supposedly commenting on, he simply replaced passages of Peter of Spain he did not like with his own text and in the commentary expounded his own nominalist doctrine without further ado:

I have chosen to deal in particular with that short treatise of logic which the venerable professor master Peter of Spain composed a while ago, by commenting on and supplementing it; indeed, occasionally I am going to have to say and write things that differ from what he has said and written, whenever it appears to me suitable to do so. (Buridan 2001:4)

To see exactly how Buridan carried out the nominalist program of ontological reduction through logical analysis, it will be useful to see what was there in the competing realist theories "to be reduced" in the first place. Ockham often complains that his realist opponents "multiply entities according to the multiplicity of names" and this is an error that stems from an "ignorance of logic" (for detailed discussion, see Klima 1999a). Actually, Ockham's charges were not quite justified. In the first place, realist authors did allow the possibility of identifying the semantic values of different expressions from different linguistic categories. In the second place, even when they did need to recognize such semantic values as distinct, sometimes they reduced the ontological commitment of their theory by attributing these semantic values a sort of "reduced ontological status," by claiming, for instance, that they are mere beings of reason [*entia rationis*], that is, not full-fledged entities on their own but rather just mere objects of the mind with some "foundation in reality" [*fundamentum in re*],

a certain way real things are. (See the entry on Being in this volume.)

It is true, however, that as far as their *semantics* is concerned, the *moderni* criticized by Ockham simply did not seem to care about the apparent "multiplication of entities": their strategy rather seems to have been to assign semantic values to linguistic items as their apparent semantic function demanded and took it to be a different task, a task of metaphysics, to find out about the identity and distinctness and the precise ontological status of each item. Thus, for instance, we find Peter of Spain distinguishing between the sort of entities or quasi-entities demanded by logic [*secundum viam logicae*] and those that there really exist in nature [*secundum viam naturae*] (Peter of Spain 1972:87). And even if he does not seem to have an extraordinary ontology *secundum viam naturae*, he has no qualms about populating his universe of discourse with universals, inherent particulars, or quasi-particulars including privations (such as blindness), or even their modes allegedly signified by syncategorematic terms, and the quasi-entities signified by propositions (which he refers to as *enuntiabilia*, and we would probably identify as "states of affairs") *secundum viam logicae*.

It was this sort of approach that was rejected and swept aside by Ockham, proposing a radically different way of constructing semantic theory, brought to fruition especially by Buridan in his *Summulae*. This alternative way of constructing semantic theory rejects in the first place the "cavalier" metaphysical attitude in logic. On this approach, the assigning of semantic values in logical theory is ontologically cautious from the start, where the logician posits distinct ontological categories only when this is demanded for compelling reasons that settle the issue already in logic. Otherwise, the logician has the task of eliminating apparent ontological commitment to distinct entities through logical analysis, whenever this is possible. The mere possibility of this type of analysis, then, in line with "Ockham's Razor," is sufficient reason for the nominalist logician not to posit a distinct category of entities. To see this in more detail, let us take a closer look at how exactly Buridan manages to provide a semantic theory with an ontology that contains only three

distinct categories of entities, namely, substances, their individualized, inherent quantities (such as length, weight, etc.), and some inherent individual qualities (such as color, heat, etc.).

Buridan's primary analytic tool to this end (partly borrowed from Ockham, partly further developed by himself) is the analysis of semantic distinctions with reference to *mental language*, the natural representational system of the human mind, providing the semantic features of the conventionally meaningful spoken and written human languages.

Although for Buridan mental language is the system of intellectual cognitive acts of individual human minds, it is definitely not to be regarded as a "private language" in the sense criticized by Wittgenstein. For mental language, being the *natural* representational system of *any* individual human mind is common for all humans in the sense that if I have an intellectual cognitive act, a *concept*, whereby I conceive of something in some way, then you, being another human person, have the natural ability to form a *similar concept*, that is, a numerically distinct mental act whereby you conceive of the same things in the same way. For obviously, and this is the key idea of using the idea of a mental language for a nominalist ontological reduction, the same things can be conceived in many different ways, depending on what sorts of concepts we form to conceive of them.

Buridan distinguishes simple and complex concepts. In connection with this distinction, it is important to note that since for him any concept is an ontologically simple entity, a simple individualized quality of an individual mind, not having any ontological components, the complexity of complex concepts is not ontological or syntactical (in the way a written sentence has ontologically and syntactically distinct components) but purely semantic. A concept in this sense is semantically complex if its representative function is dependent on the representative function of other concepts, whereas it is simple otherwise. In this way, subsuming all human concepts under the category of quality, Buridan (and Ockham, in his mature theory) at once eliminated the ontologically obscure category of "merely objective" concepts that

Ockham in his early theory referred to as *facta*. Concepts on this account are ontologically no more obscure entities than are colors, for instance, for both concepts and colors are simple individualized qualities of individual substances (see Buridan 2001:xxxviii–xxxix).

Simple concepts are either categorematic or syncategorematic. Syncategorematic concepts are "the glue" of mental language; in fact, Buridan often refers to them as "complexive" concepts, that is, concepts whose function is not to represent per se but rather to form complex concepts, thereby modifying the natural, per se representative function of categorematic concepts. Thus, he argues, although by every concept we conceive something, by complexive concepts we do not conceive anything other than what we conceive of by the categorematic concepts with which they are construed, although we do conceive of these things *differently*, in a complex, rather than in a simple manner:

But now there is a difficult question, for it was said earlier that by every concept something is conceived. What then is conceived by the complexive concept corresponding to the copula 'is', when I say 'God is God' or 'A man is a stone'?

I reply that . . . since the intellect cannot form that complexive concept without the categorematic concepts that it combines, nothing is conceived by that concept alone. But we conceive the very same things in a complex manner by means of the categorematic concepts as those that were conceived in an incomplex manner by those categorematic terms without that complexive concept. Therefore, different things are not conceived by the concepts corresponding to the various expressions 'God is God', 'God is not God', 'Every God is God', 'No God is God' and to the term 'God'; rather, that thing is conceived in different ways, namely, in a complex or incomplex manner, and affirmatively or negatively. So, coming back to the solution of the sophism, I say that although the expression 'God is God' signifies more in the mind than the name 'God', nevertheless, it signifies nothing more outside [the mind], but entirely the same [thing], although in a different manner. (Buridan 2001:842–843)

Here, we can clearly see Buridan's nominalist "ontological reduction" at work. The very same simple, absolutely indivisible entity, God, can be conceived in so many different ways, by means of the different sorts of concepts we form of Him.

Likewise, any other entities can be conceived of either in a complex manner, by means of complex concepts, or in a simple manner, by means of simple concepts, either absolutely, in terms of "absolute concepts," or in relation to each other, in terms of "connotative concepts." Thus, according to Buridan, whenever we have a term in our language that belongs to a linguistic category other than to the categories of substance, quantity, or quality, we should not suppose that consequently we must place the semantic values of that term in an ontological category other than substance, quantity, or quality: all we need to do is analyze the meaning of the term by means of a nominal definition that clearly explicates the conceptual structure of the complex concept to which this term is subordinated. This analysis should then reveal that the term in question merely signifies or connotes entities in the three "permitted" categories. (For a thorough discussion of Buridan's conception of mental language and its role in his ontological program, see Klima 2009, c. 4.)

For example, the nominal definition of the term "blind" as "animal not having sight" clearly reveals that the complex concept that renders the term "blind" meaningful merely signifies animals (substances), connoting their sights (qualities), but on account of connoting their sights negatively (because of the added syncategorematic concept of negation), in the context of a proposition it will only refer to (or "supposit for" to use the common English transcription of the medieval technical term *supponit pro*) animals that actually do not have sight. What this analysis reveals, then, is that the term "blind" does not have to be construed as signifying a mysterious "quasi-entity," a privation (as the common prenominalist analysis suggested, see Klima 1993), for its meaning is fully explained only with reference to ordinary entities, namely, animals, their sights, and the qualities of our minds, namely, the concepts whereby we can conceive of animals with a negative connotation of their sights.

In fact, this nominalist strategy of "ontological reduction through logical analysis" is so successful that one may wonder why it is not carried even further. Why allow even the distinct categories of quality and quantity? After all, Ockham could do without a distinct category of quantity (having identified the semantic values of quantity terms with entities in the category of substance or quality), and even his analyses could in principle be carried further by "analyzing away" the distinct semantic values of quality terms, as Buridan himself did with quality terms in the species of "shape" (*figura*) (see Klima 1999b, and the entry Substance, Accident and Modes in this volume). So why would Buridan allow even the distinct ontological categories of quantity and quality? The answer to this question is to be found not in his logic but in his metaphysics.

## Metaphysics and Natural Philosophy

Both Ockham and Buridan had specific, non-logical reasons for maintaining the distinct category of quality, namely, their rejection of atomism. For, in terms of the possibility of pure logical analysis, an atomistic metaphysics, qualitative changes (such as changes of color, as opposed to quantitative changes or locomotion) could have been "analyzed away" analogously to the elimination of changes in the species of "shape," with reference to complex connotative concepts referring to and connoting only substances and the locomotion of their quantitative parts. However, Buridan partly convinced by Aristotle's arguments against the ancient atomists, partly seeing the troubles incurred by contemporary atomists, such as John Mirecourt and Nicholas of Autrecourt, flatly rejected atomism as "an obscure and dangerous doctrine," and embraced the category of quality as containing individual entities distinct from substance and quantity (Buridan 1989:122).

Indeed, for similarly extralogical reasons, he departed even further from Ockham's ontology. The most important of his "ontological departures" from Ockham can be summarized in the following points:

1. Acknowledging quantity as a category distinct from substance and quality, for purely physical reasons
2. Positing *impetus* as a distinct quality to explain what *we* would describe as inertial phenomena
3. Positing *modes* as somehow, but not really, distinct from (in the sense of being merely contingently identical with) the absolute categories of substance, quantity, and quality
4. Positing intelligible species but identifying them with phantasms *qua* the immediate objects of the agent intellect
5. Endorsing the unicity of substantial forms, that is, denying the plurality of souls in the same individual while distinguishing the (instrumental) powers, habits, and acts of the simple substance of the soul
6. Positing different degrees of unity, ranging from simple substances through composite substances to merely successively persistent substances, such as rivers

As for the first point, Buridan's main reason for positing quantity as a distinct category, true to his Aristotelian empiricist approach to natural science, is that it seems to be necessary for the explanation of the phenomena of condensation and rarefaction in the framework of a non-atomistic, plenum theory. For in an atomistic theory, the explanation is easy in terms of the smaller or greater distance between the atoms of the body compressed or extended (which is precisely the idea in the modern kinetic theory of gases). But in a plenum theory (i.e., a theory of matter that denies the existence of a vacuum and holds that matter is a continuum), if there is no addition of matter to the substance of the thing (which is what distinguishes decompression or rarefaction from growth), then one has to say that while the substance remains the same, its quantity (i.e., its dimensions) must become greater, which is possible only if the quantity of the thing is distinct from its substance.

But similar (experimental as well as theoretical) considerations motivate Buridan's positing a specific quality, namely, the *impetus* of moving bodies. His *impetus* is introduced, again, as a requisite explanatory principle. Given the

principle of Aristotelian physics that everything that is in motion needs to be moved by a mover, phenomena that we would characterize as cases of inertial motion, such as the motion of projectiles, posed a problem: what moves, for example, an arrow shot from a bow, when it is no longer moved by the bowstring? Aristotle's answer, namely, that it is the air still moved by the bowstring, was heavily criticized already by his sixth-century commentator, Philoponus, who favored the view that it is some impressed force imparted to the projectile by its original mover that sustains its ongoing motion. However, it was Buridan who fully worked out the idea in his theory of *impetus*, viewed by many historians of science as a precursor of the modern notion of inertia, although in its actual description given by Buridan, it is closer to the modern idea of momentum. His *impetus* is an impressed force (imparted to the moving body by its original mover, which brings it up to a certain speed), which is directly proportional to the speed of the moving body and to its heaviness (not quite the same as what in modern physics we would call "mass," but rather a heavy body's natural tendency to be "down," at the center of the Earth) and which is not spontaneously diminished, but is only weakened by the resistance of the medium. The greatest virtue of this theory is its applicability to a whole range of diverse phenomena that were either puzzling or "anomalous" in themselves, such as projectile motion, and/or were treated as falling under radically different explanatory models in the original Aristotelian framework, such as the acceleration of falling bodies, the motion of projectiles, the ongoing rotation of a spinning wheel, and the motion of celestial bodies, thereby providing a coherent, unitary conceptual framework for all these diverse phenomena, serving as a model for the unification of earthly and celestial mechanics in early modern science.

But aside from such explicit theoretical demands of the explanation of phenomena, Buridan, being the "relentless" nominalist, was always reluctant to posit really distinct entities in diverse categories; thus, in the categories other than substance, quantity, and quality, as well as in the species of "shape" in the category quality, he consistently applied Ockham's eliminative

strategy using nominal definitions containing absolute terms only in the “permitted” categories. Nevertheless, occasionally, he does not refrain from referring to what terms in the other categories connote or signify as the modifications or *modes (modi)* of things in the “permitted” categories. Thus, he would admit without further ado, for example, that while the quantity of a straight piece of wire is arranged in one way, the same quantity is arranged in a different way, if the wire is bent, that is, the same quantity has some modification at one time and a different one at another. However, although this way of speaking involves what in modern logic we would call “quantification over” different modes, he would not regard this as adding any extra ontological commitment to his theory. For although the *modus* of the quantity of the wire at one time is different from the *modus* it has at another time, each is contingently identical with the same quantity at different times, thereby not adding to the number of things in the universe at any given time. This conception of *modes*, as being somehow different, yet without being numerically distinct, from absolute entities, was to have a bright career in later medieval and early modern philosophy, at first just undermining and eventually completely replacing the Aristotelian distinction between substance and accident. (See also the entry Substance, Accidents and Modes in this volume.)

But Buridan’s nominalist zeal also had its impact in more specific fields, such as his philosophy of the soul. Thus, although he apparently endorsed intelligible and sensible species, already diligently eliminated by earlier philosophers and theologians, such as Durand of St Pourcain or John Peter Olivi, in favor of a direct relationship between cognitive acts and their objects, he would nevertheless identify sensible species with the first receptive acts of the external senses, and intelligible species with *phantasms* (singular, sensory representations of singulars), insofar as they are the indirect objects of the act of the abstractive intellect forming its abstract concept, a mental act whereby it directly conceives all of the corresponding external singulars of the same kind. Indeed, his ontological economy shows up not only in his analysis of the cognitive process

but also in the analysis of the constitution of the soul and its powers or functions, as expressed in point 5 above: contrary to Ockham and the “pluralist” tradition in general, he argued that there is only one substantial form, one soul, in the same living individual, which alone is capable of accounting for the diverse (vegetative, sensitive, and rational) functions of the same individual (plant, animal, or human, respectively), through the diverse instrumental powers it has, as it animates the diverse organs of the same living body (or uses no organ at all, as he held, though not as a provable philosophical conclusion, concerning the intellect). But while he distinguished these “instrumental” powers from the soul itself, he also argued that the “principal” powers of the same soul (the essential abilities to carry out vegetative, sensitive, or rational functions) are nothing but the soul itself, denominated variously from its diverse operations.

Finally, we should mention Buridan’s rather original analysis of different conditions of identity and persistence through time relative to natural kinds, which apparently results in a conception that admits different degrees of unity relative to natural kinds (Buridan 1984, lb. 2, q. 7; Buridan 1509, lb. 1, q. 10). Still, this does not commit him to acknowledging anything like Aquinas’ conception of the analogy of unity and being, since for him, the conceptual order does not have to reflect the real order in such a close way as it was conceived by Aquinas (see Being).

## Ethics

Buridan’s ethical theory closely follows upon his naturalistic account of the human soul, insofar as he regards our psychological mechanisms involved in our moral decisions just as natural causal processes as those involved in the workings of any other natural agents, based on a range of natural powers, determined by the nature of the thing. In the case of moral agents, however, there is one power whose operation is not determined to one specific sort of outcome, as the powers of other natural agents are (fire, for instance, cannot but heat by its heat), because its proper operation



consists precisely in determining the action of the moral agent as a whole, namely, the free will of a moral agent, acting by choice. As he puts it:

This is the difference between a voluntary and non-voluntary agent, namely, that a voluntary agent can freely determine itself to either of two opposite alternatives, other things being entirely equal. (Buridan 1513, lb. 3, q. 1, fol. xxvi rb).

To be sure, for Buridan, this is not a demonstratively established conclusion (we do not have a scientific demonstration of the fact that our will is free), as neither is the fact that our intellect is immaterial and immortal; however, in contrast to the intellectual soul's immortality, which we can only hold on the basis of faith, we may be sufficiently certain about our freedom, simply on the basis of the evident experience that we might also choose to act otherwise.

However, just because the operation of the will is not determined to one specific type of outcome, it does not mean that its action is indeterminate in the sense of being randomly spontaneous. The determination of the will, given that it is a rational power, has to come from the intellect, in the sense that as long as the intellect presents different alternative courses of action in such a way that one is judged to be definitely better (more securely leading to happiness) than the others, then the will is naturally going to be inclined to choose that one.

Under this characterization, Buridan might seem to be squarely in the Aristotelian "intellectualist" tradition, as opposed to the Augustinian "voluntarist" tradition, despite his explicit claim that he was seeking a middle ground between these two camps concerning the issue of the determination of our voluntary actions (QNE, III, q. 4, fol. Liiii, ra). For, on the one hand, if the judgment of the intellect about the relative values of possible alternative courses of action fully determines the choice of the will, then, apparently, the will is not free, but its act of choice is determined by the intellect; whereas on the other hand, if the will chooses against the judgment of the intellect, then its choice is irrational, which goes against the very idea that intellect and will are our specifically rational powers (the intellect being our specific cognitive, speculative power, and the will our active, practical power), distinguishing us *qua*

humans from brute animals. However, on Buridan's solution of the dilemma, we do not have to opt for either of these bad theoretical alternatives. For although the will's choice may be determined by the intellect with regard to its *content*, namely, insofar as the will is rationally inclined to choose the (ostensibly) better alternative, nevertheless, the will's choice may not be determined by the intellect with regard to its *execution*, for the will always has the power of withholding its choice, especially when the relative values of the alternatives are not quite well defined by the intellect, and may send the issue back to the intellect for further deliberation.

So, on this conception, the freedom of the will consists not so much in "spontaneously" (and hence, perhaps, irrationally) choosing *this* rather than *that* alternative but rather in choosing or not choosing anything at all. To be sure, one may still say that since the will can rationally defer its choice only when there are reasonable doubts about the intellect's actual evaluation of possible alternatives (if for no other reason, then because of the lack of relevant information), and doubting is an act of the intellect; therefore, Buridan's solution is still on the "intellectualist" side. However, his refined analysis still leaves more latitude for the will to act on its own than a simple intellectualist solution, as in practical matters it is almost always reasonable to doubt our evaluation of the situation (after all, we know that we are not omniscient), and so prudence (an intellectual virtue) would in most cases allow the will to defer its choice, unless the urgency of the situation does not allow any further hesitation.

In any case, for Buridan, it is certainly not the intellect's presentation of different alternatives alone that determines the will's choice. For although the will would rationally choose what is presented by the intellect as the best choice (unless the will freely defers its choice), nevertheless, its choice may also be influenced by its acquired habits, namely, its virtues and vices. But this influence is never full determination: the will is always free to choose otherwise (influenced by the judgment of the intellect) or not to choose at all. So, virtues and vices give only a certain tendency to our choices, manifesting our character.

## Cross-References

- ▶ [Being](#)
- ▶ [Durand of St. Pourçain](#)
- ▶ [Impetus](#)
- ▶ [John Duns Scotus](#)
- ▶ [John Philoponus](#)
- ▶ [Mental Language](#)
- ▶ [Modal Theories and Modal Logic](#)
- ▶ [Nicholas of Autrecourt](#)
- ▶ [Peter John Olivi](#)
- ▶ [Peter of Spain](#)
- ▶ [Substance, Accident, and Modes](#)
- ▶ [Thomas Aquinas](#)
- ▶ [Universals](#)
- ▶ [William of Ockham](#)

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## John Calvin, Political Thought

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### Abstract

John Calvin, 1509–1564, Reformer of Geneva, Frenchman, naturalized Genevan bourgeois 1559, authority for Reformed Christians throughout Europe, translator of the Bible into French, author of a famed theological

text, the *Institution* (or *Institutes*) of the *Christian Religion* in successive Latin and French versions (first ed. 1536, last eds. 1559 (Latin), 1560 (French)), pastor, ecclesiastical organizer, bilingual preacher, and polemicist whose sermons and catechetical, controversial, and organizational works were very widely diffused.

Calvin, at that time a humanist scholar but neither a priest nor an academic, converted to evangelical Christianity in the 1530s, when many churches repudiating Rome were already established. His theology was and remained largely Lutheran in inspiration. Lutheran doctrines of salvation by faith alone (*fide sola*), the unconditional authority of Scripture (*sola scriptura*) and “Christian liberty,” an extremely problematic and easily distorted doctrine from Calvin’s point of view, are prominent in his theology. However he placed much greater stress on divine sovereignty, on predestination (a highly controversial inference from the doctrine that salvation is the result of God’s inscrutable decree, not of works), and on the Christian’s need for mediators. He had little use for Luther’s “priesthood of all believers” (see also the entry on “► [Martin Luther, Political Thought](#)” in this volume) and emphasized that Scripture needs authoritative interpretation. Moreover, he represents Christian life as a ceaseless individual and collective striving to “build up” the Kingdom of God in the world. In both respects the role of the church is vital; it was not however Luther’s “invisible,” universal church under the headship of Christ alone that mattered to Calvin, but the concrete, “visible,” institutional churches. Only they can teach, preach, administer the sacraments, and exercise discipline, in the orderly and continuous way that Christian sanctification demands. The first generation of reformers had already devoted much energy and thought to the organization of churches and the ministry, especially Bucer at Strasbourg, where Calvin gained valuable practical experience when briefly exiled from Geneva. Nevertheless, Luther had regarded “external” forms and matters of organization as of secondary importance. For Calvin, by contrast,

ecclesiology was as central to his theology as it was to his activities as pastor and ecclesiastical statesman.

In his time, evangelical churches were increasingly vulnerable. Calvin saw the main threats as: the Roman church and rulers supporting it (the Council of Trent, 1545–1563 marked its resurgence); princes intent on subordinating the reformed churches in their territories to their own purposes; hardening divisions between evangelicals; and the discrediting of reformation by those who interpreted Christian liberty as licensing insubmission to salutary ecclesiastical discipline and rebellion against political authority. To meet these threats, churches in Calvin’s view required above all else a collegial pastorate to lead them, and excommunication, the ultimate weapon of ecclesiastical discipline. Calvin’s *Ecclesiastical Ordinances* for Geneva (1541), setting out the arrangements designed to realize all this, became exemplary for much of “reformed” Christendom (the term “reformed” normally designates the Calvinist tradition). Control of excommunication had already come to symbolize the aspiration to ecclesiastical independence and a measure of clerical reassertion. Calvin however regarded discipline as a necessary means to the building of well-instructed and virtuous congregations, and much of his work was preaching, teaching, and attending to the provision of suitable ministers, teachers, catechisms, and confessions of faith.

However, it was by that time impossible, and in Calvin’s view undesirable, to deny secular authorities a prominent role in evangelical churches. Luther had asserted the distinctness of secular and ecclesiastical authority, but like the reformers of the cities had conspicuously compromised ecclesiastical independence in practice. Unlike Luther, Calvin never even attempted to safeguard the church by demarcating separate jurisdictions for secular and spiritual authorities. On the contrary, the definitive last version of his *Institution* (Book IV) described them both as “mediums” of God’s grace. In his view, they could be brought together without confusion by insisting on their independent authorization by God, their separate organization and personnel, the distinction

between the instruments they are entitled to use, and on their religious duty to cooperate.

Calvin made clear that ideally both secular and spiritual authorities ought to have the same corporate and collegial (i.e., aristocratic) “form.” Like many humanists, he regarded a “mixed” form of government tending to aristocracy as the best way to uphold the rule of law and to prevent tyranny, which he equated with “absolute” monarchy. Ideally, too, magistrates and pastors should animate and constrain each other as well as their subjects, bringing to their cooperation their separate instruments: the church can preach and reprimand, but cannot use force, whereas the magistrates cannot teach or judge conscience, but can coerce. The emblem of such cooperation between ministers and magistrates in Geneva was the Consistory, an ecclesiastical court composed of all the pastors and 12 “elders,” charged with supervising the faith and morals of the laity, “godly discipline.” The eldership was an ecclesiastical office, but elders were also magistrates and were thus able to compel culprits to appear before this court and impose civil penalties as valuable adjuncts to godly discipline. The Genevan Consistory and the “godly discipline” became exemplary for “Reformed” Christianity.

Christians generally acknowledged that God has appointed two agencies to govern the world: the church and the secular authority (not ideal rulers but the “powers that be,” in the words of the most quoted political proof text of the Reformation, *Romans 13*). What was disputed was whether these two agencies of God’s will dealt with two separable bodies of people (as sectarians held, and as Luther sometimes suggested), or whether they both had the same body of subjects, but different manners of acting on them. The orthodox evangelical idea, once the prospect of a reformation of Christendom as a whole had evaporated, was an inclusive church to which all the inhabitants of a given territory were obliged to belong. The Christian and the subject are thus one and the same person, in two different capacities. But Calvin, quite unlike Luther, always emphasized the positive, formative aspect of the Law of God, and of any law or arrangement that in some way embodies it, as well as of secular

magistrates as upholders of law, as a spur to piety and good works. For Calvin, Christian liberty means an active and willing obedience to law and discipline, not as the way to salvation but as its fruit and sign.

A church organized in this way, and supported by a theology that placed the church in the center of the Christian life, was capable of withstanding adverse political circumstances, and could appeal to those looking for an orthodox but more aggressively reforming church than that of the Lutherans. However, there was no guarantee that actual rulers would act in the supportive way that the ideal required. Many who looked to Calvin and Geneva for their inspiration lived under actively hostile rulers, particularly his followers in France who were the constant objects of concern of the Genevan pastors, all of them exiles from France. In part as pragmatic recognition of the need for its protection against a resurgent Rome (especially with the foundation of the Jesuit order in 1540) and against the ever-present sectarian tendencies within Reformation churches themselves, but also as a matter of principle, Calvin insisted that the duty of political obedience was no more conditional on the godliness of princes or magistrates than the duty to obey parents was on theirs. He even condemned the (Lutheran?) view that secular authority is a kind of necessary evil. The question of how to fulfill the duty of building up God’s kingdom when oppressed by hostile rulers therefore became acute.

Blatantly unjust and impious laws and commands must be disobeyed – “we must obey God rather than men” (St Peter in *Acts 5:29*, another much cited text). Calvin however counseled disobeying and then patiently suffering the consequences. He regarded “reformation from above,” and perhaps foreign intervention on behalf of the persecuted, as the best means of advancing reformation. Luther’s followers had however already engaged in armed resistance and justified it in the *Magdeburg Confession* of 1551. Calvin, too, conceded that organized resistance was legitimate where the laws of a particular polity allowed it. However, it is not private individuals but only holders of public offices that may resist force with

force, ideally the magistrates collectively, when assembled in representative bodies (such as Estates General or Parliaments). Calvin took it that all the kingdoms of Europe had a legal order, which made “popular magistrates” (the Lutherans said “lesser magistrates”) individually subject to kings and/or emperors, but collectively superior in authority over them. His successor as chief Genevan pastor Theodore de Bèze and his followers in France (the “Huguenots”), the Netherlands, Scotland, and England developed full-fledged resistance theories and markedly republican (or at least anti-monarchical) doctrines, all of them firmly grounded in Calvin’s own thought.

Calvin’s ideal of church and magistracy cooperating to advance *pietas* and *honestas* and to uphold the glory of God had religious intolerance as one of its consequences. Although many Calvinists subsequently practiced religious toleration, in 1553 Geneva burned at the stake a sectarian evangelical, the anti-Trinitarian and opponent of child baptism Michael Servetus. This was the act of an anti-Calvin ruling council, not the Consistory or Calvin. But Calvin fully approved it (as did Catholics abroad, where Servetus was already under sentence of burning, the normal Catholic penalty for impenitent heretics), and Calvin and de Bèze went on to publish defenses of secular punishment for “heresy,” as a threat to both civil *honestas* and religious *pietas*. Against this implication of the ideal must be set the formation of the upright, industrious, and courageous character that it fostered.

## Cross-References

- ▶ [Jesuit Political Thought](#)
- ▶ [Martin Luther, Political Thought](#)

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## John Capreolus

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### Abstract

John Capreolus, or Jean Cabrol, 1380–1444, Dominican friar, known as *princeps thomistarum*, was one of the most important and influential Thomists and commentators of Thomas Aquinas. Born in the French province of Rouergue, he studied at Paris and taught at Toulouse. He spent the last 20 years of his life in the Dominican convent of Rodez. His only surviving work, called *Defensiones theologiae Divi Thomae Aquinatis*, is a vast commentary



on Peter Lombard's *Sentences* which aims solely at defending St. Thomas' theology and philosophy against a group of handpicked critics throughout the fourteenth century. His own position therefore corresponds to Aquinas' thought. Yet in that perspective Capreolus was of great influence for future Thomists throughout the Middle Ages and beyond.

Despite John Capreolus' high profile, we know little about his life. Some facts, however, can be ascertained. John Capreolus was born in 1380 in the French province Rouergue, probably at Rodez. He joined the Dominican order there (an affiliation of the province of Toulouse) and was assigned to lecture on the *Sentences* at Paris in 1407. In 1411–1412, he obtained the license in theology. Somewhere between 1412 and 1426, Capreolus was regent of studies at the convent of Toulouse. From 1426 on, he resided exclusively at Rodez and worked on the completion of his masterpiece. He died there on April 6, 1444. His surname "Capreolus/Cabrol" (which means "little goat") was common in the region of Rouergue. The honorific title "prince of Thomists" is testified in John Mair, though it is not entirely clear since when it was used in order to characterize Capreolus (Grabmann 1956).

His life's work is called *Defensiones theologiae Divi Thomae Aquinatis* (i.e., "vindications of Thomas Aquinas' theology"). In order to grasp Capreolus' intentions in writing a vindication of Aquinas' theology, one should bear in mind the intellectual situation at Paris at the end of the fourteenth and the beginning of the fifteenth centuries (Imbach in Bedouelle et al. 1997). There were sharp critiques against Thomas' way of thought. These critiques might have easily provoked the wish to defend one of the order's greatest scholars and saints in a young Dominican student. In referring back to Aquinas and defending his view in the fifteenth century against thinkers like William of Ockham, Adam Wodeham, and Gregory of Rimini, who Capreolus calls *moderni* or *terministae*, he tries to overcome the fourteenth-century thought. Moreover, by doing so, Capreolus contributes to the establishment or better labeling of two "ways"

of thought, namely the *via antiqua* and the *via moderna*, which became a common distinction later on (Müller 2004b).

Formally, Capreolus' vindication of Aquinas' theology follows Peter Lombard's *Sentences* in their structure and their general content. This means that the first book globally deals with God as such, the second with God's creation and its fall, the third with God as becoming part of His creation, namely with Christology, and the fourth book deals with the means by which creation finds its way back to God, namely with the sacraments and with the last things (*eschata*). All books are subdivided into distinctions and questions according to Lombard's text. A single question of the *Defensiones*, moreover, is generally subdivided into three articles. In the first one, Capreolus exposes several conclusions which are drawn from Aquinas' works. In the second one, he reports several objections against the aforementioned conclusions. Here Capreolus deals with texts from, for example, Peter Auriol, John Duns Scotus, Durand of St. Pourçain, John of Ripa, Guido Terreni, and Wodeham. In the third article, he argues against these objections by using texts from Aquinas or answers them in Thomas' way (*ad mentem Thomae*). Unlike Denys the Carthusian who never lectured on the *Sentences* but solely used the pattern of the *Sentences* as a blueprint for his encyclopedic treatment, Capreolus' *Sentences* commentary is connected with university teaching. Yet, only the first book was finished by the time his lectures at Paris ended (1409). The other three books were finished 1426, 1428, and 1432, respectively. Although it was not uncommon by the time to revise one's lectures for publication, Capreolus' working on his commentary for such a long period points to the later dissociation of the *Sentences* commentary and their function in university education, serving thus primarily as finding aids for philosophical and theological positions, respectively.

For Capreolus' autograph of the *Defensiones* is not extant any more, the modern Tournai edition of the *Defensiones* is based on the *editio princeps*, that is to say the Venice edition of 1483. This edition, however, has been corrected in some places according to later editions. One using this



edition should also know that some quotations, for example, those of Scotus, do not come from their original sources but are transmitted via Auriol's *Scriptum*.

When it comes to Capreolus' doctrinal positions, one has to refer to Aquinas' positions. In fact, John himself states in his prologue that he is inclined just to recite Aquinas' opinions and would add nothing of his own but occasionally (prol., q. 1; but see D'Ettore (2013) on Capreolus' reading of Aquinas' theory of analogy). In that perspective, John's work is located in two different traditions combining two different genres. He picks up the tradition of commenting upon Lombard's *Sentences* and connects it with another tradition, namely the defense of Aquinas against manifold critiques. As one of the first examples for the latter tradition, one finds the *Correctoria* which emerge as a literary genre just after the death of Aquinas. At the beginning of the fourteenth century, Hervaeus Natalis picked up the task to defend Aquinas' view in his *Defensio doctrinae fratris Thomae*. While these works solely discussed selected questions, Capreolus' *Defensiones* bring up almost all the topics which were dealt with by Peter Lombard. Moreover, Capreolus takes into account not only the major works of Aquinas, such as the *Summa theologiae* (as does Thomas of Vio Cajetan) or the *Summa contra gentiles* (as does Francesco de Ferrara or de Sylvestris), but refers also to the minor ones. In that way, Capreolus exposes merely all relevant positions in Aquinas' thought, being also aware of the possible development in Aquinas' ideas. Scholars throughout the centuries therefore used Capreolus' work to grasp Aquinas' position as well as to get an idea of the debates his views had evoked (as does, e.g., Thomas of Vio Cajetan) (Von Gunten in Bedouelle et al. 1997). This success is also witnessed by the four editions of the *Defensiones* (Venice 1483–1484; 1515; 1588, the fourth, scheduled for 1686, though never appeared), and by the many *compendia* of this commentary (Bedouelle in Bedouelle et al. 1997; Montagnes in Bedouelle et al. 1997).

In doctrinal matters, one might give five different examples which illustrate some of Capreolus'

philosophical or theological positions. (1) Although Capreolus starts from a double meaning of being, namely essential and existential being (*esse essentiae* and *esse existentiae*), he does not identify essence with existence and hence follows Aquinas' fundamental distinction in that respect (Hegy 1959; Dewan in Bedouelle et al. 1997; Osborne 2013). Aquinas' understanding of participation functions as a background (D'Ettore 2014). Whereas in God, being and essence coincide, all other creatures have, in order to exist, to participate in being itself (*esse*). Wells (1960–1961), on the contrary, assumes that Capreolus only claims to follow Aquinas in his interpretation but in fact adopts Henry of Ghent's position (but see also Robertson 2014). (2) Other than often maintained, there is no real difference in position between Capreolus and the *moderni* in terms of God's omnipotence. The relation between language and reality rather plays a key role in distinguishing both approaches. Unlike the *moderni*, Capreolus understands the universals and predicaments not as mere sounds (*voces*), but sees them as in relation to extramental things. Thus, Capreolus adheres to a modest realism (Müller 2004a). (3) In accord with Aquinas and in contrast to other Thomists, Capreolus tries to demonstrate that theology is a science in the strict sense, thereby deviating from the stringent Aristotelian conception of science (Donneaud in Bedouelle et al. 1997). Whereas Aquinas, however, clearly defines science as a single *habitus* of the mind, some Thomists, including Capreolus, misinterpret Aquinas as to say that science is a totality of intelligible species (Maurer 1974). Finally, with respect to the relationship between theology and philosophy, Capreolus goes with Aquinas in accentuating their strong connection. In that matter, he opposes strictly a tendency at the time to depart philosophy from theology in order to strengthen theology (Müller 2004a). (4) In terms of cognition, Capreolus argues, for example, against Auriol's notion of *esse apparens*. This latter concept is introduced by Auriol to explain knowledge as the appearance of the known object to consciousness without further mediation. Hence, Auriol identifies intelligible species and

act of cognition. In contrast, Capreolus adopts a more traditional stance and therefore sticks to the real differentiation between impressed species, act of cognition, and mental word or expressed species. Capreolus affirms that the mental word is the terminus of the intellection and he defines it, unlike Auriol, as a quality of the intellectual power (Bonino in Bedouelle et al. 1997; Mahoney 2004). (5) In moral philosophy, Capreolus argues with Thomas and against fourteenth-century thinkers for the view that human virtues are habitual and that these habitual virtues are necessary to man. Yet it seems as if Capreolus adopts the distinction of Aquinas' opponents between natural and moral being, and hence breaks up with Aquinas' view that moral "habits" are grounded in natural inclinations to the good and the true (Pinckaers 2001).

Capreolus' *Defensiones* finally had a strong impact on future Thomists, such as Cajetan (Von Gunten in Bedouelle et al. 1997), Silvestro da Prierio, who even prepared a compendium of the *Defensiones*, and Petrus Negri (Tavuzzi in Bedouelle et al. 1997). But still in recent times scholars made or make use of Capreolus' *Defensiones* in order to study Thomas Aquinas better.

## Cross-References

- ▶ [Adam Wodeham](#)
- ▶ [Denys the Carthusian](#)
- ▶ [Essence and Existence](#)
- ▶ [Gregory of Rimini](#)
- ▶ [Peter Lombard](#)
- ▶ [Thomas Aquinas](#)
- ▶ [Thomas of Vio \(Cajetan\)](#)
- ▶ [Thomism](#)

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## John Dumbleton

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### Abstract

John Dumbleton's large *Summa of Logic and Natural Philosophy* is a superb exemplar of the state of teaching in the faculty of arts at Oxford in the second quarter of the fourteenth century. It covers several topics of logic and many of Aristotle's natural philosophical works, interspersed with the methods that were typical of the so-called Oxford Calculators. Unfortunately, the *Summa* has never been printed, although it exists in several large and handsome manuscript copies on the basis of which historians have analyzed about half of its contents so far.

### Biographical Information

John Dumbleton is mentioned in the records of Merton College, Oxford University, in 1338 and again in 1347–1348. He was named as one of the original fellows of Queen's College in 1341, but likely went to Paris to study theology about that time. Dumbleton was a fellow of the Sorbonne at Paris probably between 1344 and 1347. One manuscript mentions "Master John Dumbleton, one time fellow of the Sorbonne, in his *Summa*..." Another manuscript refers to him as a bachelor of theology, so his theological education extended at least that far. It is thought that he died of the plague because nothing is heard of him after 1348.

### Thought

Although there are a couple of very short works or parts of works ascribed to Dumbleton, his reputation is based almost entirely on his *Summa of Logic and Natural Philosophy*, which formed an important part of the basis of the doctoral

dissertations of James Weisheipl at Oxford in 1956 and of Edith Sylla at Harvard in 1970. Excerpts from the *Summa* can be found in the publications of these authors. The *Summa* was planned to have ten parts, but the tenth part, on Platonic forms, seems never to have been written. Most modern attention to the *Summa* has concentrated on Parts II through VI, which cover largely physical topics.

The contents of the *Summa* are described at the start of the work as follows:

- Part I. Logic beginning with the signification of terms, the imposition of terms by convention, and related matters. The next topic is what it means for something to be prior in knowledge to something else and what it means to be better known to us or to nature, with regard to distinct versus confused knowledge, universals versus particulars, and the parts of definitions versus what is defined. Later topics concern the principles of teaching and the intension and remission of credulity and science.
- Part II. First principles, matter and form. Substantial forms and how qualities are intended and remitted.
- Part III. On motion in the categories of place, quality, and quantity. On the causes of motion. How velocity is produced and caused. How alteration and augmentation are measured. The definitions of motion and time.
- Part IV. On the nature of the elements and their qualities. Whether each element has two qualities in the highest degree. The action and reaction of elements on each other. The relations of elemental and qualitative forms. Density and rarity and their variation. How the powers of natural bodies depend on their magnitudes. The relative weights of pure and mixed bodies.
- Part V. On spiritual action and light. Whether light belongs particularly to some element or compound. On the nature of the medium receiving a spiritual action such as light. On the variation of spiritual action in a medium. Whether spiritual agents act instantaneously or in time.
- Part VI. On the limits of active and passive powers. On the difficulty of action. On the

limits of the powers of natural bodies by their natural places. Do the powers of elemental forms seek rest as well as motion? On the motion of the heavens and their movers. On the limits of size of natural bodies. How some bodies are moved by an intrinsic mover and some are not.

- Part VII. In the preface, this part is said to discuss the cause of individuals and species of generable and corruptible things with regard to their numbers and the potencies of matter and agents. Whether the Prime Mover is of infinite power, and whether it has been proved by a physical argument that the world and motion had no beginning. In Part VII, as it actually exists in the manuscripts, Dumbleton discusses whether it can be proved by reason that there is an immobile Prime Mover and whether the possibility of a beginning to the world, to motion and to everything below the Prime Mover can be shown to be plausible (*probabile*) by natural reason. Finally, he raises the doubt whether everything corruptible must necessarily be corrupted at some point.
- Part VIII. On the generation of substances by like substances and of animals by complete animals and by putrefaction. On the numerical unity of the soul with respect to the sensitive and intelligible, and on the operations of the nutritive soul.
- Part IX. On material related to Aristotle's *On the Soul*, Book II, concerning the five senses.
- Part X. (probably never completed) On universals which are called "Ideas" by the Platonists and on the passive intellect. On the simple and complex operations of the human intellect.

Of these ten parts, a fair amount has been published describing Parts II–VI, and nearly nothing on Parts I and VII–IX (with X probably non-existent). Since it is possible to go to the existing literature for discussions of Parts II–VI, and the description of Parts VII–IX would require preliminary investigation far beyond what is possible here, most of the rest of this article will be devoted to a description of Dumbleton's views as found in Part I, the task being made simpler by the existence of a transcription of Part I made by James

Weisheipl and held in the library of the Pontifical Institute of Medieval Studies in Toronto.

The actual content of Part I as preserved in MS Vatican City, Latin 6750 does not exactly follow the topics announced in the prologue, and moreover, contains some repetitions. With regard to the signification of terms, Dumbleton clearly states a nominalist or Ockhamist position. We learn our first terms, he says, by repeatedly hearing a word spoken while something in our field of vision is moved, drawing our attention to it. For instance, if we repeatedly see a person moving in our field of vision or being pointed out, while someone says the word "Socrates," we understand that "Socrates" is the name of that person. Perhaps the first term we learn is "bread," he says, as the infant repeatedly sees bread while the word "bread" is spoken and remembers this connection. In a similar way we learn the word "white." Things in the external world naturally cause intentions in the mind, but the matching between intentions in the mind and words is a matter of choice (*ad placitum*) and common usage. Two people sensing the same external thing may pick out different qualities, as one person notices that fire is hot and another that it is bright, so that further experience may be needed to match words to what they pick out in the external world. The foundation of knowledge is always the things and their properties in the external world, but it is the human intellect that combines and separates the terms corresponding to things in the external world (incomplex knowledge) into propositions (*complexe*) that can be true or false. If a person only knows words and not the intention in the mind and the thing in the world that the intention corresponds to, that person is ignorant. Of course as knowledge increases, humans eventually conclude that there are also insensible things in the world, for which terms are then imposed. Contrary to Plato, intentions of things and propositions exist only in the mind. (Dumbleton leaves the issue of how universal intentions differ from singular ones to the unfinished Part X). In Dumbleton's view we learn more easily from hearing a teacher's explanation, than we learn from sight.

Here, unannounced in the prologue, Dumbleton veers into an extensive discussion of

insolubles – propositions like the so-called liar paradox – making use of his discussion of the imposition of terms and of the status of propositions in reaching his own conclusions. This mini-treatise on insolubles, consisting of at least thirteen chapters, has so far not been noticed by historians writing the history of the liar paradox. Dumbleton begins by describing the four best-known opinions on insolubles of his time. In the taxonomy of positions set out by Paul Spade, the first two positions are what Thomas Bradwardine calls that of the *restringentes*, that is, of those who say that part of a proposition cannot refer to the whole proposition, and the position of Bradwardine himself, that an insoluble proposition signifies that it is both true and false. The third position, which Spade attributes to Roger Swyneshed, concludes that an insoluble sentence falsifies itself even though it signifies precisely as is the case. The fourth opinion, which Spade links with William Heytesbury, concludes that insoluble propositions do not have their ordinary significations. No more can be done here than to point out the existence of this section of the *Summa*, leaving it to other scholars to unravel Dumbleton's discussion, but even before that is done, two points can be made. Dumbleton's references to the famous positions on insolubles of his time help to cement the dating of the *Summa* after the relevant works of Thomas Bradwardine, Roger Swyneshed, and William Heytesbury. Secondly, the examples that Dumbleton uses make it abundantly clear that he was writing in a context in which extremely complex logical issues were being debated. Many of the insolubles Dumbleton discusses use letters to represent complex propositions embedded within other propositions. For instance A may be said to represent either "God exists" or "man is an ass," and then a respondent is supposed to say whether the proposition B, "I know that A is true," is true, false, or doubtful. Is proposition B insoluble? Or the case may be put that only those telling the truth will walk across the bridge, together with other possibly contradictory conditions. In short, all the techniques of solving sophismata found in William Heytesbury's *Rules for Solving Sophisms* may be called upon to unpack a proposition which may or may not be insoluble. There may be questions of

compounded or divided senses, of knowledge and doubt, of beginning and ceasing, and so forth, all interacting with each other and mixed up by the use of "arguments in terms" or the replacement of propositions by letters. Dumbleton tries to cut through these complications by using the conclusions of the earlier section that the meanings of terms depend on intentions in the mind, which in turn depend on things in the external world; that a person cannot understand the significance of a proposition without understanding the significance of the terms of the proposition; and that no decision can be made between knowing or doubting a proposition unless the proposition is first understood. He concentrates on what is true in a person's mind, not on the external representations of propositions in writing or otherwise, which helps resolve some difficulties. Here and there, what Dumbleton says seems to reflect the conditions of a dispute on obligations (*de obligationibus*), one of the common academic exercises at Oxford in this period. What should the respondent in an exercise of obligation do, if he is obliged to accept a case in which he does not understand one of the terms or one of the extremes of a proposition? How should he respond, for instance, if he has been directed to accept "This is a man," not knowing what or who "this" refers to? Dumbleton recommends that, to succeed in the exercise, the person so obligated should sometimes give a response that is not true in fact, but follows from the obligation he has accepted.

Dumbleton's discussion gradually evolves into one concerning sophismata on knowing and doubting (*sophismata de scire et dubitare*), in which Dumbleton uses prominently tools of analysis involving latitudes and degrees, intension and remission, the application of which to qualities like hot and cold or white and black in Parts II and III of the *Summa* has been studied in detail. Here the issue is, for instance, whether truth is analogous to the maximum degree of hotness in the sense that there are no degrees of truth, but only the whole truth and nothing but the truth. Then any proposition that is not absolutely true, but which might be considered a mixture of truth and falsehood, should be considered false. Could there be a proposition that is neither true nor false? If A is the proposition that God exists and that

God does not exist, then is it neither true nor false, just as a mixture of hot and cold is neither hot nor cold? Dumbleton concludes that A is false, because truth must be pure truth, and any mixture of the true and the false becomes false.

Next Dumbleton turns to the intension and remission of science and credulity, where he treats science and credulity as analogous to velocity, and the evidence for and against a proposition as analogous to forces causing and resisting that velocity. Much of the subject matter of Part I up to this point could be matched to subjects of the various books of Aristotle's *Organon*. This section involves issues dealt with by Aristotle especially in the *Posterior Analytics*. In a passage that is repeated at the end of Part I, Dumbleton distinguishes between first principles that are known in themselves and principles that are known by experience. First, principles that are true in virtue of their terms (or *per se nota*) are not doubted, except by fools, once the individual has learned the meaning of the terms. They are either known or not known and there is no wavering (*hesitatio*). But a person may increase or decrease in degree of knowledge or conviction (*credulitas*) with regard to principles that are known by experience and on the basis of evidence. While Dumbleton's application of the tools of analysis for the intension and remission of light or other qualities including speed to cases of knowledge, conviction, and doubt is not carried through consistently and completely, it is typical of the methodology of the so-called Oxford Calculators.

Finally, Dumbleton turns to what he had announced as his second topic, which comes directly from the *Posterior Analytics* together with Averroes' commentaries on Aristotle, namely, the question of what it means to say that something is better known to us or to nature. Here, the point is to explain Aristotle's intention, as well as to explore what is true. As Dumbleton reiterates several times, human knowledge comes from sense experience, and is derived *a posteriori*. Even geometry is not truly *a priori*, because geometry assumes and does not prove that points, lines, and surfaces exist, whereas these mathematical are known only from sense, as a plane is known as the surface of a body. There could be a universal science, which would include the

demonstration *a posteriori* of the principles of geometry, but geometry as we know it is a particular science, which does not include the demonstration from sense of its foundational principles.

Parts II–VI of the *Summa* are notable for alternating between summaries of the major points of Aristotle's physical works, on the one hand, and, on the other, expositions of the main analytical tools for which the Oxford Calculators are famous, particularly the use of mathematical proportions in describing motions and the analysis of the intension and remission of forms, using concepts of latitudes and degrees. For his discussion of the proportions of forces, resistances, and velocities in motions in the categories of place, quality, and quantity, Dumbleton assumes the theory put forth in Thomas Bradwardine's *On the Proportions of Velocities in Motions*, as well as some of the ideas of earlier Oxford Calculators, including Roger Swineshead and William Heytesbury, with his proof of the so-called Merton mean speed theorem. Infinity and continuity are frequently at issue in discussing the relations of degrees to latitudes, both of which are modeled mathematically by lines rather than points. For more detail on these subjects, see the works listed in the bibliography. Parts VIII and IX, on biology and psychology, which take up almost forty percent of the *Summa*, have yet to be studied in detail.

## Cross-References

- ▶ [Insolubles](#)
- ▶ [Oxford Calculators](#)
- ▶ [Thomas Bradwardine](#)
- ▶ [William Heytesbury](#)

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uses passages from the copy of the *Summa* in MS Cambridge, Peterhouse 272.

An unpublished transcription of the early parts of the *Summa* based on MS Vatican City lat. 6750, made by James A. Weisheipl in preparation for his 1956 Oxford University dissertation. Early fourteenth century physics of the Merton 'school': with special reference to Dumbleton and Heytesbury, 2 vols, is deposited at the Pontifical Institute for Mediaeval Studies in Toronto. John Dumbleton's *Summa logicae et philosophiae naturalis* is available only in manuscript form. Among the many good manuscripts are Cambridge, Peterhouse 272 and Vatican City, lat. 6750.

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## John Duns Scotus

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### Abstract

John Duns Scotus (1265/1266–1308) was one of the most important and influential philosopher-theologians of the High Middle Ages. His

brilliantly complex and nuanced thought, which earned him the nickname "the Subtle Doctor," left a mark on discussions of such disparate topics as the semantics of religious language, the problem of universals, divine illumination, and the nature of human freedom. This essay first lays out what is known about Scotus's life and the dating of his works. It then offers an overview of some of his key positions in four main areas of philosophy: natural theology, metaphysics, the theory of knowledge, and ethics and moral psychology.

### Life and Works

"Scotus" identifies Scotus as a Scot. His family name was Duns, which was also the name of the Scottish village in which he was born, just a few miles from the English border. We do not know the precise date of his birth, but it is a reasonable conjecture that he was born between December 23, 1265 and March 17, 1266.

In the academic year 1298–1299, Scotus lectured at Oxford on the first two books of the *Sentences* of Peter Lombard. He began revising those lectures for publication almost immediately, probably completing his revisions to Book I in 1300. In 1302 Scotus left Oxford for Paris and lectured again on the *Sentences*, probably in the order Book I, Book IV, Book II, Book III; he completed his lectures in 1303. In June 1303, Scotus was expelled from France along with 80 other friars for taking the Pope's side in a dispute with the king. They were allowed to return in April 1304. On November 18, 1304 Scotus was nominated as Franciscan regent master in theology at Paris, taking up the post in early 1305. In 1307 he was transferred to the Franciscan *studium* at Cologne, probably beginning his duties as lecturer in October. He died there in 1308; the date of his death is traditionally given as November 8.

It is generally agreed that Scotus's earliest works were his logical works: questions on Porphyry's *Isagoge* and Aristotle's *Categories*, *Peri hermeneias* (two sets), and *De sophisticis elenchis*. These probably date to around 1295; the *Quaestiones super De anima* is also very

likely an early work. Scotus's other Aristotelian commentary, the *Quaestiones super libros Metaphysicorum Aristotelis*, seems to have been started early; but Book 9 is probably late, and it is possible that Books 6 through 9 are all late or were at least revised later in Scotus's career. Scotus also wrote an *Expositio* on Aristotle's *Metaphysics*.

We have three distinct versions of Scotus's lectures on the *Sentences*. Of these, the *Ordinatio* (i.e., a version prepared for publication by the author himself) of lectures at Oxford, based in part on earlier lecture notes (the *Lectura*) and on material from his lectures in Paris, is generally taken to be Scotus's premier work; the critical edition of the *Ordinatio* was completed in 2013. Scotus seems to have been revising the *Ordinatio* up to his death. Scotus's lectures in Paris also survive in the form of *Reportationes* (student reports). The most important is the *Reportatio examinata* of Book 1; the designation *examinata* indicates that it was examined and corrected by Scotus himself. The *Reportatio examinata* is in the process of being critically edited.

In addition to these works, we have 46 short disputations called *Collationes* dating from 1300–1305, a late work in natural theology called *De primo principio*, and *Quaestiones quodlibetales* from Scotus's days as regent master (between Lent 1305 and Lent 1307). Finally, there is a work called *Theoremata*. Though doubts have been raised about its authenticity, the recent critical edition accepts it as a genuine work of Scotus.

## Natural Theology

Scotus agrees with Thomas Aquinas that all our knowledge of God starts from creatures, and that as a result we can only prove the existence and nature of God by an argument *quia* (reasoning from effect to cause), not by an argument *propter quid* (reasoning from essence to characteristic). Aquinas and Scotus further agree that, for that same reason, we cannot know the essence of God in this life. The main difference between the two authors is that Scotus believes we can apply certain predicates univocally – with exactly the same meaning – to God and creatures, whereas

Aquinas insists that this is impossible, and that we can only use analogical predication, in which a word as applied to God has a meaning different from, although related to, the meaning of that same word as applied to creatures.

Scotus has a number of arguments for univocal predication and against the doctrine of analogy (*Ordinatio* 1, d. 3, pars 1, q. 1–2, nn. 26–55). He draws one of them from Anselm. Consider all nonrelative predicates, Anselm says. (We exclude relative predicates because no relative predicate expresses the nature of a thing as it is in itself.) Let *F* be our predicate variable. For any *F*, either (a) it is in every respect better to be *F* than not to be *F* or (b) it is in some respect better to be not-*F* than *F*. A predicate will fall into the second category if and only if it implies some sort of limitation or deficiency. Anselm's argument is that we can (indeed must) predicate of God every predicate that falls into the first category, and that we cannot predicate of God any predicate that falls into the second (except metaphorically, perhaps). Scotus agrees with Anselm on this point (as did Aquinas: see *SCG* I.30). Scotus has his own terminology for whatever it is in every respect better to be than not to be. He calls such things “pure perfections” (*perfectiones simpliciter*). A pure perfection is any predicate that does not imply limitation.

So Scotus claims that pure perfections can be predicated of God. But he takes this a step further than Anselm. He says that they have to be predicated univocally of God; otherwise the whole business of pure perfections will not make any sense. For if we are going to use Anselm's test, we must first come up with our concept – say, of good. Then we examine the concept to see whether it is in every respect better to be good than not-good. We realize that it is, and so we predicate “good” of God. That test will not work unless it is the same concept that we are applying in both cases.

Not only can we come up with concepts that apply univocally to God and creatures, we can even come up with a proper (distinctive) concept of God. Granted, there is one sense in which we cannot have a proper concept of God in this life: we cannot know his essence as a particular thing. We know God through general concepts that can

apply both to him and to other things. In another sense, though, we can have a proper concept of God, that is, one that applies only to God. If we take any of the pure perfections to the highest degree, they will be predicable of God alone. Better yet, we can describe God more completely by taking all the pure perfections in the highest degree and attributing them all to him.

But these are all composite concepts; they all involve putting two quite different notions together: “highest” with “good,” “first” with “cause,” and so on. Scotus says that we can come up with a relatively simple concept that is proper to God alone, the concept of “infinite being.” Now that concept might seem to be every bit as composite as “highest good” or “first cause,” but it is really not. For “infinite being” is a concept of something essentially one: a being that has infinity (unlimitedness) as its intrinsic way of existing. I will return to the crucial role of the concept of infinite being in Scotus’s natural theology after I examine his proof of the existence of God.

Scotus’s argument for the existence of God is rightly regarded as one of the most outstanding contributions ever made to natural theology. The argument is enormously complex, with several subarguments for almost every important conclusion, and I can offer only a sketch of it here. (Different versions of the proof are given at *Lectura* 1, d. 2, q. 1, nn. 38–135; *Ordinatio* 1, d. 2, q. 1, nn. 39–190; *Reportatio* 1, d. 2, q. 1; and *De primo principio*.)

Scotus begins by arguing that there is a first agent (a being that is first in efficient causality). Consider first the distinction between essentially ordered causes and accidentally ordered causes. In an accidentally ordered series, the fact that a given member of that series is itself caused is accidental to that member’s own causal activity; in an essentially ordered series, by contrast, the causal activity of later members of the series depends essentially on the causal activity of earlier members. Scotus argues that any effect must be produced by something else, and since there can be no infinite regress in an essentially ordered series of causes, there must be a first agent – an agent that is first among efficient causes. Scotus then

goes on to argue that there is an ultimate goal of activity (a being that is first in final causality), and a maximally excellent being (a being that is first in what Scotus calls “preeminence”).

Thus, he has proved what he calls the “triple primacy”: there is a being that is first in efficient causality, in final causality, and in preeminence. Scotus next proves that the three primacies are coextensive: that is, any being that is first in one of these three ways will also be first in the other two ways. Scotus then argues that a being enjoying the triple primacy is endowed with intellect and will, and that any such being is infinite. Finally, he argues that there can be only one such being.

The concept *infinite being* has a privileged role in Scotus’s natural theology. For Scotus, infinity is not only what is ontologically central about God, it is the key component of our best available concept of God and a guarantor of the success of theological language. That is, our best ontology, far from fighting with our theological semantics, both supports and is supported by our theological semantics. The doctrine of univocity rests in part on the claim that “[t]he difference between God and creatures, at least with regard to God’s possession of the pure perfections, is ultimately one of degree” (Cross 1999: 39). Remember Scotus’s argument for univocity: if we are to follow Anselm in ascribing to God every pure perfection, we have to affirm that we are ascribing to God the very same thing that we ascribe to creatures. God has it infinitely, creatures in a limited way.

Scotus criticizes Aquinas’s conception of infinity as purely negative and relational. The infinite, for Aquinas, is that which is not bounded by something else. But Scotus thinks we can have a positive conception of infinity, according to which infinity is not a negative, relational property, but instead, a positive, intrinsic property: an “intrinsic degree of perfection.” It helps, Scotus says, to think of some quality (say, goodness) as existing infinitely: so that there is, as it were, no more goodness that you could add to that goodness to make it any greater. That is infinite goodness. The specific degree of goodness of a thing is an intrinsic, nonquantitative feature of that thing. Infinite being is just like that; it is “a measure of intrinsic

excellence that is not finite.” This is why the concept of “infinite being” is the simplest concept available to us for understanding God. Infinity is not an accidental addition to being, but an intrinsic mode of being. Of course, if this is right, then the concepts of “infinite goodness,” “infinite power,” and so forth are every bit as simple as the concept of “infinite being.” But “infinite being” is of particular interest because it “virtually contains” all the other infinite perfections of God. That is, we can deduce the other infinite perfections from infinite being. So besides being the next best thing to a simple concept, it is the most theoretically fruitful concept we can have of God in this life.

## Metaphysics

Metaphysics, according to Scotus, is a “real theoretical science”: it is real in that it treats things rather than concepts, theoretical in that it is pursued for its own sake rather than as a guide for doing or making things, and a science in that it proceeds from self-evident principles to conclusions that follow deductively from them. The various real theoretical sciences are distinguished by their subject matter, and Scotus devotes considerable attention to determining what the distinctive subject matter of metaphysics is. His conclusion is that metaphysics concerns “being qua being” (*ens inquantum ens*). That is, the metaphysician studies being simply as such, rather than studying, say, material being as material.

The study of being qua being includes, first of all, the study of the transcendentals, so called because they transcend the division of being into finite and infinite, and the further division of finite being into the ten Aristotelian categories. Being itself is a transcendental, and so are the “proper attributes” of being – one, true, and good – which are coextensive with being. Scotus also identifies an indefinite number of disjunctions that are coextensive with being and therefore count as transcendentals, such as infinite-or-finite and necessary-or-contingent. Finally, all the pure perfections are transcendentals, since they transcend the division of being into finite and infinite.

Unlike the proper attributes of being and the disjunctive transcendentals, however, they are not coextensive with being. For God is wise and Socrates is wise, but earthworms – though they are certainly beings – are not wise.

The study of the Aristotelian categories also belongs to metaphysics insofar as the categories, or the things falling under them, are studied as beings. (If they are studied as concepts, they belong instead to the logician. For Scotus’s logical treatment of the categories, see Pini 2002.) There are exactly ten categories, Scotus argues. The first and most important is the category of substance. Substances are beings in the most robust sense, since they have an independent existence: that is, they do not exist in something else. Beings in any of the other nine categories, called accidents, exist in substances. The nine categories of accidents are quantity, quality, relation, action, passion, place, time, position, and state (*habitus*).

Scotus follows the Aristotelian orthodoxy of his day, which identified matter as what persists through substantial change and substantial form as what makes a given parcel of matter the definite, unique, individual substance that it is. (There are also accidental forms, which are a substance’s accidental qualities.) But as Scotus elaborates his views on form and matter, he espouses three important theses that mark him off from some other philosophers of his day: he holds that there exists matter that has no form whatsoever, that not all created substances are composites of form and matter, and that one and the same substance can have more than one substantial form. Let us examine each of these theses in turn.

First, Scotus argues that there is matter that is entirely devoid of form, or what is known as “prime matter” (*Quaestiones in libros Metaphysicorum* 7, q. 5; *Lectura* 2, d. 12, q. un.). Scholars debate now (just as they debated in Scotus’s day) whether Aristotle himself really believed that there is prime matter or merely introduced it as a theoretical substratum for substantial change, believing instead that in actual fact matter always has at least some minimal form (the form of the elements being the most minimal of all). Aquinas denied both that Aristotle intended to posit it and that it could exist on its own. For

something totally devoid of form would be utterly featureless; it would be pure potentiality, but not actually anything. Scotus, by contrast, argues that prime matter not only can but does exist as such: “it is one and the same stuff that underlies every substantial change” (King 2003).

Second, Scotus denies “universal hylemorphism,” the view that all created substances are composites of form and matter (*Lectura 2*, d. 12, q. un., n. 55). Universal hylemorphism (from the Greek *hyle*, meaning “matter” and *morphe*, meaning “form”) had been the predominant view among Franciscans before Scotus. Saint Bonaventure, for example, had argued that even angels could not be altogether immaterial; they must be compounds of form and “spiritual matter.” For matter is potentiality and form is actuality, so if the angels were altogether immaterial, they would be pure actuality without any admixture of potentiality, whereas in fact only God is pure actuality. But as we have already seen in his affirmation of the existence of prime matter, Scotus simply denies the unqualified equation of matter with potentiality and form with actuality. Prime matter, though entirely without form, is actual; and a purely immaterial being is not automatically bereft of potentiality.

Third, Scotus holds that some substances have more than one substantial form (*Ordinatio 4*, d. 11, q. 3, n. 54). This doctrine of the plurality of substantial forms was commonly held among the Franciscans but vigorously disputed by others. We can very easily see the motivation for the view by recalling that a substantial form is supposed to be what makes a given parcel of matter the definite, unique, individual substance that it is. Now suppose, as many medieval thinkers (including Aquinas) did, that the soul is the one and only substantial form of the human being. It would then follow that when a human being dies, and the soul ceases to inform that parcel of matter, what is left is not the same body that existed just before death. For what made it that very body was its substantial form, which (*ex hypothesi*) is no longer there. When the soul is separated from the body, then, what is left is not a body, but just a parcel of matter arranged corpse-wise. To Scotus and many of his

fellow Franciscans it seemed obvious that the corpse of a person is the very same body that existed before death. Moreover, they argued, if the only thing responsible for informing the matter of a human being is the soul, it would seem that (what used to be) the body should immediately dissipate when a person dies. (There was a theological reason as well: what lay in Joseph of Arimathea's tomb from Good Friday until Easter morning had to be Jesus' body, and not just something that used to be Jesus' body; and what happened on Easter morning was resurrection, not reincarnation.) Accordingly, Scotus argues that the human being has at least two substantial forms. There is the “form of the body” (*forma corporeitatis*) that makes a given parcel of matter to be a definite, unique, individual human body, and the “animating form” or soul, which makes that human body alive. At death, the animating soul ceases to vivify the body, but numerically the same body remains, and the form of the body keeps the matter organized, at least for a while. Since the form of the body is too weak on its own to keep the body in existence indefinitely, however, it gradually decomposes.

While Scotus's account of form and matter has clear implications for what happens to the body at death, it is less forthcoming about what happens to the soul. Can the animating soul survive the death of the body it informs? Scotus considers a number of arguments for the incorruptibility of the human soul, but he finds none of them persuasive. This is not to say that he denies the immortality of the soul, of course, but that he does not think it can be proved by human reason unaided by revelation.

Another metaphysical topic on which Scotus defends a distinctive position is the problem of universals. The problem of universals may be thought of as the question of what, if anything, is the metaphysical basis of our using the same predicate for more than one distinct individual. Socrates is human and Plato is human. Does this mean that there must be some one universal reality – humanity – that is somehow repeatable, in which Socrates and Plato both share? Or is there nothing metaphysically common to them at all? Those who think there is some actual universal

existing outside the mind are called realists; those who deny extramental universals are called nominalists.

Scotus was a realist about universals, and like all realists he had to give an account of what exactly those universals are: what their status is, what sort of existence they have outside the mind. So, in the case of Socrates and Plato, the question is “What sort of item is this humanity that both Socrates and Plato exemplify?” A related question that realists have to face is the problem of individuation. Given that there is some extramental reality common to Socrates and Plato, we also need to know what it is in each of them that makes them distinct exemplifications of that extramental reality.

Scotus calls the extramental universal the “common nature” (*natura communis*) and the principle of individuation the “haecceity” (*haecceitas*). The common nature is common in that it is “indifferent” to existing in any number of individuals. But it has extramental existence only in the particular things in which it exists, and in them it is always “contracted” by the haecceity. So the common nature humanity exists in both Socrates and Plato, although in Socrates it is made individual by Socrates’ haecceitas and in Plato by Plato’s haecceitas. The humanity-of-Socrates is individual and non-repeatable, as is the humanity-of-Plato; yet humanity itself is common and repeatable, and it is ontologically prior to any particular exemplification of it (*Ordinatio* 2, d. 3, pars 1, qq. 1–6, translated in Spade (1994: 57–113)).

Another important aspect of Scotus’s contributions to metaphysics is his theory of modality. Scotus offers the first systematic exposition of an intensionalist account of possibility and necessity (see the entry on ► [Modal Theories and Modal Logic](#) in this volume). A key element of his theory is the notion of synchronic alternative possibilities, derived from Peter John Olivi: that if a state of affairs *S* obtains contingently at a time *t*, there is a genuine (though of course unrealized) possibility that not-*S* obtain at *t*. Scotus finds application for this theory not only in his account of God’s relation to the created world but also in his theory of human freedom.

## Theory of Knowledge

Scotus adopts the standard medieval Aristotelian view that human beings alone, among the animals, have two different sorts of cognitive powers: senses and intellect. The senses differ from the intellect in that they have physical organs; the intellect is immaterial. In order for the intellect to make use of sensory information, therefore, it must somehow take the raw material provided by the senses in the form of material images and make them into suitable objects for understanding. This process is known as abstraction, from the Latin *abstrahere*, which is literally “to drag out.” The intellect pulls out the universal, as it were, from the material singular in which it is embedded. This activity is performed by the active or agent intellect, which takes the “phantasms” derived from sense experience and turns them into “intelligible species.” Those species are actualized in the possible or receptive intellect, whose function is to receive and then store the intelligible species provided by the active intellect. Scotus denies that the active and passive intellect are really distinct. Rather, there is one intellect that has these two distinct functions or powers.

Phantasms do not, however, become irrelevant once the intelligible species has been abstracted. Scotus holds (just as Aquinas had held) that the human intellect never understands anything without turning toward phantasms (*Lectura* 2, d. 3, pars 2, q. 1, n. 255). That is, in order to deploy a concept that has already been acquired, one must make some use of sensory data – although the phantasms employed in using a concept already acquired need not be anything like the phantasms from which that concept was abstracted in the first place. I acquired the intelligible species of dog from phantasms of dogs, but I can make use of that concept now not only by calling up an image of a dog but also by (say) imagining the sound of the Latin word for dog. Scotus’s point is simply that there must be some sensory context for any act of intellectual cognition.

And even that point is not quite as general as my unqualified statement suggests. For one thing, Scotus believes that our intellect’s need for



phantasms is a temporary state. It is only in this present life that the intellect must turn to phantasms; in the next life we will be able to do without them. For another thing, Scotus may have thought that even in this life we enjoy a kind of intellectual cognition that bypasses phantasms. He called it “intuitive cognition.”

Scotus understands intuitive cognition by way of contrast with abstractive cognition. Abstractive cognition involves a universal, and a universal as such need not be exemplified. That is, my intelligible species of dog only tells me what it is to be a dog; it does not tell me whether any particular dog actually exists. Intuitive cognition, by contrast, “yields information about how things are right now” (Pasnau 2003). Sensory cognition, as Scotus explicitly acknowledges, counts as intuitive cognition on this account. It is, after all, quite uncontroversial that my seeing or hearing a dog gives me information about some particular dog as it exists when I see or hear it. Scotus’s much bolder claim concerns intellectual intuitive cognition, by which the intellect cognizes a particular thing as existing at that very moment. Intellectual intuitive cognition does not require phantasms; the cognized object somehow just causes the intellectual act by which its existence is made present to the intellect. Robert Pasnau characterizes intellectual intuitive cognition, so described, as in effect a “form of extrasensory perception” (Pasnau 2003). Richard Cross replies that such a characterization is not apt, arguing instead that intuitive intellectual cognition requires sensation (Cross 2014).

In some places Scotus seems to think of this sort of intuitive cognition as a mere theoretical possibility, but in others he argues vigorously for the reality of intellectual intuitive cognition. Indeed, in the latter sorts of passages it becomes clear that intuitive cognition is quite pervasive in human thought. (For three different takes on what to make of Scotus’s apparently conflicting signals on this matter, see Day 1947, Pasnau 2003, and Wolter 1990a.) He argues, for example, that since the intellect engages in reasoning that makes reference to the actual existence of particular sensible objects, it must know that they exist. Abstractive cognition, of course, cannot provide

such knowledge. Moreover, without intuitive cognition I could never know about my own intellectual states. Abstractive cognition could provide me with an abstract concept of thinking about Scotus, but I need intuitive cognition to know that I am in fact exemplifying that concept right this minute.

If these arguments represent Scotus’s considered views on intuitive cognition, then Scotus is making a bold exception to the general rule that in this life the intellect acquires knowledge only by turning to phantasms. It would seem that he has little choice, given the importance he attaches to our intuitive self-knowledge in his attack on skepticism. For our intellect is immaterial, as are its acts, and it is difficult to see how an immaterial act can be captured in a sensory phantasm. Even so, Scotus is enough of an Aristotelian about the functioning of our intellect on this side of heaven to insist that even though our brute acquaintance with those acts is independent of phantasms, the descriptions under which we know those acts must be capable of being captured in a phantasm. And our intuitive cognition of extramental singulars extends only to material singulars, that is, those that are capable of being captured in a phantasm. Scotus consistently denies that we can have intuitive cognition of nonsensible objects (such as angels) or universals in this life.

Scotus argues that the human intellect is capable of achieving certainty in its knowledge of the truth simply by the exercise of its own natural powers, with no special divine help. He therefore opposes both skepticism, which denies the possibility of certain knowledge, and illuminationism, which insists that we need special divine illumination in order to attain certainty. He works out his attack on both doctrines in the course of a reply to Henry of Ghent in *Ordinatio* 1, d. 3, pars 1, q. 4. (For the text and translation, see Wolter 1987: 96–132.) Henry had argued that the natural cognitive powers of human beings are deficient in various ways that mean that certainty can be attained only by divine illumination. Scotus argues that if Henry is right about the limitations of our natural powers, even divine illumination is not enough to save us from pervasive uncertainty. So Henry’s arguments, far from showing that

certainty is possible through divine illumination, actually lead to a pervasive skepticism. Scotus counters that we can show that skepticism is false. We can in fact attain certainty, and we can do so by the unaided exercise of our natural intellectual powers. There are four types of knowledge in which infallible certainty is possible. First, knowledge of first principles is certain because the intellect has only to form such judgments to see that they are true. (And since the validity of proper syllogistic inference can be known in just this way, it follows that anything that is seen to be properly derived from first principles by syllogistic inference is also known with certainty.) Second, we have certainty with respect to quite a lot of causal judgments derived from experience. Third, Scotus says that many of our own acts are as certain as first principles. It is no objection to point out that our acts are contingent, since some contingent propositions must be known immediately (that is, without needing to be derived from some other proposition). For otherwise, either some contingent proposition would follow from a necessary proposition (which is impossible), or there would be an infinite regress in contingent propositions (in which case no contingent proposition would ever be known). Fourth, certain propositions about present sense experience are also known with certainty if they are properly vetted by the intellect in the light of the causal judgments derived from experience.

### Ethics and Moral Psychology

For Scotus the natural law in the strict sense contains only those moral propositions that are *per se notae ex terminis* along with whatever propositions can be derived from them deductively (*Ordinatio* 3, d. 37, q. un.). *Per se notae* means that they are self-evident; *ex terminis* adds that they are self-evident in virtue of being analytically true. Now one important fact about propositions that are self-evident and analytically true is that God himself cannot make them false. They are necessary truths. So the natural law in the strict sense does not depend on God's will. This means that even if (as I believe) Scotus is some sort of

divine-command theorist, he is not whole-hog in his divine command theory. Some moral truths are necessary truths, and even God cannot change those. They would be true no matter what God willed.

Which ones are those? Scotus's basic answer is that they are the commandments of the first tablet of the Decalogue (Ten Commandments). The Decalogue was thought of as involving two tablets, the first covering our obligations to God and the second our obligations toward others. The commandments of the first tablet are part of the natural law in the strict sense because they have to do with God himself. For Scotus says that the following proposition is *per se nota ex terminis*: "If God exists, then he is to be loved as God, and nothing else is to be worshiped as God, and no irreverence is to be done to him." Given the very definition of God, it follows that if there is such a being, he is to be loved and worshiped, and no irreverence should be shown to him. Because these commandments are self-evident and analytic, they are necessary truths. Not even God himself could make them false.

But even the first three commandments, once we start looking at them, are not obviously part of the natural law in the strict sense. In particular, the third commandment, the one about the Sabbath day, is a little tricky. Obviously, the proposition "God is to be worshiped on Saturday" is not self-evident or analytic. In fact, Scotus says it is not even true anymore, since Christians are to worship on Sunday, not Saturday. So, Scotus asks, what about the proposition "God is to be worshiped at some time or other?" Even that is not self-evident or analytic. The best one can do is "God is not to be hated." Now that is self-evident and analytic, since by definition God is the being most worthy of love and there is nothing in him worthy of hate. But obviously that is far weaker than any positive commandment about whether and when we should worship God.

So by the time Scotus completes his analysis, we are left with nothing in the natural law in the strict sense except for negative propositions: God is not to be hated, no other gods are to be worshiped, no irreverence is to be done to him. Everything else in the Decalogue belongs to the natural law in a weaker or looser sense. These are

propositions that are not *per se notae ex terminis* and do not follow from such propositions, but are “highly consonant” with such propositions. Now the important point for Scotus is this: since these propositions are contingent, they are completely up to God’s discretion. Any contingent truth whatsoever depends on God’s will. Moreover, there is nothing that constrains or forces God to will in one way rather than another.

Scotus quite self-consciously puts forward his understanding of freedom as an alternative to Aquinas’s. According to Aquinas, freedom comes in simply because the will is intellectual appetite rather than mere sense appetite. Intellectual appetite is aimed at objects as presented by the intellect and sense appetite at objects as presented by the senses. Sense appetite is not free because the senses provide only particulars as objects of appetite. But intellectual appetite is free because the intellect deals with universals, not particulars. Since universals by definition include many particulars, intellectual appetite will have a variety of objects. Consider goodness as an example. The will is not aimed at this good thing or that good thing, but at goodness in general. Since that universal goodness contains many different particular things, intellectual appetite has many different options.

But Scotus insists that mere intellectual appetite is not enough to guarantee freedom in the sense needed for morality. The basic difference comes down to this. When Aquinas argues that intellectual appetite has different options, he seems to be thinking of this over a span of time. Right now the intellect presents *x* as good, so I will *x*; but later on the intellect presents *y* as good, so then I will *y*. But Scotus thinks of freedom as involving multiple options at the very moment of choice. It is not enough to say that now I will *x*, but later I can will *y*. We have to say that at the very moment at which I will *x*, I also am able to will *y*. (Thus Scotus’s account of freedom depends on the notion of synchronic contingency set forth above in the section on metaphysics.) Aquinas’s arguments do not show that intellectual appetite is free in this stronger sense. So as far as Scotus is concerned, Aquinas has not made room for the right kind of freedom.

This is where Scotus brings in his well-known doctrine of the two affections of the will (see especially *Ordinatio* 2, d. 6, q. 2; 2, d. 39, q. 2; 3, d. 17, q. un.; and 3, d. 26, q. un.). The two affections are fundamental inclinations in the will: the *affectio commodi*, or affection for the advantageous, and the *affectio iustitiae*, or affection for justice. Scotus identifies the *affectio commodi* with intellectual appetite. For Aquinas, intellectual appetite is the same thing as will, whereas for Scotus, intellectual appetite is only part of what the will is, because he does not see how intellectual appetite could be genuinely free. *Affectio iustitiae* is the will as free.

For Aquinas the norms of morality are defined in terms of their relationship to human happiness. We have a natural inclination toward our good, which is happiness, and it is that good that determines the content of morality. So like Aristotle, Aquinas holds a eudaimonistic theory of ethics: the point of the moral life is happiness. That is why Aquinas can understand the will as an intellectual appetite for happiness. All of our choosing is aimed at the human good (or at least, it is aimed at the human good as we conceive it). And choices are good – and, indeed, fully intelligible – only when they are aimed at the ultimate end, which is happiness. So Aquinas just defines the will as the capacity to choose in accordance with a conception of the human good – in other words, as intellectual appetite.

When Scotus rejects the idea that will is merely intellectual appetite, he is saying that there is something fundamentally wrong with eudaimonistic ethics. Morality is not tied to human flourishing at all. For it is Scotus’s fundamental conviction that morality is impossible without libertarian freedom, and since he sees no way for there to be libertarian freedom on Aquinas’s eudaimonistic understanding of ethics, Aquinas’s understanding must be rejected. And just as Aquinas’s conception of the will was tailor-made to suit his eudaimonistic conception of morality, Scotus’s conception of the will is tailor-made to suit his anti-eudaimonistic conception of morality. It is not merely that he thinks there can be no genuine freedom in mere intellectual appetite. It is also that he rejects the idea that moral

norms are intimately bound up with human nature and human happiness. The fact that God creates human beings with a certain kind of nature does not require God to command or forbid the actions that he in fact commanded or forbade. The actions he commands are not necessary for our happiness, and the actions he forbids are not incompatible with our happiness. Now if the will were merely intellectual appetite – that is, if it were aimed solely at happiness – we would not be able to choose in accordance with the moral law, since the moral law itself is not determined by any considerations about human happiness. So in addition to the *affectio commodi*, which is the will as intellectual appetite, Scotus must also posit an *affectio iustitiae*, which is the will as free. In virtue of the *affectio iustitiae*, the will can choose in accordance with the moral law and does not function deterministically as an appetite aimed exclusively at the human good as conceived by the intellect.

## Cross-References

- ▶ [Categories](#)
- ▶ [Divine Power](#)
- ▶ [Form and Matter](#)
- ▶ [Happiness](#)
- ▶ [Intuitive and Abstractive Cognition](#)
- ▶ [Metaphysics](#)
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- ▶ [Skepticism](#)
- ▶ [Universals](#)
- ▶ [Will](#)

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## John Fortescue

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### Abstract

Sir John Fortescue (c. 1397–1479), jurist and political theorist, is significant for a notably English interpretation of Aristotelian political theory in his distinction between royal and political dominion, for his development of the abstract idea of the crown as the corporate personification of the realm, and for his defense of English common law as against the Roman law jurisprudence of the continent.

### Life

Fortescue was active in the service of Henry VI. He wrote treatises in support of the House of Lancaster during its years of conflict with the House of York and was a skilled propagandist as well as the Chief Justice of the King's Bench.

### Thought

Two of Fortescue's works have been important for the development of English jurisprudence and for political philosophy. *De laudibus legum Angliae* (1468–1471), presented the advantages of the

English common law over the Roman law used on the continent, with particular attention to France. Especially, notable in *De laudibus* is Fortescue's assertion of the presumption of innocence, "I should, indeed, prefer twenty guilty men to escape death through mercy, than one innocent to be condemned unjustly" (*De laudibus* 27, Lockwood 1997: 41).

*De dominio regale et politico* (1471) articulates the distinction between royal dominion, the sovereignty of a king, and political dominion, in which king and people function together in legislation and governance in a "mystical body" of the realm. Fortescue's conception of these two distinct species of dominion is based in scholastic Aristotelian political thought, particularly as articulated in the *De regimine principum* begun by Thomas Aquinas and completed by his student Ptolemy of Lucca. The Aristotelian concepts of justice and polity were "Englished" when Fortescue introduced the tradition of English common law and the concept of the crown as the corporate entity of the British realm. The idea of the crown as the corporate person expressing the sovereignty of the collective body of the realm, protected and nurtured by the living bodily king and people, had begun to develop in the thought of Henry of Bracton in the thirteenth century. It would continue to develop into the sixteenth century, and Fortescue's use of it in describing the *dominium politicale* that made the English system distinct from continental kingship contributed significantly to the idea.

In Fortescue's distinction between royal and political dominion, royal dominion is based on conquest, with the conqueror subjecting the vanquished to justice as he defines it, eliminating their possible participation in, and contribution to, its development and nourishment. The inevitable result of this is tyranny. According to Fortescue, the best example of purely royal dominion and the strict limits it puts on justice for the people is the French system of rule. While it may have begun as political dominion, the constant threats posed by war with England and the inability of French kings to marshal sufficient support from within to meet these threats caused it to degenerate into its present form, in which the king rules on his

own behalf. The French people live in poverty, despite inhabiting a fertile land, and they have scant hope for justice under the Roman system of law, which depends upon the wisdom and jurisprudence of its royal executive.

The origins of political dominion, on the other hand, are found in a joint agreement of people to the rule of a king that is both royal and political. In this combined model, the king exercises royal rule in the execution of his responsibilities to protect the realm from external threat and internal divisions, but he lacks the power to alter the established system of justice or to change the laws of the realm. This power rests in political dominion, which is held jointly by the king and the people. In describing political dominion, Fortescue harkens back to the rule of the Judges in Israel, to an idealized imperial Roman structure, and to the legend of Brutus as the founder of England popularized in Geoffrey of Monmouth's *History of the Kings of Britain*.

In both, royal and political dominion, the system of government is determined by historical origin. In the case of political dominion, the origin resembles the modern model of social contract, but with two important distinctions. Although the people enter into a design by their own agreement, in which a king rules by laws peculiar to their identity, the design is not that of a trust, as in Lockean political theory, nor are the people wholly incapable of self-direction, as in Hobbes.

The organic model of kingship, with the king as head and the people as the members of the body, was a commonplace in medieval political thought. Fortescue's innovation was to describe political dominion in its terms. He began by describing the heart of the body as the intention of the people. His term, *intencio populi*, has been mistranslated as "will of the people," which too easily suggests an autonomy that the people have in fact surrendered in entering the "mystical body" of government. The king, not the people, provides the body its will. The intention precedes the deliberation, which precedes the willing in Fortescue's model. The desires and ideas of the people serve as the intention, the king's reasoned consideration of these – dependent upon royal council – serves as deliberation, and the royal

action articulates the will of the body politic. Were the former two elements to be absent, the result would be simple royal dominion. The heart distributes the blood, which Fortescue describes as the political provision for the interests of the people, which nourishes all the members of the body and strengthens the sinews, the laws that bind the body together. The body that results is not merely the sum of its parts. Fortescue describes a "mystical body" of the realm, a corporate being, personified in the crown that survives damage done to its members. He gives the analogy of a college, in which laity and clergy are joined together under the guidance of a governing element into a corporate person, a *collegium*. Just as the college endures despite matriculation and graduation and changes in administration remaining a separate entity apart from its members, so, too does the crown.

An important result of Fortescue's version of the mystical body of the realm is that the king is incapable of doing evil. In Augustinian theology, evil is an absence, or privation of good, which means that choosing evil is choosing a nonbeing, a detraction from, rather than use of, the will's power. Willing evil, then, becomes an impotence, a privation of the will's power. This is most particularly the case for angelic wills, unstained by original sin; the angelic rebellion was effectively a surrender of angelic power. Likewise, Fortescue describes tyranny as a privation, a *privatio potestatis* in his analogy of the king as embodying the realm's will, suggesting that the mystical body is more angelic than human. Earlier medieval political theorists might use this as an opportunity to discuss the place of the church in the political structure, but Fortescue speaks little of ecclesiastical matters and never of the relation the quasi-angelic crown has to the corporate nature of the church.

The one role ecclesiastics have to play is in the make-up of the king's council. The contribution of a select group of wise counselors plays an important role in Fortescue's argument that political dominion must be consent-based, affording the people and the king the justice they deserve. Deliberation must precede the exercise of the royal will, and Fortescue describes a private



group of chosen men as ideal for this task. The council he recommends is not made up of the wealthiest in the kingdom but is a body of laity and clergy, twelve of each, with a governing body of six supervised by two of their number. A mistake frequently made in royal councils has been to rely upon the wealthiest members of the nobility, which has led inevitably to oligarchic decision making and, frequently, to the diminution of the royal office. Fortescue's council obviates the need for the king to have an all-encompassing grasp of the law, but the king should be as knowledgeable about the laws of the realm as is necessary for the proper execution of the justice of the crown, just as he ought to be practiced in warfare sufficiently to protect the realm from external threat. These two responsibilities define kingship, and absence of means to either will cripple the realm. Accordingly, Fortescue argued strongly that the king should be, by far, the wealthiest individual in the realm.

## Cross-References

- ▶ [Ptolemy of Lucca](#)
- ▶ [Thomas Aquinas, Political Thought](#)

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## John Gerson

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### Abstract

John Gerson, theologian, chancellor of the University of Paris, and a leading light at the Council of Constance (1414–1418), came from a family that had to make sacrifices to send him to Paris. Here he showed brilliance in literary achievements and theological wisdom, but he insisted that learning must be made useful for ordinary people. He shared with his sisters his insights and became one of the greatest vernacular preachers of Paris. After losing faith in the

meaning of academic life, Gerson went into voluntary exile but after a year returned to his teaching and administrative duties. The climax of his career was the Council of Constance, where his voice was one of the central ones in an attempt to reform the Christian Church and limit the power of the papacy. If Gerson had succeeded, the reformations of the sixteenth century might never have taken place.

John (Jean le Charlier) Gerson (1363–1429) was one of the central theologians and church reformers of the later Middle Ages. He was born in the hamlet in the Ardennes from which he took his surname and was the first child of a family in modest circumstances. The father was a wheelwright and probably instructed his son in the trade before the parents sent him off at the age of 14 to the University of Paris. Gerson may have been taught Latin by the parish priest or by the Benedictines in a nearby monastery. Whoever his first teachers were, he came to show a remarkable ability to remember language, especially that of the Bible, and to incorporate it into his writings. In Gerson, the affective monastic theology of the twelfth century revived and became integrated with scholastic theology, in a synthesis whose importance only recently has been appreciated. In philosophical terms his approach can be considered to be eclectic, in combining realism and nominalism in untraditional ways.

At Paris, Gerson quickly impressed his teachers, especially Peter of Ailly (c. 1351–1420), who encouraged him to study theology. Peter of Ailly's political connections brought him to reform the university, in a protest against the chancellor, Jean Blanchard, who was doing his best to enrich himself on exorbitant fees for degrees. In 1389, Peter of Ailly replaced Blanchard as chancellor, and at about the same time the young Gerson was invited to begin giving sermons at the royal court. During these years he was completing his doctorate in theology, and it is in this period he may have written a begging letter to a benefactor, perhaps Peter of Ailly himself, in which Gerson described his penury and the shame he would create for his parents if he had to give up

his university career and return to his home village.

Gerson was apparently given the support he needed, for he completed his degree, and in 1395 he succeeded Peter of Ailly as chancellor of the university, a post he kept until his death in 1429. He loved the university so much that he became discouraged by his inability as its chancellor to influence the favoritism and corruption that were rife in it. In the late 1390s, he decided to give up his post and concentrate on the deanship of the church of Saint Donatien at Bruges. Unable to reform the church and university, he would concentrate on one church and its running. As he wrote to his colleagues in explaining his desire to resign the chancellorship: "I am forced because of the consideration of others or because of the custom of the age to promote those who lack knowledge and are morally corrupt" (Gerson 1998: 161).

Gerson soon found out that church institutions were just as immune to reform as the church and university themselves. The canons of Bruges resented his intervention and made his life miserable. In September 1400 he returned to Paris, after having sent more letters to his colleagues in which he explained his reform program. Thus began 15 fruitful years in which Gerson taught at the university, gave sermons in Latin to students and colleagues, preached in French in Paris churches where he eventually got his own benefice at one of them, and wrote on various theological subjects. Already at Bruges Gerson decided to convey some of his thoughts not in the usual scholastic Latin but in a French accessible "for ordinary people who have no Latin" (Gerson 1998: 75).

In the opening lines of *The Mountain of Contemplation*, Gerson made it clear that he was opening theological discussion to women, for he had seen how his sisters understood the ideas that until Gerson's time were only available in Latin: "The lack of learning of my sisters cannot keep me from going ahead, for I intend to speak only about what they can fully grasp according to the understanding I have seen in them" (Gerson 1998: 75).

In *The Mountain* Gerson showed how the way of contemplation involved both knowledge and affectivity. Thanks to predecessors such as Bernard of Clairvaux, Gerson argued that individual

human experience was essential on the path to wisdom. Gerson's faith in the insight and understanding of women shows a remarkable receptivity to the visionary women of his period, even though later in life, in three treatises on the discernment of spirits, he showed doubt and hesitation about trusting such insights. But his *Mountain of Contemplation* remains as a monument to a transference of theological discourse from Latin to French, from university men to village women.

Gerson during these years was teaching theology to his students, and he offered them courses in mystical theology, first of a speculative nature and then in its practical forms. As in the *Mountain of Contemplation* Gerson succeeded in summarizing an earlier tradition and clarifying it. He praised the life of contemplation but warned against abandoning "the care of the people" and seeking "to enjoy the sweetness of contemplative leisure" (Gerson 1998: 295). Gerson never forgot that the task of the clergy was to provide spiritual nourishment for the people, and he considered it wrong for priests caught up in their own interior lives to ignore the parishioners in their care.

Gerson considered his primary responsibility as priest and teacher to open up the way to salvation. At times this task meant warning against dangers, as he did in writing a polemic against *The Romance of the Rose*, the thirteenth-century poem which indirectly urged the necessity of sexual experience. Gerson considered the work pornographic and tried to undermine its attractiveness by composing an allegory with a heavenly court where the poet and author were tried and convicted for crimes against humanity. In involving himself with such a matter, Gerson indicated that the theologian was obliged not only to deal with speculative matters but also to be concerned with practical concerns affecting the moral life of individuals and society.

The primary moral and political issue of the age was the papal schism. From 1378, a few years after Gerson arrived at Paris, the Christian Church in western Europe was divided between two popes, one in Rome and one in Avignon. The French king supported the Avignon pope and tried to forbid any discussion of the matter by

Paris theologians. Gerson did his best to stay clear of the controversy, but after 1400 his thinking matured, and he concluded that the only possible solution to the stalemate was to hold a council, to which each of the papal candidates would be invited. This was finally arranged at Pisa in 1409, but the new pope elected here did not receive universal acceptance. Another council was planned for Constance, and here Gerson journeyed in 1415, never to return to Paris.

The development of Gerson's conciliar thinking in the years after 1400 is a fascinating story of how a medieval intellectual changed with the times and circumstances. Gerson had feared at first that the Holy Spirit would not necessarily guide the decisions of a council in deposing one pope and electing another. But prayer, politics, discussion, and hard thinking led Gerson to the conclusion that the Holy Spirit would be with such a council. Gerson became the champion of a church to be reformed "in head and members" and saw the Council of Constance as a turning point away from a papally controlled church toward a more parliamentary government.

Gerson's efforts were in vain, for the new pope elected on November 11, 1417, Martin V, belonged to a traditional Roman family that had no sympathy for parliamentarism. Also Gerson on leaving Constance could not return to Paris, for the Burgundians in 1418 occupied Paris and murdered some of his colleagues. Gerson was caught in the longstanding conflict between England and France known as the Hundred Years War. From 1419 until his death in 1429 Gerson, after traveling to Vienna, settled down in Lyon, a town safe from the Burgundians, where he continued writing brief theological treatises and letters, especially to the Carthusians. As ever, Gerson considered his task to be the formulation of a pastoral theology with encouragement and enlightenment for his readers, but he no longer wrote in the vernacular and apparently had lost contact with his sisters, who had been so important an inspiration to him.

On the surface Gerson's life was a failure: the reformation of the Church for which he worked came to nothing, and later papal triumphalists in the nineteenth century either ignored him or

considered him to be almost a Gallican heretic. But his writings are being rediscovered today as part of a late-medieval attempt to combine affectivity with intellectuality. In this sense Gerson continued the work of Bernard in his pre-scholastic theology in search of contemplative insight. Gerson might be called a philosophical eclectic who used his own life experience in order to find meaning and hope in the love of learning and desire for God.

## Cross-References

- ▶ [Bernard of Clairvaux](#)
- ▶ [Conciliarism](#)
- ▶ [Parisian Condemnation of 1277](#)
- ▶ [Peter of Ailly](#)

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## John Italos

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### Abstract

John Italos was one of the most original Byzantine philosophers. A student of Psellos, he taught at the Imperial School of Constantinople and wrote commentaries on Aristotelian logic and treatises on particular topics of logic and metaphysics. He occupies a special place in the history of Byzantine thought for having been put on trial and condemned by the Orthodox Church, on the charge of having advocated the systematic use of philosophical analysis and logical reasoning in clarifying central theological issues.

## Biography

John Italos was born in Southern Italy in c. 1025. In 1049, he came to Constantinople with his father, a Norman mercenary, who had been hired to assist the emperor Constantine IX Monomachos (1042–1055) in his campaign against the semi-nomadic Pechenegs. There is no reliable information about his education in Italy, but upon his arrival in Constantinople, he became a pupil of Michael Psellos. In 1055, he succeeded Psellos in the Imperial School of Constantinople as

“Consul of the Philosophers” and taught all branches of philosophy. The emperor Michael VII (1071–1078) and his brother Andronikos Doukas were among his students as well as Eustratios of Nicaea and possibly Theodore of Smyrna. In 1076/1077, Italos was accused of teachings contrary to the Christian dogma, but the emperor Michael VII Doukas (1071–1078) intervened, and he was acquitted. However, in 1082, he was again put on trial and this time he was condemned. The precise date of his death is unknown. It is telling that to this day, during the mass of the first Sunday in Lent, the so-called *Synodikon* of the Greek Orthodox Church is read, in which Italos is anathematized in 11 articles.

Anna Komnene refers to Italos in the *Alexiad* (5.8), the history she wrote of the events during the reign of her father Alexios I (1081–1118). Although in general her report is not at all complimentary about Italos’ physical appearance, character, and rhetorical abilities, she nevertheless admits that his courses attracted crowds of students and that he was better than anyone else in teaching and interpreting Aristotle’s logic. Michael Psellos (*Oratoria minora* 18 and 19), too, acknowledges that Italos’ style was not at all graceful but praises him without reservation for his passionate quest for truth, the clarity of his thinking, and the careful construction of his logical arguments. A negative portrait of Italos is also to be found in the twelfth-century *Timarion* (1075–1130, ed. R. Romano). It is interesting, however, that in this text Psellos is portrayed as happy to be counted among the rhetoricians, whereas Italos is seen as someone who viewed himself as a philosopher; he tries to sit next to Pythagoras, though the latter accuses him of not getting rid of his Christian garment, and when the rhetoricians start throwing stones at him accusing him of not writing elegant speeches, Italos appeals to Aristotle and the syllogisms for assistance.

## Thought

What mainly survives from his writings is the commentary on the second, third, and fourth

book of Aristotle’s *Topics*, two small treatises on dialectic and on the Aristotelian syllogisms together with a very brief synopsis of rhetoric, and finally, the *Quaestiones quodlibetales*, a collection of 93 answers to philosophical questions posed to him by his students.

Regardless of the positions Italos advocated in these texts, positions some of which after all were not at all different from those of other philosophers, notably from Psellos’, what seems to have been really unacceptable for the religious and the political establishment at the time was his rationalist approach toward doctrines, which the Orthodox Church considered as beyond comprehension, as something, which Christians should simply accept on faith, and as something, which only the Church had the authority to judge. Furthermore, Italos questioned in his writings the supremacy of theology and defended the ancient conception of philosophy, well known from both the Platonic and the Aristotelian traditions, according to which theology is part of philosophy, since philosophy culminates in the attempt to understand the first principle of everything. It probably was this supposedly arrogant attempt on his part to develop a natural or philosophical theology that the Orthodox Church also refused to accept and that led to Italos’ trial and condemnation.

More specifically, the 11 anathemas that were added to the *Synodikon* of Orthodoxy are concerned with:

1. The application of logical arguments to theological issues such as the incarnation of Christ or the relation of Christ’s two natures
2. The introduction of natural philosophy into the Church
3. The acceptance of the doctrine of the transmigration of the soul and the denial of Christian eschatology
4. The acceptance of the view that matter and forms have no temporal beginning or end
5. The preference for Greek philosophers to Christian saints
6. Suspiciousness against divine miracles
7. The study of Greek philosophy not only for the sake of education but as a repository of

truths to which all other beliefs should ultimately be reduced

8. The denial of God's voluntary creation of the world *ex nihilo* and the acceptance of Platonic Forms
9. The denial that our bodies will be the same at resurrection as now
10. The acceptance of the preexistence of the soul and the denial of its creation *ex nihilo*, of eternal punishment, and of the eternal kingdom of God
11. Any "Hellenic and heterodox" doctrines taught by Italos

Italos' views on universals, which he discusses in many of his *Quaestiones quodlibetales*, are also worth mentioning. Just like many other Byzantine philosophers, Italos defended the Neoplatonic theory that universals exist in three modes; namely, they exist as universals "before the many (particulars)" in God's mind, as universals "in the particulars" within perceptible individuals, and finally as universals "after the particulars" in the form of concepts acquired by our mind by abstraction of the common characteristics of perceptible individuals. Benakis has labeled this position conceptual or moderate realism and stressed that it has nothing in common with the nominalist position on universals that we find in western medieval philosophy; for even the third mode of the universals' existence, namely, the universals after the particulars, should not be confused, on his view, with what western medieval philosophers thought about *universalia post res*, since the a posteriori status of such universals does not alter the fact that they do exist.

Indeed, Italos argued that universals are incorporeal in a weak sense, because they are not strictly speaking incorporeal but depend on a body for subsisting; in other words, universals are incorporeal *per accidens* and not *per se*, because they are incorporeal insofar as they are in the human soul, while at the same time, they are corporeal by participation (*kata methexin*) insofar as they subsist in the particulars. Being incorporeal in this weak sense, universals are said to be beings also in a special sense: Italos

often made use of another distinction that is a commonplace in Platonic texts from Plotinus to Simplicius but seems to have its origins even earlier, namely, the distinction between something subsisting and something depending on mere thought. According to Italos, things that do not subsist (*anupostata*) but depend on mere thought are not beings. As for things that subsist, he distinguishes between two different kinds of beings, those that subsist *per se*, which he calls subsistences (*hupostaseis*), and those that subsist in something else (*enupostata*); subsistences are particulars and for the most part bodies, whereas beings that subsist in something else are predicates shared by many things and concepts (*noēmata/dianoēmata*). Italos distinguishes these two kinds of beings from the standard examples of things that do not subsist, that is, goat-stags and centaurs, as well as from his own examples of many-eyed men and four-headed horses; for all these are, on his view, nothing but fabrications of the human mind and products of our imagination (*phantasmata*). Hence, Italos conceives of universals not as beings that subsist *per se* but as beings that subsist in something else and thus in no way can be treated, on his view, as mere products of the human imagination.

## Cross-References

- ▶ [Eustratios of Nicaea](#)
- ▶ [Logic, Byzantine](#)
- ▶ [Michael Psellos](#)
- ▶ [Universals](#)

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## John Mair

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### Abstract

John Mair (c. 1470–1550) was a very influential British philosopher and theologian in the beginning of the sixteenth century. He had some very influential students and is claimed to have had a lasting influence on British thought up until the time of John Reid.

John Mair (Maior) is little known, but he was in fact one of the most influential thinkers in the beginning of the sixteenth century. He was originally from Scotland, but studied in Cambridge and Paris. He graduated in Arts in 1495 in Paris and became master at the Montaigu College in 1499. He subsequently continued his career in Paris and took his doctorate in theology in 1501.

Under Mair, Montaigu College became a leading philosophical school in Europe and the thinking of William Ockham and John Buridan flourished among his students. One of the most exciting things about Paris at this time was the intermingling of Scholasticism and Humanism. Both Erasmus and Juan Luis Vives were influenced by the circle of thinkers around Mair, and among his students we find, for example, John Calvin, Ignatius Loyola, Reginald Pole, Robert Wauchope, François Rabelais, and George Buchanan.

In 1518, Mair left Paris and returned to Scotland, where he became the principal of Glasgow University. In 1522, he moved to St. Andrews, where he spent most of his later life, except for a period in Paris again, from 1526 until 1531. He also wrote extensively throughout his career in all areas of philosophy, but foremost in logic. Strangely enough, his most known work is probably the *Historia Majoris Britanniae* (History of Greater Britain) from 1521.

Mair can be said to have continued a long tradition of philosophy initiated by William Ockham and John Buridan in the early fourteenth century. The focus of this tradition is primarily on logic and linguistic analysis. Mair wrote on all areas of philosophy, but his philosophy of mind, metaphysics, political philosophy, and ethics have been very little studied.

## Cross-References

- ▶ [John Buridan](#)
- ▶ [Peter of Ailly](#)
- ▶ [William of Ockham](#)

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## John Maxentius and the Scythian Monks

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### Abstract

From their monastic community at the north-eastern borderlands of the Late Roman Empire, the abbot John Maxentius and the Scythian monks coalesced Cyril's teachings on divine suffering (i.e., theopaschism) with Augustine's teachings on divine grace, thereby, transgressing cultural, linguistic, and theological boundaries concomitant with reordering the conciliar (a.k.a. orthodox, catholic and imperial) tradition. During the early winter of 519, the Scythian monks traveled southwards to Constantinople to submit their 12 anathemas and profession of faith before the imperial court of Emperor Justin. After the deacon Victor and papal legate Dioscorus rejected these overtures on account of their inclusion of divine suffering, the Scythian monks departed to Rome to seek support from Pope Hormisdas. Rather than gaining papal approval, the relationship between Hormisdas and the Scythian monks deteriorated during their 14 months in Rome. Simultaneous with the collapse of relations with the papacy, the Scythian monks forged new allies across the constellation of political and ecclesiastical networks, which produced channels for transmitting and rereading the conciliar tradition (i.e., church fathers and ecumenical creeds). The

interventions of the Scythian monks, in tandem with allies, culminated with the vindication of Cyril's theopaschite writings at the Second Council of Constantinople (553) and also shaped canonical decisions regarding Augustine's doctrine of divine grace at the Second Council of Orange (529). Under favorable circumstances including support from two notable compatriots – the vaunted military commander Vitalian and erudite linguist Dionysius Exiguus – the Scythian monks entered the ecclesiastical centers then persisted in collaborations and contestations, which led to the reconfiguring of the conciliar tradition.

### Christianity and Monasticism within Scythia Minor

The province of Scythia Minor was nestled along the Black Sea at the northeastern frontier of the Late Roman Empire. The Latinization of Scythia Minor occurred during Roman conquests in the first century, then intensified after the Council of Ephesus (431), so that by the fifth century, the Scythians wrote and read in Latin but followed the Greek liturgy (Holubeanu 2014). In addition to the Greeks who surrounded the Scythian province, the Dacian, Illyrian, Syrian, Gothic, and Hunnic cultures streamed into this eastern territory. Situated as this strategic hub of commercial and cultural exchange, the tradition of the Scythian monks was imprinted with a diversity and an inclusivity akin to proto-ecumenism (Coman 1970). From bishops to missionaries and monks, the Scythian Christians embraced the Latin and Greek church fathers to support the imperial Nicene faith. Prior to the events within Constantinople, the Scythian Church defended the Nicene faith at the frontier-borderlands. From the fourth to the end of the sixth century (with the demise of Nicene Christianity following the northern invasions), the Scythian Church enjoyed amicable relations with the patriarchates of Constantinople, Rome, and then more locally, with the Gothic and Cappadocian churches. The Scythian monks – without the support of the Scythian bishops – reinterpreted the available cultural and linguistic

options, therein, including Latin translations of Cyril's Greek writings provided by their compatriot, Dionysius Exiguus, thereby advancing their integrative rereading of the conciliar tradition (Pereira 2015).

### Theopaschite Controversy of 519

Under the patronage of the vaunted Scythian commander Vitalian, the Scythian monks secured safe passage to Constantinople, which presented a rare opportunity to address the imperial court of Justin (r. 518–527). After providing complaints against Paternus, their local bishop of Tomi, they submitted two of their writings: *Chapters of Maxentius* (*Capitula edita contra Nestorianos et Pelagianos ad satisfactionem fratrum*) and *Little Book of Faith* (*Libellus fidei oblatus legatis apostolicae sedis Constantinopolim*). Maxentius wrote these communiqués in collaboration with the Scythian monks who affirmed the catholic teachings with one deviation when inserting their qualified theopaschism. In the *Chapters of Maxentius*, the fourth chapter declared, “If anyone does not consent to confess that Christ who suffered for us in the flesh is ‘one of the Trinity (*unum de trinitate*)’ even with his own flesh, although according to that flesh itself he is not of the substance of the Trinity but is the same as us, let him be anathema.” Chapter six then asserts, “If anyone says that Christ has suffered in the flesh (*Christum passum carne*) but does not consent to say that God has truly suffered in the flesh (*deum vero passum carne*), which is precisely what it means to say Christ suffered in the flesh, let him be anathema.” The deacon Victor and papal legate Dioscorus believed the Chalcedonian Definition – the ecumenical creed produced at the Council of Chalcedon (451) – was entirely sufficient for the church catholic, therefore, they dismissed these upstart monks (Fairbairn and McGregor 2013). The Scythian monks countered by insisting it was necessary to teach the “Word of God suffered in the flesh” in order to protect the Chalcedonian Definition from misinterpretations that separated the human and divine natures of Christ. To interpret the conciliar tradition was accepted as a necessary practice by late antique

theologians with the caveat that the explanations were deemed faithful to the church fathers and ecumenical creeds.

Having exhausted any possibility for agreement in Constantinople, the Scythian monks travelled to Rome seeking the support of Pope Hormisdas (450–523). Justinian (482–565) – the nephew and successor of Emperor Justin – sent a correspondence to Hormisdas that reached Rome prior to the Scythian monks. In this letter (*Exemplum Epistolae Iustiniani*) on 29 June 519, Justinian warned Hormisdas that the Scythian monks threatened the peace by introducing novelty against the “four venerable synods” and Leo’s letter (*Tomus ad Flavianum*). However, in a second letter to Hormisdas (*Exemplum Epistolae Iustiniani. Per Fratrem Proemptoris*), Justinian instructed him to embrace the Scythian monks. From here onwards, Justinian favored the Scythian monks and rehabilitated Cyril’s theopaschite teachings at the Second Council of Constantinople (553). Hormisdas stalled expressing wishes to wait on the papal legates before undergoing deliberations with the Scythian monks. The papal legates remained outside of Rome until the departure of the Scythian monks. After 14 months of waiting for the papal legates, the Scythian monks distributed writings throughout Rome, then departed to Sardinia, for the North African bishops.

Under the leadership of the Augustinian, Fulgentius of Ruspe (ca. 462–533), the North African bishops enjoyed a mutually formative relationship with the Scythian monks (Gumerlock 2009). Augustine’s predestinarianism became prominent within the writings of the Scythian monks after Hormisdas responded to Possessor’s letter (*Exemplum relationis Possessoris episcopi Afri. Per Iustinum diaconum eius*). Having cited Faustus of Riez (d. 495) against the Scythian monks, Possessor requested Hormisdas’ opinion on the teachings of the southern Gallic bishop (Smith 1990). In *Letter to Possessor (Epistula Papae Hormisdas ad Possessorem)*, Hormisdas advised one may read Faustus and that Augustine’s writings contained the faith of the church catholic. Following his instructions on Faustus, Hormisdas impugned the Scythian monks, consequently, Maxentius wrote his

*Response against the Epistle to Possessor (Responsio adversus Epistolam quam ad Possessorem)* to free the Scythian monks from all guilt.

Due to the emphasis on the crucified Word of God (who suffered) throughout their writings, the above series of events, from Constantinople to Rome and then Sardinia, is conventionally known as the Theopaschite Controversy of 519. Undoubtedly, the actions and writings of the Scythian monks extended beyond divine suffering, indeed, this story is foremost about convergences and divergences between the Scythian monks and imperial centers, which engendered an alternative conciliar tradition.

### Rereading Chalcedon and Cyril on Divine Suffering

The legacy of Cyril was contested from the Council of Ephesus (431) through Chalcedon (451) to the Theopaschite Controversy (519). At Ephesus (431), Cyril defended the *Twelve Chapters* by asserting the Word of God liberated us from “death and corruption by making his own body alive, as God (*Explanation of the Twelve Chapters*).” Following Ephesus, in August of 431, Emperor Theodosius II demanded a profession from the Syrian bishops John of Antioch (d. 441) and Theodoret of Cyrhus (d. 457). Cyril included this profession – known as the *Formula of Reunion of 433* – in a correspondence to John, the patriarch of Constantinople, thereby signaling tacit approval. This ambiguous profession (Price 2009), produced by allies of Nestorius omitted Christ crucified, nonetheless, it was attached to Cyril prior to Chalcedon. Cyril also narrowed the scope of his *Twelve Chapters* to his contest against Nestorius, thus demonstrating his willingness to be flexible for the sake of ecclesiastical rapprochement. Towards the twilight of his lifetime, Cyril returned to theopaschism in a second letter to John of Constantinople therein declaring the “divine Word is impassible, even if in his all-wise economy of the mystery is seen to attribute to himself the sufferings that befall his flesh,” then later, asserted Christ “bears the

suffering of his own flesh in an economic appropriation to himself (*Letter 39*).” Within his mature treatise *On the Unity of Christ (Quod Unus Sit Christus)*, Cyril returned to theopaschism, declaring the Word of God appropriated all belonging to his flesh while remaining impassible in the Godhead.

On account of his willingness to compromise and then return to his convictions, two iterations of Cyril emerged during oppositional synods convened at Constantinople (448) and Ephesus (449). At the Home Synod of Constantinople (448), the council fathers under Flavian, the patriarch of Constantinople, affirmed Cyril’s synodical letters and Leo’s *Tome*, then they rebuked Eutyches. Countering the Home Synod, Dioscorus of Alexandria convoked another synod at Ephesus (449) to rehabilitate Eutyches and Cyril’s theopaschite teachings, then condemn Flavian and dismiss the *Formula of Reunion*. On the eve of Chalcedon (451), the legacies of Eutyches, Cyril and Leo emerged as theological and cultural fault lines dividing the church catholic (Gwynn 2009).

In the first session at Chalcedon, the council fathers rebuked Dioscorus, who convoked the synod at Ephesus (449). In the second session of Chalcedon, the council fathers received Leo’s *Tome*, then Atticus, the bishop of Nicopolis, called for the inclusion of Cyril’s theopaschite teachings by asserting, “We should also be provided with the letter of the blessed Cyril written to Nestorius in which he urged him to assent to the *Twelve Chapters*, so that at the time of the examination we may be found well prepared.” Atticus’ provocation was ignored and unmentioned in subsequent sessions as the council fathers privileged Cyril’s synodical letters over the theopaschite writings. Under mandate from Emperor Marcian, the council fathers produced, recited and acclaimed their creed – the Chalcedonian Definition – at the conclusion of the fifth session.

In the fifth session, Aetius recited aloud the Nicene Creed (325) and Constantinopolitan Creed (381), Cyril’s synodical letters and Leo’s *Tome*, which were acclaimed by the council fathers. Having recounted these canonical teachings, Aetius then read aloud the Chalcedonian Definition, which reiterated the christological

teachings of the ecumenical creeds except for Christ crucified, who suffered “for our salvation.” The Nicene Creed declared that – for our salvation – Christ “suffered” whereas the Constantinopolitan Creed omits suffered and inserted Christ “crucified.” The council fathers of Chalcedon deleted Christ crucified, suffered “for our salvation,” thereby reflecting conciliar discourse that increasingly silenced the crucified Word of God who suffered. “For our salvation,” the council fathers of Chalcedon declared the human and the divine natures are recognized “unconfusedly, unchangeably, undividedly and unconfusedly” within the one and same Christ (Pereira 2016). Three of these famed adverbs were first employed within Cyril’s *First Letter to Succensus*, which declared the Word of God is united to the holy flesh “without confusion, without change, and without alteration” in Christ (*Letter 45*). The council fathers of Chalcedon participated in the conciliar revision of Cyril by lifting up his conciliar teachings and ignoring divine suffering.

Prior to arriving in Constantinople, the Scythian monks received Latin translations of Cyril’s Greek writings, including his *Twelve Anathemas*, from the Scythian linguist, Dionysius Exiguus (470–544). After receiving select translations, the Scythian monks reread Cyril’s teachings in a collaborative and inclusive manner that made interpretive claims upon the conciliar tradition. In addition to Cyril’s writings, Dionysius translated Proclus’ *Tome to the Armenians*, which was then referenced in the *Little Book of Faith*, wherein Maxentius cited the following church fathers to demonstrate that divine suffering was intrinsic to the conciliar tradition: Athanasius of Alexandria, Cyril of Alexandria, Gregory of Nazianzus, Flavian of Constantinople, and Augustine of Hippo and then concluded with a lengthy excerpt by Proclus of Constantinople, which included the classic theopaschite profession.

We do not say that he suffered in this same essence (*essentia*), in which he exists and is united to the Father and to the Spirit, but in his flesh (*carne*), by which he was made one of us and for us. In fact, not another one was made flesh, but one of the Trinity: and was crucified in flesh

(*crucifixus est carne*) which he was made of, and he did not suffer in his divinity (*non est passus divinitate*), by which he is united to the Father and to the Spirit, that we may say that these same (Father and Spirit) are crucified with him. If we would say that he was crucified in his divinity, in reality we would introduce suffering in the Trinity; whereas if we say that the Word accepted sufferings in his flesh, we confess there is one of the Trinity who suffered, and that the nature of the Trinity remained passionless (*impassibilis*).

Having cited the Latin and Greek church fathers, Maxentius explained that he turned to Proclus because he professed divine suffering with greater clarity than Augustine and the church fathers (although all professed the crucified Word of God).

In the later work *Response against the Headless Ones* (*Responsio Contra Acephalos*), Maxentius rebuked the Miaphysite *Acephaloi* (i.e., ones without a head), who declared there is one nature in Christ after the union because, “there is no nature without person.” Reflecting on the axiom “God and man, Word and flesh,” Maxentius contended the authentic uniting of the Word of God and flesh means the two natures remained after the Incarnation. If the divine nature subsumed the human nature of the Word of God, then divine suffering “in the flesh” is impossible. Maxentius argued the “divinity of the Word is not uncompounded but complex and capable of suffering” in the flesh. Maxentius also provided a concise profession: “It remains that the union, which causes the coming together (two natures), avoids singleness and this undoubtedly means the assumption of the human nature by the Son of God, and so it is evident that after the union there are in the Son of God two natures – that is, divinity and humanity – from which and in which it subsists the one and single person of Christ.”

In the *Little Book of Faith* and in later writings, Maxentius and the Scythian monks subsumed the Latin inflected Chalcedonian Definition with Greek colored teachings on the crucified Word of God, who suffered in the flesh (for our salvation), thus therein, providing an integrative tradition that transgressed the cultural, linguistic, and theological boundaries.

## Augustine of Hippo and Divine Grace

Contemporary historians have puzzled over the Augustinianism in the writings of the Scythian monks because it was difficult to square it with residing in eastern provinces, where Augustine’s teachings rarely circulated. One explanation that enjoyed influence was that their Augustinianism was due to random events that connected the Scythian monks to the exiled North African bishops (Loofs 1887). The Scythian monks sought to appease, so goes this argument, the North African bishops by espousing Augustine. Along similar lines questioning the depth of their commitment, there is a veiled correction of Augustine in the Scythian monks’ *Letter to the Bishops* (McGuckin 1984). Alternatively, Augustine’s teachings on divine grace were located in the earliest writings of the Scythian monks, thus suggesting Augustinianism was native to Scythia Minor (Maxwell 2003). The Scythian monks may have even influenced Fulgentius and his fellow North African bishops (Gumerlock 2009). The Augustinianism of the Scythian monks was questioned by those historians who seemingly ignored the effects of Latinization in the eastern province. Reflective of their Latin education, the Scythian monks preserved a compendium of Augustine’s writings in their monastic library. Predestination was likely preached in Scythia Minor by the fifth century (Holubeanu 2014); however, the Scythian monks focused on divine suffering as it was the more pressing issue related to the Chalcedonian Definition (Pereira 2015).

In the *Chapters of Maxentius*, the Scythian monks reconfirmed Augustine’s teachings on divine grace and human nature, including original sin. Following the defense of divine suffering in the earlier sections of the *Chapters*, Maxentius condemned anyone who believed sin was natural and derived from the Creator, then embraced four popes – Innocent, Boniface, Zosimus, Celestine, Leo – Atticus, archbishop of Constantinople, Augustine, and the African bishops. Reflecting the fifth century conciliar discourse that avoided Augustine’s predestinarianism (most notably the popes muted this



doctrine), Maxentius bypassed this difficult teaching throughout the *Chapters*.

In his second writing, the *Little Book of Faith*, Maxentius expanded upon divine grace, echoing Augustine who taught Adam's punishment was passed down to everyone, thus, newborn children must be baptized for the remission of sins. Human free will is corrupted, therefore, humanity is only capable of desiring "the carnal or mundane," so eternal life must be solely by the "gift of grace of the Holy Spirit." Rebuking anyone teaching the "willing is ours," Maxentius cited the Apostle Paul, who declared, "willing and accomplishing are a divine gift." The doctrine of predestination was also ignored within the *Little Book of Faith*.

Maxentius turned to predestination within the appendix of the *Responsio* against Hormisdas' letter to Possessor. After recounting how Hormisdas asserted to Prosper that Augustine's books to Hilary and Prosper "support the Roman Church" and contained the essential teachings on "divine grace and human free will," Maxentius thought it would be prudent to cull over "certain chapters from Faustus" with the "above-mentioned books" of Augustine to demonstrate that Faustus' writings were heretical. The treatises to Hilary and Prosper contained Augustine's strongest language on predestinarianism, therefore, it was most useful for showing differences against Faustus. To provide an example of his comparative approach, Maxentius cited Faustus who challenged those teaching, "faith is not given to all but is a personal gift and it supplies enough belief for them to whom God has specifically given it," then followed up with Augustine, who declared the "elect from God" must not extol themselves by declaring they do that which God has promised because if divine grace was given "according to our merit" then "grace would not be grace." Here, in the above account from the *Response*, Faustus argued against salvation as a divine gift for the elect alone, whereas Augustine taught divine grace must be a gift given by God to the elect, or else, it was something based on our merit and works, and thus, not divine grace (Pereira 2015).

In the *Letter to the Bishops (Epistula Scytharum monarchum ad Episcopos)*, the

Scythian monks affirmed Augustine's doctrine of divine grace, then cited the *Prayer to the Altar*, attributed to the Greek bishop, Basil of Caesarea: "Lord, grant strength and protection. We pray make those who are evil to be good. Preserve those who are good in goodness. For you are able to do all things and there is no one may contradict you. When you will, you save, and no one resists your will." The Scythian monks asserted that Basil's *Prayer* anticipated Augustine by declaring God alone makes humanity good, then anticipated his doctrine on the "preservation of the saints" when it professed, "they persevere in the goodness not by their own strength but by the assistance of divine grace." This liturgical prayer, according to the Scythian monks, would have ended the "future controversy" (i.e., controversy beginning with debates between Augustine and Pelagius), thereby insinuating the Eastern Church could have assisted the Western Church (Pereira 2015). Following the recounting of Basil's *Prayer to the Altar*, the Scythian monks returned to citing the Roman Church to illustrate the similarities with the Eastern liturgy.

### Literary Works of John Maxentius and the Scythian Monks

The writings of the Scythian monks were written prior to, during or soon after, the Theopaschite Controversy. Maxentius composed seven writings preserved in the critical edition (Glorie 1978). From their initial writing (i.e., *Chapters of Maxentius*) onwards, the Scythian monks blended the Chalcedonian Definition and crucified Word of God (who suffered in the flesh for our salvation) to demonstrate that the Latin and Greek traditions have unanimously professed Christ crucified. Likewise, as illustrated with Basil's *Prayer at the Sacred Altar*, the Scythian monks contended the church catholic – West and East – rightly aligned with Augustine's teachings on divine grace.

In their first extant writing, *Chapters of Maxentius*, completed between 518 and March of 519, the Scythian monks elucidated their central

teachings, which were expanded upon within subsequent writings. The central beliefs that guided the theological tradition of the Scythian monks were the Chalcedonian Definition, the Virgin Mary as Mother of God (*dei genetrix*), the crucified Word of God (who suffered in the flesh for our salvation), and then Augustine's teachings on divine grace.

Three writings by the Scythian monks were theological professions: the aforementioned *Little Book of Faith*; *A Brief Profession of the Catholic Faith* (*Item eiusdem professio brevissima catholicae fidei*); the *Very Brief Reasoning for Uniting the Word of God to a Particular Flesh* (*Brevissima adunationis ratio Verbi Dei ad propriam carne*). The stated objective of the *Little Book* was to clarify teachings on the Incarnation (chapters 1–14) and divine grace (chapters 15–18). Within these three brief professions, Maxentius expanded upon the essential teachings on the Incarnation (consubstantiality of the Son and Father, axiomatic profession “God was made man,” natural uniting of divine and human natures, crucified Word of God), then transitioned to divine grace, which was the consistent ordering of reflection (i.e., from the Incarnation to divine grace) within their literary corpus (Maxwell 2003).

Polemical writings attributed to the Scythian monks include: *Chapters of Maxentius*; *Response against the Headless Ones*; *Dialogue against Nestorius* (*Dialogus contra Nestorianos [libri duo]*); *Response against the Letter to Possessor*; and *Refutation of the Writings of Nestorius* (*Refutatio quorundam Nestorii Dictorum*). The *Dialogue against Nestorius* may have been the “most outspoken” and “interesting” writing of the Scythian monks (Bark 1936, 1943).” In book one of the *Dialogue*, Maxentius elucidated Virgin Mary as *Theotokos*, whereas the second book focused on the Word of God, theopaschism and the composite nature (*Christus compositus*) of Christ. Rather than citing the church fathers throughout the *Dialogue*, Maxentius referenced scripture to defend the *Theotokos* and crucified Word of God (who suffered in the flesh).

The Scythian monks collected and preserved select writings from Augustine in the *Chapters of Saint Augustine* (*Capitula sancti Augustini in*

*urbem Romam transmissa*). Many of the passages preserved within this collection were composed at the height of the contentious debates between Augustine and the southern Gallic bishops; consequently, these selections contain some of the strongest language on divine grace and predestination.

The correspondence to the North African bishops, known as the *Letter to the Bishops*, completed in Rome between June (519) and August (520), has been described as a repackaged (Glorie 1978) and expanded (Fairbairn and McGregor 2013) version of the *Little Book of Faith*. Keeping with their approach throughout their writings, section one focuses on the Incarnation, then section two transitioned to divine grace. Emphasis on the compositeness of Christ (*Christus compositus*) within the *Letter* distinguished their christological position from radical Cyrillines and Monophysites (McGuckin 1984). This *Letter* was heavily Cyrilline inflected, indeed, their theopaschite formula was more aligned with Cyril's *Twelve Anathemas* than the classic formula (McGuckin 1984).

The final writing of the Scythian monks is attributed to an anonymous collator of select texts, known as the *Collectio Palatina*, it includes *Disputation on the Twelve Chapters* (*Disputatio XII Capitulorum*); *Refutation of the Writings of Nestorius* (*Refutatio Nestorii Dictorum*); and an *Epilogue* (*Epilogus Collectionis*). The *Disputation on the Twelve Chapters* provides a defense of Cyril's *Twelve Anathemas* in the format of an unfolding dialogue where each section begins with one of Cyril's anathemas, then is followed by a teaching from Nestorius, and concludes with a response from the rhetorical figure Catholicus. The collator preserved writings from heresiarchs, namely, Nestorius, Eutyches, Paul of Samosata and Sabellius, within *Refutation of the Writings of Nestorius* and the *Epilogue*, therein reflecting the common approach of late antique theologians wherein the conciliar tradition was “defined to a significant degree in negative terms” so that the approved teachings occurred by the “exclusion of those who lied outside” the accepted limits (Gwynn 2009).

## Legacy of the Scythian Monks

Contemporary assessments have routinely marginalized the Scythian monks by berating them as rabble rousers marked by an “extreme case of mind” (Smith 1990) who stirred dissension through unsophisticated teachings, at the same time as they are applauded for their contributions to late antique Christology (Grillmeier 1995). As the harbingers of the Neo-Chalcedonian movement (i.e., theologians who affirmed Cyril’s theopaschite teachings and the Chalcedonian Definition), the interventions of the Scythian monks during the Theopaschite Controversy stand as one moment within this “great line of development” from the Palestinian monasteries to the Second Council of Constantinople (Schurr 1935). The writings of the Scythian monks exercised “direct influence” on the Second Council of Orange (529) and Second Council of Constantinople (553) (Maxwell 2003). Their borderland rereading of Cyril and Augustine produced a textured and subversive conciliar tradition, which was proliferated across, within and throughout the ever shifting power relations of the sixth century.

## Cross-References

- ▶ Augustine
- ▶ Maximus the Confessor
- ▶ Natural Philosophy, Byzantine

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## John of Damascus

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### Abstract

John of Damascus, born in Damascus (c.650/75), died in or near Jerusalem (c.750), after living there for about half a century as a monk: polemist defending conciliar (Orthodox) Christianity, preacher, liturgical poet, and author of *150 Philosophical and Theological Chapters*, which he perhaps intended to develop into a tripartite work, called the *Fount of Knowledge*. The first part of this

work (in either of its forms) is a Christian textbook of logic, to help Christians, living under Islam, to express and defend their faith. This is the most explicitly philosophical of his works, though largely derivative. John's philosophical contribution lies in his clarification of the philosophical, especially ontological, terminology, fashioned to express the Christian faith, in the course of which he develops a metaphysical synthesis revolving round the notion of hypostatic selfhood. Other philosophical topics for which John is important include divine providence and its relationship to human freedom, the notion of the will, and the place of images in human understanding.

### Biographical Information

Our knowledge about the biography of John of Damascus is very scanty: the Greek *vita* is late and reveals more about John's later reputation than about the circumstances of his life; his writings are not very revealing, and there is little about him in contemporary records or in the chronicles. It seems that he was born in Damascus probably in the third quarter of the seventh century into a family that had been prominent in the fiscal administration of Syria. His grandfather, called in Arabic Mansour, seems to have served the varying regimes through which he lived: initially appointed by the Emperor Herakleios; soon to serve the Persians; after the reconquest of the Eastern provinces by the Byzantines once again serving the Emperor; and instrumental in the smooth transition of Damascus to the Muslim Arab conquerors, whom he served for the rest of his life. His son, Sarjun ibn Mansour, seems to have followed his father in the fiscal administration, to be followed by his son, John, whose secular name was Mansour ibn Sarjun. Probably at the beginning of the eighth century, John left the service of the caliph to become a monk in (or near) Jerusalem, by tradition the Monastery of Mar Saba in the Judaeian Desert. The tradition is, however, late (not mentioned in the entry in the tenth-century *Synaxarion*) and now generally doubted; it seems more likely that he was a monk at the

Church of Anastasis in Jerusalem. At Jerusalem he seems to have been close to Patriarch John V (patriarch 705–35), and it was there that he wrote most, if not all, of his works. The date of his death is not known for certain, but, as he was condemned (under his Arab name of Mansour) at the Iconoclast synod of Hiereia in 754 as already dead, his death is generally given as circa 750.

### Works

His works fall into several categories. Many of them are polemical: directed against Manichees, against Christians John regarded as heretical – Monophysites (who he also calls Jacobites and Acephali), Nestorians, and Monotheletes – together with a summary work of 100 chapters on heresies, the last of which is Islam (Ismaelites, Hagarenes, Saracens, he calls them), which he regarded as the “forerunner of Antichrist.” Polemical, too, are his three treatises against the iconoclasts. He was also a noted preacher, called *Chrysorroas* (“flowing with gold”) by Theophanes, the early ninth-century chronicler. His homilies, preserved not as a collection of homilies, but in the service books for feast days (mostly in the *Menaia*), are carefully composed, written to be read (as their presence in the *Menaia* indicates); they mark a transition from the sermons of the great rhetorical preachers of the fourth century (e.g., Gregory Nazianzen, John Chrysostom), delivered extempore, to more liturgical compositions. In this way they complement another genre of the Damascene's work, his liturgical poetry, especially the new form of the canon, composed for monastic matins, and consisting of verses (or troparia) to be inserted in the verses of the biblical canticles, that formed the backbone of the service. Most famous (though not in comparison with the most popular of his canons, e.g., the Easter canon) are three treatises – a textbook of logic (the *Dialectica*), his century of chapters *On Heresies*, and his *Exact Exposition of the Orthodox Faith*, also, as is made clear by Kotter's critical edition, a century of chapters. Seen together in relation to one another, his works as a whole reflect the religious situation in which they were



composed. For John belongs to period when new demands were placed on Christians owing to the rise of Islam. John inherited a pattern of Christianity that had been defined by the councils, convoked by Byzantine emperors in each century from the fourth to the seventh (and called, therefore, “œcumenical”): they represented the form of Christianity sanctioned by the emperors. The rise of Islam and the conquest of the eastern provinces of the Empire changed forever the religious and political situation for those like John. No longer could conciliar Christianity rely on imperial enforcement; the various different groups of Christians, those who supported the Œcumenical Councils and those who rejected some or other of them (Chalcedon, 451, had provoked the deepest schism; but Ephesus, 431, was rejected by many in the East, who took refuge in the Persian Empire), not to mention other religious groups – Jews, Samaritans, Manichees – who had suffered proscription or persecution in the Christian Byzantine Empire: all these had equal rights under politically ascendant Islam. Christians (of all stripes, though we know most about those who supported conciliar orthodoxy) had to know what they believed and how to defend it. The work of John of Damascus, written in the shadow of the recently built mosques on the Dome of the Rock in Jerusalem, is to be seen as part of this project. It is striking, too, that this process of definition and defense was accompanied by celebration in song and verse of the faith thus discerned and affirmed; John was central to both dimensions of this celebration of Orthodoxy. Although doubtless in some way occasioned by the victory of imageless Islam, iconoclasm was seen by John of Damascus and others like him as yet another attack on the inherited traditions of the Church.

### Philosophical Thought

The most overtly philosophical of John’s works is his *Dialectica*. It develops what John had set out in his earlier *Institutio Elementaris*, which provided definitions of the kind of terms Christians needed to understand and know how to use in the defense and definition of their faith: terms like essence

(οὐσία), nature (φύσις), person (ὑπόστασις, πρόσωπον), consubstantial (ὁμοούσιον), activity (ἐνέργεια), and will (θέλημα). The *Dialectica* gives a more detailed account and sets out a more elaborate program. It also came to be intended (or maybe was from the beginning) as an introduction to a more extended account of the Orthodox faith of the Œcumenical Councils. At some point, probably late on in his life, John envisaged a three-part treatise, which he called *The Fount of Knowledge* (Πηγὴ γνώσεως). In the introductory letter that precedes the (later version of the) *Dialectica*, John says:

First, I shall set forth what is most excellent among the wise men of the Greeks, knowing that anything that is true has been given to human beings from God, since ‘every good endowment and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights’. If anything is opposed to the truth, then it is a ‘dark invention’ of Satanic error’ and an invention of the mind of a wicked demon’, as Gregory said, who is rich in theology. Imitating therefore the ways of a bee, I shall gather together what belongs to the truth and pick the fruits of salvation from the enemies, and reject everything that is evil and falsely-called knowledge. Then I shall set forth in order the chattering nonsense of the heresies hateful to God, so that by recognizing what is false we may cleave the more to the truth. Then, with the help of God and by his grace, I shall set out the truth, truth that destroys error and drives away falsehood, and is adorned and made beautiful, as with golden tassels, by the words of divinely inspired prophets and divinely taught fishermen, of God-bearing shepherds and teachers, that truth, the glory of which shines from within and illuminates by its rays those who encounter it with due purification and having set aside troubling trains of thought (*Dial. proœm.* 43–60).

Here is envisaged a threefold program: first, what can be drawn from the Greek philosophers; secondly, an account of the errors of heresy; thirdly, an exposition of the truth. This threefold program is that we are familiar with modern editions and translations of the Πηγὴ γνώσεως, or “Fount of Knowledge,” consisting of the *Dialectica*, or “philosophical chapters,” the treatise on heresies, and the *Exact Exposition of the Orthodox Faith*. The manuscript tradition, however, tells a different tale: this threefold program is only found in one of the manuscripts, and the extension of the title Πηγὴ γνώσεως to the whole trilogy (rather



than to the *Dialectica* alone, as John's own use is commonly held to imply: *Dial.* 2. 8–9) seems to be no older than the seventeenth-century Greek Catholic scholar, Leo Allatius. In the manuscripts, the *Dialectica* is usually followed immediately by *On the Orthodox Faith*. One of the earliest references to this work, by a certain Elias who made a sharp criticism of John's exposition of Christology, refers to it as "150 chapters," which would seem to be the shorter version of the *Dialectica*, followed by the hundred chapters of *On the Orthodox Faith*, which is indeed one of the commonest arrangements found in the manuscripts (Van Roey 1944, 8). It seems likely then that this was the original version intended by John and that the more elaborate tripartite treatise was a later development, taking place at the same time as the revision of the *Dialectica*, which John never finished.

As Kotter revealed in the first volume of his edition of the works of John of Damascus, there can be discerned in the manuscripts two versions of the *Dialectica*, which are sometimes combined. The earlier version consisted of 50 chapters – a half-century, as it were – whereas it seems that in his revision he intended to extend it to a full century, but never completed it. John was clearly attracted to the form of the century. This genre was introduced to Christian literature by Evagrius (d. 399) and became very popular in the Byzantine ascetic tradition. The first centuries were collections of chapters concerned with asceticism and prayer for a monk to meditate on; later on, notably by Maximos the Confessor, the genre was extended to presentations of dogmatic theology (to emphasize, I would argue, the rooting of dogmatic theology in prayer). It is this tradition that John follows in the three treatises that go to make the *Fount of Knowledge* (in Western editions and translations of *On the Orthodox Faith*, the fact that it is a century is obscured by being divided into four books, a division that goes back to the early Latin translations that assimilate the structure of John's work to Peter Lombard's *Sententiae*).

The *Dialectica* itself also belongs to a genre of what one might call Christian textbooks of logic, which seem to have emerged in the seventh century (see Roueché 1974, 1980). These textbooks

were devised to help Christians argue – among themselves and with others; they are based on classical summaries of logic, for example, Porphyry's *Isagogê* ("Introduction") and Aristotle's *Categories*. The Christian textbooks betray their affiliation by replacing examples concerned with "Socrates," with examples using, for example, "Peter." John, in the *Dialectica*, goes further than this: his introduction to logic is devised to introduce the reader to the terminology of Christian theology that had developed from the controversies of the fourth and following centuries. Furthermore, they lead up to the notion of ὑπόστασις, a term introduced into Christian theology, primarily to designate the members of the Trinity, and then to designate the one Christ, both God and man; the last chapter of the earlier short version of the *Dialectica* is concerned with the hypostatic union, which expressed to conviction that in Christ there are two natures, but only one person, ὑπόστασις.

Although John's work in composing the *Dialectica* seems to be simply that of a compiler, and probably a compiler relying on earlier Christian textbooks of logic, John's purpose in doing this is loftier. In what Richter argues is the first chapter of the revised version of the *Dialectica*, we find John's account of the purpose of his whole theological activity, starting, as it does, with clarification of logical terms and ways of argument (Richter 1964). This chapter is about knowledge (γνῶσις) and he begins by praising it: "Nothing is more honorable than knowledge, for if knowledge is the light of the rational soul, then contrariwise ignorance is darkness." Knowledge is the proper state of rational beings, so for rational beings lack of knowledge renders them worse than irrational beings. John then comments, "knowledge is the true knowledge of beings." Consequently, knowledge of what is not is not knowledge at all, it is simply ignorance. However, in this life the soul is clothed with the veil of the flesh, and though it possesses an intellect (νοῦς) which is "a kind of eye, that sees and knows and is receptive of the knowledge and understanding (ἐπιστήμη) of beings," the intellect does not possess knowledge of understanding from itself; rather it stands in need of a teacher: therefore, John says, "let us

approach the teacher who is free of all deceit, truth itself,” that is Christ, “and let us hear his voice in the divine scriptures and let us learn the true knowledge of everything that is.” To do this, it is necessary to purify the “intellectual eye of the soul” from the passions, for even the purest and clearest eye is scarcely able to attain the truth. It is not enough to reach the gate, we have to knock hard on it, so that:

when the door of the bridal chamber is opened to us, we may see the beauties within. For the gate is the letter, and the bridal chamber within the gate is what is hidden by the letter, the beauty of thoughts, the spirit of truth. Let us knock hard, let us read once, twice, many times, so that by digging we may find the treasure of knowledge and delight in its riches. Let us seek, let us search, let us examine, let us enquire; ‘for everyone that asks receives, and everyone who seeks finds and to everyone who knocks it shall be opened’. (*Dial.* 1. 37–46)

John then goes on to say that in every task, one needs helpers. So, too, in this task of seeking knowledge: let us not be afraid to make use of anything that is good, for they are, as it were, the ‘favorite slaves’ who serve the queen. So rhetoric and argument can be used, in subordination to the truth. With Christ as our guide, we are embarking on a journey, the purpose of which is “to be led upwards by the senses to that which is beyond everything belonging to the senses and beyond any apprehension, to the one who is the source and maker and creator of everything.” John quotes Wisdom 13:5 and Rom. 1:20, which speak of the way we may pass from the creation that we can perceive to the Creator who is beyond perception and then finally reminds his reader of the need for a way of thinking (φρόνημα) that is humble and free from being puffed up by self-regard, if we are to learn from one who himself taught the way of humility (John quotes John 5:44 and Luke 14:11).

This is the voice, not so much of the scholar, as of the monk: knowledge, the pursuit of truth, is to follow Christ, the Truth. The way demands humility and purification: it demands one’s whole life, not just one’s committed intellect. If few claims can be made for John’s place in the development of logic in late antiquity, his role in drawing the resources of classical logic into the pursuit of theology has some importance.

In John’s other works, there are several places where John discusses and develops philosophical themes. First, there is the way in which John’s reflection on the meaning of ὑπόστασις can be seen as placing at the center of his philosophical vision a notion of what Markov has recently called “hypostatical selfhood” (Markov 2015). In reflecting on this, John develops his notion of περιχώρησις, “co-inherence” or “co-penetration” (the older view that John was dependent on Ps-Cyril is disposed of in Conticello 1995). For John, since there can be no “spatial distance, as with us, in the uncircumscribable Godhead,” the ὑποστάσεις are ‘in one another [ἐν ἀλλήλαις], not so as to be confused, but in accordance with the word of the Lord, “I in the Father and the Father in me” (John 14:10)’ (*Expos.* 8. 253–6). It is this being “in one another” of the ὑποστάσεις that John designates by the term, περιχώρησις, “co-inherence”: they have “co-inherence one in another without any coalescence or mixture” (*Expos.* 8. 263–4). The notion of co-inherence of the persons of the Trinity describes something that is uniquely true of the uncreated reality of the Godhead, where the distinction of ὑποστάσεις does not detract from the unity of the Godhead: the ὑποστάσεις can be discerned to be distinct in their several “modes of existence,” but in reality they are wholly at one, and that unity between the ὑποστάσεις is manifest in their interpenetration or co-inherence, περιχώρησις.

John’s understanding of περιχώρησις is relevant to question of the nature of ὑπόστασις and its central role in his metaphysical synthesis. Ὑπόστασις is a central term in John’s Christian ontology: reality is primarily hypostatic. Following earlier theologians such as Leontios of Byzantium and, especially, Maximos the Confessor, John utilizes what might be called a “Chalcedonian logic,” in accordance with which he distinguishes between the level of nature or being, φύσις or οὐσία, at which level beings are defined by their λόγος τῆς οὐσίας, the principle or meaning of their being, and the level of existence, where beings have concrete existence as ὑποστάσεις, persons, individuals, in accordance with their “mode of existence,” τρόπος τῆς ὑπάρξεως. In the Incarnation, the ὑπόστασις of

the Son can assume human nature, for the mode of filial existence can take both a divine and human form. For the most part, however, John defines his logical concepts in terms of creaturely reality. Although the distinction between *ὑπόστασις* and *οὐσία* was first made to elucidate Trinitarian theology, John, in common with his sixth- and seventh-century predecessors, defines this distinction in creaturely terms. The consequence of this for John is not to propose any kind of analogy between divine and personal existence; on the contrary, John rules out any kind of analogical continuity. In fact, it is improper in his view to think of reality as divided into uncreated and created reality, for there is no common reality to be thus divided. Uncreated reality is utterly unlike created reality. We use the same terms, *ὑπόστασις*, *οὐσία*, etc., of both God and created being, but the reality they map on to is quite different: one uncreated and utterly simple, so that the divine persons are co-inherent one in another, the others created, occupying space and time, which entails genuine separation or distance (*διάστημα*) and prevents any genuine co-inherence.

Another philosophical theme, important to the Damascene, is the concept of divine providence, *πρόνοια*, and its consequences for the notion of human freedom. In his development of this notion, John is heavily dependent on Maximus and, through him on the fourth-century bishop, Nemesios of Emesa (whose works it is possible Maximus discovered: there seems no trace of his influence before Maximus' endorsement of his ideas, especially on providence), as well as other Fathers, especially Basil the Great, and his influential homily, *Quod Deus non est auctor malorum* (CPG 2853). In *On the Orthodox Faith*, there are three chapters that discuss providence: the two chapters that come at the end of his discussion of human nature, chapters 43 (on *πρόνοια*) and 44 (on *πρόγνωσις*, foreknowledge, and *προόρισμος*, predetermination), and one of the miscellany of chapters that complete the century, chapter 92 ("That God is not the author of evils"). Chapter 43 develops a notion already discussed in preceding chapters, namely, the distinction between what is up to us (*τὸ ἐφ' ἡμῖν*: identified

in chapter 39 as *τὸ αὐτεξούσιον*, self-determination, often – misleadingly – rendered "freewill") and what is not up to us (chapter 42). Providence, John asserts, "is God's care for everything that is," or "God's will, by which all beings receive guidance toward what is fitting" (*Expos.* 43: definitions taken from Nemesios, *De natura hominis* 42). Providence is an aspect of God's care for all he has created, and John lists the works of providence; all this, however, concerns "what is not up to us, for what is up to us belongs not to providence, but to our self-determination." In chapter 92, drawing largely on Basil's homily, John uses the distinction in providence mentioned in chapter 43 between what happens *κατ' εὐδοκίαν* ("by good pleasure") and what happens *κατὰ συγχώρησιν* or *κατὰ παραχώρησιν* ("by permission"): the former covers acts simply good; the latter events not good in themselves that God uses to guide rational beings to what is fitting. In chapter 92, the distinction is used to make room for what is "up to us" and absolve God from being responsible for evil: an elaboration on Plato's *αἰτία ἐλομένου· θεὸς ἀναίτιος* (*Rep.* X. 617E: "blame belongs to the one who chooses; god is blameless"). John's understanding of will (*θέλημα*) which is by nature *αὐτεξούσιον*, self-determining, is developed in the context of his thought on providence; he draws on Maximus' reflection on the nature of will, occasioned largely by his defense of the presence of a human will in Christ in his refutation of the heresy of monotheletism. John refines Maximus' thought; his concept of will proved to be influential on later Greek thought and also on Latin scholasticism (through the Latin translations on the *Exposition*: see Frede 2002).

Another context in which John's reflections proved of philosophical importance is his understanding and defense of the notion of image, *εἰκών*. John's immediate purpose was the refutation of Byzantine iconoclasm, which, as a subject of the caliph, not the emperor, he was free to oppose. The notion of image played a fundamental role in Platonic thought: images mediated between the world of the senses and the world of the intellect; images derived from what we perceive through the senses gave a glimpse of the

invisible world of the intellect, which expressed itself through images drawn from the senses. Dionysios the Areopagite gave lapidary expression to this central perception in his remark, “truly visible things are manifest images of things invisible” (*Ep.* 10), which John Damascene placed at the head of his most exhaustive florilegia of patristic citations that formed an appendix to the third treatise against the iconoclasts (*imag.* III. 43). In this third treatise, John distinguishes six different meanings of the word “image”: firstly, the natural image, as a son is an image of the father (and more particularly, as the Son of God is the image of God the Father); secondly, the images or paradigms (or predeterminations, as Dionysios calls them) within God of what is to be; thirdly, humankind, as created in the image of God, manifest both in the Trinitarian structure of the human soul as intellect, reason, and spirit and in human self-determination and human rule over the rest of creation; fourthly, there are images that use bodily forms to represent the spiritual world, necessary if human beings, composed of body and soul, are to form some conception of the spiritual; fifthly, there are images in the Old Testament that prefigure the realities of the New – the burning bush as a figure of the virginity of the Mother of God, or water as a figure of baptism; finally, there are images that recall the past, either in written form or in pictures (III. 18–23).

This is not just a list; it is an evocation of the multitude of ways in which reality echoes reality, from the Father imaging forth the Son and the Son the Spirit in the life of God the Trinity, through the patterns of providence, humanity as an image of God, the way in which the visible world finds its reality in the spiritual world and images it forth, the images that shadow the relationship between the Old and the New Testaments, to the images that remind us of the past, of the ‘rock from which we were hewn’ (cf. Isa. 51:1). The notion of image, in its different forms, is always mediating, always holding together in harmony. Images in the form of pictorial icons fit into this pattern, in a quite humble way. But to deny the icon, the pictorial image, is to threaten the whole fabric of harmony and mediation based on the image. At the heart of all this is human kind as the image of

God: it is humanity in the image of God, as John makes clear in his epitome of patristic anthropology in *On the Orthodox Faith*, that is the microcosm, the little universe, the bond of the cosmos (*expos. fid.*, 89). This world of signs was created by God, who first made images, when he created human kind in his image, and manifested himself in the Old Testament in theophanies that took the form of images: Adam hearing the sound of the Lord God walking in the garden in the cool of the day; Jacob fighting with God; Moses seeing God’s back; Isaiah seeing him as a man seated on a throne; Daniel seeing the likeness of man and as Son of man, coming to the Ancient of Days (*imag.* III. 26). John’s seeing the fundamental role of the image in human understanding has a further consequence: his defense of the place of imagination, φαντασία, in human understanding, for it is the imagination that receives and interprets images in the human mind (*imag.* I. 11).

In these ways, what often seems no more than the compilation and summary of the thought of his (mainly, in my view) Christian predecessors discloses hints of genuine philosophical understanding, which he bequeathed to his readers, both in the Greek East and in the Latin West.

## Cross-References

- ▶ [Logic in the Arabic and Islamic World](#)
- ▶ [Maximus the Confessor](#)
- ▶ [Porphyry, Arabic](#)

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## John of Jandun

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### Abstract

John of Jandun (c. 1285–1328) was a Parisian Master of Arts known as one of the main supporters of Averroes. "The prince of the averroists" or "Averroes' monkey," he was a commentator's Commentator. Abundantly read, and also criticized, most notably for his theory of the intellect, his influence persisted until the sixteenth century in Padua, Italy.

John's life is not well known. Born around 1285 in the Ardennes, he probably began to study philosophy around 1306 at the University of Paris, where he was admitted for a Master of Arts degree in 1310, which framed his teaching career until 1326. In 1315, he appears as *magister artistarum* among members of the College of Navarre founded by Queen Jeanne. The following year, in 1316, he was appointed by John XXII canon at Senlis, but still continued to teach. His fate, however, made him leave the university. In Paris, he became friends with his colleague Marsilius of Padua, who completed the *Defensor pacis*, a pro-imperial pamphlet in violent opposition to the idea of a theocratic papacy, on June 23, 1324. Its release caused a scandal, and the two men had to flee the city in 1326. At Nuremberg, they found refuge at the court of Emperor Louis of Bavaria, where they continued to argue against the Church. John was excommunicated in 1327, condemned as a "heretic" along with Marsilius. Nevertheless, he followed the emperor to Italy, attended his coronation, and Louis rewarded his loyalty by appointing him Bishop of Ferrara on March 1, 1328 and soon thereafter, member of the court as *secretarius sive conciliarius*. John died before he was able to fulfill his new functions, probably in Montalto, between the 10th and the 15th of September 1328.

His teaching is based on the texts of Aristotle, which the *curriculum* of the Faculty of Arts had just assimilated. An “Aristotle” still impure, produced by the Latin translations from Greek or Arabic and dependent on a vast network of Neoplatonist interpretations. John of Jandun explores almost the entire corpus of Aristotle. We do not have his commentaries on the *Liber ethicorum* and on the *Liber politicorum*, but we have access among other writings to his *Quaestiones* on the *Parva naturalia* (1309), on the *Physics* (written most likely in 1315), on the *De coelo et mundo*, on the *Rhetoric* and the *Economics* (1319), on the *De anima* (written between 1317 and 1319), and on the *Metaphysics* (between 1318 and 1325). He also commented on Averroes’ *De substantia orbis* and wrote, besides various other things, two poems: one in honor of Senlis and the other in honor of Paris, *Tractatus de laudibus Parisius* (1323). His relations with his contemporaries were numerous. He argued with philosophers (Bartholomew of Bruges, Raoul of Breton, and Maino of Maineri) as well as theologians (among others Peter Auriol or Thomas Wylton from whom he borrowed a lot). He also might have been involved with Raymond Lull toward 1310.

The work of John of Jandun is almost entirely structured around the Latin translations of Averroes, to which he refers frequently and in close detail. In the field of natural philosophy, he aims at revealing the *intentio Aristotelis* with the help of Averroes, his foremost interpreter. This earned him the reputation of the principal defender of “Latin Averroism,” which is justified from a formal point of view by the reference system that formed the basis of all his work. However, his readings are not a strict repetition of Averroes’ exegeses and theories. John is involved in the quarrels of his time, and he inevitably departs, sometimes despite himself, from Averroes’ difficult texts that were modified by the Latin translation as well as the manuscript tradition.

This is the most obvious in his doctrine of the soul and of the intellect. John is, for example, a defender of the “agent” sense, which is based on the model of the agent intellect. In noetics, under the influence of Scotus, he confers a different role

to the agent intellect than the usual one of the abstraction of the intelligibles from images. The agent intellect operates on the intelligible species received in the material intellect in order to activate its representative dimension and access the quiddity corresponding to it. Regarding these two intellects, John believes with Averroes that they are ontologically separated from human bodies, unique for the entire species, and eternal. However, it was to Siger of Brabant more than to Averroes himself that he owes his conception of the relationship between the human being and the intellect, and that of the individual intellectual act. The intellect is not the substantial form of the body; it does not give it its being, but it is all the same its form as its “intrinsic operator.” During the intellectual process, it forms a whole with the body, subtract of images. The intellect and the cogitating body unite during an operation (i.e., thought) for which they necessarily cooperate, because we do not think without images. The thinking human being is therefore a being who, as such, contains within him his intellect as a part, just as the sky qua moving includes the intelligence that moves its sphere as one of its parts. The concept of “continuatio” in Averroes is transformed: man thinks qua producing in himself concepts. John uses the idea of a plurality or gradation of forms to explain this relationship between the body and the intellect. A human being has two forms, each of them proper to him or her, one cogitative, the other the intellect. The one is never present without the other. To the contrary of what the anti-averroists claimed, John does not for a moment imagine that my cogitative form – even though it is the ontological form of my body – could exist without the separate intellectual form also being associated with me.

John is equally known as a major figure in the history of the so-called double truth theory, that is to say, the idea that there are two contradictory truths, one in philosophy, (obtained by reason) and the other in theology (given by faith). This is not John’s position. Like other Masters of Arts, he does not intend to question that there is one truth. The Catholic faith, for him, remains the criterion of absolute truth. However, he takes part in the



movement that undermines the unity of knowledge, seeking to liberate philosophical research from religious guardianship, that is to say, proclaiming the intellectual right of the Masters of the Arts faculty to fully explicate the thinking of philosophers and to systematically deduce the logical consequences of the principles guiding their scientific research, these deductions having a truth value only within certain epistemological limits.

John develops his thinking in many individual and original ways (e.g., the collective actualization of knowledge, or his perspective of ultimate happiness, partly influenced by al-Fārābī). We should stop seeing John as a carbon copy of Averroes if we are to better elucidate how philosophy continued to develop within an Aristotelian tradition.

## Cross-References

- ▶ [Ibn Rushd, Muḥammad ibn Aḥmad al-Ḥafīd \(Averroes\)](#)
- ▶ [Philosophical Psychology, Jewish Tradition](#)
- ▶ [Siger of Brabant](#)
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## John of La Rochelle

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### Abstract

The Franciscan theologian John of La Rochelle (1190/1200–1245) studied and taught in Paris and was active as a preacher. Collaborating with Alexander of Hales from the 1230s to the end of his life, he is best known for his contribution to the *Summa fratris Alexandri*. Scholarship recognizes him as the principal

redactor of the first and third parts. John also planned to compose a *Summa theologicae disciplinae* of his own, which at least partially survives. His other writings consist of theological questions, exegetical works, a treatise *De arte praedicandi*, sermons, (probably) a gloss commentary on Peter Lombard's *Sententiae*, (possibly) a treatise on time, and two interrelated treatises of psychology: *Tractatus de divisione multiplici potentialium animae* and *Summa de anima*. The *Tractatus de divisione* discusses definitions of the soul, the powers of the soul, and the soul's perfection through virtue and grace. It presents an updated survey of the principal authorities of moral psychology available near 1240, but refrains from developing personal views. John's most successful work, the *Summa de anima*, examines the substance of the soul and its powers. It partially depends on the *Tractatus*, but provides a magisterial discussion of the soul and its faculties by systematically confronting received opinions. Particularly remarkable is John's theory on the degrees of abstraction. Further study of the *Summa de anima* may lead to a revision of the still current opinion that John was an able compiler rather than an original thinker.

John of La Rochelle (Jean de La Rochelle, Johannes de Rupella) was born about 1190/1200 in the French town of La Rochelle. Little is known with certainty about his career. He studied in Paris, becoming master of arts and thereupon master of theology under William of Auxerre and, probably, Philip the Chancellor. At some time before 1238, he entered the Franciscan order and started collaborating with his confrere Alexander of Hales. He was a master in the Franciscan school at Paris in 1238; at the University, he appears to have shared Alexander's chair as a public regent master of theology and/or to have succeeded Alexander in 1241. The cooperation between John and Alexander would last until John's premature death (either in Lyon or in La Rochelle) on February 3 or 8, 1245. John counted Bonaventure among his pupils and was succeeded in his regent chair by Odo Rigaldi.

Together with Alexander of Hales and Haymo of Faversham, John headed in 1239 the opposition against Elias of Cortona as Minister General of the Franciscan Order. The three men convinced Pope Gregory IX to summon a chapter general of the Order on May 15, 1239, in which Elias was deposed. In 1241–1242, John, Alexander, and two other masters (probably Odo Rigaldi and Robert de la Bassée) worked together in composing, at the request of the Franciscan chapter of Montpellier, an explanation of the Franciscan Rule known as the *Expositio quatuor magistrorum super regulam fratrum minorum*.

Apart from teaching and writing, John was active as a preacher. Several contemporaries were witness to the effectiveness of his oral rhetoric. The last recorded event of his life is his delivering a sermon before the papal curia in the Dominican church of Lyon on December 4, 1244. Pope Innocent IV had arrived in town two days before in order to make preparations for the First Council of Lyon, in which John appears to have been involved.

Long being reputed as an able compiler rather than an original thinker, John receives increasing recognition in recent scholarship for his achievements in psychology and moral theology. John was primarily a theologian (he defined theology as ultimate *sapientia*), but insisted on the usefulness of philosophy for theological study, even explicitly warning his colleagues for the dangers of neglecting it. Philosophy, in his opinion, provided Christians with the intellectual sharpness and invincible arguments needed, in combination with charity, in order to deepen the understanding of the faith and to live by its standards. St. Anthony of Padua appears to have been his prime model of sacred doctrine (Brady 1974).

As a theologian, John is best known for his contribution to the *Summa fratris Alexandri* or *Summa Halensis*. Scholarship recognizes him as the principal redactor of the first part (*De Deo*) as well as the third (*De verbo incarnato, De legibus et praeceptis, De gratia et virtutibus*), while the other two parts incorporate many of his surviving writings. The third part remained unfinished at John's death and was completed by, among others, Odo Rigaldi. John also planned to

compose a *Summa theologicae disciplinae* of his own in order to provide basic theological instruction. He may not have fully completed this work either, but its outline is apparent from the extant sections. The work was to consist of two parts, on faith (comprising two sections, *De articulis fidei* and *De divinis nominibus*, which have both been preserved) and on morals (comprising sections on the vices, virtues, beatitudes, commandments, gifts, and sacraments). Several texts survive in manuscript form, in different redactions and combinations, which may correspond to the sections of the second part. Recently, evidence has come to light which suggests that the second part was actually completed, either by John himself or by a collaborator after his death, with sections on the vices and virtues straightly depending on the *Summa de vitiis* (1236) and the *Summa de virtutibus* (before 1248) of William Peraldus, a Dominican of Lyon whom John may have personally met near the end of his life (Bejczy 2004). John's own *Summa de vitiis*, regarded in earlier scholarship as the projected section on the vices of the *Summa theologicae disciplinae*, may hence have been conceived by John as a separate work.

John's other writings consist of some dozens of theological questions on various subjects (portions of these questions were integrated into the *Summa fratris Alexandri*; only the questions on divine grace are partially available in a modern edition), exegetical works (including two introductory lectures on biblical exegesis, *postillae* on several books from the Old Testament as well as on all four gospels (Smalley 1980), and a *summa* on the Pauline Epistles), a treatise *De arte praedicandi*, and over two hundred sermons, a number of which have been edited in recent years (Duval-Arnould 1976–1977; Bougerol 1988; Rasolofoarimanana 2005); however, the cycle of sermons *de communi* attributed to John may actually be the work of Odo Rigaldi (Duval-Arnould 1976). John is also believed to have written a gloss commentary on Peter Lombard's *Sententiae* as well as a short *Tractatus de tempore*. Finally, John composed two interrelated treatises of psychology, which bear a properly philosophical interest: *Tractatus de divisione multiplici potentiarum animae* and *Summa de anima*. Both

treatises have been critically edited and permit an evaluation of John's intellectual achievement.

The *Tractatus de divisione* consists of three parts of highly unequal length: *De anima secundum diffinitionem*, *De anima secundum divisionem*, *De anima secundum perfectionem*. The first part is the briefest. In it, John discusses twelve definitions of the soul; five of these are taken from Pseudo-Augustine's *De spiritu et anima* (a probably Cistercian product of the twelfth century), the others from John Damascene, Alfred of Sareshel, Plato, Aristotle, Nemesius of Emesis, the Book of Genesis, and Seneca. Typically, John discusses each definition in its own right, without confronting them with each other or developing a personal stand. In the second part, which is by far the longest, John explains the various meanings of the terms used for the powers of the soul (*ratio*, *intellectus*, *voluntas*, etc.) and exposit five classifications of these powers: those of "the philosophers, in particular Avicenna" (in fact an amalgam of theological opinions), "the physicians" (Johannitius [Ḥunayn b. 'Ishāq] and Avicenna), John Damascene, and, again, *De spiritu et anima*. The third part involves a theological perspective and investigates the role of grace in the soul's (supernatural) perfection. After discussing the various manifestations of grace (virtues, gifts, sacraments, beatitudes, etc.), John concentrates on the virtues and exposit their definitions and classifications according to Plotinus (mediated through Macrobius), Cicero, Aristotle, "the theologians" (in fact Philip the Chancellor's theories as expressed in his *Summa de bono*), and the twelfth-century, Stoically inspired *Moralium dogma philosophorum* – thus introducing philosophical theories in his theological disquisition, but again without taking a personal stand. Remarkably, however, John supplies the acquired moral virtues with functions that Philip the Chancellor only attributed to the infused virtues: they make us *uti* the things which are *ad finem* and determine the actions and passions related to our *ingressus in vitam*. The third part ends with a discussion of beatitude *secundum philosophos et sanctos*, taking its departure in the definitions of Boethius, Aristotle, Anselm of Canterbury, Seneca, and

Augustine (one of the three definitions borrowed from Augustine actually derives from Prosper of Aquitaine). It is only here that John confronts the opinions of the authorities and tries to resolve the ensuing conflicts in the form of questions. All in all, however, the *Tractatus de divisione* makes the impression of a compilation rather than a sustained synthesis. It nevertheless has the merit of presenting an updated survey of the principal philosophical, theological, and even medical authorities of moral psychology available to western learning near 1240.

The *Summa de anima* is John's most successful work, being preserved, either or not integrally, in 50 manuscripts. It was written after the *Tractatus de divisione*, while several chapters from the *Summa* were incorporated into the second part of the *Summa fratris Alexandri*. The work consists of two parts, on the substance of the soul and on its powers; the main source of the second part is the *Tractatus de divisione*, which John often copies literally. Yet the *Summa* bears an altogether different character than the *Tractatus*. Using the same set of sources (including Avicenna's *De anima*), John provides a magisterial discussion of the soul and its faculties by systematically confronting received opinions. Particularly remarkable is his theory on the degrees of abstraction, formed under the influence of Avicenna. According to John, the imagination reorganizes sensible features of perceived individual objects; thereupon, the estimative faculty produces corporeal forms by retaining the similarities and eliminating the differences between these features; finally, the intellect strips away all conditions associated with the matter and singularity of the perceived objects and produces pure universals, predicable of all individuals of the same species (Sondag 2003). Also, John holds that the faculties of the soul are substantially identical to the soul itself, even though the operations of the intellect imply a distinction between the two (*ibid.*).

## Cross-References

- ▶ Alexander of Hales
- ▶ Bonaventure

- ▶ Ibn Sīnā, Abū 'Alī (Avicenna)
- ▶ Philip the Chancellor
- ▶ William of Auxerre

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## John of Paris

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### Abstract

John of Paris (d. in 1306) was a Dominican theologian, deeply and personally involved in the theological and political debates of his time. He is well known as the most outstanding “ideological” supporter of Philip the Fair in his struggle against Boniface VIII. His treatise *De regia potestate et papali* played an important role in medieval political thought, also after the dramatic conclusion of the clash between papacy and the French crown. John counters, in fact, curial claims of plenitude of power in a way that found positive echo also in the Conciliar epoch. His philosophical and theological doctrines have been studied only partially. He was a convinced advocate of the unity of substantial form, against the doctrine of the plurality of forms, held by most Franciscan authors of the time. He also rejected William de la Mare’s criticism of Aquinas; this does not imply, however, that he always reproduces the thought of his great confrere. His most controversial theological opinion was his account of the Eucharistic miracle as “impanation” and not as “transubstantiation.” Although in a moderate way, he also criticized the Catalan physician and theologian Arnau de Villanova for his attempts at determining the exact time of coming of the Antichrist.

John of Paris (also known as Jean Quidort, Johannes Dormiens, Surdus, Monoculus), member of the Order of the Friars Preacher; in an encomiastic sermon most likely held in occasion of the awarding of his doctorate we read that he had been Master of Arts before entering the Dominican Order. Most probably he read the *Sentences* in Paris, in 1293–1294; in 1295 he

drafted a memoir defending himself from accusations leveled against him because of his teaching. Documentary evidence of his presence in Paris, at the Convent of Saint Jacques is dated the June 26, 1303, when he signed in favor of Philip the Fair’s appeal against Boniface VIII. At that date he had already taken part in the dispute between the pope and the French crown, contributing the famous treatise *De regia potestate et papali*. In 1304 he intervened in the dispute between seculars and mendicants: his *De confessionibus audiendis* argues in favor of Benedict XI’s bull *Inter cunctas*, which was highly favorable to the mendicants. His first *quodlibet* is dated 1304/5. In his writings John of Paris shows a self-conscious, critical, and independent attitude. He does not refrain from polemical remarks and biting irony. He died on September 22, 1306, in Bordeaux, while he was waiting for the final results of his appeal to the pope against the sentence that prohibited him from teaching because of his Eucharistic doctrine.

John of Paris is mostly known as a political thinker. While his name seldom appears in handbooks devoted to the history of medieval philosophy and theology, a history of medieval political thought must consider his *De regia potestate et papali* in some detail. This treatise supports Philip the Fair’s position in his controversy against pope Boniface VIII, arguing that Christianity is based on two mutually autonomous principles: nature, which gives rise to temporal institutions such as monarchy, which also exist in pre-Christian and non-Christian societies, and revelation, on which ecclesiastical institutions are based. These two realms do not depend on each other but are complementary, providing mankind with the means to reach its ends, respectively, temporal well-being and eternal beatitude. On the temporal level, John argues in favor of a plurality of kingdoms and criticizes universalistic theories of empire; on the spiritual level, the church is one and universal, ruled by the pope. John argues here along the lines of the ecclesiology of the mendicant orders. Interventions by the authorities of one sphere in the affairs of the other are legitimate only in case of extreme necessity, that is, when the leaders in charge fail to fulfil their duties and risk hindering



the attainment of the specific end for which they are responsible. The reference to Philip the Fair's actions against Boniface is clear. Moreover, scholars such as Janet Coleman have pointed out that John draws a clear-cut distinction between individual right of ownership, which is acquired through one's own labor, skill, and industry, and political power, which can dispose of private goods for the sake of the common good only exceptionally, in case of necessity. The sovereign is therefore in no sense owner of the goods of his subjects. John's idea is close to the principle of inalienability of individual rights to property. The church, on the other hand, can have property, not because of a supposed *a priori* divine right to it, but because it receives donations from legitimate owners (be they temporal rulers or other lay donors); such goods are owned by the church as a community, while prelates are only administrators: the pope is therefore the supreme steward of the properties belonging to the ecclesiastical community.

*De potestate regia* has traditionally been dated 1302 and considered the most significant Parisian reaction to curial positions and in particular to Giles of Rome's *De ecclesiastica potestate*. More recent studies (first and foremost by Lars Vinx and Karl Ubl) have questioned this reconstruction, pointing out that John of Paris, in fact, criticizes, not Giles, but a *quodlibet* of James of Viterbo held in Paris before the clash between the pope and the king came to its crucial phase. It could well be the case, then, that Giles wrote in answer to John and not the reverse. The discussion among scholars is still open, but its development shows that a new critical edition of the treatise is needed, since the existing ones do not take into account the existence of different versions of John's treatise, which was most probably revised by the author himself. The two last chapters of the treatise deal with the much debated issue of the possibility of papal resignation. Exploiting for his own ends materials from Giles of Rome's treatise on the same subject, originally aimed at defending the legitimacy of Celestine's abdication, and therefore of Boniface VIII's election, John argues, not only that a pope can resign, but that he can also be deposed by a general council. John of Paris'

treatise bears features that ensured it a wide reception long after the dispute between Philip and Boniface, especially, in the first half of the fifteenth century, in the context of the Councils of Constance and Basel. Most recent scholarship tends to exclude John from being the author (or among the authors) of the short political treatise *Rex pacificus* which is most probably among the sources of *De regia potestate et papali*.

John of Paris' metaphysical and theological doctrines have been comparatively less studied than his political thought (Book III and IV of his *Commentary on the Sentences* are still unedited). Specialists have disagreed about the extent of his "Thomism." Their discussion has not led to definitive results yet and most probably never will. Scholars have devoted attention to his doctrine of a real distinction between *esse* and *essentia*, which he defended following Thomas Aquinas. In John's opinion the *esse* of every created being is distinct from its essence. It does not flow from the essence but must be caused by an external cause, by God. Although well acquainted with the debate concerning individuation and with alternative solutions (e.g., Henry of Ghent's and perhaps Thomas Sutton's), John takes the position in his *Quodlibet* (most probably 1304/5) that matter is the most plausible candidate. John is also a supporter of the doctrine of the unity of substantial form. According to him, only this doctrine can guarantee the unity of the human being.

Some doubts notwithstanding, available evidence suggests that John of Paris took part in the so-called *Korrektorienstreit*, authoring the *Correctorium corruptorii circa*. In this work he expounds William de la Mare's criticisms of Aquinas contained in William's *Correctorium fratris Thomae* and rejects them one by one, as far as the discussion of *Summa theologia*, Ia-IIae, q. 50. John took a controversial stance in the debate concerning the beatific vision, arguing for a mediation between the voluntaristic and intellectualistic approach: he claimed that beatitude does not simply consist in seeing God but is a reflective act that comes at the end of a complex process, one which also involves the will, that is triggered by the vision of the divine essence. In his solution, he also allowed for a progress in the

vision of God in the afterlife. As is well known, a much more radical version of such a doctrine was later adopted by Pope John XXII, giving rise to a dramatic controversy.

John's doctrine of change in the Eucharist, which had quite serious consequences for his teaching career, is most probably designed also to overcome the difficulties intrinsic to an account of transubstantiation based on the principle of the unity of the substantial form. In his earlier works he had tried to combine transubstantiation and unity of form; in his *Determinatio*, however, he suggested an alternative to transubstantiation that is a version of the doctrine termed "impanation" in modern theological discourse. This doctrine develops an account of eucharistic changes along the lines of the Incarnation: the substance of bread is not transformed, but in some way assumed by Christ.

John of Paris expressed his opinion also with regard to theology of history and eschatology. In 1300 he wrote a treatise, *De adventu antichristi*; in its second part he criticizes Arnau de Villanova's speculations about the date of the coming of the Antichrist and the end of history. John maintains that investigations concerning eschatology may be a useful exercise but cannot claim to determine with certainty the time of such future events. The scope of human knowledge is in fact limited in this perspective; the resulting uncertainty, however, has a providential goal, because human beings must be aware of being on divine trial in every epoch.

## Cross-References

- ▶ [Giles of Rome, Political Thought](#)
- ▶ [James of Viterbo](#)
- ▶ [Thomism](#)

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## John of Reading

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### Abstract

John of Reading was an English Franciscan theologian and philosopher who was a staunch defender of the teachings of his fellow Franciscan, John Duns Scotus. He joined company with Walter Chatton to defend Scotus on most issues, criticizing fellow Franciscans Robert Cowton, William of Nottingham and William of Alnwick who both defended and criticized Scotus' various teachings and Peter Auriol and William of Ockham who later opposed Scotus on many points. Reading and Chatton might even be considered the preparation team for what eventually would be called the Scotistic School. Reading's chief work is his *Commentary on the Sentences*, which has come down to us in a unique copy contained in the Florence manuscript of the Biblioteca Nazionale, Conv.

Soppr. D.IV.95. The main part of it is his Prologue to the *Sentences*, where he attempts in great detail to establish theology's claim that it is a scientific discipline. In his effort to do so, he examines the portraits of theology presented by a dozen other authors and relates them to his own position. Here, and in the rest of his commentary, he provides a detailed history of decades of discussions on the theological themes he examines.

John of Reading (c. 1272–1346) was an English Franciscan who is listed as the 45th Regent Master of his religious order at Oxford, probably in 1319. Earlier records tell us that he was ordained a subdeacon in 1292 and became a deacon 2 years later. Although only one manuscript copy of his main theological work has come down to us, we know from other sources that he lectured twice on the *Sentences of Peter Lombard*, first at Oxford or perhaps prior to coming to Oxford. Wherever he might have first commented the *Sentences*, it was before William of Ockham, who did so in 1317–1319, since Ockham quotes him. He commented again, however, after Ockham, since John criticizes Ockham's commentary on the same work. Ockham's student and frequent defender, Adam Wodeham, according to the student report of his *Lectura secunda* (II, 126), which he delivered at Norwich between 1329 and 1332, confirms that John left two renditions of his *Commentary on the Sentences* when he tells us that Reading was satisfied with a response he had given “to a certain doubt he treated in his *Ordinary Lectures* and also, I believe, in his *Scriptum*.” In any case, it is certain that John of Reading at points was both a source and a critic of Ockham. He was a master at the Franciscan house of studies at Avignon by 1323, the year in which he provided advice to Pope John XXII related to the publication of his bull *Antiquae concertationi* (*To an Ancient Dispute*), until his death in 1346. Since he criticizes the final version of Ockham's commentary, which William brought to Avignon in 1324, we consider his *Scriptum* to be a work completed in Avignon around this time. The only other works that have come down to us as

attributed to Reading are his two *Quodlibeta*, of which the first and second questions of *Quodlibet I* has been published, and an unpublished commentary on Aristotle's *On the Soul*.

## Prologue to the Sentences

By the early years of the fourteenth century, many *Commentaries on the Sentences of Peter Lombard*, the main instrument for discussing the difficult doctrinal questions of the Christian faith, had changed dramatically from questions with a few simple arguments for and against particular responses to catalogues of authors and collections of their arguments in support of one side or the other. If one examines just the questions of the Prologue to these works, they have expanded from a few pages to a volume of their own. The modern editions of the Prologue of John Duns Scotus' *Ordinatio* fills 237 pages, that of Peter Auriol's *Scriptum* counts 329 pages and William of Ockham's *Scriptum* required 370 pages. The traditional questions about the four causes (material, formal, efficient, and final causes) of the Bible, or the *Sentences*, or the science of theology, exploded into a number of more specific questions and subquestions. John of Reading's *Commentary* provides a text that is the final commentary of Reading. Still, it contains much of the material of his early commentary. This is most evident, as we have mentioned, from the fact that it contains materials criticized by William of Ockham and also has materials criticizing Ockham. Furthermore, it criticizes early fourteenth-century authors like Richard of Conington and Richard Drayton, and also later ones, such as Peter Auriol and William of Ockham. In sum, this final *Commentary* text, which only has the Prologue and six distinctions, is a compilation of his early and late treatments of the questions he debates.

## Theology as a Science

The first Prologue question, "Is theology science?," depends in part on what you mean by

"science." In the tradition descending from St. Augustine, "science" could be any form of knowledge by which the Christian faith could be "begotten, nourished, defended and strengthened" (*On the Trinity*. XIV, 1). Or, more technically, "science" could be knowledge of created things in contrast to "wisdom," that is, the knowledge of divine things. However, in the Aristotelian tradition of the *Posterior Analytics*, "science" is of universal, essential, necessary causes of effects that are assented to because of evidence produced through a demonstrative syllogism. Duns Scotus, in his *Ordinatio*, examined the questions "Whether theology is science?" and "Whether theology is a subalternated science?" This combination of questions suggests that he has in mind Aquinas' position that "sacred doctrine is a subalternated science." In the meantime, many objections against Thomas' contention, especially from Henry of Ghent and Godfrey of Fontaines, forced Scotus to examine the conditions for science in the strict Aristotelian sense of the term. This led him especially to discuss "certitude" and "evidence." Scotus' discussions of these terms drew critics, so that John of Reading, sympathetic to the views of Scotus, had to respond. In dealing with "certitude," he was forced to deal with necessity as a ground for certitude. This led him into discussions of God's absolute and ordained power, and while he admitted with Scotus that within the ordained order we could have some certitude because some things followed necessary laws, still, going beyond Scotus' context for discussing the issue, he argued that by his absolute power, God could interfere with the ordained laws. He likewise dealt with "evidence," and in the very same framework, he argued that we could have intuition of non-existing objects if God chose absolutely to give us such knowledge. Reading was later criticized by the Benedictine, Robert Graystones, for his defense of the possible intuition of nonexistents.

One of the subquestions regarding the formal cause or scientific character of the study of theology was the interrelationship of theology with other forms of science. Thomas Aquinas spoke of the study of theology as a subalternated science, subordinated to the knowledge of God and the blessed revealed in the sacred scriptures.

Aquinas, once again, was criticized by his contemporaries Henry of Ghent and Godfrey of Fontaines on this point. It is against these two critics that John of Paris and William Peter of Godino, followers of Aquinas, attempted to respond by arguing that subalternation is a substitute expression for any form of hierarchical relationship. John of Reading centers his attention on Henry of Ghent and his Franciscan follower, Richard of Conington. However, his critique of Thomas' view of subalternation is basically the same as that of Godfrey of Fontaines. Moreover, his demand for greater precision in contrasting "subalternation" with any other form of subordination indicates his discontent with the imprecision of John of Paris and William Peter of Godino. Unlike these defenders of Aquinas, John of Reading insists that "subalternation" is not a synonym for "subordination," but rather a specific form of relationship between superior and inferior sciences. In this discussion, Reading thus seems to be responding to other sources than the ones he actually names, that is, Henry of Ghent and Richard of Conington.

### Further Questions

A question raised in the Prologue, but developed in great detail in Question 3 of Distinction III, is a question nominally about memory. "Thirdly, I ask about memory: Is memory found in the intellect having actual or habitual intelligible objects present to it by means of species which formally inhere in the intellect prior to the act of understanding?" Here Reading, defending Scotus against Henry of Ghent, who contended that an intelligible species is not necessary, since, if it were known, it would interfere with knowledge of the object because it takes its place. His second opponent is Richard Drayton, another Franciscan follower of Henry of Ghent, who also fought Scotus and denied the necessity of an intelligible species. The principal opponent of Scotus in Reading's Distinction III text, however, is William of Ockham, who argues in accord with his famous razor that holding to the necessity of intelligible species to account for human and angelic

universal knowledge of created realities should more probably be considered as defending something that is superfluous. Reading's presentation of Ockham's position is a very thorough representation of Ockham's whole portrait of intuitive and abstractive cognition and its various types, both natural and supernatural, before summarizing Ockham's conclusions regarding intelligible species as follows: (1) to have intuitive intellectual knowledge the object and the intellect suffice, without any species; (2) for abstractive cognition the object and intellect are not sufficient; (3) what is needed beyond the intellect and object is not an intelligible species but rather a habit (*habitus*). John of Reading then brings on Scotus to defend the necessity of intelligible species, using the texts of Aristotle and Averroes as interpreted by Scotus, as firm supports. For Scotus, unless the intellect could have its object present to it without it being present to the sense powers, and thus through a species, it would necessarily depend on the sense powers in its own operation and therefore would depend on them for its very existence. Nor is it enough to say, as Ockham argues, that a habit would suffice, since habits depend on acts: how then can an act depend on a habit, when acts themselves build up habits and thus precede them. It is in this debate with Ockham that one can sense that Reading believes that Ockham is the chief threat to Scotus' teachings: he goes into the most detailed presentation of Ockham's disagreement with Scotus and answers every one of his arguments in the most clarifying way possible for a follower of Scotus. It is in discussions such as this one that we can understand why Adam Wodeham considered John of Reading Scotus' most faithful disciple.

One of the most famous positions of Scotus concerns the nature of freedom. He argued that the created will could operate with complete autonomy. Reading summarized his own position with a declaration of allegiance: "As the Subtle Doctor argues, so also do I." The direction of Reading's thinking can be gleaned from the way he poses the question: "Whether when the ultimate end is grasped by the created intellect the will necessarily wills that end?" For both Scotus and Reading, the negative answer is a declaration of the primacy

of angelic and human freedom. This sixth Question of Distinction I fills 76 pages in its modern edition and shows the presence of the authors of his early commentary, Henry of Ghent, Duns Scotus, Robert Cowton, and Richard of Conington, as well as the later discussions of this issue in the works of Peter Auriol and William of Ockham. In this question, Reading not only follows Scotus, he once again attempts to explain Scotus' teaching to those who have over the past 2 decades raised objections or given other interpretations to the Subtle Doctor's teaching and his understanding of St. Augustine, St. Anselm, and Peter Lombard.

John of Reading's metaphysical thought leads him to a twofold approach to the discussion of man's natural knowledge of God. In questions 2 and 3 of Distinction II, Reading poses these problems: "Can a First Being be known with certitude by our natural abilities?" and "Is there but one First Being?" Once again, we can sense that in answering the first question, he is following John Duns Scotus. Scotus, in his discussion of our natural ability to know with certitude that God exists, touches on a number of prefatory definitions regarding causes: univocal versus equivocal, *per se* versus *per accidens*, partial versus total, and essentially ordered versus accidentally ordered. William of Ockham had challenged many of Scotus' explanations and claims regarding each of these couples. John of Reading made it his task to clarify and justify the Scotistic options. For the second question, Reading's chief opponents, as he answers, are William of Ware and Peter Auriol. William of Ware, known as a *Praeceptor Scoti* (a teacher of Scotus), held that the unicity of God is a tenet of faith, and is thus not demonstrable. Reading here takes on the many Franciscans who followed Ware (William of Alnwick, Robert Cowton, Peter Auriol, and William of Ockham) and criticized Scotus. However, most of his effort in dealing with the unicity of God focuses on Peter Auriol who presents him with two theses: an analysis of final causality does not bring us to a single final cause of all things, nor can it show a final cause that is identical with the efficient cause of the world. These are not theses of Auriol himself, but rather his representation of

Averroes' portrait of Aristotle's views. Nonetheless, it provides John of Reading, with some help from the Dominican Robert Holcot, the opportunity to develop his own philosophical arguments for the existence and unicity of God through his reinterpretation of final causality and its link to a unique efficient cause.

## Conclusion

The sample of texts of Reading so far edited allows us to appreciate his relationship to Scotus, for the most part as clarifier and defender. This collection of questions also shows one of the early confrontations between Scotus and Ockham and the effort on the side of a follower of Scotus to respond to the head of the Ockhamist camp that challenged Scotus on so many points.

## Cross-References

- ▶ [Adam Wodeham](#)
- ▶ [Godfrey of Fontaines](#)
- ▶ [Henry of Ghent](#)
- ▶ [John Duns Scotus](#)
- ▶ [John of Paris](#)
- ▶ [Peter Auriol](#)
- ▶ [Robert Holcot](#)
- ▶ [Thomas Aquinas](#)
- ▶ [Walter Chatton](#)
- ▶ [William of Alnwick](#)
- ▶ [William of Ockham](#)
- ▶ [William of Ware](#)

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## John of Salisbury

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### Abstract

John of Salisbury (1115/1120–1180) was among the foremost philosophers of the twelfth century, contributing to the development of political and moral philosophy as well as the medieval theory of education and to debates about universals and other metaphysical questions. His general philosophical stance may be labeled “Christian humanism.” While he received extensive formal education in Paris, he spent most of his life in active service to the church. An associate of Archbishop Thomas Becket in his dispute with King Henry II of England, John eventually was raised to the office of Bishop of Chartres.

John of Salisbury enjoys a considerable and well-deserved reputation as an original thinker as well as an observant witness to the vast intellectual and cultural changes that engulfed twelfth-century Europe. Educated in France by some of the best minds of his time, he turned to public affairs in the service of the English church, becoming an intimate of archbishops, popes, and kings. Yet amidst his political entanglements, he still found time to compose two of the most important and influential philosophical works of the mid-twelfth century – the *Policraticus* and the *Metalogicon* – along with a number of other writings in various genres. John survived the conflict between Archbishop of Canterbury Thomas Becket and King Henry II, and devoted his last years to chronicling the turbulent times he had experienced. Late in life, he was raised to high ecclesiastical office as bishop of Chartres.

John was born at Old Sarum (the former site of Salisbury) in England between 1115 and 1120. Specific knowledge of his family background and early life is scant; we know in detail only about a brother, Richard, and a half-brother,

Robert, both of whom held offices within the English church. John probably received an early education at Salisbury and then at Exeter. The first date we can safely associate with him is 1136, when he traveled to Paris to study at Mont-Saint-Geneviève. A famous autobiographical passage of the *Metalogicon*, in which John narrates his 12 years of education, forms an important source for the understanding of French higher instruction in the twelfth century. The list of his teachers during the ensuing years includes many of the great thinkers of the mid-twelfth century. He received instruction at one time or another from Peter Abelard, Robert of Melun, William of Conches, Thierry of Chartres, Adam de Petit Pont, Gilbert of Poitiers, Robert Pullan, and others; his studies encompassed speculative philosophy, rhetoric, linguistic theory, literature, and theology. John also seems to have taught students of his own during his later years in Paris.

Like so many other educated churchmen of his era, John eventually made his way into the corridors of power rather than choosing a life in the cloister or the classroom. Through the intervention of his friend, Peter of Celle, he joined the household of Archbishop Theobald of Canterbury, a vocal and energetic advocate of the rights of the English church, in 1147. In his capacity as secretary to Theobald, John was an omnicompetent bureaucrat: he composed the Archbishop's letters, advised him on legal and political affairs, traveled often to the Continent as an archiepiscopal envoy, and altogether lived in the manner of a trusted intimate.

Theobald's court attracted many clerics with training and experience similar to John's own, so he could continue to indulge his intellectual pursuits in a sympathetic environment at Canterbury during the 1140s and 1150s. John was counted a member of a circle of learned administrators one of whose number was Thomas Becket, the future archbishop and martyr, who was a trusted servant of Theobald before he was appointed as King Henry II's Chancellor in late 1154. This group of like-minded men constituted the immediate audience for much of John's writing. Both the *Policraticus* and the *Metalogicon* were dedicated to Becket and often address him personally about

current events or personalities with which they were both familiar.

John's activities on behalf of the Archbishop brought him into contact with some of the most powerful and prominent men of twelfth-century Europe. He was present at the Roman curia for many crucial occurrences during the pontificate of Eugenius III (1145–1153), 4 years of which he would later chronicle in his *Historia Pontificalis*. He enjoyed a warm friendship with his fellow countryman Nicholas Breakspear, who ascended the papal throne as Adrian IV in 1154. The *Policraticus* relates stories and sayings derived from its author's interviews with Adrian, with whom John was sufficiently intimate to raise criticisms of the conduct of the papal curia.

John was also well-acquainted with important figures in twelfth-century secular life, especially the young King Henry II. He had supported Henry's side in the struggle against the partisans of King Stephen during the period of English history known as the Anarchy. His later writings reveal a consistent horror of civil war of the sort engendered by Stephen's usurpation of the throne. John was, however, sufficiently vocal in his opposition to Henry's policies towards the English church to be banished from court during 1156 and 1157. Although he ultimately recovered favor with his monarch, he acquired a lingering skepticism about Henry's motives which was to be confirmed by later events.

After Becket became Archbishop of Canterbury in 1162, John backed his resistance to the English crown, albeit somewhat reluctantly. John consequently spent much of the 1160s in exile, either in France or at the papal court, lobbying on behalf of Becket and against Henry and the English bishops who backed the King. The large body of his correspondence dating from this period testifies, however, that John felt no more comfortable with Becket's zealotry than with Henry's repressiveness. His letters often adopt an independent line and express a willingness to compromise with Henry which is in marked contrast to Becket's intransigence.

Following the murder of Becket, John served the English church in numerous capacities during the early 1170s. He was consecrated Bishop of

Chartres in 1176 (a post in which he actively promoted the cult of the sainted Becket). His waning years were peaceful and restrained after his intrigues during the era of Theobald and Becket. He died at Chartres in 1180 and is buried in the abbey church of Notre-Dame de Josaphat.

The literary output of John of Salisbury falls broadly into two categories. On the one hand, he composed several treatises of considerable philosophical interest, most notably the *Policraticus*, but also the *Entheticus de Dogmate Philosophorum* (or *Entheticus Major*), a satirical poem about philosophers and courtiers, and the *Metalogicon*, an important discussion of pedagogy and speculative philosophy. These works all date from roughly the period between 1154 and 1159, although they may have had origins in his school days in Paris. By contrast, John's writings of a historical nature – the *Historia Pontificalis* and most of his letters, as well as his lives with St. Anselm and Becket – were composed later in his career, during or after his association with Becket. This should not be taken as evidence that he lost interest in academic or theoretical disputes. On the contrary, his historical writings (and indeed many of the crucial decisions of his administrative career) often represented practical applications of the principles he had already articulated in a philosophical form. Above all, it was a constant concern to unify theory and practice that constituted the hallmark of John's political and intellectual life.

The core of John's thought has often been described as "humanistic" in orientation, since he valorizes human dignity and the concomitant dignity of nature: both are intelligible and may be accessed by human beings through the application of reason. The truth that John seeks is hence nothing less than a comprehensive knowledge of the operation of the universe in which humanity itself constitutes the noblest (if still flawed, because fallen) of God's creations. Yet John admitted that severe impediments exist to the attainment of wisdom. Throughout his writings, he professed to follow the moderate skepticism of the New Academy, and protested that the human mind is poorly equipped to know very much with certainty. The best we can hope for, he says, is probable truth, always subject to reevaluation and

revision. The powers of human reason – its ability to intuit the cosmos and humanity's place therein – are modest.

According to John, a human path to happiness is sought by all human beings. He does not assume that all of humanity is happy or has attained knowledge of the proper route to becoming so; rather, the *possibility* of earthly happiness is held out to those who sincerely struggle and overcome the obstacles to its realization. Happiness is not given to the human race, but is something that must be earned by exertion. And human beings can be fooled or mistaken about the correct sources of happiness, for example, by confusing pleasure with true satisfaction. The happy human existence embraces both active and reflective dimensions: one must do the good (virtue) as well as know the good (wisdom) in order to flourish. In pursuing happiness in the present life, we may learn equally from the deeds and writings of infidels as from those of believers. John's Christian humanism may thus be construed as embracing a "parallelism" in matters of instruction. Christian authorities will certainly guide us toward happiness (eternal as well as temporal), but they may usefully be supplemented by studying the acts and ideas of worthy pagans. The ancients as well as Scripture and the Fathers contribute to instilling in humanity the virtue and wisdom that produce the measure of earthly fulfillment of which we are capable.

The *Policraticus* applies these general principles to the lives of public figures, including rulers and their counselors and courtiers. John presents there a theory of political morality, as well as an influential account of the proper ordering of the political community conceived on the model of the human body. John is concerned with the effects of political disorder, expressed by the idea of tyranny, and he offers advice about how the injustice engendered thereby may be challenged. He even argues that the murder of a tyrannical ruler may be not merely legitimate but just.

In the *Metalogicon*, John investigates the nature of the twelfth-century curriculum, focusing on rhetoric, grammar, and dialectic. He includes brief commentaries on the recently transmitted writings of Aristotle's *Organon*, which had become the basis for higher-level instruction

during his day. John also analyzes the dispute between philosophers and theologians concerning the nature of universals. His own position in the debate may be classified as a form of moderate realism.

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## John Pecham

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### Abstract

John Pecham (c. 1225–1292), Doctor Ingeniosus, was born c. 1225 in Patcham near Brighton. He pursued his early studies under

the tutelage of the Benedictine monks at the Cluniac abbey at Lewes. He joined the Franciscans sometime between 1250 and 1256 and was sent to Paris to pursue his theological studies. He became regent master at the University of Paris in 1270–1271. From there, he returned to England where he was regent master at the University of Oxford from 1272 to 1275. He was elected minister provincial of the English friars in 1275 and subsequently became lector at the Papal Curia from 1277 to 1279 when he was made Archbishop of Canterbury on January 28, 1279, occupying England's primate see until his death on 8 December 1292.

In his theory of knowledge, Pecham upheld the need for divine illumination regarding the first principles of veracity and morality, although this influence is not consciously experienced. In opposition to Aquinas, he maintained that the intellect (human, angelic, and divine) had direct and immediate knowledge of singulars. The intellect, he said, abstracts the universal from the singular either knowingly or unknowingly; if unknowingly, how can abstraction be true? The intellect can be variously characterized as *materialis*, *in habitu*, *adeptus*, *accomodatus* (agens), and *practicus*. Cognition requires both sensible and intelligible species or similitudes. There are species of various sorts: abstract, innate, impressed, expressed, latent in memory, and “col-lated.” The sensible species is first impressed upon the sense and then upon the mind; the abstract species is drawn from the imagination and impressed upon the intellect. Sensible species do not damage their respective organs, although very intense species cause pain. Intellectual cognition originates in sensation. Knowledge is *collativa* and also inquisitive, that is, in search of certitude. *Cognitio simplex* occurs through contuitio (I do not find him using the term “intuitive cognition”), composite by collation. Cognition is inquisitive, having a natural desire to know everything. Man has a twofold memory: sensible and intelligible.

In the realm of psychology (in the medieval sense), Pecham's writings are extensive. The first

“act” of the soul is life. The soul is the most noble of forms. There are not two souls in man, but just one composed of two substances as bases for vegetative, sensitive, and intellective functions. Traducianism of souls from parents is excluded, rather each soul is created singly and “daily” by God. The soul is the cause of the body in the threefold genus of causality, namely efficient, formal, and final. The soul is the “act” and mover of a most noble body; it is communicated to each and every part of the body; it is everywhere in its little world as God is everywhere in the bigger world. The soul is united to the body as a form is to matter. The human soul is incorruptible and hence immortal. Although the soul is simple, it has virtual parts, namely powers; memory, intellect, and will are powers of the soul. The sensitive soul is not corrupted with the advent of the rational soul with which it becomes one. As vegetative, the soul has three powers: nutrition, growth, and regenerative. As sensitive, the soul has motive and apprehensive powers, the latter being the five senses. To the sensitive soul are likewise attributed imaginative, estimative, and memorative powers. There is a twofold agent intellect: God and the human intellect as active. The agent and possible intellect are diverse powers of the soul. Averroes is in error for positing but one possible intellect for all humans. The human will is a self-moving power; it is at the apex of creation. The human will is free and cannot be coerced by anything else. Moral virtue is essentially rooted in the will. The appetites of the human will are rationality, concupiscence, and irascibility. The free will is not some third power composed of reason and volition. The will is free to such a point that it can withhold consent to the dictates of practical reason.

In natural philosophy, Pecham emerges as an opponent of Aquinas on a number of issues. Matter is an essence distinct from form and as such is not pure potency; by divine power, it could exist without any form. The root of corruptibility lies in matter. Matter alone is not the principle of individuation but as conjoined with form. He espoused seminal reasons whereby latent forms perdured and could be generated.

Substance is known through its powers and there can be multiple powers in a single substance. Material substances have substantial parts. An accident is more dependent on substance than form is on matter. The world was present to God ideally from all eternity, but it was not “creatable” from all eternity. He is perhaps most noteworthy for his theory of the grades of the form, in opposition to Aquinas and his followers who posited a single form for each individual. His principal treatise *De gradibus formarum* has not survived, although it was in the library of Merton College as late as the fifteenth century (Douie 1952, p. 380 note 2). His grades theory of a single form as distinct from a plurality of forms in individual beings may have been the first such refinement. The most telling argument against the single form theory was based on theological reasons, namely the need to posit a corporeal form (*corporeitatis*) regarding Christ’s body in the tomb. This led Henry of Ghent to posit a twofold form: a corporeal form generated by nature and the rational form/soul created directly by God. As Archbishop of Canterbury, he “renewed” the condemnations of Kilwardby regarding the unicity theory and this intensified the conflict between the Dominicans and Franciscans.

In the realm of moral philosophy, virtue resides essentially in the will. Political and purgative are grades of virtue. Justice is more “delightful” than its opposite. Even the unjust creature knows what justice is in the light of the eternal reasons.

Pecham’s last philosophico-theological treatise was his *Quodlibetum Romanum*, debated while he was lector at the Papal Curia c. 1277–1278. His treatise on the celestial spheres is believed to have been composed during this period.

## Cross-References

- ▶ [Augustine](#)
- ▶ [Bonaventure](#)
- ▶ [Ethics](#)
- ▶ [Form and Matter](#)
- ▶ [Henry of Ghent](#)
- ▶ [Natural Philosophy](#)
- ▶ [Philosophical Psychology, Jewish Tradition](#)

- ▶ Robert Kilwardby
- ▶ Roger Marston
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## John Philoponus

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### Abstract

John Philoponus was a sixth-century commentator on Aristotle who lived between 490–570 CE. “John” was his Christian name, while “Philoponus” was a nickname given to him by various philosophers (which literally means “lover of work”), though he much preferred “the Grammarian.” Philosophically, Philoponus was perhaps the most brilliant of all the Ancient Commentators, developing some of the most stinging criticisms of Aristotelianism in history. He disagreed with

Aristotle on such important matters as dynamics, optics, the existence of void, and the need for a fifth element. These criticisms in turn gave rise to a series of innovative ideas, placing Philoponus among the important scientific thinkers of Late antiquity. His religious beliefs were no less radical and controversial, which eventually led him to be condemned posthumously in 680 CE by the Third Council of Constantinople. This entry examines Philoponus' most sustained attacks on Aristotelian science, including Aristotle's position on motion, prime matter, space, and void.

### Life and Works

John Philoponus was a sixth-century commentator on Aristotle who lived between 490–570 CE. “John” was his Christian name, while “Philoponus” was a nickname given to him by various philosophers, which literally means “lover of work.” According to Sorabji (1987:5), this was the name given to groups of Christian lay workers who were known to have lived together in a guild called a *philoponeion*. Philoponus had referred to himself as “the Grammarian,” for he held no Philosophy Chair though some speculate that he may have held a Chair in grammar and taught grammar to the Coptic community in Alexandria (Sorabji 1987:5–6). (He had also written two books on grammar, neither of which contained any philosophically relevant material.) As far as his philosophical stripes go, Philoponus was a Neoplatonist who flourished in the sixth century. There were two major schools of Neoplatonism, the pagan school in Athens, which was eventually closed by the Emperor Justinian in 529, and the more successful Alexandrian school in Alexandria, which had survived only by capitulating to Christianity. Philoponus was a student in the Alexandrian school, headed by Ammonius. Ammonius had taught all of the influential Neoplatonists, from both the Alexandrian and Athenian schools, including Philoponus, Asclepius, Simplicius (a pagan), and Olympiodorus. (The exception is Damascius, who fled Alexandria after the violent persecution of the Neoplatonists

by the Christians in 488–489.) So both Philoponus and his archrival Simplicius would have been students sitting around Ammonius' lecture throne (*thronos*) listening to his seminars on Aristotle (see Sorabji 2008).

In some ways, Philoponus was a bad commentator. According to Simplicius, the duty of a commentator was to harmonize the thought of Plato and Aristotle, which was something Philoponus did rather poorly. Yet, philosophically, he was perhaps the most brilliant of all the commentators, developing some of the most stinging criticisms of Aristotelianism in history. He disagreed with Aristotle on such important matters as dynamics, optics, the existence of void, and the need for a fifth element (on the latter see Wildberg 1988). These criticisms in turn gave rise to a series of innovative ideas, placing Philoponus among the important scientific thinkers of Late antiquity. In the latter part of his life, Philoponus turned away from philosophy and took up theology. His religious beliefs were no less radical and controversial. For example, he held that Christ had only one nature, not two (one human and one divine), and applied Porphyry's conception of three gods (rather than three persons) to the Holy Trinity, a doctrine that eventually led him to be condemned posthumously in 680 CE by the Third Council of Constantinople (Sorabji 2005a:20).

There are seven extant commentaries on Aristotle from Philoponus, four of which (*in De generatione et corruptione*, *in De anima*, *in Analytica priora*, and *in Analytica posteriora*) claim to be "from the lectures of Ammonius son of Hermeias" (*ek tôn sunousiôn Ammōniou tou Hermeiou*). However, as Sorabji (1987:4–5) notes, comparison with Ammonius' own commentaries shows Philoponus' relative independence and even dissent from Ammonius. The three remaining commentaries (*in Physica*, *in Categoriae*, and *in Meteorologica*) were not professed to be lectures from Ammonius but Philoponus' own contributions. And yet none of his commentaries were merely comments on Aristotle. Many (untraditional) "commentaries" express Philoponus' own disagreement with Aristotle and offer fresh ideas. Writing a detailed exegesis on the works of Plato and Aristotle

interspersed with critical analysis was simply the way of doing philosophy at the time. Finally, Philoponus wrote two independent treatises, *Contra Aristotelem*, which contains a systematic attack on the Aristotelian world view (including the fifth element), and *De aeternitate mundi contra Proclum*. The latter presents a series of refutations on behalf of Christianity directed against the pagan belief that the universe – specifically matter – had a beginning. (Philoponus also refers to a commentary on Plato's *Phaedo*, at *in An Post.* 215,5, which is now lost. There are also several medical writings in Arabic translation attributed to Philoponus. For a complete list of Philoponus' writings, see Sorabji 1987:231–235.)

### Philoponus Against Aristotle on the Void

Many of Aristotle's predecessors (notably, the Atomists) had argued that motion was impossible without void. In *Physics* IV.8, Aristotle turns the argument on its head and claims that the existence of a void would make motion impossible. His arguments are grounded in two basic assumptions. First, we observe bodies moving at unequal speeds. Second, the speed of a moving body is a function of the density of the medium and the weight of the body. Therefore, a difference in speed must be due either to a difference in the density of the medium or to a difference in the bodies themselves (an "excess of heaviness or lightness"). Aristotle's most famous argument against the void runs as follows. If the same body moves through a void, its journey must take time. And that time must bear some proportionate relation to the times for corporeal media. But since the density of the void is zero, there cannot be any ratio between the void and those other media (e.g., air cannot be "twice as dense" as void). Therefore, motion through a void is impossible. In effect, Aristotle is asserting that motion through a void would take no time, that a body would move through the void with infinite speed (215b20–3), which is absurd.

In *Corollary on Void* (a discussion in his commentary on Aristotle's *Physics* Books V to VIII) Philoponus attacks the claim that the density of

the media varies in direct proportion to the time taken (684,10–20). According to Philoponus, motion through a void must take some time  $t$  (684, 23–5), which is determined by the body's inner *rhopê* (its downward impulse). What the medium adds to this is extra time, which is the time needed to part the medium. What should be compared, then, are the additional times taken to part the medium: the density of the medium is proportional to that additional time (684,32–685,10). For the void, this additional time will be zero since it offers no resistance, and so there will be no ratio of extra time through the void to extra time through a bodily medium. In effect, Philoponus thinks Aristotle is wrong to assume that there is some calculable relation that holds between the time taken to move through different media and the densities of those media. The only proportional relation that holds is between density and extra time (Sorabji 2005a:333).

Philoponus' rejection of Aristotle's arguments against the void is connected with three substantial revisions of Aristotelian science: Aristotle's conception of dynamics, his conception of prime matter, and his conception of place (or space).

## Dynamics

Throughout his attack on Aristotle's rejection of void, Philoponus is concerned to deny the assumption that the speed of a moving body is a function of the density of the medium and the weight of the body. Philoponus denies that the medium is an efficient cause of motion in a body (cf. Wolff 1990). For Philoponus, the only active cause of motion is the body's own weight, which is the internal source of its downward motion (*Corollary on Void* 678,23; *Contra Proclum* 261,25; cf. *in GC* 229,7–20). The medium is only an incidental cause of motion in the sense of offering resistance (*in Phys.* 195,24–32). This revision forms part of Philoponus' larger project of establishing his theory of impetus, according to which all motion is caused by an internal force of some kind.

Aristotle's account of projectile motion provided the occasion for Philoponus to introduce his impetus theory. Aristotle had explained projectile motion in a way that was consistent with his theory of forced motion. The hand of the thrower moves the portion air immediately adjacent to it, which in turn moves the next pocket of air, and so forth. The projectile rides in front of the different portions of air, which form a series of moved-movers (*Physics* VIII.10). Philoponus rejected this account of projectile motion and instead appealed to the idea of an impetus. He argued that a projectile is carried along, not by the motion of the medium, but by an impressed force (*kinêtikê dunamis, energeia kinêtikê*) that is transferred to it by the mover (*in Phys.* 642,3–5; 644,17–22).

The introduction of an impetus likely cleared the way for the end of Aristotelian physics, for it eroded the important distinction between natural and forced motion. A projectile is clearly moved by force, since the "natural" motion of a heavy body is downward. And yet, Philoponus claimed, its motion derives from an internal force imparted to the projectile by the thrower. This notion of an inner force makes no sense in the framework of Aristotelian dynamics. For Aristotle, natural motion is motion that derives from an internal principle of change while forced motion is due to an external cause. Thus, all forced motion requires an external mover that maintains contact with the thing moved. With the introduction of impetus, there was no longer any difference between natural and forced motion. (For an alternative view, see Sorabji 1987:13.)

## Prime Matter

When it came to prime matter, Philoponus was no less critical of Aristotle. In his early commentary on the *Categories*, Philoponus had endorsed a traditional Aristotelian view of prime matter as that which is, in itself, devoid of all quality. Bodily substance was thus understood as a composite of this qualityless matter plus the three dimensions (*in Cat.* 83,13–19). The three dimensions were seen as inseparable accidents of prime matter, so that when three dimensionality is stripped away

what is left is prime matter, which is the ultimate subject of all attributes, including the three dimensions (*in Phys.* 578,32–579,8; 561,3–24; cf. Sorabji 2004a:263–264). Eventually Philoponus rejected the view of body as a composite of incorporeal prime matter plus three-dimensional extension (*Contra Proclum* 428,7–10). Instead, prime matter came to be identified with three-dimensional (corporeal) extension itself, which Philoponus took to be qualityless body. Thus three-dimensional extension becomes the ultimate subject of all attributes (405,23–7; 413,24–414,5; 424,4–428,25; 440,6–8). Like Descartes, Philoponus had made this three-dimensional extension the essence of body, since we cannot think of body without extension in three dimensions (424,23–425,14).

## Place

Philoponus' reconceptualization of prime matter was connected with his reconceptualization of place (see Sedley 1987), though here he was less innovating. In *Physics* IV, Aristotle made place "the limit of the containing body which is in contact with the contained body" (212a6–7) or "the first immovable limit of that which contains the <body>" (a20). Like most philosophers in antiquity, Philoponus rejected this concept of place. Instead he defended a view of place as three-dimensional spatial extension, which is distinct from the bodies that occupy it (*Corollary on Place* 563,23). More interestingly, Philoponus treated place as coextensive with the concept of void (563,21). In effect, place is seen as empty space (empty with respect to its definition but never actually devoid of bodies):

We may come to see well enough from these considerations that place is not the boundary of the container. That it is a certain extension in three dimensions, different from the bodies that come to be in it, bodiless with respect to its own proper account [*tô oikeiôlogô*] – dimensions alone, empty of body (for void and place are in reality the same in subject [*hupokeimenon*]) (567,29–35 Furley transl. with modification).

Of course I do not mean that this extension either ever is or can be empty of all body. Not at

all. But I do claim that it is something different, over and above the bodies that come to be in it, and empty by its own definition, although never without body. In the same way we claim that matter is different from the forms, but can never be without form. In this way, then, we conceive the extension to be different from all body and empty in its own definition (569,7–13 Furley transl.).

## Light

Philoponus' theory of light is typically seen as being no less innovative than his theory of impetus in dynamics. According to Sambursky, for example, Philoponus' theory of light represents another major advance over the Aristotelian world view:

Philoponus' conception of light is in many respects of interest from the point of view of the history of scientific thought. As in his criticism of Aristotelian dynamics Philoponus reveals himself once more as an independent thinker, and though, like the other commentators, he gives a loyal description of Aristotle's doctrine, he does not shirk an exposition of his own view, albeit dressed up as an interpretation of Aristotle (125).

In the *De anima*, Aristotle treats light as something immobile and static. *DA* II.7 defines light as the state of the medium when it is actually transparent. According to Sambursky, whenever Aristotle speaks of "movement" in connection with light and color, he simply has in mind the transition from a state of potentiality to a state of actuality (114). Only later, most notably with Philoponus, do we find a significant shift in the meaning of the word *kinêsis* "from that of transition from the potential to the actual to that of locomotion from the luminous object to the eye" (115).

In order to reconcile the Aristotelian theory with the basic facts of geometrical optics, Philoponus reinterprets Aristotle's "*kinêsis*" as an active entity (*energeia*) that is emitted from the luminous object to the perceiver whose behavior could be described by means of geometrical concepts (*in DA* 331,1ff.; cf. Sambursky 118). As Sambursky notes, there are passages in Philoponus' *Physics* commentary that suggests he sincerely took this to be view of Aristotle (*in*

*Phys.* 642,3ff.), including the view that the *energeia* of color travels through the air (Sambursky 125). However, Sambursky claims that this “interpretation” of Aristotle’s doctrine by Philoponus “amounts to nothing less than a complete rejection of the Peripatetic doctrine” (118). It introduces a “radical shift” in the usage of the terms *kinêsis* and *energeia* in their application to light and color.

Philoponus’ contribution to the history of optics is not quite as radical as this (at least in this area). For the discussion of perception in *Generation of Animals* Book V shows that Aristotle already understood color (and other sensibles) as something that travels in straight lines from the object to the perceiver:

The position of the eyes is the cause of seeing things at a distance and of the fact that the movement coming from distant objects succeeds in reaching the eyes (*tên apo tôn porrôthen horatôn aphikneisthai kinêsin*). For those with protruding eyes do not see well from afar, while those that have their eyes situated in a hollow cavity are able to see things from afar on account of the movement not being scattered into the open space but passes straight into <the eye> (*to tên kinêsin mê skedannusthai eis achanes all’ euthuporein*). It makes no difference whether one says, as some do, that (A) vision is effected by *sending out* the sight (for insofar as there is not something in front of the eyes because it is dispersed fewer of them must strike the visible objects and the less one is able to see the things from afar), or whether one says that (B) vision is effected by the movement *coming from* the visible objects. For it is necessary that the visual ray [on theory (A)] behave similarly to the movement [on theory (B)]. Therefore, things from afar would be seen best of all if there was something continuous, like a tube, extending straight out from the eye to the visible object; for the movement coming from the visible objects would not be diffused (*ou gar an dieluetô hê kinêsis hê apo tôn horatôn*). But if not, then the further this sort of thing extends, the more accurately the things from afar must be seen (780b34–781a12).

(A) of course represents the competing theory of visual rays, whereas Aristotle’s own theory is represented by (B). Vision is produced by “the movement of the colors” (780a24) coming from the visible object and passing into the eye. When Aristotle says it makes no difference which theory

we adopt, his point is a methodological one. Relative to argument at hand it makes no difference which of these two theories turns out to be correct. On either theory accuracy of distance vision will depend on something projecting over the eyes, whether to keep the visual rays together or to funnel the incoming movements into the eye. (For an alternative reading see Sorabji 1987:27.) In many important respects, then, Philoponus’ theory of light is a loyal description of Aristotle’s doctrine. Of course Aristotle did not conceive of light as something traveling; light for Aristotle remains a purely static concept (though see *PA* II.13, 658a1–4). But Philoponus’ theory can be seen as an application of the Aristotelian conception of color as a local motion to the phenomenon of light. (For a discussion of Philoponus’ influence on optics in the Middle Ages see Sorabji 1991.)

## Cross-References

- ▶ [Categories, Commentaries on Aristotle’s](#)
- ▶ [De generatione et corruptione, Commentaries on Aristotle’s](#)
- ▶ [Impetus](#)
- ▶ [Philoponus, Arabic](#)

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## John Scottus Eriugena

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### Abstract

John (Johannes) (c. 800–c. 877 CE), referred to by his contemporaries as “the Irishman” (*Scottus*), and who signed himself “Eriugena,” was an Irish-born Christian Neoplatonist philosopher and theologian of great originality. The most outstanding philosopher writing in Latin between Boethius and Anselm, Eriugena is best known as the author of *Periphyseon* (*De divisione naturae*, *On the Division of Nature*, c. 867 CE), an immense dialogue unfolding an impressive cosmological system, and as the influential transmitter of Greek Christian theology to the medieval West, notably through his translations of Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite, Gregory of Nyssa, and Maximus Confessor.

Eriugena's philosophy centers around God, understood in Neoplatonic terms as an infinite, transcendent “immovable self-identical one” (*unum et idipsum immobile*, *Peri*. I.476b). This God is incomprehensible to created, finite minds (angels, humans) but through His freely willed theophanies (*theofaniai*, divine manifestations) He becomes manifest to and can be apprehended by His creation. The One, as highest principle, engenders all things timelessly, causing them to proceed into their genera, species, and individuals located in space and time, and then retrieves them back into itself. This cosmological process is triadic or Trinitarian, involving a dialectic of oneness, outgoing and return. All created entities, including human nature, are to be understood as eternal “ideas” (*ideae*, *notiones*) in the mind of God. But only human nature is made in the divine image and likeness. Humankind, therefore, plays a special role in the dialectic of outgoing and return. Eriugena quotes



Augustine to the effect that God became man (*inhumanatio*) so that humans can become God (*deificatio*). Humans fail to understand their own true nature as images of God because they are distracted by created, fleeting temporal “appearances” (*phantasiai*), which cloud the intellect and generate the sensible spatiotemporal realm. However, through the practice of intellectual contemplation (*theoria, intellectus*), assisted by the grace of divine illumination (which is the receiving of a divine self-manifestation, *theophania*), humans may return to and achieve unification (*henosis*) with God. Salvation, or return to the One, involves the corporeal body being resolved into its original incorporeal essence. Both heaven and hell are maintained to be states of mind, not actual places (*loci*). Paradise, Eriugena says, is nothing other than perfect human nature. A select few (e.g., St. Paul) will even undergo deification (*deificatio, theosis*). Eriugena’s account of nature as inclusive of God and creation has been interpreted as pantheist. Eriugena, however, stresses both the immanence of God in creation and His transcendence beyond it.

## Biographical Information

The place, date, and circumstances of Eriugena’s birth and early life are unknown. Surviving *testimonia* suggest that he was born in Ireland around 800 CE. A letter (c. 850/851 CE) by Bishop Pardulus of Laon refers to a certain Irishman named “Joannes” at the palace of the King of France (*Patrologia Latina* [hereafter “PL”] 121:1052a), who was engaged in a theological controversy. He signed his translation of Dionysius (PL 122:1236a) with “Eriugena,” meaning “Irish born.” Biblical glosses attributed to Eriugena includes several Old Irish terms testifying to his knowledge of Irish. Furthermore, Bishop Prudentius of Troyes refers to Eriugena’s “Irish eloquence” (*Celtica eloquentia*, PL 115:1194a), albeit while disparaging his employment of dialectic in theology.

Eriugena had strong links with the court of King Charles the Bald (Carolus Calvus) and associated ecclesiastical centers (Rheims, Laon, Soissons, and Compiègne). He was esteemed as an erudite Liberal Arts master: Bishop Florus calls him “academic and learned” (*scholasticus et eruditus*, PL 119:103a). Two partial commentaries (c. 840–c. 850) on *The Marriage of Philology and Mercury*, the liberal arts handbook of Martianus Capella, testify to his familiarity with the Liberal Arts tradition of Cicero, Cassiodorus, Isidore, and others. Eriugena wrote poems that confirm his Greek learning and celebrate his royal patron King Charles. Eriugena died around 877 CE.

## Eriugena’s Thought

### The Treatise on Predestination (c. 851)

Around 850 Eriugena was commissioned by Hincmar, Archbishop of Rheims, and Pardulus, Bishop of Laon, to rebut a treatise on predestination by Gottschalk of Orbais (806–868), a priest in Hincmar’s jurisdiction who interpreted Augustine as teaching a “twin predestination” (*gemina praedestinatio*), namely, of the elect to heaven and of the damned to hell. Eriugena’s opposing treatise, *De divina praedestinatione (On Divine Predestination, c. 851, hereafter De praed.)*, employed dialectical argument rather than scriptural citation to reject the twin predestination thesis. Eriugena invokes the divine unity, transcendence and infinite goodness to show that there can be but one predestination. God’s nature is one, and so is His predestination. God wants all humans to be saved. He does not predestine souls to damnation; humans damn themselves through their own free choices. Furthermore, “sin, death, unhappiness are not from God. Therefore God is not the cause of them” (*De praed.* 3.3). God cannot predestine to evil since evil is nonbeing. Properly speaking, God, who is outside time and acts “all at once” (*semel et simul*), cannot be said to foreknow or to predestine (*De praed.* 9.6), terms that are transferred from created things (*De praed.* 9.7).

Eriugena's tract was itself considered suspect. He was accused of "Origenism" and "Pelagianism" by his former supporter Prudentius (see PL 115:1010c) and the treatise was condemned as "Irish porridge" (*pultes scottorum*) at the councils of Valence (855) and Langres (859), in part for its employment of dialectic instead of scriptural commentary.

### The Translation of Dionysius the Areopagite (c. 860–c. 862 CE)

Notwithstanding this setback, around 860, King Charles commissioned Eriugena to translate a manuscript of the writings of Dionysius the Areopagite (then considered to be St. Denis, patron saint of Francia). This manuscript had been presented to Charles' father, Louis the Pious, by the Byzantine Emperor Michael the Second in 827. Eriugena enthusiastically adopted the Areopagite's negative theology, according to which negations concerning God are "more true" (*verior*), "better" (*melior*) and "more apt" than affirmations. Affirmative appellations do not "literally" (*proprie*) apply to God and must be understood analogically or "through metaphor" (*per metaphoram, translative*). God is not literally "Father," "King," and so on. Negations are more appropriate to express the divine transcendence. God is more properly not being, not truth, not goodness, and so on. Following Dionysius, Eriugena describes God as "beyond being," "more than being," "neither one nor oneness," and "beyond assertion and denial."

Following his Dionysius translation (c. 862), Eriugena translated other Greek Christian works, including Gregory of Nyssa's *De hominis opificio*, Maximus Confessor's *Ambigua ad Ioannem* (*Difficulties in Response to John*) and his *Quaestiones ad Thalassium* (*Questions in Response to Thalassium*), and possibly Epiphanius' *Anchoratus de fide* (*The Anchorite Concerning Faith*). He also wrote a long commentary on Dionysius' *Celestial Hierarchy* (*Expositiones in hierarchiam coelestem*), a fragmentary *Commentary on the Gospel of John* (*Commentarius in Evangelium Iohannis*), and a sermon (*Homilia in Johannem*) on the Prologue to

John's Gospel, all of which show the influence of the Greek theological tradition.

### The Dialogue *Periphyseon De divisione naturae* (c. 867)

Eriugena's *Periphyseon* (hereafter *Peri.*), also called *De divisione naturae* (*On the Division of Nature*), written between 860–867 CE, is an extensive treatise on cosmology, anthropology, and theology, written as a dialogue between Master and Pupil, and offering a grand synthesis of Greek and Latin Christian theologies. At the outset, Eriugena defines nature as including both "God and the creature." *Natura* is the "totality of all things" (*universitas rerum*) that are (*ea quae sunt*) and are not (*ea quae non sunt*). Echoing similar divisions in Augustine (*City of God* Bk. V.9, PL 41:151) and Marius Victorinus (*Ad Candidum, To Candidus*), nature is divided into four "divisions" or "species" (*Peri.* I.441b–442a): that which creates and is not created (i.e., God); that which creates and is created (i.e., Primary Causes or Ideas); that which is created and does not create (i.e., Temporal Effects, created things); that which is neither created nor creates (i.e., nonbeing, nothingness). This fourfold division of nature represents God as the Beginning, Middle, and End of all things. The four divisions unfold from and enfold back into the divine Unity. Creation is a process of divine self-articulation; the entire cosmic drama of expression and return takes place within the Godhead. Human nature, as the image of God, plays a very direct role in the cosmic process of the divine self-manifestation and self-gathering.

In *Periphyseon* Book One, Eriugena outlines "five ways of interpreting" (*quinque modi interpretationis*) the manner in which things may be said to be or not to be (I.443c–446a). According to this complex and original account, attribution of being or nonbeing is dependent on the mode of approach and care needs to be taken. Thus, when Eriugena calls God "nothing," he means that God transcends all created being (*nihil per excellentiam*). Matter, on the other hand, is "nothing through privation" (*nihil per privationem*).

Eriugena's fourfold division offers a rich negative theological account of God and His relation to creation. God, as uncreated and creating, transcends everything created and is the "negation of everthing" (*negatio omnium*, III.686d). God is not "literally" (*proprie*) substance or essence, quantity, quality, relation, place, or time. He is *superessentialis* (I.459d). His "being" is "beyond being," or as Eriugena puts it, in his version of a Dionysian saying, God's being is the superbeing (of) divinity (*Esse enim omnium est super esse divinitas*), or "the being of all things is the Divinity above being" (*Peri.* I.443b). Sometimes, Eriugena speaks simply of the "divine superessentiality" (*divina superessentialitas*, *Peri.* III.634b), or, quoting Dionysius' *Divine Names* I 1–2 (PG 3:588b–c), of the "superessential and hidden divinity" (*superessentialis et occulta divinitas*, *Peri.* I.510b). God may also be called "nothingness" (*nihilum*), since His essence is unknown to all created beings, including all the ranks of angels (I.447c). Indeed, Eriugena argues, God's nature is unknown even to Himself, since He is the "infinity of infinities" and hence beyond all comprehension and circumscription.

Eriugena understands creation as the self-manifestation of the divine (*Peri.* I.455b), whereby the hidden transcendent God manifests Himself in divine outpourings or theophanies (I.446d). Moreover, there is a strong unity between Creator and created, as there is between cause and effect. God and the creature are not two things distinct from one another, but as one and the same: "For both the creature, by subsisting, is in God; and God, by manifesting himself, in a marvellous and ineffable manner creates himself in the creature. . ." (*Peri.* III.678c).

Although Eriugena asserts the identity of God and creation, he explicitly rejects the view that God is the "genus" or "whole" of which the creatures are "species" or "parts." Only metaphorically (*metaforice*, translative) can it be said that God is a "genus" or a "whole." As is typical in Christian Neoplatonism, the divine immanence in creation is balanced by the divine transcendence and impassibility. God is indeed "form of all things" but He is also formless and above being. The creature can therefore never be simply

identified with God. On the other hand, the creature, considered in itself (following St. Augustine) must be considered to be nothing (*nihilum*).

*Periphyseon* Book Two discusses the Primary Causes (*causae primordiales*) or "divine willings" (*theia thelemata*), through which God creates all things. Eriugena's conception of these Causes draws on the Platonic Forms, the Stoic–Augustinian notion of eternal reasons (*rationes aeternae*), Dionysius' account of the divine names, and Maximus' notion of "divine willings" (*theia thelemata, divinae voluntates*). God is infinite and His Causes too are infinite in number. Moreover, there is no hierarchy or precedence among them; Being is not prior to Goodness, or vice versa. Each is in its own way a divine theophany. This "outflowing" (*proodos; processio, exitus*) of the Causes creates the whole universe from the highest genus to the lowest species and individuals (*atoma*). In his understanding of this causal procession, Eriugena accepts Neoplatonic principles (drawn from the tradition of Proclus) concerning causation: like produces like; incorporeal causes produce incorporeal effects; causes that are immaterial, intellectual, and eternal produce effects that are equally immaterial, intellectual, and eternal. Cause and effect are mutually dependent, relative terms (V.910d–912b).

The Primary Causes produce their Effects timelessly. The Effects, for Eriugena, are also originally timeless and incorruptible, but, as they proceed from their essences through their genera, species, and individuals (in a kind of ontological descent through the tree of Porphyry), they become located spatially and temporally but not yet in a corporeal sense. Eriugena seems to postulate two kinds of time – an unchanging time (a reason or ratio in the divine mind, *Peri.* V.906a) and a corrupting time. Since place and time are definitions that locate things, and since definitions are in the mind, place and time are therefore said to be "in the mind" (*in mente*, I.485b). The sensible, corporeal, spatiotemporal appearances of things are produced by the qualities or "circumstances" (*circumstantiae*) of place, time, position, and so on, which surround the incorporeal, eternal essence. Indeed, the entire spatiotemporal world (including corporeal

human bodies) is a consequence of the Fall. For Eriugena, God, foreseeing that human beings would fall, created a body and a corporeal world for them. But this corporeal body is not essential to human nature, and in the return of all things to God the corporeal body will be transformed into the spiritual body (*spirituale corpus*). The corporeal world will return to its incorporeal essence, and place understood as extension will return back into its cause or reason as a definition in the mind (*Peri*. V.889d). Since there is nothing outside God (the transcendent nothingness), creation “from nothing” (*ex nihilo*) does not mean creation from anything outside God; rather it means creation out of God Himself (*a se*). All creation comes from God and remains within Him.

*Periphyseon* Books Four and Five draw heavily on Maximus Confessor’s and Gregory of Nyssa’s accounts of the return (*reditus*) of all things to God. In particular, Eriugena explicates the role of human nature in the cosmic process of return. Eriugena’s theological anthropology is a radical reinterpretation of the biblical theme of humans as made in the image and likeness of God (*in imaginem et similitudinem dei*). Eriugena begins from the ideal nature of humanity had it not sinned. Eriugena argues that paradise and original human nature were entirely spiritual and intellectual. By nature, every effect returns to its cause. Corporeal things return to their incorporeal causes; the temporal to the eternal, the finite to the infinite. As part of this general return, the corporeal, temporal, material world becomes essentially incorporeal, timeless, and intellectual. Human nature will return to its Primary Cause or “Idea” (*notio*) in the mind of God. “Paradise” is actually the scriptural name for this ideal human nature in the mind of God. Humans who refuse to abandon their “circumstances” remain trapped in their own phantasies, and it is to this mental state that the scriptural term “hell” applies. Aside from the general return of all things to God, Eriugena claims there is a special return whereby the elect achieve “deification” (*deificatio, theosis*), merging with God completely, as lights blend into the one light, as voices blend in the choir, as a droplet of water merges with the stream. God shall be “all in all” (*omnia in omnibus, Peri*. V.935c).

In Book Four, Eriugena rejects the classical definition of human nature as “rational animal” since it does not capture the true status of human beings. Just as, according to the dialectic of affirmative and negative theology, God may be said to be or not to be (*Deus est; deus not est*), so too human nature may be said to be animal or not animal. Following Gregory of Nyssa, Eriugena also denies that human nature is a “microcosm.” Rather, human nature is “a certain intellectual concept formed eternally (*aeternaliter facta*) in the divine mind” (IV.768b). For Eriugena, human nature uniquely mirrors transcendent divine nature. Only of human nature can it be said that it is made in the image and likeness of God. Not even the angels are accorded that honor. Perfect human nature would have possessed the fullest knowledge of its Creator, of itself, and of everything else had it not sinned (*Peri*. IV.778c). Just as God knows that He is but not what He is, since He is uncircumscribable, so too human nature knows that it is but not what it is. Human self-ignorance mirrors the divine self-ignorance and is a mark of the infinite and transcendent nature of the human as of the divine. Human nature, without the Fall, would have ruled the universe (IV.782c). Similarly, perfect human nature would have enjoyed omniscience and other attributes enjoyed by God. Just as God is infinite and unbounded, human nature is indefinable and incomprehensible and open to infinite possibility and perfectibility (V.919c). God’s transcendence and immanence are reflected in human transcendence and immanence with regard to its world (IV.759a–b). The Fall is construed by Eriugena as the descent from intellect into sense: *intellectus* is distracted by the voluptuousness of sensibility (*aisthesis*). Eriugena follows Gregory of Nyssa’s view that sexual difference is a consequence of the Fall and not a defining characteristic of human nature. Perfect human being is neither male nor female, just as “in Christ there is neither male nor female” (*Peri*. IV.795a).

Christ as the divine idea of human nature is the centerpiece of the entire cosmic procession and return. Christ as Logos is the manifestation of the divine and also “the perfect human” (*vir autem perfectus est Christus, Peri*. IV.743b). Christ is

actually what all human beings can be and will be, and that is precisely the promise of salvation for Eriugena (*Peri.* II.545a). For Eriugena, a true image is identical to its exemplar in all respects “except number” or “subject” (*Peri.* IV.778a). Neither divine nor human nature is in space or time, both are incorporeal and hence numerical difference, or difference in subject, can only have the Neoplatonic meaning that the first will always differ from what comes after the first. God is creator and humankind is created, but since creation is self-manifestation, that amounts to saying that God manifests himself fully as human nature. Sometimes Eriugena, quoting Maximus Confessor (e.g., V.879c–880a), says that humankind is by grace (*per gratiam*) what God is by nature. On the other hand, all nature is a theophany; nature is the outpouring of grace. Every gift (*donum*) is a given (*datum*), and vice versa. The creation of human nature is both the free outpouring of the divine will and the self-expression of the divine nature. Human nature stands closer to God than any other creature (including the angels, who are not made in the image and likeness of God).

Eriugena places extraordinary emphasis on the infinity and boundlessness of both God and human nature. The divine causes are infinite in number and so are the theophanies under which God may be viewed. Human progress to Godhead proceeds infinitely. Holy Scripture too has infinite richness (*Sacrae scripturae interpretatio infinita est*, *Peri.* II.560a), its interpretations are as innumerable as the colors in a peacock’s tail (IV.749c). Human capacity for perfection and self-transcendence is also endless (a theme that will reappear in Renaissance Humanism).

### Eriugena’s Influence

Eriugena’s *Periphyseon* had influence in France at the schools of Laon, Auxerre, and Corbie. It was popular again in the twelfth century (with Hugh of Saint Victor, Alan of Lille, and Suger of Saint-Denis) when circulated in the “edition” of William of Malmsebury and the paraphrase of Honorius Augustodunensis. Eriugena’s translations of Dionysius circulated widely during the eleventh and

twelfth centuries, as did his *Homily on the Prologue to John* (often attributed to Origen). In the thirteenth century, the *Periphyseon* was somewhat unfairly associated with the doctrines of two Paris theologians, David of Dinant and Amaury of Bène, and was condemned in 1210 and 1225. Eriugena was also, again unfairly, linked with certain views on the Eucharist associated with Berengar of Tours. Meister Eckhart of Hochheim (c. 1260–c. 1328) and Nicholas of Cusa (1401–1464) were familiar with the *Periphyseon*. Eriugena’s conception of human nature as *imago dei* influenced Renaissance Humanism. Thomas Gale produced the first printed edition of Eriugena’s works in 1687, which was soon listed on the papal *Index of Prohibited Books*. In the nineteenth century, Hegel and his followers revived Eriugena as the forefather of speculative idealism, and process theologians also acknowledged his dynamic conception of the divine. New critical editions of Eriugena’s works contributed to a revival of interest in Eriugena in the twentieth century.

### Cross-References

- ▶ [Anselm of Canterbury](#)
- ▶ [Augustine](#)
- ▶ [Being](#)
- ▶ [Boethius](#)
- ▶ [Carolingian Renaissance](#)
- ▶ [Church Fathers](#)
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- ▶ [Platonism](#)
- ▶ [Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite](#)
- ▶ [Time](#)

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## John Torquemada

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### Abstract

John Torquemada (1388–1468) was the leading papal apologist of the mid-fifteenth century. Torquemada, a Dominican friar trained as a Thomist, attended the Council of Basel (1431–1449) to represent his order and the King of Castile. There he became concerned that conciliarism would harm the church, the papacy, and his order. He became the pope's defender. Eugenius IV (1431–1447) made him Master of the Sacred Palace and then a cardinal. As a member of the Roman Curia, he promoted orthodoxy, defended the conversos of Castile, and promoted a crusade against the Ottoman Turks. He also promoted reform of religious houses. Most notably, he wrote a massive *Summa de ecclesia* (1453), which defended the institutional church against the Hussite heresy and the Roman see against conciliarism. It became a source for later defenders of Rome, including Cajetan and Robert Bellarmine.

### Life and Works

John Torquemada (Juan de Torquemada, Johannes de Turrecremata) (1388–1468), a Dominican friar and cardinal, was the most prominent papal apologist of the fifteenth century. Born of a Castilian noble family, he joined the Dominican Order as a youth. Torquemada accompanied his provincial to the Council of Constance (1414–1418) and then studied theology at the University of Paris. After becoming a master of theology in 1425, he returned to Castile and served as a conventual prior. Torquemada was chosen to represent both his order and King Juan II of Castile at the Council of Basel (1431–1449).

There he participated in debates with the Hussites and interested himself in reform of the church. This did not prevent him from defending the interests of his order and the papacy, on which the friars relied for support in their work of preaching and hearing confessions. Most of his early works were polemics favoring papal plenitude of power. Pope Eugenius IV (1431–1447) chose him to serve as Master of the Sacred Palace, his theological advisor.

Torquemada left Basel in 1437 when Eugenius transferred the council to Ferrara to meet with the Emperor John VIII Palaeologus and representatives of the Greek church. This decision precipitated efforts by the Basel assembly to declare conciliar supremacy a dogma and depose the pope. Torquemada was busy for the following 3 years representing the pope on diplomatic missions and participating in the Council of Ferrara-Florence (1438–1445). He helped negotiate a brief-lived reunion of the Greek and Latin churches and debated Cardinal Giuliano Cesarini on issues of papal versus conciliar power, upholding papal primacy. His influence can be seen in papal letters condemning conciliarism. Pope Eugenius rewarded Torquemada with promotion to the cardinalate in 1439.

John Torquemada was a resident in the Roman Curia for the rest of his life, participating in routine business and advising on important issues. He played a role in the discussions leading to the termination of the Basel schism, arguing for firmness in negotiating with the princes of the Holy Roman Empire. The cardinal participated in four conclaves, casting the deciding vote in the election of Pope Nicholas V (1447–1455). He later supported efforts to organize a crusade against the Ottoman Turks, especially at the Congress of Mantua (1459). Torquemada supported the interests of his order, whose habit he continued to wear, and promoted reform of monastic houses, including the Abbey of Subiaco, of which he was commendatory abbot. He died in Rome in 1468 and is buried at Santa Maria sopra Minerva in the Chapel of the Annunciation. The Guild of the Annunciation, which he founded to dower poor girls of good birth, was favored by the papacy thereafter.

Torquemada continued to write extensively as a cardinal. His most notable works focused on the papacy. A commentary on the *Decretum* of Gratian (finished in 1464) was intended to give the proper, pro-papal interpretation of key texts in canon law that had been used to support conciliarism. His *Summa de ecclesia* (finished in 1453) was the most thorough defense of the institutional church written during the Middle Ages. Other works included defenses of mendicant poverty and the conversos of Toledo, a tract on the legitimacy of the Holy Roman Empire, an exposition of the Psalter, and a brief mystical work. A critique of Islam, as Torquemada perceived it, was intended to promote a crusade. The cardinal also became an early patron of printing. In 1467, he had an illustrated edition of his *Meditationes* printed in Rome. Torquemada's writing style was scholastic, molded by his Thomist education, but the humanist Lorenzo Valla regarded him sympathetically.

Torquemada's influence on papalist apologetics can be seen in the works of the Dominican Cardinal Thomas of Vio (Cajetan) and of the Jesuit polemicist Robert Bellarmine. His defense of papal primacy also has been discerned in the depiction of Saint Peter in the fresco cycles on the walls of the Sistine Chapel. Perhaps his most enduring contribution to the defense of Roman primacy was the contention that conciliarism was derived from the works of Marsilius of Padua and William of Ockham. This polemical genealogy of conciliarism remained influential into the twentieth century, but it is no longer accepted by most scholars. Torquemada, as a Thomist, was a critic of the feast and doctrine of Mary's Immaculate Conception. Edward Bouverie Pusey republished his polemic against celebration of the feast, written at the Council of Basel, to combat the dogmatic definition of the Immaculate Conception by Pope Pius IX in 1854.

### ***Summa de ecclesia* (1453)**

Torquemada's *Summa de ecclesia* was one of the few tracts on the church (*de ecclesia*) written during the Middle Ages. It was begun with an

eye to defending the institutional church against the Hussites, as well as defeating the conciliarist challenge to papal primacy. The methodology is scholastic, thorough, phrased with arguments *pro et contra* leading to solutions of disputed questions, and rich in citations to authorities. The *Summa* has four books, concerned with the nature of the church, the papal office, the general council, and schism and heresy. The work was distributed, but not widely, in manuscript form. It was first printed in Rome in 1489. Two of the printed versions conclude with an additional text, Torquemada's anthology of excerpts from the works of Thomas Aquinas that deal with papal power (Lyon, 1496) or his commentary on the decree *Laetentur coeli* of the Council of Florence, the document that briefly united the Greek and Latin churches (Venice, 1561).

The first book of the *Summa* focuses on the church as an institution. It includes a defense of the visible institution as legitimately representative of the true church (*vera ecclesia*) against the Hussites. The principal definition of *ecclesia* employed by Torquemada is "the congregation of the faithful" (*congregatio fidelium*). The emphasis is on membership in the visible church through faith expressed in baptism. The good Christian has faith formed by charity (*fides formata*). Torquemada did not deny that some believers are predestined to damnation, but he treated this as known only to God. The church could not function on the basis of such hidden knowledge as the clergy preached the gospel and administered the sacraments.

The second book concentrates on the powers of the pope. The pope had no greater power of orders than any other bishop, but he was supreme in jurisdiction. His jurisdictional supremacy, the plenitude of power (*plenitudo potestatis*), was exercised in the external forum of censures and other practical measures. This included the pope's ability to settle doctrinal disputes and grant indulgences. The cardinal's proofs of this supremacy included interpretation of all biblical texts about Peter and the other apostles as recording the conferral of jurisdiction by Christ through Peter to the other apostles. Diffusion of power from the pope downward through the hierarchy was

described in terms derived from Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite. Torquemada discussed the possibility of papal infallibility, but he accepted older ideas about a few popes having fallen into error. In such cases, the cardinal believed that an errant Roman pontiff could lose his see by embracing heresy. This canonistic concept saved the pope from judgment by a council, but it left him open to being declared self-deposed by his enemies. Torquemada also argued that the pope might intervene in secular affairs but only where religious concerns motivated him. Lay regimes had their own legitimacy grounded by reason in natural law, conferring the means of temporal felicity on both Christians and non-Christians.

The third book treats general councils as authorized by the pope. They had no additional jurisdictional power, but they might offer the prestige of wide participants backing conciliar decrees and their wisdom advising the pope about issues of doctrine and practice. A legitimate pope could convoke, transfer, or dissolve a council. This was the cardinal's response to the refusal of the Council of Basel to move to Italy or disperse. Nor could anyone appeal a decision of a pope to the next general council, as opponents of papal policies occasionally did. Torquemada dismissed the decree *Haec sancta* of the Council of Constance, one of the foundation documents of conciliarism, as the act of only one obedience in the Great Schism. This argument against the decree remained a cornerstone of pro-papal polemic on conciliar power into the twentieth century.

The fourth book was divided into two sections. One section was concerned with schism, division of church unity. This was a crime if someone intruded himself into the papacy, but no legitimate pope could be forced to step aside under those circumstances. Another type of schism, a choice between claimants to the see of Peter, could be addressed through an inquiry to determine the truth. Torquemada enumerated several schisms in the past, but he was careful not to take the side of any claimant in the Great Schism. The other part of book four was concerned with heresy, the teaching of false doctrine. Remedies for

heresy were discussed, and an enumeration of past heresies was offered. The most recent heresies described are those of John Wycliffe and John Hus, whose teachings had been condemned by the Council of Constance.

## Cross-References

- ▶ [Conciliarism](#)
- ▶ [Marsilius of Padua](#)
- ▶ [Political Philosophy](#)
- ▶ [Thomas of Vio \(Cajetan\)](#)
- ▶ [Thomism](#)
- ▶ [William of Ockham](#)

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## John Wyclif

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### Abstract

John Wyclif (c. 1331–1384) was an English philosopher and theologian whose thought led later historians to incorrectly associate him with the Protestant Reformation. Wyclif was Master of Balliol College at Oxford in 1360 and became famed for his philosophical abilities thereafter. He entered royal service with John of Gaunt in 1376, arguing vigorously for the royal right to control the church, was condemned by Gregory XI in 1377, and was compelled to leave Oxford in 1381. He retired to Lutterworth, Leicestershire, where he died on December 31, 1384. His main works are two large *Summae*: the *Summa de ente*, containing philosophical and theological treatises, and the *Summa theologie*, containing his political, ecclesiastical, and other later controversial thought. He also composed a *Postilla* of the *Bible*, second only to Nicholas Lyra's work, a set of sermons, Scripture commentary, and the *Trialogus*, an introductory-level summary of the whole of his theological project. While many of his works were published by

the Wyclif Society a century ago, many need to be reedited. His *Postilla* has never been fully edited. His reputation as a philosopher continues to suffer in light of his condemnation for heresy.

## Logic and Philosophy of Language

Until recently, Wyclif's philosophy has generally been described in terms of the vigorous arguments for philosophical realism that characterize his metaphysics, which has led to the use of the term "ultrarealism" to describe his thought. The result of this approach has been the assumption that Wyclif's interests lie primarily in revivifying an ontological program harking back to the twelfth century in a reactionary rejection of the Ockhamist *Moderni* conceptualism. This is a mischaracterization of Wyclif's philosophical approach caused in large part by nineteenth- and twentieth-century scholars' unfamiliarity with the sensitivity to the logic and semantics of terms and propositions pervading philosophical discourse in Oxford in the fourteenth century. Before engaging in the metaphysics and philosophical theology that make up the *Summa de ente*, Wyclif had explored questions of the reference of terms and propositions in a number of earlier treatises, including the three grouped together in *De logica*, and a treatise on *Insolubilia*. Wyclif's logic is less notable for innovation in inferential reasoning than it is for the clarity with which it introduces students to the general elements of Aristotelian syllogistic. The popularity of Wyclif's logic that continued into the fifteenth century, after his more controversial works had been condemned, arose from the utility of its introductory treatise, the first of the three logical treatises. The second two treatises are less approachable, in large part because Wyclif begins his chapters with an ostensibly traditional question about how terms refer with particular propositions and then invariably launches into complex analysis of the relation of species of reference to the semantics of propositions and the corresponding relation of such propositions to questions in ontology. His chief

interest is in establishing a theory of propositional realism, the understanding of which makes his ontological realism, his Scripture hermeneutics, and other significant elements of his philosophical theology much more intelligible.

Wyclif's conception of the relation of propositions to things is that whatever is, is a proposition. "A proposition, broadly speaking, is 'a being signifying in a complex way'; and so, because everything that is signifies in a complex way that it exists, everything that is can well enough be said to be a proposition." The problems that arise from this are manifold: how to account for propositions expressing absence or nonexistence, or for false propositions, or for propositions of indeterminate or future contingent truth-value? In what sense is the fact that a stone is lying in the road propositionally structured? Why should there be a necessary isomorphism between the propositions we construct to describe our perceptions of reality and the nature of the world outside our minds?

His theory of the reference of terms is derived from Ockham, who understood that terms naturally signify concepts, which naturally represent things in the world. Wodeham followed Ockham, and introduced the complex significable, akin to a state of affairs to which our statements about the world refer, but did not posit an isomorphism between things in the world, the complex significable that relates the things in the world, and the propositions we construct describing the complex significable. Wyclif made the leap to suppose that reality is structured in exactly the way that the sentences we form in our minds, and with our words, suggest. He explains that there are five kinds of propositions: mental, vocal, and written ones, real ones, and true ones. The latter two are especially relevant to Wyclif's realist ontology.

A "real proposition" is the individuated reality of a creature, made up of a subject and a predicate. Take Socrates: in him there is this person, an individuated particular of the human species, which functions as the subject. In him there is also a human nature, which is essentially present in the subject as a predicate. Uniting the subject, Socrates, and the predicate, a human nature, is his essence, the actualization of the union of the two,

making the real proposition "Socrates (subject) is (essential actualization) a human being (predicate)." A "true proposition" is a truth significant apart from the thing. For example, "To be a man" is a complex truth, indicating the truth of a number of real propositions considered in themselves. That is, the existence of all the subjects having human being as a predicate essentially actualized in them comprises a reality "to be a man." This is functionally similar to Adam Wodeham's complex significable. So there are real propositions existing as individuals in creation, and true propositions existing as describing, and organizing, the individuals.

As a linguistic proposition has subject and predicate, so every created being has a predicative structure. Predication, then, becomes more than just a topic for philosophy of language; it is the primary element to be described in metaphysics. Wyclif lists three kinds of predication in *De universalibus* that account for every aspect of a particular thing's being. Real formal predication expresses the existence of a form in a subject. The proposition "Peter is a man" describes the state of affairs of the form Humanity existing in Peter, while "Peter is musical" describes the state of affairs of a formal quality in Peter whereby he is musical. Real essential predication indicates an indissoluble, real identity between subject and predicate, although we can rationally distinguish between the definition of the subject and the definition of the predicate. Hence, while "Peter is a man" and "Humanity is in Peter" appear to say the same thing, the first expresses a truth about a particular being, Peter, while the second seems to have for its subject Humanity. Humanity is formally distinct from Peter, for we conceive of an idea of Humanity from our experience of Peter, but we cannot actually separate Humanity from Peter. When we say something like "Humanity entails being a rational animal," the referent is this Humanity that is formally distinct from each of its subjects. This is the basis for what Wyclif will describe as Universals of Community in his description of the kinds of universals; it is not something really distinct from particular human beings, but it is a real something about which true propositions are formulable. The questions that

naturally arise from this asserted isomorphism between propositions and reality, such as the referent of propositions about nonexistent entities like “All chimeras growl,” are the focus of *De logica*, making it absolutely necessary for understanding his realist ontology.

## Metaphysics and Epistemology

Wyclif’s epistemology is an important part of his philosophical approach, grounded in his conviction that reality is propositionally structured. His account of cognition is structured on the model of optics, as was common in fourteenth-century Oxford: how the mind perceives truths about the world is analogous to the way in which the eye perceives objects in the world. While Ockham had argued that we directly perceive objects, many of his immediate successors, including Adam Wodeham, Robert Holcot, Richard Fitzralph, and William Crathorn, argued for the species model of perception. In this model, objects of perception emit appearances, or species, which are refracted in the eye and converted by mental act into the material of intuitive cognition. Crathorn is exceptional among species theorists in dismissing the need for mental acts in the process, arguing instead that the species enters directly into the mind to become the idea of the object perceived. Wyclif directed his epistemic account against Crathorn, arguing that mental acts are qualities of the mind while enthusiastically advocating the species model. Indeed, his fondness for the heuristic of optics appears frequently throughout the body of his works; for example, he uses the terminology and mechanics of optics to account for the real presence of Christ in the elements of the Eucharist and also in his discussion of kingship. Wyclif follows Fitzralph, Henry of Ghent, and ultimately Robert Grosseteste in his belief that understanding is reliant on divine illumination, although he does not argue directly for the position in his discussions of epistemology. Instead, his frequent assertions that human understanding is impossible without its assent to the divinely given teaching lead the reader to recognize that his epistemology depends on God’s illumination

of truth for its model of certainty. The mental assent we give to what we come to know is common to both truths known about the perceptible world, truths we learn through deductive reasoning, truths we are shown through direct divine illumination, and truths that are accepted as matters of faith. Faith has a natural place in all our acts of understanding, great and small, and if we can claim to have an accurate explanation for even the least act of understanding the simplest thing, we should also admit to the possibility that great truths of faith, like the Trinity, may be explored and understood by human reason. So to view faith and reason as incompatible is premature. Faith is at once an act of believing and assent to a truth; since what is known is believed as well, faith and knowing are not really incompatible. This incorporation of faith into every act of knowing forms the basis for his refutation of the *Moderni* contention that theology and philosophy are different in kind, which Wyclif articulates in the first part of his philosophical analysis of the Trinity.

Wyclif’s metaphysics, like that of many of his Oxford predecessors, grows out of his understanding of how terms fit together in propositions, and he is not the first to have concluded that universals have a reality apart from the particulars of which they are predicated. Walter Burley had argued that fundamental truths that we form about the world, like “Socrates is Human,” are structured like their objects, such that Humanity is something real that is a part of Socrates that is also a part of every other particular of which Humanity is predicable. The universal Humanity cannot exist apart from the particulars of which it is a part, but it has a “specific identity” that is different in kind from the “numerical identity” of individual substances. There is a certain reciprocity relation holding between the two kinds of identities: the identity of the particular depends on the identity of the universal, but the being of the universal depends upon the being of the particulars. Wyclif believed that Burley’s position was dangerously close to Platonism, in which universals have being apart from particulars and apart from God’s ideas of created beings. On the other hand, he was unable to accept the Ockhamist rejection of their reality, and he felt that the



Thomist and Scotist position, in which universals have reality arising from our cognition of individual objects, was likewise inaccurate. Their answer was to emphasize the commonality of the form of the human beings, which commonality is realized as a universal Man in our understanding of the things. Wyclif argued that it was better to distinguish between Man's existence in God's mind, and its existence in creation, a distinction between first- and second-intention universals. A first-intention term is a concept we derive from a real thing: when I hold a red apple, I can consider the redness of that apple. That concept is a first-intention concept of the apple's redness. I can then reflect back on all the other red apples I have encountered and compare this apple's redness with them. This reflection back is itself a concept, derived from earlier concepts, and is a second-intention concept. Similarly, universals have existence as objects of God's mind, or divine Ideas, and they also have existence in the being of things. When we encounter an individual apple, we recognize the universal "fruit" as it exists in the essential nature of the apple as a universal of the first intention. This gives us a foundation for understanding the universal's primary being, which is to have being as a second-intention Idea in God's mind. Since the divine Ideas are eternal, while universals are created, this means that second-intention universals have ontological primacy over first-intention universals.

Wyclif's realism is very carefully developed, beginning with a distinction between universals of causality, universals by community, and universals by signification, exhaustive analysis of relation holding between the real predication of universals by created beings and the species of predication by which we formulate truths about the identities of these beings and their universals, and patient treatment of the manifold objections to ontological realism that were common in fourteenth-century arguments. It is necessary to understand the relation of Wyclif's treatise on universals to his treatise on the divine Ideas, which together articulate his understanding of the relation of first- and second-intention universality. The realism described in *De universalibus* can easily lead one to wonder how he understands

the divine understanding of the universals to be distinct, yet not a detraction from the divine unity. This is the substance of his argument in *De ideis*, making it an important part of his ontological program.

### The Necessity of God's Knowledge

Wyclif's philosophical theology is based on his propositional realism, and encompasses many of the traditional problems generally associated with the medieval *Sentence* commentary. This suggests that the treatises that describe it may contain the traces of the commentary on Lombard he would have been required to complete for the doctorate in theology. Wyclif develops metaphysically complex accounts of the relation of the persons of the Trinity, of the natures united in the Incarnation, and of the contents of God's knowledge to divine willing and understanding. The theological approach he attempted to articulate was condemned for its inability to accept the philosophical possibility of annihilation in creation, which was an important aspect of traditional accounts of the transubstantiation of the Eucharistic elements into the body and blood of Christ. Admitting the possibility that substance might be annihilated, Wyclif argued, was as good as recognizing that God could both eternally know and not know that substance. A large part of Wyclif's energies was directed toward defining the nature of God's knowledge. He is best known for espousing a strongly determinist theology which, along with his repeated definition of the church as being the body of the elect, has led critics both medieval and modern to condemn him for eliminating human free will from his soteriology. This is a misinterpretation of Wyclif's complex account of the necessity of God's foreknowledge and the reciprocity that holds between human free willing and God's eternal volition. He departs from the traditional position by positing a two-way relation between eternal knowledge and created action, in contingent created acts that cause divine knowledge, which is necessary, even though it is caused by created action. Wyclif's method of addressing this was to distinguish between absolute and

hypothetical, or suppositional, necessity. Wyclif's modal theory is complex, and the species of necessity he posits as he describes the eternal nature of divine knowledge and the contingent nature of created action are manifold. The heart of his resolution is his use of "antecedent suppositional or hypothetical" necessity.

Consider the following argument:

1. If God eternally knows that Peter sins today, then Peter sins today.
2. God eternally knows that Peter sins today.

Therefore, Peter sins today.

Statement 1 is eternally true, and would be logically unavoidable, no matter what. This is an instance of absolute necessity – necessary because connected to the necessity of divine omniscience. Likewise, the argument formed by combining 1 and 2 leads directly to the conclusion according to Modus Ponens. This argument is both valid and true by absolute necessity from eternity, as is every logical, mathematical, and geometric truth. Suppositional necessity arises from the relation of truth-values in propositions that are used syllogistically to explain our understanding of how God knows created events. With antecedent suppositional necessity, once the truth of the situation described as antecedent is met, the consequent will necessarily come about, as with "God wills Socrates to exist," the truth of "Socrates exists" will necessarily follow. The antecedent in 1, "if God eternally knows that Peter sins today" is not absolutely necessary in itself, although the whole of 1 is. The antecedent is dependent upon God eternally knowing that Peter sins, which is where Wyclif perceives room for nuance. He argues that truths like "God eternally knows that Peter sins today," true by antecedent suppositional necessity, do not thereby lose contingency. Peter's sinning is dependent upon Peter, and God's knowledge follows from Peter's choice. That God eternally knows how Peter will choose does not cause Peter's choice. This allows room for contingency in Peter's action without plunging the eternality of God's knowledge into temporal constraints. While God knows what Peter will choose, it is possible from all eternity that Peter

have chosen differently, thereby admitting contingency into the mix without limit to the necessity of God's knowing. This means that while God eternally knows who will be among the elect, and who among the damned, this does not entail the freedom-destroying effect of double predestination.

Wyclif's ecclesiology rests upon this balance between God's eternal knowledge and human free willing, as does his hermeneutic of Scripture. He understands Scripture to be ontologically structured as universal and particulars, in which the eternal contents of the divine mind function as universal, giving reality to a hierarchy of particular instantiates. The first instantiate is the *Book of Life*, which contains the names of the elect, and the instantiate most immediate to us is the *Bible*. This makes Scripture the repository of all that is knowable, every part of which is eternally true; at the same time, the events described in it were dependent upon the wills of the people who acted, as in the example with Peter above. Wyclif's posthumous fame for instigating the first English translation of the *Bible* was not based in an assumption that its truths are readily comprehensible; his Scripture hermeneutic repeatedly emphasizes the need for the reader to be adept at the "logic of Christ," which entails both a moral and a philosophical awareness few were likely to master.

### Wyclif's Political Philosophy

Wyclif developed a monarchist political theory out of the realist metaphysical program he had articulated in *Summa de ente*, prior to 1376. Unlike many medieval political theorists, Wyclif perceived a strong tie between an ontological position, in his case realist, and the just articulation of church and state. His understanding of the fundamental term of mastery, *dominium*, provides the basis for this unified understanding. *Dominium* had become a word with two commonly united referents, namely, the master-slave relation and property ownership. Wyclif combined the two senses in his use of the concept and conceived of *dominium* as a relation holding

between two *relata*. God's *dominium* relation to creation originates in the act of creation, implying that true lordship/ownership is only possible for a creator. Divine *dominium* serves as a universal by causality for all cases of just human *dominium*, of which there are three possible kinds. Prelapsarian *dominium* entailed communitarian enjoyment of creation without the burden of property ownership or artificial mastery, but was lost with the Fall. Postlapsarian human *dominium* relations are founded in ownership and mastery and are artificial approximations of the ideal for which human beings were created. The Incarnation has made possible two interrelated species of just human *dominium*: the first, an apostolic poverty imitative of the life of Christ and fully realized in the early church, and the second, a just human lordship designed specifically to protect the former in a world still rife with sin. Wyclif argued that the church should retain this rejection of private ownership, and vigorously attacked its political and proprietary interests as indicative of Antichrist's control over the institution intended to save mankind. Grace has provided an antidote to the fall of the earthly church, though; a civil lord or king may, and should, divest the church in his realm of all political and proprietary concerns. In so doing, the civil lord would be serving God and his subjects by providing the basis for the just evangelical lordship first realized by the apostolic church. Wyclif described this politically reformative vision in *De civili dominio* and *De officio regis* and articulated his ecclesiology in *De potestate pape* and *De ecclesia*. While Gregory XI compared his vision to that of Marsilius of Padua, Wyclif's political thought is intimately connected with his understanding of the true nature of the church, and with his soteriology, and should not be considered apart from his theology.

## Cross-References

- ▶ [Adam Wodeham](#)
- ▶ [Atomism](#)
- ▶ [Henry of Ghent](#)
- ▶ [Oxford Calculators](#)

- ▶ [Realism](#)
- ▶ [Richard Fitzralph](#)
- ▶ [Robert Grosseteste](#)
- ▶ [Robert Holcot](#)
- ▶ [Thomas Bradwardine](#)
- ▶ [Walter Burley](#)
- ▶ [Walter Chatton](#)
- ▶ [William Crathorn](#)
- ▶ [William of Ockham](#)

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## Juan Luís Vives

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### Abstract

Juan Luis Vives (1492/3–1540) was a Spanish-born humanist who spent the greater part of his life in the Low Countries. He strongly opposed scholasticism and made his mark as one of the most influential advocates of humanistic learning in the early sixteenth century. His bent was philosophical rather than philological. His works deal with a wide range of subjects including education, psychology, politics, social reform, and religion. Vives was not a systematic writer, which makes it difficult to classify him as a philosopher. His thought is eclectic and pragmatic, as well as historical, in its orientation. He took what he considered most valid from a variety of sources and combined these elements into a Christianized Aristotelianism.

### Biographical Information

Juan Luis Vives was born in Valencia, Spain in 1492, or more likely in 1493, to Jewish parents who had converted to Catholicism. He attended the Estudio General of his hometown until 1509,

when he moved to Paris and enrolled as a freshman in the Faculty of Arts. He began his studies at the Collège de Lisieux, where Juan Dolz del Castellar had just started a triennial course, but soon moved to the Collège de Beauvais, where he attended the lectures of the Fleming Jan Dullaert (1470–1513). From the fall of 1512, Vives started to attend the course of the Aragonese Gaspar Lax (1487–1560) at the Collège de Montaigu. Through Nicolas Bérault (c.1470–c.1545), who was an associate of Guillaume Budé (1467–1540) and taught at various colleges in Paris, Vives also came into contact with the Parisian humanist circle.

In 1514, Vives left Paris without having taken any formal academic degree and moved to the Low Countries. He settled in Bruges, where he would spend most of his life. About this time, he was introduced to the court of Brussels, where he met Erasmus and, around 1517, was appointed as tutor to the Flemish nobleman William II of Croy. Until Croy's sudden death in 1521, Vives lived in Louvain and taught at the Collegium Trilingue, a humanist foundation based on Erasmian educational principles. During this period, he wrote "Fabula de homine" (1518), an early version of his views on the nature and purpose of mankind; *De initiis, sectis et laudibus philosophiae* (1518), a short essay on the history of philosophy; *In pseudodialecticos* (1520), a lively and trenchant attack on scholastic logic; and a critical edition of, with an extensive commentary on, Augustine's *De civitate Dei* (1522), which was commissioned by Erasmus.

From 1523 to 1528, Vives divided his time between England, which he visited on six occasions, and Bruges, where he married Margarita Valldaura (1505–52) in 1524. In England he attended the court of Henry VIII and Catherine of Aragon and was tutor to their daughter, Mary. He also held a lectureship at Corpus Christi College, Oxford, and associated with English humanists such as Thomas More and Thomas Linacre. During these years he published *De institutione feminae Christianae* (1524), in which he set out pedagogical principles for the instruction of women; the extremely popular *Introductio ad sapientiam* (1524), a short handbook of ethics, blending Stoicism and Christianity; and *De*

*subventionem pauperum* (1526), a program for the organization of public relief, which he dedicated to the magistrates of Bruges. In 1528 he lost the favor of Henry VIII by siding with his fellow countrywoman Catherine of Aragon in the matter of the divorce. He was placed under house arrest for a time, before being allowed to return to Bruges.

The last 12 years of Vives' life were his most productive, and it was in this period that he published several of the works for which he is best known today. These include *De concordia et discordia in humano genere* (1529), a piece of social criticism emphasizing the value of peace and the absurdity of war; *De disciplinis* (1531), an encyclopedic treatise providing an extensive critique of the foundations of contemporary education, as well as a program for its renewal; and *De anima et vita* (1538), a study of the soul and its interaction with the body, which also contains a penetrating analysis of the emotions. *De veritate fidei Christianae*, the most thorough discussion of his religious views, was published posthumously in 1543. He died in Bruges on May 6, 1540.

## Thought

Vives' career as a leading Northern European humanist starts with the publication of *In pseudodialecticos* (1520), a satirical diatribe in which he voices his opposition to scholastic logic on several counts. In his criticism, he follows in the footsteps of earlier humanists such as Lorenzo Valla (1406–57) and Rudolph Agricola (1443–85), who set about to replace the scholastic curriculum, based on syllogistic and disputation, with a treatment of logic oriented toward the use of the topics, a technique of verbal association aiming at the invention and organization of material for arguments, and persuasion. Vives' severe censure of scholastic logic derived from his own unhappy experience with the scholastic curriculum at Paris. Therefore, as he himself emphasized, no one could accuse him of condemning it because he did not understand it. Erasmus wrote to More that no one was better suited than Vives for the

battle against the dialecticians, in whose ranks he had served for many years.

The main targets of Vives' criticism are Peter of Spain's *Summule logicales*, a work dating from the thirteenth century but which still held an important place in the university curriculum, and the theory of the property of terms. He repudiates the use of technical jargon, accessible only to a narrow group of professionals, and maintains that if scholastic logicians made an effort to speak plainly and according to common usage, many of their conundrums would disappear. Instead, they choose to fritter away their ingenuity on logically ambiguous propositions known as *sophismata*. Vives provides many examples of such propositions, which in his view make no sense whatever and are certainly of no use. Many of these, such as "Some animal is not man, therefore some man is not animal," were standard scholastic examples. Others, such as "Only any non-donkey *c* of any man except Socrates and another *c* belonging to this same man begins contingently to be black," are intended as a mockery of the futile quibbling he associated with scholastic method. Since dialectic, like rhetoric and grammar, deals with language, its rules should be adapted to the rules of ordinary language; but with what language, he asks, have these propositions to do? Moreover, dialectic should not be learned for its own sake but as a support for the other arts; therefore, no more effort should be spent on it than is absolutely necessary. Vives' criticism is also informed by ethical concerns and the demand for a method that would be of use in everyday life rather than in academic disputations.

A more detailed criticism can be found in *De disciplinis* (1531). This encyclopedic treatise is divided into three parts: *De causis corruptarum artium*, seven books devoted to a thoroughgoing critique of the foundations of contemporary education; *De tradendis disciplinis*, five books in which Vives outlines his program for linguistic and educational reform; and five shorter treatises *De artibus*, dealing mainly with logic and metaphysics. These five treatises include *De prima philosophia*, a compendium of Aristotelian physics and metaphysics from a Christian point of view; *De censura veri*, a discussion of the proposition and the forms of argumentation; *De*

*explanatione cuiusque essentiae*, which offers an account of the predicables and definition; *De instrumento probabilitatis*, which contains a theory of knowledge, as well as a detailed account of dialectical invention; and *De disputatione*, in which he discusses nonformal proofs. In these treatises, Vives not only continues the trends in humanist dialectic initiated by Valla and Agricola but also displays a familiarity with philosophical technicalities that was unusual among humanists and that reveals the more traditionally Aristotelian aspects of his thought. His appraisal of the Aristotelian corpus is summarized in *Censura de Aristotelis operibus* (1538). A posthumously published treatise entitled *Dialectices libri quatuor* (1550) appears to be a youthful work that Vives evidently did not consider suitable for publication.

Vives' criticism of scholastic logic hinges on a profound analysis of the arts of discourse. For him, the supremacy of ordinary discourse (*sermo communis*) over the abstract language of metaphysics is indisputable. Philosophy ought not to invent the language and subject of its own specific investigation. Instead of the formal language of the dialecticians, which he found completely unsuited to interpreting reality, he proposes the less rigorous but more concrete universe of everyday communication, which answers all our practical needs and aims to provide a knowledge that is useful.

Vives was pessimistic about the possibility of attaining knowledge as understood in Aristotelian terms. His thought anticipates the moderate skepticism of early modern philosophers such as Francisco Sanches (1551–1623) and Pierre Gassendi (1592–1655). Vives belongs, like Francis Bacon (1561–1626), to the so-called "maker's knowledge" tradition, which regards knowledge as a kind of making or as a capacity to make. He often insists on the practical nature of knowledge, maintaining that peasants and artisans know nature far better than many philosophers. A central tenet of the maker's knowledge tradition is that man cannot gain access to nature's intimate works, since these, as divine works, are only known to God, their maker. In *De prima philosophia*, he describes nature as an automatic



machine, like a clock, prepared and adapted by God. Moreover, God is always present to nature, holding together his construction with his continual assistance in the same way as the human soul maintains the harmony of the human body.

Vives subscribes to the Aristotelian principle that all of our knowledge has its origin in perception. We cannot learn anything, he asserts, except through the senses. But since that which is incorporeal or hidden cannot be grasped by the senses, sense perception does not yield any knowledge of the essence of things but only of their accidents. Vives' view, however, is that sensory knowledge must nonetheless be transcended by means of reasoning. Yet, according to him, the best that human reason can accomplish in this process is to provide a judgment grounded in all the available evidence, thereby increasing the probability of the conclusion. In his view, our knowledge of the essence of a thing is only an approximate guess based on the sensible operations of the thing in question.

The most reliable guide for human inquiry, he argues, is mankind's natural propensity toward what is good and true. This light of our mind, as he also calls it, is always, directly or indirectly, inclined toward what is good and true and can be regarded as the beginning and origin of prudence and of all sciences and arts. This natural propensity can be perfected if it is subjected to teaching and exercise, just as the seeds of plants grow better if they are cultivated by the industrious hands of a farmer. The topics, which Vives conceives as a reflection of the ontological order, represent another valuable instrument for human inquiry. In his view, the topics are a set of universal aspects of things that help to bring order to the great variety of nature. As such, they play an important role as organizing principles of knowledge. They are like a grid through which knowledge can be acquired and arguments formulated. Nevertheless, human knowledge can be nothing other than a finite participation in creation. Because of the limitations that characterize man's fallen state, investigations into the realm of nature can only lead to conjectures, and not to firm and indubitable knowledge, which we neither

deserve nor need. In his opinion, certainty is not a prerequisite for advances in science and philosophy; and as a criterion for scientific progress and for the rational conduct of life, he advocates a method consisting in sound judgment based on experience.

History, seen as the sum of all human experience, is therefore of great importance for every branch of learning. In principle, each new generation is better equipped than the preceding one, since it can derive advantage from all earlier experience. Hence, the idea of progress plays an essential role in Vives' conception of intellectual history, and several of the cultural problems he deals with, such as the causes of the corruption of the arts, are approached from an historical perspective.

Vives' moral philosophy stems mainly from his Christian humanism and is aimed at the reform of both individuals and society. He often proclaims the superiority of Christian ethics over pagan wisdom. In *De causis corruptarum artium*, he argues at length that Aristotle's ethics, on account of its worldly conception of happiness and virtue, is completely incompatible with the Christianity. He has more sympathy for Platonism and Stoicism, which he believes are broadly in line with Christian morality. In *Introductio ad sapientiam*, he recommends self-knowledge as the first step toward virtue, which he regards as the culmination of human perfection. In his view, vice follows from a wrong judgment about the value of things. To be wise, however, is not only to have true opinions about things but also to translate this knowledge into action by desiring honorable things and avoiding evil. Wisdom therefore requires the subordination of the passions to the control of the intellect.

Vives holds that the best means to secure the reform of society is through the moral and practical training of the individual. Man, by his own nature, is a social being. In the first book of *De subventionem pauperum*, which consists of a theoretical discussion of the human condition, he stresses not only our need for and dependency on others but also our natural inclination to love and help one another. He regards the development

of society as a distinctly human achievement, based on the ability to profit from experience and turn knowledge to useful ends. Social problems, such as poverty and war, are the result of emotional disorders. During Vives' lifetime, Europe experienced dissention and war between princes and within the church, as well as the increased threat posed by Muslim expansion into Western Europe. He addressed the problems of political and religious disturbances in several works, which also deal with the psychological origins of discord, the proper conduct of all the offices of the commonwealth, and the theme of Christian harmony. His major political treatise on European war and peace is *De concordia et discordia in humano genere* (1529), where he sets out the case for the origins of discord in society and then aims to show how peace and concord can be fostered through knowledge of human nature, especially the emotions. According to him, the virtue of the people can only be maintained and promoted in peace.

Vives' philosophical reflections on the human soul are mainly concentrated in *De anima et vita* (1538), which provides the psychological underpinning for many of his educational ideas and can be characterized as a prolegomenon to moral philosophy. He attempts to reconcile the Aristotelian view of the soul as an organizing and animating principle with the Platonic conception of the soul as an immaterial and immortal substance. He also pays close attention to physiology and, following the Galenic tradition, maintains that our mental capacities depend on the temperament of our body.

The structure of the treatise is indebted to the traditional approach of faculty psychology, in which the soul is said to be composed of a number of different faculties or powers, each directed toward a different object and responsible for a distinct operation. The first book covers the functions of the vegetative soul (nutrition, growth, and reproduction), of the sensitive soul (the five external senses), and of the cogitative soul (the internal senses, i.e., a variety of cognitive faculties, including imagination, fantasy, and the estimative power, which are located in the three ventricles

of the brain and whose actions follow from those of the external senses). The second book deals with the functions of the rational soul and its three faculties (mind, will, and memory), as well as with topics stemming from Aristotle's *Parva naturalia*, such as sleep, dreams, and longevity. The third and final book explores the emotions, which Vives, rejecting the Stoic view, regards as natural responses to the way things appear to us and as essential constituents of human life.

In *De disciplinis*, Vives did not include a section on theology, which he proposed to deal with at a later time. His work *De veritate fidei Christianae* was still in progress when he died. The treatise, which consists of five books, was published posthumously in 1543. In the first two books, he expounds his views on God, human nature, and Christ. The next two books are dialogues, in which a Christian engages a Jewish and a Muslim interlocutor. The fifth book concludes by recapitulating the superiority of Christianity over any other religious persuasion.

Vives' works, which went through hundreds of editions and were translated into several vernacular languages, continued to be widely read and extremely influential during the century after their publication. His critical attitude toward the Aristotelian orthodoxy of his day left a mark on several authors. Psychology was another area within which he enjoyed considerable success. His views were recommended, quoted, or discussed by Philipp Melancthon, Francisco Suárez, Robert Burton, René Descartes, and William Hamilton, among many others. During the second half of the nineteenth century and the first decades of the twentieth, Vives was read and studied by philosophers such as Ernest Renan, Friedrich Albert Lange, Wilhelm Dilthey, Pierre Duhem, Ernst Cassirer, and José Ortega y Gasset. Lange regards him as one of the most important reformers of philosophy of his time and as a precursor of Bacon and Descartes. In Vives' method based on experience, as well as in his emphasis on a culture that ought to be founded, not on barren speculation, but on the usefulness of knowledge, one could, according to Ortega y Gasset, discern some anticipations of the modern *Zeitgeist*.

## Cross-References

- ▶ [Augustine](#)
- ▶ [Certainty](#)
- ▶ [Emotions](#)
- ▶ [Epistemology](#)
- ▶ [Ethics](#)
- ▶ [Internal Senses](#)
- ▶ [Lorenzo Valla](#)
- ▶ [Natural Philosophy](#)
- ▶ [Nicomachean Ethics, Commentaries on Aristotle's](#)
- ▶ [Parva Naturalia, Commentaries on Aristotle's](#)
- ▶ [Peter of Spain](#)
- ▶ [Poverty](#)
- ▶ [Sense Perception, Theories of](#)
- ▶ [Skepticism](#)
- ▶ [Terms, Properties of](#)
- ▶ [Virtue and Vice](#)

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## Judah Halevi

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### Abstract

Judah Halevi (Spain, c. 1075–1141), Hebrew poet and Jewish philosopher. His *Book of the Kuzari*, a fictional dialogue between a king and a Jew (based on the historical conversion to Judaism of the king of the Khazars), presents a critique of the dominant Aristotelian philosophy of the day, especially the theory of emanation. The critique is philosophical: Aristotle is wrong because he failed to demonstrate what he claimed, not because he contradicts Scripture. Metaphysical speculation is uncertain, whereas historical fact is undeniable. If, as rationalist philosophers suggest, prophecy is an intellectual process, one would expect to find prophets among all nations, in all places, and at all times. For Halevi, the fact is that only the prophets of Israel are universally acknowledged to be true prophets (i.e., also by

Christianity and Islam). Halevi therefore proposes that the Jewish people, in addition to universal human reason, are endowed with a particular biological “divine faculty” (*amr ilahi*) enabling them, under certain conditions (in the ideal median climate of the Land of Israel, and when activated by the “divine actions” of the sacrificial cult), to prophesy.

Judah Halevi (c. 1075–1141), Hebrew poet and Jewish philosopher, was born in Spain, possibly in Toledo or Tudela, to a wealthy family, and received a thorough education in both Hebrew and Arabic sources. He supported himself by commerce and medicine, but achieved renown for his poems, of which we have approximately one thousand, including love poems, eulogies, liturgical poetry (some of which were adopted in various communal rites), and most famously, poems expressing love and longing for Zion. His social circle included leading poets and intellectuals, including the Bible exegete, grammarian and philosopher Abraham ibn Ezra (1089–1164), who cites Halevi in his Bible commentaries, and whose son Isaac seems to have been married to Halevi’s daughter. In 1140, as he alludes in the closing sections of his *Kuzari*, Halevi left Spain, intending to fulfill the religious obligation of *aliyah* (immigration to the Land of Israel), in his eyes an act not merely of personal fulfillment but of national redemption. Debarking in Alexandria, Halevi was warmly welcomed and hosted by the Egyptian Jews, with whom he spent some months. In May, 1141 his departure by boat from Alexandria for Israel was delayed by stormy weather, and while awaiting a favorable west wind he wrote his last two poems. There is no concrete evidence that Halevi reached Israel, although according to a popular legend (recorded in the sixteenth century), when Halevi reached Jerusalem and composed his “Ode to Jerusalem,” he was killed by an Arab horseman. References to Halevi in the summer of 1141 indicate that he was no longer alive.

Although Halevi was not a rigorous philosopher of the rank of Maimonides, in many respects he remains an existentially compelling thinker. Perhaps because of his skills as a poet, he was

able to reduce complex questions to stark, basic formulas. For example, Halevi succinctly summarized the differences between impersonal philosophical conceptions of God (generically called *Elohim*, known through intellectual deduction, *qiyas*) and the personal God of biblical religion (loved and experienced existentially in “taste,” *dhaug*, and called by the Tetragrammaton) respectively as “the God of Aristotle” and “the God of Abraham” (*Kuzari* 4:16). There is no sharper (and more humorous) critique of the intellectual bankruptcy of the dominant theory of emanation than Halevi’s assertion that if it were true that intellectual self-contemplation results in the emanation of a sphere, and that contemplation of the first cause results in the emanation of an angelic (separate) intellect, when Aristotle was conscious of himself he should have emanated a sphere, and when he contemplated the first cause he should have emanated an angel (*Kuzari* 4:25). What other medieval thinkers asked his readers – and by extension our generation of Jews, the first in two millennia to have a state and military power – whether Jewish morality is not merely a function of powerlessness, not principle, “and if you had the power, you would also kill” (*Kuzari* 1:114)?

Halevi’s Judeo-Arabic philosophical work, *Kitāb al-Radd wa’l Dalīl fī ‘l-Dīn al-Dhalīl* (*The Book of Refutation and Proof in Defense of the Despised Faith*), usually called *Kitāb al-Khazari* (*The Book of the Kuzari*), translated into Hebrew by Judah ibn Tibbon, takes the form of a dialogue between the king of the Khazars (“the Kuzari”) and a Jewish spokesman, the *haber* (Hebrew: *haber*). According to internal evidence, the book was written in 1140. However, in an earlier letter, which S. D. Goitein dated as having been written in 1125, Halevi already refers to having sent the book to a Karaite Jew in Christian Spain, who had asked him some questions to which the book responds. This led Goitein and some other scholars to conclude that the book was written in stages over some 20 years, initially as an anti-Karaite polemic; according to them, those sections of the book (notably *Kuzari* 3:33–65) dealing with Karaism are its oldest strata.

In a literary analysis of the work, Eliezer Schweid suggested that Halevi personally

identified with the *haver*, and that the king represents the reader. Yochanan Silman's meticulous study of Halevi's thought, agrees that the book was written in stages, and differentiates between Halevi's "early thought" (when Halevi still believed in Aristotelian philosophy) and his "later thought" (when Halevi freed himself from Aristotelianism and emphasized the superiority of the historical-religious Jewish experience). The two titles of the book, according to Silman, reflect this evolution: *The Kuzari* (the name mentioned in the letter) is the earlier name, and the final version is *The Refutation and Proof in Defense of the Despised Faith*. The early thought may be found in *Kuzari* 1:68–79, 2:1–7, and 3, whereas the later thought is contained in *Kuzari* 1:1–67, 2:7–81, 4, and 5. This evolution is not merely autobiographical, according to Silman's theory, but also reflects the stages necessary for anyone's (i.e., the reader's) intellectual and spiritual development. Silman's theory, however closely argued, fails to explain how the allegedly early anti-Karaite sections of the book reflect Aristotelian philosophy, nor how the book was ultimately put together. If, as alleged, the book represents a guide or spiritual pilgrim's progress, it would have made more sense for Halevi, a talented poet with exquisite literary sense, to have written, or at least later edited, the book with a linear structure, taking the reader from earlier positions to a more mature understanding of the truth. A free and atomistic admixture of earlier and later elements is not only literarily clumsy, but logically and pedagogically self-defeating. Moreover, such scholars as D. Z. Baneth have questioned the early dating of Halevi's letter (the original basis for the speculation of the evolution of the book in stages), and Halevi's letter never states that the book was written as an anti-Karaite polemic, nor even that the questions related to Karaism, but only that a Karaite Jew had asked for his views "on several subjects."

Other scholars see the book as an instance of esoteric writing. Leo Strauss regarded the *Kuzari* as exoterically opposing philosophy, while esoterically regarding philosophy as at least partially useful for religion, whereas Dov Schwartz has concluded the opposite: exoterically the book

retains a positive function for philosophy, whereas esoterically it totally repudiates philosophy, a "secret" position Halevi, who moved in intellectual circles, had to conceal. However, Halevi's critique of Aristotle, and especially contemporary Aristotelianism, is explicit, both in the book and in one of his poems: "Do not let Greek wisdom entice you/Which has no fruit but only flowers." His critique, however, is not of philosophy *per se*, but of Aristotelianism as a philosophical failure; he never states that Aristotle and his followers were wrong because they contradict Scripture, but that they fail to prove their claims (especially in metaphysics), and their fallacious theories fail to take into account undeniable historical fact.

Borrowing from a historical account of the conversion to Judaism of the King of the Khazars (known from several sources, including the exchange of letters, c. 960, between Khazar King Joseph and Hisdai ibn Shaprut, a leader of Spanish Jewry), Halevi portrays a fictional Khazar king ("the Kuzari") who in a dream "as it were" sees an angel who tells him that his intentions are pleasing to God, but not his actions. Seeking an explanation of his dream, the king first consults a philosopher (typical of the Aristotelianism of the day), then a Christian, and a Muslim. The Jews, universally degraded and despised, apparently lack divine favor and therefore need not be consulted. However, the claims of the philosopher, Christian, and Muslim fail to persuade the king, and the most reasonable claims of the other religions are based on their common Jewish source. The king, accordingly, engages the Jewish *haver* in a dialogue for the rest of the book.

The *haver* surprises the Kuzari by affirming his belief in the God of Abraham who miraculously led the Israelites out of Egypt, sustained them in the wilderness, revealed the Torah at Sinai, and brought them to the Promised Land, rather than by affirming a belief in God as the creator of the universe. A universalistic conception based on natural reality is dubious, because it is the product of theoretical speculation which cannot be scientifically and conclusively demonstrated. The disagreements among the philosophers are evidence of the inadequacy of metaphysical speculation.

Historical fact, however, originally experienced by thousands and then reliably transmitted publicly (as Saadia Gaon had already argued), is indisputable, and our theories must conform to the facts, not vice versa; moreover, these historical facts are confirmed, not denied, by the Christians and Muslims.

Rationalist philosophers (like Saadia Gaon and especially Maimonides), who identified the process and content of prophetic revelation with reason, have no way to explain the historical anomaly that the only prophets universally acknowledged as such, by other religions namely Christianity and Islam, are the prophets of Israel. Reason and morality are universal (even a gang of bandits must operate, at least internally, on some moral basis; *Kuzari* 2:47–48), and if the phenomenon of prophecy were a function of reason, it would also have to be universal, among all peoples, at all times, and in all places. In fact, however, no philosopher was ever a prophet, and no prophet a philosopher. For Halevi, the fact is also that prophecy occurred only among the Jews, in or near the Land of Israel, and while the sacrificial cult existed. Halevi therefore proposes that in addition to faculty of reason, Adam was endowed with a higher biological “divine faculty,” the *amr ilahi* (Hebrew: *inyan elohi*), enabling him to communicate with God. This inborn “divine faculty” was passed down to unique individuals, reaching Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, from whom it passed to all the children of Israel. Like a vineyard, whose grapes can only flourish in certain soil and with proper cultivation, the “divine faculty” could only be activated in the ideal median climate of the Land of Israel, through the “divine actions” of the sacrificial cult.

The Jewish People thus possess a unique innate faculty for divine communication, and are the essential “core” (*lubb*) of humanity (the husk or shell, *qishr*), but their latent “divine faculty” can no longer be activated in the absence of the temple cult. Reversing Paul’s parable of the olive tree (Romans 11), Halevi explains the degraded status of the Jews in exile in terms of the parable of the seed which seems to be degraded into its environment, but actually assimilates the surrounding soil into itself to produce a tree. Christianity and Islam

are “a preparation and introduction for the messiah,” because they are the ground permitting the Jewish seed to grow into the tree, the fruit of which is the hoped-for messiah. “They will then revere the root they had previously despised” (*Kuzari* 4:23).

## Cross-References

- ▶ [Abraham ibn Ezra](#)
- ▶ [Moses Maimonides](#)
- ▶ [Saadia Gaon](#)

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## al-Juwaynī

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### Abstract

Abū l-Ma'ālī al-Juwaynī is considered as the last important representative of so-called “early” (or “classical”) Ash'arism, a school of Sunni “rational theology” (*kalām*). He was the

teacher of the famous Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazālī, with whom Ash'arism entered a new phase and increasingly came under the influence of Avicennian philosophy. Yet the introduction of “philosophical” ideas into the doctrinal system of Ash'arism was to some extent anticipated by al-Juwaynī: not only did he engage with the ideas of his opponents in *kalām* theology, but also with those of the *falāsifa*.

## Life and Works

Abū l-Ma'ālī al-Juwaynī was born in 1028 in the region of Nīshāpūr. He studied “rational theology” (*kalām*) and Shāfi'ite law with his father, who had already played a role in Khurāsānian Ash'arism. After his father's death, al-Juwaynī followed him as teacher in Nīshāpūr. Yet with the Seljuq conquest of the city in 1037, Ash'arites like al-Juwaynī faced growing hostility: the vizier Tughril Beg (d. 1063) implemented an anti-Shāfi'ite and anti-Ash'arite policy and denounced the practice of *kalām* theology as an illegitimate innovation. In order to escape from persecution, al-Juwaynī fled with other scholars inclined towards Ash'arism – like the mystic Abū l-Qāsim al-Qushayrī (d. 1074), one of Nīshāpūr's leading scholars – to Baghdad. Later, he spent 4 years in the Ḥijāz and taught at Mecca and Medina – wherefore he earned his honorific title of “the Imam of the two sacred cities” (*imām al-ḥaramayn*). When the vizier Niẓām al-Mulk (d. 1092) eventually came to power the Seldjuqs' attitude towards Ash'arism radically changed: the vizier became a patron of Ash'arism and founded a series of colleges in Iraq, the Arabian Peninsula, and Persia – specifically Khurāsān – to promote their teachings. He invited al-Juwaynī to return to Nīshāpūr and to teach at a *madrasa* that was built specifically for him.

Some of al-Juwaynī's writings in *kalām* have survived – either partially or in their entirety – and provide substantial information about his thought. The longest is a supercommentary on a work by the eponym of Ash'arism, Abū l-Ḥasan al-Ash'arī's (d. 935–6) *al-Luma'*. Al-Juwaynī's work is entitled *al-Shāmil fī uṣūl al-dīn*, and it is based on a commentary by Abū Bakr al-Bāqillānī (d. 1013), another

major figure of Ash'arism. The *Shamil* has not survived in its entirety and its largest parts have not been rediscovered. A second text, entitled *al-Irshād ilā qawā'ī' al-adilla fī uṣūl al-i'tiqād*, is much shorter than the *Shāmil* but complete. Allard (1965) argued that the length of al-Juwaynī's works most likely decreased over the course of their relative chronology. The *Shāmil* and the *Irshād* would then have been followed by *Luma' al-adilla fī qawā'id ahl al-sunna* and finally *al-'Aqida al-Nizāmiyya*, a short work dedicated to the vizier Nizām al-Mulk.

Al-Juwaynī died in 1085 near Nīshāpūr. He is often considered as the last important representative of so-called "early" or "classical" Ash'arism. The school then entered a new phase that was marked by an increasing engagement with Avicennian philosophy. It was al-Juwaynī's student, the famous Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazālī (d. 1111), who played a significant role in stimulating this transition. Yet the introduction of "philosophical" ideas into the doctrinal system of Ash'arism had already started earlier – this is in fact visible in al-Juwaynī's own thought. Two other students of al-Juwaynī, al-Kiyā' al-Harrāsī (d. 1010–11) and Abū l-Qāsim al-Anṣārī (d. 1118) followed the doctrines of their teacher much closer than al-Ghazālī. Abū l-Qāsim al-Anṣārī has two major works that draw on his teacher's *al-Irshād*: one is explicitly called a "commentary" (*Sharḥ al-Irshād*), the other is entitled *al-Ghunya fī l-kalām*. Al-Juwaynī's *al-Irshād* was furthermore very popular in the Islamic west with numerous commentaries that were devoted to it.

## Teaching

Al-Juwaynī's works and the accounts of later Ash'arite theologians bear witness to a number of revisions and changes in his doctrinal positions and argumentations. Consequently, he did not follow a consistent teaching throughout his life. This reflects perhaps a character trait portrayed by biographers, who describe al-Juwaynī as someone in constant quest for the truth behind the theological and metaphysical problems of his time.

## The Theory of ḥāl

One of such problems was the question of the ontological status of the properties of beings. It shall serve here as a first example for providing some insight into al-Juwaynī's views, specifically because this issue had implications on various levels of his teaching, including metaphysics, epistemology, and theology in a narrower sense. The question of the ontological status of the properties of beings concerned on the one hand the qualifications of objects in this world and on the other hand God's attributes. Al-Juwaynī addressed the issue by adopting the so-called theory of *ḥāl* (literally "state," pl. *aḥwāl*). After Abū Bakr al-Bāqillānī, he was the second major representative of Ash'arism (there were others, less well-known, though) to endorse this theory. Originally the *kalām* notion of *ḥāl* was developed by opponents of Ash'arism, namely, the Mu'tazilite Abū Hāshim al-Jubbā'ī (d. 933) and his followers.

The theory of *ḥāl* built upon the assumption that the properties of things have a metaphysical reality. Previously, *kalām* theologians considered that only entities (i.e. only that which is qualified by properties) possess a reality. The proponents of the *ḥāl* believed, however, that unlike entities a *ḥāl* is metaphysically real without being described by either existence or non-existence. Proponents and opponents of *aḥwāl* divided over the question whether or not we really need to affirm their reality alongside entities which constitute the basic elements of their ontology. According to *kalām* ontology, entities comprise God, atoms, and accidents.

Al-Juwaynī's definition of *aḥwāl* departs from dividing them into two groups: the "grounded" or "caused" (*mu'allal*) and the "ungrounded/uncaused" (*ghayr mu'allal*). In the context of *kalām* theology, the Arabic term *mu'allal* always means "caused" by something distinct from the affected object (that is, saying that something is *mu'allal* by itself would be self-contradictory). The "caused/grounded" *ḥāl* is therefore understood by al-Juwaynī as the effect of an entity that resides in another entity and causes it to have a property. This can be realized in two possible ways: the first case applies to an accident that inheres in an atom

and causes its locus of inherence to have a property; the second case applies to God in whom reside entitative attributes (*ṣifāt*) which cause him to possess such properties as “knowing,” “powerful,” or “living.” “Ungrounded/uncaused” *aḥwāl* are in turn those qualities that things possess by virtue of themselves, that is, that which is predicated whenever we describe their very nature. In the case of atoms, for example, such qualifications include descriptions like “being an atom,” “being existent,” and “occupying space.”

There were essentially three major concerns for al-Juwaynī that lead him to posit in some of his works the reality of the *ḥāl*. The first argument is that the *aḥwāl* are necessary to account for why distinct things may share some common features despite their distinctiveness. In his view, such accidents as the colors black and white are distinguished by their “blackness” and “whiteness,” but they both share a common feature: namely, their “being color.” If “blackness,” “whiteness” and “being color” were not ontologically real, al-Juwaynī argued, we were not able to establish what they have in common and what distinguishes them. This claim is related to al-Juwaynī’s second argument, namely, that without affirming the notion of *ḥāl* we would fail to draw definitions of things. The reasoning behind this is that definitions consist in identifying what all defined items have in common and what distinguishes them from other objects. Al-Juwaynī’s third argument finally highlights the theological dimension of positing the *ḥāl*. He claims that a central Ash‘arite doctrine actually presupposes the reality of the *ḥāl*. Ash‘arites posited that God’s co-eternal attributes are entities that subsist in Him. This doctrine was criticized by other schools of *kalām* as a fundamental violation of monotheism: they argued that there cannot be more than one eternal being. The Ash‘arites countered this objection by positing that if man is knowing by virtue of an entity of knowledge, the same must be true for God. Yet for al-Juwaynī, this analogy can only be valid if the common feature “knowing” has a reality distinct from entitative knowledge. Otherwise, he argues, the reasoning would result into an attempt to prove the existence of God’s entitative knowledge by itself.

Al-Juwaynī’s adoption of the notion of *ḥāl* is found in his two longer works, the *Irshād* and the *Shāmīl*. In contrast, al-Juwaynī’s *Luma‘* and his *‘Aqīda al-Nizāmiyya* no longer appeal to the theory (Allard 1965; Gimaret 1970; Frank 2004; Benevich 2016).

## The Proof of God

Al-Juwaynī did not only engage with the theories of his detractors within the field of *kalām* theology. As previously mentioned, he also felt the challenge posed by the views and arguments advanced by the *falāsifa*, that is, the “philosophers” who draw on the Hellenic tradition. This challenge had become even more acute with the rise of the Avicennian system in the eleventh century. There were profound divergences between the *falāsifa* and *kalām* theologians, including the controversy over the “philosophers” doctrine of the eternity of the world – a topos that was rejected by their opponents as heretical. Despite these differences, al-Juwaynī acknowledged that some arguments of the *falāsifa* made a good point and could be adopted by *kalām* theology. This was, for example, the case with their demonstration of God’s existence. Whether or not al-Juwaynī’s proof was directly influenced by Avicenna (as claimed, for example, by Davidson 1987; Rudolph 1997) is not entirely clear. Madelung has proposed an alternative scenario, whose starting point is the observation that al-Juwaynī’s argument has significant parallels with that of Abū l-Ḥusayn al-Baṣrī (d. 1044). Abū l-Ḥusayn was a Mu‘tazilite theologian from Baghdad, who had lived too early for there to be a possible influence of Avicenna’s theories on his thought. He was, however, trained by Christian philosophers in Baghdad and therefore familiar with *falsafa* teachings (Madelung 2006).

Al-Juwaynī’s starting point in revising the proof for God’s existence concerned its central premiss: the traditional argument in *kalām* built on the assumption that the world is created. In order to prove this assumption, it was claimed that bodies, which make up the world, necessarily carry accidents that have a temporal existence. It

was then reasoned that bodies must also have temporal existence. However, this argumentation falls short of the possibility of an infinite series of created accidents. Yet the upshot of this assumption would have been that an eternal body could possess an infinite number of accidents, an idea that completely undermined the argument for creation. This deficiency of the traditional proof was already identified by Abū l-Ḥusayn al-Baṣṛī. Al-Juwaynī took these reflections into consideration and therefore demonstrated that whatever is created has “a first.” He thereby neutralized the argument of an infinite series of accidents inhering in an eternal body (Davidson 1987; Madelung 2006).

A second version of al-Juwaynī’s revised proof for God’s existence eventually got along without the necessity of positing accidents at all. As mentioned, the existence of accidents was traditionally affirmed to prove that a particular body must be created. It was then concluded that the temporal existence of bodies requires a creator, who must be God. This conclusion was drawn by way of analogy with our worldly experience that any such works as manufacture, writing need a manufacturer, writer, etc. In this second version of the proof, al-Juwaynī no longer appeals to the case of a particular body and rather considers the creation of the world as a whole: he claims that the world, instead of being existent, could also be non-existent or come into existence at different times. This, he went on to argue, implies its being possibly existent, which, as he says, self-evidently implies that there must be an agent by virtue of whose arbitrary choice the world comes into existence at a given time instead of continuing in a state of non-existence or of coming into existence at some other time. This agent and creator of the world, he concludes, cannot be other than God. Al-Juwaynī denotes God’s choosing by the verb “to particularize” (*ikhtaṣṣa*), and, therefore, the proof is also known as “particularization argument.” The central assumption that underlies the argument is an idea formulated by Avicenna, namely, that the existence of the world is contingent (*mumkin al-wujūd*) and that God is necessarily existent (*wājib al-wujūd*). Referring to the world, al-Juwaynī in turn uses the formulations

*jā’iz al-wujūd* or *wujūd mumkin*. Yet the core of al-Juwaynī’s line of reasoning is already found in Abū l-Ḥusayn al-Baṣṛī’s teaching, who uses, however, another (less Avicennian) terminology (Davidson 1987; Rudolph 1997; Madelung 2006).

## Human Acts

With regard to the free will problem, the Ash‘arites were determinists. The doctrine of divine determinism was for them a logical corollary of God’s omnipotence, which cannot be restricted in any way. They therefore believed that whatever happens in this world depends on Him, including human actions. Nonetheless, the Ash‘arites had to provide an explanation how man can be held morally responsible in the absence of freedom of action. The school’s founder al-Ash‘arī therefore developed a theory that distinguishes between two types of acts: appealing to our intuition, he claimed that such motions of the body as walking on the one hand, and trembling on the other hand do not occur in the same way. Trembling implies our “weakness” and occur “necessarily,” whereas this is not the case with our walking from A to B. While both acts are determined by God, they are still distinct because our walking occurs voluntarily and our trembling not. Therefore, we would never be held responsible for our trembling, but we are accountable for our voluntary acts. Now if “necessary” acts involve our weakness, the opposite must be true for voluntary acts: they involve our “power” (which means an accident of “power” (*qudra* or *quwwa*) in the agent).

Al-Ash‘arī’s theory proposed an alternative to the doctrine of freedom of action in order to account for our moral responsibility, but he fell short of providing solutions to some problems, and so it was up to his later followers to resolve them. One of these questions was the precise function of “power.” Al-Ash‘arī posited that this “power” is conjoined to man’s voluntary acts but has no effect whatsoever. In the *Irshād*, al-Juwaynī follows this idea, and he consequently failed to explain why one should posit the existence of “power” if it is not correlated in any way to man’s

acts. Later, however, in *al-ʿAqīda al-Niẓāmiyya*, al-Juwaynī develops an original theory of human acts that departs from the assumption that man’s power *must* be effective. His central argument is that otherwise God’s imposing duties and obligations was no longer a tenable idea. In order to resolve this theological dilemma, he affirmed that man’s acting is caused by his power. He could consequently argue that whatever we do is controlled by our very own selves. By this line of reasoning, he provided an explanation why we are rightly rewarded or punished for our acts. Nonetheless, al-Juwaynī did not give up the central Ashʿarite idea that all happenings in the world originate in God: he maintained the claim of God being the all-encompassing Creator by reasoning that man’s power is only an intermediate cause, which in turn is created by God. This theory was not uncontroversial. Al-Juwaynī was later blamed because his reasoning recalls to some extent the notion of emanation supported by the *falāsifa* – that is the idea of God being the first cause from which all other causal relations proceed. Irrespective of whether or not al-Juwaynī was really inspired by the idea of emanation, this is at least not entirely excluded: as we have seen, he was actually acquainted with, and even adopted, ideas developed by the *falāsifa* (Gimaret 1980).

## Cross-References

- ▶ [al-Ġazālī, Abū Ḥāmid Muḥammad](#)
- ▶ [Ibn Sīnā, Abū ʿAlī \(Avicenna\)](#)
- ▶ [Kalām](#)
- ▶ [Metaphysics](#)
- ▶ [Philosophy, Arabic](#)
- ▶ [Proofs of the Existence of God](#)
- ▶ [Theology Versus Philosophy in the Arab World](#)

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## Kalām

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### Abstract

*Kalām* is a genre of theological and philosophical literature in Arabic that was actively pursued between the eighth and nineteenth centuries. In its early period, the genre employed a particular type of argumentative technique and developed a distinct method that is also referred to as *kalām*. First produced by Muslim authors in Iraq, the genre and its method was also employed by Jewish and to a lesser degree Christian Arab theologians. A practitioner of *kalām* is known as a *mutakallim* and, in plural, as *mutakallimūn*. Often translated as “rationalist theology,” *kalām* is in Islam among the most important genres of theological literature. Muslim *kalām* can be divided into three periods: an early period of development as Muʿtazilite *kalām*, a middle period after the ninth century when the discourse and its method were adopted by Sunni Muslim theologians of the Ashʿarite and Māturīdite schools, and a late period after the eleventh century when *kalām* appropriated many techniques and teachings from the movement of Neoplatonized Aristotelian philosophy in Arabic (*falsafa*). In medieval European

philosophy and theology, we find references to and refutations of teachings developed during the second period by Ashʿarite authors, who were known in Latin as *loquentes in lege Maurorum*. In its third period, *kalām* engaged in an active reception of Aristotelian philosophy in Arabic, most importantly the philosophy of Avicenna (Ibn Sīnā, d. 1038).

### Development of the Genre and Its Methods

*Kalām* describes a particular genre of theological and philosophical literature in Arabic. In its later period after the fourteenth century, it also appears in other Islamic languages such as Persian or Ottoman Turkish, though even then Arabic remains the main language of *kalām*. As a genre of literature, *kalām* focuses on establishing and defending certain theological positions through the use of rational arguments. In doing so, *mutakallimūn*, that is, the practitioners of *kalām*, have developed elaborate and systematic views in such fields as epistemology, the natural sciences, metaphysics, ethics, and psychology, and it is a matter of debate whether and to what degree *kalām* should be considered part of philosophy in Islam (Frank 1979; Sabra 2006). The claim of *kalām* to be considered an integral part of the history of philosophy in Islam is clearest during its late period after the twelfth century, when it appropriates and continues much of the earlier



discourse of *falsafa*. *Kalām* is often translated as “rational theology,” although this neglects the philosophical element particularly in its late period. Developed in Islam, *kalām* also establishes itself as a genre of Jewish and Christian Arabic literature (Wolfson 1979). It went through significant changes throughout its history, which can be classified into three main periods: early Muʿtazilite *kalām*, classical Sunni *kalām* particularly of the Ashʿarite tradition, and the late *kalām* of the period after the eleventh century that incorporates techniques and teachings of *falsafa*.

As a genre of literature and a particular method of argumentation, *kalām* established during the mid-eighth century in Iraq. Although much about the early history of *kalām* is unknown, it appears that it originated in public religious debates (singular *munāẓara*) between members of different religions and different Muslim denominations that aimed at the conversion of one’s adversaries to one’s own theological views (van Ess 1991–1997, 1, pp. 48–56). Leading participants in these public disputes became known as *mutakallimūn*, “those who appear as speakers (of a certain group).” *Kalām* (“to appear as speaker”) is the verbal noun of that activity. During the earliest period, it need not be connected to theology or even rationalist theology, as grammar and law were also subjects of debate. By the mid-ninth century, however, a *mutakallim* was a theologian who aimed to convince his adversaries through rationalist arguments. Public debates between *mutakallimūn* remained a staple of *kalām* for many centuries (van Ess 1976). The focus on rational evidence (singular *hujja*) may have resulted from the fact that scriptural arguments are of little value in public disputes between members of different religions. Another etymology of *kalām* focuses on its original meaning as “speech” and on the verb *takallama fī* (“to speak about”), from which the name of its practitioners derived. *Mutakallimūn* spoke about and publicly debated subjects such as God and His attributes, where other, more traditionalist scholars in Islam practiced self-imposed restraint (Abdel Haleem 1996). *Kalām* is therefore also translated as “speculative theology,” in the sense of formal, conceptual, and theoretical reasoning into such subjects

as God and questions of ontology and ethics (Frank 1992, pp. 9–12). Such reasoning was not unanimously accepted among the scholars of Islam, and there have always been groups who opposed its practice and/or deemed it illegitimate.

During its early period up to the beginning of the tenth century, *kalām* is largely synonymous to Muʿtazilite *kalām* (see below) and even the Jewish and Christian theologians who adopted *kalām* during this period should be regarded as Muʿtazilite *mutakallimūn* (Adang et al. 2007). The relationship of early *kalām* to the contemporaneous movement of translating Greek texts into Arabic is still unclear. There is a significant amount of common technical language that was used in these two movements, although the words do not always bear the same meaning. Both movements, that of early *kalām* and the translation movement from Greek into Arabic, were influenced by Aristotelian as well as Neoplatonic undercurrents in the scientific and religious scholarship that existed in pre-Islamic Iraq. Unlike in *falsafa*, however, there was no direct influence of Greek philosophical literature on early *kalām* and the type of connections we see appear to be mediated by such channels as the Christian Aramaic discourse on theology or Persian natural sciences. Also unlike *falsafa*, there are no textual connections of early *kalām* to any preceding theological or philosophical literature of the wider region, and the lines of influences seem to go along oral transmissions, possibly by imitating the argumentative strategies and the technical language of non-Muslim theologians in public debates.

Early *kalām* theologians refer to their method as “disputation” (*al-munāẓara*) and “dialectic” (*al-jadal*) and thus describe the dialogical character of their works (Frank 1992). Most early *kalām* works cite the position of an opponent or an interlocutor and then present the model response to that position or challenge: “if someone says . . . then I respond” (*in qīla. . . fa-qultu*) (van Ess 1970). Often an adversary’s position is refuted by showing that one of its implications is either undesirable or leads to an impossibility. Thus, early *kalām* texts frequently employ the *modus ponens* where a position P is shown to be wrong through the impossibility of one of its

implications  $Q (P \Rightarrow Q; \neg Q, \text{ therefore } \neg P)$ . *Kalām* texts tend to focus on a discussion of the implications of and the opposition to a given position, a practice that would lead philosophers of the Aristotelian tradition in Arabic (*falāsifa*) to criticize *mutakallimūn* for pursuing a non-apodictic method of inquiry (Gutas 2005). One of its methods is “exhaustive investigation and successive elimination” (*sabr wa-taqṣīm*), in which the presentation of one’s own solution to a problem is accompanied by a discussion and refutation of all known alternatives and all possible objections. Many *mutakallimūn* were also active in the field of Islamic law, and the dialectical methods developed in that field, particularly that of legal analogy (*qiyās*), had a strong influence on *kalām*.

One of the most important literary vehicles of the genre was the “*kalām* compendium,” a textbook or comprehensive *summa* where subjects discussed in *kalām* are dealt with according to the same basic scheme. *Kalām* compendia were produced up to the thirteenth century, when Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī’s (d. 1210) activity changed this basic scheme and adapted it to the literary genres of *falsafa*. A classical *kalām* compendium would begin with the discussion of questions of epistemology (*al-ilm wa-l-naẓar*), then proceed to proofs for the existence of God, then discuss the attributes of God and turn to the way God relates to His creation. At the end of such a compendium stood the discussion of prophecy (and thus revelation) as well as the afterlife, sometimes followed by an inquiry into the status of the individual and the order of society, including its leadership (*imāma*) (Frank 1992, p. 12f.).

### The First Period: Mu‘tazilite *kalām*

The development of *kalām* as a genre of Arabic literature coincides with the formation of the first group of systematic theologians in Islam, the Mu‘tazilites. The Mu‘tazilites emerged from the earlier group of Qadarites, who engaged in the Islamic theological dispute about human free will versus divine predestination. Qadarites, who were active in the Iraqi city of Basra, argued that

humans are morally responsible for their actions and therefore must have power (*qadar*) over them. They argued against a traditionalist group of scholars (the *ahl al-ḥadīth*) who held that the power to act lies with God, whose omnipotence determines human actions. Later Mu‘tazilites claimed that around the year 740, the Basrian scholar Wāṣil ibn ‘Aṭā’ (d. 748) disputed with his colleague ‘Amr ibn ‘Ubayd (d. 761) and convinced him that the teaching of the prominent Qadarite al-Ḥasan al-Baṣrī (d. 728), namely, that a grave sinner is a “hypocrite” is wrong. Wāṣil ibn ‘Aṭā’ together with ‘Amr ibn ‘Ubayd are credited to have formed a new school of thought that called itself “those who set themselves apart” (*al-mu‘tazila*). Various positions of this group developed into a system of thought that expressed itself in five principles: (1) God’s unity (*tawḥīd*), (2) God’s justice (*‘adl*), (3) God’s absolute sincerity regarding the promised rewards and punishments for human actions (*al-wa‘d wa-l-wa‘d*), (4) the claim that a grave sinner is neither an unbeliever nor a believer, which implies that he should not be subject to legal sanctions while he should still be morally shunned and will certainly be punished by God in the afterlife (*al-manzila bayna al-manzilatayn* “the station between the two stations”), and (5) the obligation to command right and forbid wrong (*al-amr bi-l-ma‘rūf wa-l-nahy ‘an al-munkar*).

After the ‘Abbāsīd dynasty took control of the Caliphate in 750, the Mu‘tazilites became the leading theological school in Basra and the new capital Baghdad. The early ‘Abbāsīd Caliphs, particularly al-Ma’mūn (reg. 813–833) and his successors, favored them over their traditionalist and more scripturalist adversaries. Although he himself was not committed to Mu‘tazilite theology, al-Ma’mūn invited prominent Mu‘tazilites to his court. During the so-called Inquisition (*miḥna*), al-Ma’mūn unsuccessfully tried to compel acquiescence in the Mu‘tazilite doctrine that the Qur’ān was created in time as opposed to being eternal. The Inquisition excited great opposition among prominent traditionalists and would become one reason for the diminishing influence of Mu‘tazilite theology during subsequent centuries.

During the first half of the ninth century, leading proponents of the Muʿtazilites in Baghdad, most prominently Abū l-Hudhayl (d. 842) and al-Nazzām (d. around 840), developed the school theology into a system that included explanations of physical processes, God’s nature, His relationship to creation, and ethics (van Ess 1991–1997). A second intellectual peak was reached during the early tenth century in Basra, where Abū ʿAlī al-Jubbāʿī (d. 915–916) and his son Abū Hāshim al-Jubbāʿī (d. 933) dominated the school tradition. The teaching tradition of Abū Hāshim (known as Bahshāmiyya) became the most influential expression of Muʿtazilite *kalām*. To it belonged the Qāḍī ʿAbd al-Jabbār (d. 1025), who in his *Replete Book (al-Muḡnī)* formulated the most comprehensive treatment of the school’s theology and remains our most important source for Muʿtazilite *kalām*. He created a circle of Muʿtazilite theologians in Rayy (modern Tehran, Iran) and had a significant influence on Zaydī Shīʿite theology and early 12th century Shīʿite theology.

Although Muʿtazilites continued to be influential in regions on the edge of the Islamic world (in Khwarezm, that is, modern Uzbekistan, and among the Zaydī Shīʿites in Yemen), their influence on theological debates in the center diminished during the eleventh century. One of their last major proponents was Ibn al-Malāḥimī (d. 1141) in Khwarezm and al-Zamakhsharī (d. 1144), author of an influential Qurʾān commentary. Both were influenced by the teaching tradition of Abū l-Ḥusayn al-Baṣrī (d. 1044), a renegade student of ʿAbd al-Jabbār who was educated in medicine and thus familiar with an Aristotelian approach to the natural sciences.

Under the heading of God’s unity (*tawḥīd*), the principal Muʿtazilite concern was to uphold divine simplicity and to defend God against anthropomorphism (*tashbīḥ*). They taught that the relationship between God and His attributes (*ṣifāt*) is totally unlike that of humans and the attributes they have. Theirs was an austere view of God in which the essential divine attributes were grounded directly in His essence and were not affirmed as distinct entities. Thus, when one affirms God to be living (*ḥayy*), knowing (ʿ *ālim*), or powerful (*qādir*), one does not affirm

a separate life (*ḥayā*), knowledge (ʿ *ilm*), or power (*qudra*), the way one does when talking about a human, in whom such attributes are grounded in so-called entitative accidents or *maʿānī* (sing. *maʿnā*) (van Ess 1991–1997, 3, pp. 270–276, 399f.; 4, pp. 425–445). God is believed “to be” the perfect mode of essential divine attributes like “living,” “knowing,” or “powerful.” Al-Nazzām taught that “God is by Himself continuously knowing, living, powerful, hearing, seeing, and eternal, not through a (separate) knowledge, power etc. (that he has).” Although a similar range of attributes can be predicated both of human beings and God, the mode of their predication or entitlement (*istiḥqāq*) differs (Frank 1978).

The insistence on divine unlikeness under the principle of God’s unity (*tawḥīd*) was nevertheless accompanied by a different emphasis on divine likeness with regard to the attributes themselves, particularly that of God’s justice. In defending divine justice, the Muʿtazilites claimed that the same standards of right and wrong apply to divine actions as to human actions, arguing that these standards are innately known to all human beings through reason and constitute objective characteristics (*wajh*, pl. *wujūh*: grounds or act descriptions) of actions (Hourani 1985, pp. 57–117). Any human action has one of four objective characteristics: obligatory (*wājib*), recommended (*nadb*), permissible/morally neutral (*mubāḥ*), or bad (*qabīḥ*). Performing a morally relevant action creates a certain “desert” (*istiḥqāq*) on the side of the human, either as blame and punishment or as praise and reward. In his dealings with humankind, God necessarily abides by the moral code that results from these objective characteristics and by the economy of deserts that it generates. He honors claims of reward when they arise, punishes only the deserving, and compensates for undeserved suffering. This claim was complemented by the view that human beings are free to act and responsible for their moral failures or successes, and thus also with the view that God gives every human being an opportunity to attain salvation (Vasalou 2008). The view that God in His justice administers no unjust punishment led to the admission that destruction through

natural disasters, for instance, must either be compensated in the hereafter or is just punishment for bad actions that could have been avoided. Acting according to the morals of the one justice that is both divine and human would, in turn, force God to grant salvation.

### The Second Period: Sunni *kalām*

It was the heavily moralistic outlook of Muʿtazilite *kalām* evident in this short account that made it vulnerable to the attacks of Sunni theologians, mostly of the Ashʿarite school, who argued that human conceptions of justice were inapplicable to God and, more generally, that human beings can have no full understanding of the divine attributes. At the beginning of the tenth century, al-Ashʿarī (d. 935–936), a renegade Muʿtazilite theologian from Basra, pointed to what he saw as a fundamental incoherence at the heart of the Muʿtazilite attempt to give a systematic rationalization of God’s justice and the futility of efforts to reconcile God’s justice with His foreknowledge: Assuming that God knows whether a given human will go on to make the right or wrong moral choices within his or her lifetime and assuming also that God determines a person’s time of death, how can the Muʿtazilites explain why an infant who dies without having performed any actions, whether good or evil, has been deprived of the chance to earn rewards in the afterlife, while numerous wretched people are allowed to live long lives in which they thoughtlessly waste their chances to obey God – chances that the infant craved in vain? Prompted by this objection, al-Ashʿarī developed an alternative to Muʿtazilite *kalām* that would preserve the Muʿtazilites’ technique of rational argumentation yet criticize their extension of human rational principles into the divine realm. He insisted, for instance, that when God describes Himself in the Qurʾān as “knowing” (*ʿālim*) this would imply – according to the rules of the Arabic language – the existence of an entity (*maʿnā*) of “knowledge” that God has. Such knowledge is different from human knowledge and humans cannot gain a full understanding of divine attributes. With regard to the entitative quality of the divine attributes (*ṣifāt*)

and the way they are grounded in God’s unity – as well as other subjects of theology that would apparently defy human reason – the Ashʿarites applied the principle of acknowledging what they understood to be the teachings of revelation “without asking how” (*bi-lā kayf*). Al-Ashʿarī’s aim was to practice *kalām* in a way that would preserve the outward wording of the text of revelation as much as possible (Gimaret 1990). Unlike the Muʿtazilites, he saw himself as part of the broader movement of traditionalist Sunni Islam that grew out of the opposition to al-Maʾmūn’s Inquisition.

The Ashʿarites’ refusal of extending human rational principles into the divine led in their ethics to the rejection of the Muʿtazilite view that God’s justice follows a moral code that is innately known to humans. Ashʿarites acknowledge that humans have an innate understanding of “good” and “bad,” but this does not reflect objective ethical characteristics but is determined to be a mere consideration of their innerworldly benefits. These innate judgments, however, are ultimately fallacious and cannot be the basis of ethics or jurisprudence (*fiqh*). Ashʿarites have a voluntarist understanding of ethical values, where “good” and “bad” are determined by God’s will. Good actions are those that are rewarded by God (in this world as well as in the afterlife) and bad actions are those that are punished. The kind of connection between human actions and divine reward or punishment can only be learned from revelation (Hourani 1985, pp. 124–166).

While the Ashʿarites were the first group of Sunni *mutakallimūn*, they were soon joined by a second group that established itself in the border region between Iran and Central Asia and took its inspiration from the work of al-Māturīdī (d. c. 944), a contemporary of al-Ashʿarī from Samarkand. Whereas Ashʿarite *kalām* adopted certain positions in a conscious effort to oppose Muʿtazilism, Māturīdite *kalām* was less driven by such an opposition and is thus in general more rationalist than Ashʿarite *kalām* in its approach and in this respect closer to Muʿtazilism (Rudolph 2015).

Ashʿarite *kalām* developed in Basra and Baghdad, where al-Ashʿarī taught, but moved to

Khorasan in northwest Iran at the beginning of the eleventh century. Its main proponents al-Bāqillānī (d. 1013), Ibn Fūrak (d. 1015), al-Isfarāʾīnī (d. 1027), and al-Juwaynī (d. 1085), whose *Guide to Conclusive Proofs* (*Kitāb al-Irshād*) remains a point of reference for this period, developed systematic positions in many fields of the sciences. Initially only a small movement, Ashʿarite *kalām* benefited from the patronage of rulers beginning with the second half of the eleventh century and became the most influential branch of *kalām* in Islam. During this period, Ashʿarite *kalām* also became institutionalized in the newly formed *madrasa*, a seminary-type school or college – often financially independent – where *kalām* was part of the curriculum (*pace* Makdisi 1981, p. 302f).

Central to early (or also: classical) Ashʿarite *kalām* was a concern with the preservation of God’s omnipotence, which provided the context for their systematic denial of the Aristotelian concept of “natures” (Arab. *ṭabāʾi*). Classical Ashʿarites denied that beings contained inherent potentialities capable of determining their future states and development and emphatically rejected the existence of any true potentiality outside of God. Out of that position grew an independent attempt to explain physical change in this world and the performance of human actions. Ashʿarites adopted their understanding of physical processes from earlier theories developed in Muʿtazilite *kalām*. The Muʿtazilite movement was particularly rich in attempts to explain physical processes (Dhanani 1994). Some Muʿtazilites speculated that movements are not continuous processes but consist of smaller leaps (singl. *ṭafra*) that our senses cannot detect and whose sum we perceive as a continuously flowing movement. This theory, in turn, led other Muʿtazilite thinkers to suggest that time itself is not a continuous flow but is rather a fast procession of “moments” (singl. *waqt*), which again is concealed from our senses. Al-Ashʿarī adopted these notions and created an explanation of physical change known as occasionalism. Occasionalism assumes that no element in the created world has any causal efficacy over any other. God is the only cause in this world and He does not employ secondary agents

or intermediaries to mediate His creative activity. God creates each event immediately, or rather, He creates this world anew at every moment and arranges the relationship between the elements therein anew without causal connection to a prior moment. What we consider causal natural laws is merely God’s custom (*ʿādat Allāh*) in creating certain sequences of events. God, however, can break His custom and He does so when He creates a miracle in order to confirm the claim of one of His prophets (Perler and Rudolph 2000, pp. 23–62).

Moses Maimonides (d. 1204) gives a faithful yet critical report of the occasionalist teachings in classical Ashʿarite *kalām* at the end of the first part, in chapters 71–76, of his *Guide of the Perplexed* (*Dalālat al-hāʾirīn*, pp. 121–162; English trans. 1, pp. 175–231). He presents 12 premises (*muqaddimāt*) of Ashʿarite occasionalism and explains their implications. While written in Arabic, Maimonides’ *Guide* became known in Europe first through its Hebrew translation (*Mōreh nevūkhīm*, translated c. 1200 by Samuel ibn Tibbon) and through a Latin translation (*Dux neutrorum* or *Dux perplexorum*, translated c. 1240) of the Hebrew version, which renders the Hebrew word *medabberīm* (for Arab. *mutakallimūn*) as *loquentes* (Niewöhner 1974). Maimonides thus introduced medieval European thinkers such as Thomas Aquinas (d. 1274) to the occasionalist ontology of Ashʿarite *kalām*. Aquinas discusses and refutes a number of their assumptions in his *Summa contra gentiles* and in other works (Perler and Rudolph 2000, pp. 131–153).

### The Third Period: The Appropriation of *falsafa* in *kalām*

Already Ibn Khaldūn (d. 1406) in his history of *kalām* divides it into two main periods and distinguishes the “method of the later authors” (*tarīqat al-mutaʾakhhirīn*) from those who preceded them in the classical period. He characterizes the new method as “meddling with philosophical works” and locates the turning point al-Ġazālī (d. 1111) (Ibn Khaldūn 2005, 3, pp. 23–36,



English trans. 3, pp. 34–55). The Arabic philosophers of the Aristotelian tradition (*falāsifa*) had criticized the *mutakallimūn* for their use of dialectical methods of argumentation and their rejection of Aristotelian logic and the method of demonstration (*burhān*). At the turn of the twelfth century, their criticism is taken up by al-Ġazālī, who began his career as an Ash‘arite *mutakallim* and who also wrote a fairly traditional *kalām* compendium (al-Ġazālī 2006). In his *Incoherence of the Philosophers* (*Tahāfut al-falāsifa*), he employs the method of *kalām* as well as arguments developed by earlier *mutakallimūn* to show that many teachings held by the *falāsifa* are not apodictically proven. Al-Ġazālī’s *Incoherence* aims to counter the philosophical accusation against *kalām* that it constitutes a nonapodictic science by showing that much of *falsafa* is equally nonapodictic. The book also points the way to a new kind of *kalām* by acknowledging that the teachings of the *falāsifa*, even if they are unproven by demonstrative arguments, are not necessarily wrong. Al-Ġazālī accepts that Aristotelian logic is superior to the logic of the *mutakallimūn* and should be adopted by them (Rudolph 2005). Given the nature of Aristotelian logic, any incorporation of its system of definitions and syllogisms also implies a significant incorporation of Aristotelian ontology, and al-Ġazālī was not opposed to that. In the natural sciences, al-Ġazālī appropriated the methods of the Aristotelian *falāsifa* and adopted their results. Overall, while rejecting the Aristotelian claim of metaphysics as a demonstrative science, al-Ġazālī employed and adopted many philosophical teachings in metaphysics as well as other branches of the sciences, including, for instance, the psychology of Avicenna (Ibn Sīnā, d. 1038). These teachings are, for al-Ġazālī, not the indubitable results of demonstrative arguments, as the *falāsifa* claim, but merely sound explanations of phenomena that we witness or that are mentioned in the Qur’ān. For al-Ġazālī, many teachings of the *falāsifa* are true because they have taken them from the earlier revelations of such prophets as Abraham and Moses. The *falāsifa* later concealed this and falsely ascribed their origin to Aristotle and other Greek philosophers (Griffel 2009, p. 100).

Al-Ġazālī’s critique of both *falsafa* and *kalām* leads to a gradual rapprochement between these two genres of Arabic literature. During the twelfth century, the Aristotelian tradition in Arabic performed a “dialectical turn,” most importantly in the work of Abū l-Barakāt al-Baġdādī (d. c. 1165). He dismissed earlier claims of *apodeixis* on the side of the *falāsifa* and tried to conduct metaphysics as a dialectical science, using techniques similar to those already established in *kalām* (Griffel 2011). The next step was Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī, who like al-Ġazālī began his career as an Ash‘arite *mutakallim* of classical outlook but who wrote books in *kalām* that make full use of arguments developed in *falsafa* as well as in earlier *kalām* literature. In his two influential textbooks of philosophy, *Eastern Investigations* (*al-Mabāḥith al-mashriqiyya*) and *The Summary in Philosophy and in Logic* (*al-Mulakhkhaṣ fī l-ḥikma wa-l-mantiq*), Fakhr al-Dīn developed a novel division of the sciences that was adopted by many later textbooks of *kalām*. He rejected the types of divisions found earlier in philosophical literature according to the books in the *corpus Aristotelicum* as well as the established divisions in *kalām*. Instead, Fakhr al-Dīn created a new division – and thus a new curriculum of studies – along the lines of the most basic ontological distinctions in philosophy (Eichner 2009). Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī’s works led to an adaptation of philosophical divisions in later textbooks of *kalām*. Authors of postclassical Ash‘arite *kalām* who were active at the *madrasas* of the Muslim east were often equally familiar with the works of earlier *mutakallimūn* as with those of the *falāsifa*, most importantly that of Avicenna (Endress 2006). Although driven by the overarching theological concerns of Ash‘arite *kalām*, they made extensive use of concepts and arguments developed by philosophers such as Avicenna (Endress 2005; van Ess 1966). Often they made small but significant changes to these concepts and arguments that reflect the different theological positions of Ash‘arite *kalām* and Avicennan *falsafa*. Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī’s *Summary in Philosophy and in Logic* provided the template for a group of theological and philosophical *summae* that were produced during the Il-Khānīd period



(1256–1353) in Iran and Iraq. These works, such as al-Bayḏāwī's (d. c. 1286) *Risings Lights* (*Ṭawālī' al-anwār*) and 'Aḏud al-Dīn al-Ījī's (d. 1355) *Book of Stations in kalām* (*Kitāb al-Mawāqif fī 'ilm al-kalām*), became centerpieces of *kalām* instruction and were used for centuries. Together with the commentaries and the supercommentaries on these works, they were part of *kalām* education in Muslim *madrasas* up to the mid-twentieth century (Robinson 1997). Among the 12er Shī'ites, Naṣīr al-Dīn al-Ṭūsī (d. 1274) adopted the synthesis of Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī and established an intellectual tradition that includes teachings and techniques of earlier *kalām* as well as earlier *falsafa*. His *Undressing of Religious Convictions* (*Tajrīd al-aqā'id*) would become a popular textbook of *kalām* even in Sunni *madrasa* education. His student al-'Allāma al-Ḥillī (d. 1325) revived the study of Mu'tazilite *kalām*, particularly the tradition of Abū l-Ḥusayn al-Baṣrī (Schmidtke 1991). Subsequently, 12er Shī'ite *kalām* was – and still is – open to influences from Ash'arite and Mu'tazilite *kalām* as well as *falsafa* (Schmidtke 2000).

Among the three periods of *kalām*, this last one has attracted the least attention among researchers and many questions remain open. *Kalām*, however, was practiced throughout the centuries at intellectual centers such as the al-Azhar seminary in Cairo, and some of these works were used in the instruction. The literary activity of this late period focuses mainly on commentaries and supercommentaries to earlier works (Wisnovsky 2004). One of the last productive *mutakallim* of al-Azhar in Cairo was al-Bājūrī (d. 1860) who composed numerous commentaries to earlier works of *kalām*. Muḥammad 'Abduh's (d. 1905) influential *Epistle on Divine Unity* (*Risālat al-Tawhīd*) of 1897 is still written in the tradition of *kalām* although it no longer situates itself in the context of earlier works in that genre and implicitly argues from the background of the European Enlightenment. The rediscovery of many texts of Mu'tazilite *kalām* during the twentieth century led to renewed interest in *kalām* among Muslim scholars and to partial efforts of reappropriating Mu'tazilite doctrines (Hildebrandt 2007).

## Cross-References

- ▶ [Abū l-Barakāt al-Baḡdādī](#)
- ▶ [Aristotle, Arabic](#)
- ▶ [Ethics, Arabic](#)
- ▶ [al-Ġazālī, Abū Ḥāmid Muḥammad](#)
- ▶ [Ibn Khaldūn, Abū Zayd 'Abdarrahmān](#)
- ▶ [Ibn Sīnā, Abū 'Alī \(Avicenna\)](#)
- ▶ [Logic in the Arabic and Islamic World](#)
- ▶ [Moses Maimonides](#)
- ▶ [Natural Philosophy, Arabic](#)
- ▶ [Philosophy, Arabic](#)
- ▶ [Political Philosophy, Arabic](#)
- ▶ [Saadia Gaon](#)
- ▶ [Theology Versus Philosophy in the Arab World](#)
- ▶ [al-Ṭūsī, Naṣīr al-Dīn](#)

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## Khafri, Shams al-Din al-

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### Abstract

**Shams al-Din al-Khafri** (dated between 942/1535 and 946/1539) was one of the most prominent philosophers, mathematicians, and astronomers of his times. He completed his education in Shiraz in various religious and rational sciences under the philosopher and theologian Şadr al-Din al-Dashtakī (dated 903/1498), then spent the last part of his life in Kashan. As a jurisconsult (*mujtahid*), he seems to have played an important role in the instauration of Imāmi Shī‘ism as the religion state of Iran under the first Safavid Shāhs. The importance of his works in astronomy has been emphasized by George Saliba, however. In the field of philosophy, he took on from al-Dashtakī the heritage of both peripatetic and mystical – Ishrāqī and Akbarian – traditions, but in contrast with his master, aimed to bring them together. In logics, he wrote two treatises dealing with the famous “Liar paradox.” In physics, he defended the Aristotelian conception of prime matter against the criticism of Suhrawardī. In metaphysics and theology, he composed five works attempting to prove the philosophical concept of “the necessary being” against the attacks of theologians and supported Ibn ‘Arabī’s doctrine of “unity of being.” He was particularly concerned by the problem of the nature of God’s knowledge, which he focused on in his philosophical commentary of the Qur’anic verse known as “the Verse of the Pedestal” (II, 255). By combining

all these influences in a personal endeavor, al-Khafri must be considered as a forerunner of the “Renaissance of Islamic philosophy” in the eleventh/seventeenth century.

**Shams al-Din Muḥammad b. Aḥmad al-Khafri** (d. between 942/1535 and 946/1539), also known as al-Fāḍil, al-Muḥaqqiq, or al-‘Allāma al-Khafri, was a philosopher, mathematician, astronomer, and Shī‘i jurisconsult (*mujtahid*) of the second half of the eighth century and the first half of the ninth century of the Hegira. He was active in Iran under the reign of the two first Safavid Shāhs, Ismā‘il (r. 906–930/1501–1524) and Tahmāsb (r. 930–984/1524–1576) (Shūshtarī 2014-15, vol. 2, p. 233; Idem, vol. 4, p. 568; Afandī 1981, vol. 7, p. 88). He witnessed thus major changes in the political, religious, and intellectual fields of the Eastern Islamic world, subsequent to the establishment of Shī‘ism as a religion state in Iran in 906/1501. In the field of mathematical astronomy, Khafri shall be considered one of the most competent scientists of medieval Islam (Saliba 2011, p. 341). In philosophy, he is rightly counted among the representatives of the philosophical School of Shiraz with Şadr al-Din Muḥammad al-Dashtakī (d. 903/1498), Jalāl al-Din al-Dawānī (d. 908/1502-03), and the son of the former Ghiyāth al-Din Maṣṣūr al-Dashtakī (d. 948/1541-42) (Nasr and Aminrazavi 2015, pp. 27–116). Moreover, his influence is sensible in the works of the two most prominent philosophers of the subsequent century and maybe of all the early modern philosophy in Islam, Mīr Dāmād (d. 1041/1631) and Mullā Şadrā Shīrāzī (d. 1050/1640-01).

### His Life

As indicated by his *nisba*, Shams al-Din al-Khafri was probably born in Khafir, a little village in the outskirts of Shiraz, circa 885/1480 (Saliba 2011, p. 341). He completed his education in Shiraz in various religious and rational sciences such as logic, *fiqh*, *kalām*, and philosophy, under the philosopher and theologian Şadr al-Din Muḥammad

Dashtakī (Shūshtarī 2014-15, vol. 2, pp. 233–234; Idem, vol. 4, p. 568; Saatchian 2011, p. 20). We don't know any other of Khafri's masters, especially in the field of astronomy. The claim of 'Alī al-Dawānī that he had been the student of his father Jalāl al-Dīn al-Dawānī, a Sunni Ash'arī theologian and a philosopher rival to Dashtakī, does not gain any evidence (Naṣr and Aminrazavi 2015, pp. 114–116; Bdaiwi 2014, p. 74).

We don't know exactly at which date Khafri emigrated from Shiraz to Kashan, in central Iran, where he spent the last part of his life composing his works, teaching his thought, and delivering juridical advices (*fatwa*, pl. *fatāwā*). According to Ni'matullāh Jazā'irī (d. 1112/1700-01), he settled in Shiraz in 909/1503–04, at the venue of Shāh Ismā'īl in this city, and was already famous enough to be invited by him to profess publicly his allegiance to Shi'ism (Ja'fariyān 2009-10, vol. 2, p. 1140). He had already composed his *Muntahā al-idrāk fī madrak al-aflāk*, in the field of astronomy, completed in 901/1496, and perhaps his *Ibrat al-fuḍalā*, in the field of logic, in which he criticized Jalāl al-Dīn al-Dawānī when the latter was still alive. It should be *circa* 926/1519–20 that 'Alī al-Karakī (d. 940/1533–34), an eminent Shī'i scholar who migrated from Jabal 'Āmil (present South Lebanon) to Iran at the invitation of the Shāh, visited him in Kashan. Khafri had many students, among whom the most famous are his son Mullā Qawām al-Dīn Ḥusayn Khafri (n.d.), who led a career as an astronomer and philosopher, and Shāh Ṭāhir Raḍī al-Dīn Dakkanī (d. 952/1546), who played an important role in propagating Twelver Shī'i thought in India (Shūshtarī 2014-15, vol. 2, p. 235; Idem, vol. 4, pp. 571–572; Kākā'i 2008, pp. 61–65).

As regards Khafri's confessional affiliation, the reports are somewhat confusing. Some biographers say that he was initially a Sunni and converted to Shī'ism during the reign of Shāh Tahmāsb (Afandī 1981, vol. 7, p. 88), while according to other sources, he was already a Shī'i at the advent of Shāh Ismā'īl (Qazwīnī 1986, p. 64). According to a story reported by Nūrullāh Shūshtarī (d. 1019/1610) and Ni'matullāh Jazā'irī, two overtly Shī'i-oriented historians, when Shāh Ismā'īl ordered religious

scholars to curse the three first caliphs Abū Bakr, 'Umar, and 'Uthmān, whose legitimacy is denied by Shī'is, Khafri approved it and insulted the three caliphs in private too (Shūshtarī 2014-15, vol. 2, pp. 233– Idem, vol. 4, pp. 568–570; Qazwīnī 1986, p. 64; Al-Khwānsārī 1971, vol. 7, p. 196; Ja'fariyān 2009-10, vol. 2, pp. 1203, 1240). Qāsim Kākā'i suggests that Khafri dissimulated his Shī'i faith before the Safavid advent because of the high anti-Shī'i attitude of the population of Shiraz (Kākā'i 2008, p. 50). Shūshtarī also reports that in the beginning of the Safavid era – or during the interim period between Qara Qoyunlu and Safavid rule – when all Sunni jurists had fled from Kashan, the people of this city asked Khafri for juridical advice; because of his lack of juridical science and of the poor amount of Shī'i sources available to him, he did it according to the “sane reason” (*'aql-i salīm*); then, when 'Alī al-Karakī, in charge of the religious policy of the state, came in Kashan and examined Khafri's *fatāwā*, he found them tally with Imāmi religion and confirmed Khafri's position in Kashan (Shūshtarī 2014-15, vol. 2, pp. 233–234; Idem, vol. 4, pp. 568–70; Mudarris Tabrizī 1995, vol. 2, p. 154; Khwānsārī 1971, vol. 7, p. 196; Kākā'i 2008, pp. 50–51). It is also said that once Karakī became a real minister of religious affairs, he appointed Khafri as his *chargé d'affaires* when he went on pilgrimage (Mudarris Tabrizī 1995, vol. 2, p. 154).

However that may have been, the Shī'i affiliation of Khafri is obvious in some of his works. In *Ithbāt al-wājib*, he claimed that from God emanates the eternal light of Muḥammad al-Muṣṭafā, the Prophet, and 'Alī al-Murtaḍā, the first Imām (*al-nūr al-muṣṭafawī al-murtaḍawī*), identical to the “First Intellect” (*al-'aql al-awwal*) of the philosophers (Saatchian 2011, p. 23), and that the elite of the knowers are the Shī'i Imāms (Saatchian 2011, Arabic text, p. 29). He devoted his *Arba'īnīyāt* to the commentary of fourteen *ḥadīths* on the virtues of the “people of the Holy Prophetic Family” (*ahl al-bayt*) (Saatchian 2011, pp. 48–49).

As for the date of Khafri's death, the records are divergent. Some say he passed away in 935/1528 (Qazwīnī 1986, pp. 64–65; Hidāyat

1994, p. 209; Mudarris Tabrizi 1995, vol. 2, p. 154); others say in 942/1535 (Al-Ṭīhrānī 1983, vol. 4, p. 331; Idem, vol. 7, p. 73) and others, or even the same authors, in 957/1550 (Al-Ṭīhrānī 1983, vol. 4, p. 331; Idem, vol. 7, p. 73; Mudarris Tabrizi 1995, vol. 2, p. 154). Reporting the testimony of another scholar, Sayyid Jalāl Ṭīhrānī attests that at the end of a copy of his *Muntahā al-idrāk fī madrak al-aflāk*, his death is given as the 28th Šafār 942/27th of August 1535. On the other hand, an expression found on a manuscript of Khafri's *Ithbāt al-wājib* indicates that he was not alive when the book was copied in 946/1539 (Kākā'i 2008, p. 51). Consequently, it can be assumed that he passed away between 942/1535 and 946/1539.

If Khafri seems to have played an important role in the instauration of Imāmi Shī'ism as the religion state of Iran, a process that was not achieved before the end of the Safavid period (end of the eleventh/seventeenth century, beginning of the twelfth/eighteenth century), his role was not of less importance in the emergence of the "philosophical Renaissance" in Safavid, Iran, especially in the eleventh/seventeenth century, with major thinkers such as Mīr Dāmād and Mullā Šadrā.

## His Thought

Shams al-Dīn Khafri was an original and influent thinker in both fields of philosophy and theoretical astronomy. The importance of his works in the "science of the stars" (*ilm al-nujūm*), as Khafri and his contemporaries were calling astronomy, has been rightly emphasized by George Saliba in his studies devoted to these works (Saliba 1997, 2000, 2004); however, his place in the history of Islamic philosophy remains poorly considered and recognized. He was one of the first thinkers of Safavid Iran to combine the sources of Avicennian philosophy, Suhrawardī's (d. 587/1191) "Illuminationist philosophy" (*ḥikmat al-ishrāq*), Ibn al-'Arabī's (d. 638/1240) theosophy, and the tradition of Shī'i esotericism. In both fields of astronomy and philosophy, he was concerned about studying and discussing the

systems of his forerunners, whether Greek masters or Islamic philosophers, to elaborate his own thought.

Shams al-Dīn Khafri was primarily a scientist, considered by Saliba "a genius in mathematical astronomy and a pioneering innovator with a profound insight into the nature of the science of astronomy itself" (Saliba 2011, p. 343). After such scholars as Našīr al-Dīn al-Ṭūsī (d. 672/1274) and Quṭb al-Dīn Shīrāzī (d. 710/1311), Khafri embarked "on the most important project of medieval times project, namely to try to bring some inner consistency to the Greek tradition [especially the Ptolemaic legacy], or, in case of failure, to overhaul that tradition all together, by creating an entirely new astronomy to replace it" (Saliba 2011, p. 342). In his own works, Khafri aimed to synthesize and to achieve the efforts of his forerunners. He began with a critical and innovative commentary upon Ṭūsī's *al-Tadhkira fī 'ilm al-hay'a* ("The Memento of Astronomy") and its traditional commentary by Sharīf Jurjānī (d. 815/1413), which he called *al-Takmila fī sharḥ al-tadhkira* ("The Completion of the Commentary on the Memento"), in which he states that the problems of the Ptolemaic model for the Moon and Mercury can be resolved in different ways (*wujūh*) – most of them invented by him – without introducing any of them as *the* correct one (Saliba 1997). Then he wrote a supercommentary upon two extensive commentaries on Ṭūsī's *Tadhkira* by Shīrāzī, *Nihāyat al-idrāk fī dirāyat al-aflāk* and *al-Tuḥfa al-Shāhiya*, which he called *Muntahā al-idrāk fī madrak al-aflāk* ("The Ultimate Comprehension in the Grasping of the Spheres") (Saliba 2000). Finally, Khafri composed an independent book in his own words, a short treatise entitled *Hall mā lā yanḥall* ("The Resolution of That Which Cannot Be Resolved"), especially devoted to theoretical astronomy. Having showed in his previous works that several mathematical models can represent the same observational data, he supports that mathematics is just like a language separable from the phenomena it attempts to describe (Saliba 2000; Idem 1997, p. 119).

Like other Islamic philosophers of the pre-modern and modern period, whether Peripatetics



or Ishrāqīs, Khafri was extremely competent in the field of logic. He wrote two treatises dealing with the famous “Liar paradox,” whose earliest form can be traced back to Epimenides of Crete (circa 600 BC) who is reputed to have said, “the Cretans are always liars.” The paradox of the liar became very popular in the Islamic world and was discussed by logicians, theologians, and philosophers, especially in later times by thinkers such as Athir al-Din Abhari (d. c. 663/1265), Naṣir al-Din al-Ṭūsī, Najm al-Din Kātibī (d. c. 657/1276), and the aforementioned philosophers of Shiraz (see Alwishah and Sanson; Qaramaleki). Khafri’s first work on the subject is *Risāla ‘Ibrat al-fuḍalā’ fī ḥall shubha jidhr al-aṣamm* (or *fī ḥall shubha kull kalāmī kādhib*) (“Treatise on the Bewilderment of the Learned: The Liar’s Paradox”), in which he exposes and criticizes the solution proposed by Jalāl al-Din Dawānī (Al-Ṭihirānī 1983, vol. 15, p. 113). Then, in the more extensive *Ḥayrat al-fuḍalā’* (“The Perplexity of the Learned”), he proposed five solutions to the paradox, among them that of Ṣadr al-Din Dashtakī seems to be preferred by him (Pourjavady 2011, p. 84).

As a philosopher, Khafri could hardly be classified in a specific school of thought. To be sure, he made more than receive passively the teaching of his master Ṣadr al-Din Dashtakī. The latter was assuming the heritage of Peripatetic philosophy, in contrast with most of the contemporary Shī‘i theologians (*mutakallimūn*), by teaching the *Ishārāt wa tanbīhāt* of Avicenna and the *Tajrīd al-mantiq* of Naṣir al-Din Ṭūsī; he also presented some mystical tendencies under the influence of Suhrawardī and Ibn ‘Arabī. However, he recommended a separation (*tafkīk*) between rational philosophy and spiritual gnosis (*‘irfān*), considered as two different modes of knowledge. As a result, he considered the doctrine of “unity of Being” (*waḥdat al-wujūd*), as elaborated by Ibn ‘Arabī and his disciples, to be indemonstrable, and the famous analogy of the sea and waves – the numerous waves being the manifestations of the same and unique sea – to have just a rhetorical value (Kākā’ī 2008, pp. 52–53). Khafri took on this double heritage of Peripatetic and mystic traditions but, in contrast with his master, aimed to

go beyond the separation by bringing together rationalist philosophy and spiritual gnosis. To give an example, he wrote a short treatise aiming to prove “the Necessary Being” (*wājib al-wujūd*) by both Peripatetic and Illuminationist methods (Saatchian 2011, pp. 35–36). In his *Marātib al-wujūd* (“The Hierarchy of Being”), he also took up the analogy of the sea and waves to ascertain the unity of Being through the multiplicity of its manifestations (*MW*).

Khafri composed five works attempting to prove the “Necessary Being” and to defend this concept against the attacks of theologians (edited in Saatchian 2003). Although he was committed to the Avicennian philosophical tradition, he aimed to elaborate an independent thought on this issue. He claimed that the “Necessary” or “Real Being” (*al-wujūd al-ḥaqīqī*), whose existence is necessary by essence, bestows existence, by the way of procession (*ṣudūr*) or emanation (*fayḍ*), onto all other beings which are possible by essence. Consequently, Being or Existence is unique for all the existents, which are separated from each other only in the external and apparent reality (*RI*, pp. 111–114). According to Kākā’ī, Khafri was also supporting the primacy of existence (*iṣālat al-wujūd*) over quiddity (*māhiyya*), the former being “real” or “true” (*ḥaqīqī*) when the latter is only “derived” (*muntazi’*) from existence, a “point of view” (*i’tibār*) taken on it. It is on this “principality of existence” that Mullā Ṣadrā would eventually build his metaphysical system, one of the most creative and achieved of all the history of Islamic philosophy (Kākā’ī 2008, pp. 53–54). As a result, Kākā’ī argues, Khafri should be considered a major source of the thought of Mullā Ṣadrā (Kākā’ī 1996). Even the title of the latter’s masterpiece, *al-Ḥikma al-muta’aliyya fī l-asfār al-‘aqliyya al-arba’a* (“The Transcendental Philosophy. On the Four Intellectual Journeys”), could be borrowed from that of an epistle of Khafri beginning by these words, “the Gnostics have four journeys...” (*li-l-‘arīfīn arba’a asfār*). The manuscript of this epistle, whose copy is conserved in the Central Library of the University of Tehran, is incidentally attributed to Mullā Ṣadrā (Kākā’ī 2008, pp. 55–56).



Khafri was not affiliated to any Sufi order and seems to have been an autodidact in the field of mysticism. About the “philosophy of illumination” of Suhrawardi, he adopted a selective attitude. Resuming the hierarchical structure of knowledge and knowers as defined by Suhrawardi in his introduction of *Ḥikmat al-ishraq* (Suhrawardi 1999, p. 3; Bdaiwi 2014, 76), he distinguished between the “veiled philosophers” (*al-ḥukamā’ al-mahjūbūn*), who pretend to prove everything by logical demonstrations (*barāhīn*), the “people of the spiritual unveiling” (*ahl al-kashf*), and “the self-divinized philosophers” (*al-ḥukamā’ al-muta’allahīn*), who combine demonstration and mystical experience (*IWW*, pp. 86, 93–94). He also borrowed from Suhrawardi the concept of “dominating lights” (*anwār qāhira*) that he identified to the “angels of proximity” (*al-malā’ika al-muqarrībūn*) (*TAK*, p. 274). However, he adopted a much more skeptical attitude toward the “*mundus imaginalis*” (*‘ālam al-mithāl*), the intermediary world between the corporal and the spiritual ones. After distinguishing between the obscure “images and apparitions” (*muthul wa ashbāh*) produced by the inferior faculty of imagination and the “luminous icons” (*al-muthul al-nūrāniyya*) of the immaterial world, i.e., the “Platonic forms” (*al-muthul al-aflāṭūniyya*) (Khafri, *IWW*, pp. 55–56), he denied to the “*mundus imaginalis*” (*‘ālam al-mithāl*) any kind of substantiality (*TAK*, p. 276).

Undoubtedly, the school of Ibn ‘Arabī had a more decisive influence on Khafri’s thought than any other, especially with the doctrine of “unity of Being,” one of the most discussed doctrine of all medieval Islam. According to Mullā Ṣadrā, Khafri was one of the philosophers having adopted this doctrine, like Naṣīr al-Dīn al-Ṭūsī and Ibn Abī Jumhūr (d. after 904/1499). He would have supported that things, in the intelligible world, exist by the unique real existence (*al-wujūd al-ḥaqīqī*) which is the essence of the Creator itself and that existence is subject to division and change only when in relation with sensible perception (Mullā Ṣadrā 1996-97, p. 457). He would also have argued that existence has an individual essential reality (*ḥaqīqa shakhsīyya*), free of any

multiplication, subsisting by its own essence, and that everything depends on it, whether by unification, like the Necessary Being, or by relation, like the possible being (*ibid.*, p. 461). This idea leads to the concept of “hierarchical structure of existence” (*marātib al-wujūd*), in the terms of Khafri, or what Mullā Ṣadrā would eventually call the “gradation of being” (*tashkīk al-wujūd*).

Khafri was particularly concerned by the problem of the nature of God’s knowledge. This issue, which undoubtedly proceeded from Plato’s *Timaeus* in the Arabic tradition (Arzen 2012), can be expressed as follows. Did God create things following preexistent forms or without any preconception in His knowledge? The thesis makes run the risk of introducing plurality within the essence of God, since knowledge is an essential attribute of God (*ṣifa dhātiyya*), while the alternate view seems to result in admitting that God created what He had no knowledge of. Muslim philosophers such as al-Fārābī (d. 339/950) and Avicenna were supporting the former position, speaking about “inscribed forms” (*ṣuwar murtasima*) in the Divine Knowledge, or “divine Forms” (*ṣuwar ilāhiyya*) (Al-Fārābī 1999, pp. 146–147). Khafri, in his *Risāla ithbāt wājib al-wujūd* (“On the Demonstration of the Necessary Being”), scrutinized critically the positions claimed on this issue by ancient Greeks such as Thales, Anaximenes, Empedocles, and Plato, following the accounts of Shahrastānī’s *Kitāb al-milal wa l-niḥal* (“The Book of Religions and Sects”), like those of al-Fārābī, Avicenna, and Suhrawardi, in order to develop his own argumentation (Khafri, *IWW*, pp. 36–100). He particularly aimed to refute the doctrine of the “divine Forms,” whose origin he found in the teaching of Anaximenes of Milo (*Anaxīmānis*), as reported by Shahrastānī: “The form of every innovated being (*mubda*), before its manifestation in the limit of its innovation, is already present in the Knowledge of its Innovator, the First One; and the forms that are within Him are in infinite number. If we say that God created what was in His Knowledge, it results that the form is eternal by His eternity, but neither His Essence becomes plural because of their plurality, nor it changes due to their change” (Khafri, *IWW*, pp. 38–39;

Shahraṣṭānī 1955, vol. 2, p. 71; French transl., vol. 2, p. 189; the primary source of this saying is the Neoplatonic Pseudo-Ammonios: Rudolph 1989, p. 36). Khafri objects that if it were the case, God would not have a perfect and essential knowledge (*'ilm kamālī dhātī*) because His knowledge would follow the effusion (*fayḍān*) of these forms. This argumentation is reported, and most of its conclusions are shared, by Mullā Ṣadrā in several of his works (Mullā Ṣadrā 1981, vol. 6, pp. 221–227, 232; Idem 2014, vol. 2, pp. 205–206).

Contrary to the view of the Peripatetics, Khafri asserted that God, the Necessary Being, has a synthetic (*ijmālī*) knowledge which is the very knowledge of His Essence, identical to it, and an essential perfection (*kamāl dhātī*). In this sense, God's knowledge of the proceeding being pre-dates the existence of the latter, and God's knowledge of all proceeding being is verified within the Divine Essence itself. "His Essence, be He exalted, is a synthetic knowledge of all things emanating from His Essence" (Khafri, *RI*, pp. 128–129; Idem, *TAK*, pp. 283–284). God has also an analytic knowledge (*tafṣīlī*) which is the very procession (*ṣudūr*) of all beings, His detailed disclosure of all things by giving existence to them (Khafri, *RI*, p. 130; Idem, *TAK*, p. 284). Khafri also argued that God's knowledge of all existents, whether sensible or intelligible, is a knowledge by presence (*ḥuḍūrī*), identical to the act of giving existence to them (*ījād*) (Khafri, *IWW*, p. 57). All these positions would eventually have a strong echo in the thought of Mīr Dāmād, the first master of Mullā Ṣadrā, in his *Taqwīm al-īmān* ("The Strengthening of the Faith") (Mīr Dāmād 2003, pp. 368–369). Therefore, it appears that Khafri played a decisive role, rarely noticed until now, in the formation of the thought of the two most prominent philosophers of the eleventh-/seventeenth-century Iran.

As regards the principles of physics, Khafri defended the Aristotelian conception of prime matter (*hayūlā*, Arabic transcription of Greek ὕλη) against the criticism of Suhrawardī, explaining the view of Ibn Sīnā upon the form of corporality as stipulated in the *Shifā'* and offering a number of proofs of his own. He considered

prime matter to be an individual entity on which forms and figures may appear continually: "The prime matter of all the elements is a single entity to which no plurality attaches. It acquires unity by virtue of its continuous existence on the two states of conjunction and separation (. . .) It is multiplied accidentally by virtue of the plurality of forms. Prime matter is then an individual entity in itself, and an ambiguous entity by virtue of the forms" (*TH*, Engl. transl. in Nasr and Aminrazavi 2015, p. 113). This position would be eventually rejected by Mullā Ṣadrā, who asserts in his *Asfār* that contrarily to Khafri's claim, the existence of matter does not precede the existence of forms but, quite the reverse, is subsequent to it; as a result, matter cannot possess more unity than form does (Mullā Ṣadrā 1981, vol. 2, p. 223). Khafri also wrote a short note refuting the indivisible particle, i.e., atomism (*Naḥī al-juz' [alladhī lā yatajazza']*), also known and mentioned by Ṣadrā (Mullā Ṣadrā 1981, vol. 5, p. 34; Ḥā'irī 1968, vol. 22, p. 187; Saatchian 2011, pp. 39–40). These positions on matter and corporality are tally with Khafri's position upon unity of existence, as seen before. As a scientist and a philosopher, he seems having tried to build a holistic system in which the whole reality, whether physical or metaphysical, would be explained (Pourjavady 2011, p. 40).

Khafri shall also be counted among the Shī'ī philosophers who, following the example of Sayyid Ḥaydar Āmulī (d. after 787/1385–86), appropriated the practice of Qur'anic esoteric interpretation (*ta'wīl*). It is worth reminding that in early Shī'ism, the authority to interpret the Qur'an is a privilege exclusive to the impeccable Imāms. The works of Khafri in this field are much more modest than those of Āmulī, as well as those, equally monumental, of Mullā Ṣadrā; however, his *Tafṣīr āyat al-kursī* ("Commentary of the 'Verse of the Pedestal' [II, 255]") offers an outstanding example of Qur'anic philosophical exegesis. This verse says, "God there is no god but He, the Living, the Everlasting. Slumber seizes Him not, neither sleep; to Him belongs all that is in the heavens and the earth. Who is there that shall intercede with Him save by His leave? He knows what lies before them and what is after

them, and they comprehend not anything of His knowledge save such as He wills. His Throne comprises the heavens and earth; the preserving of them oppresses Him not; He is the All-high, the All-glorious” (transl. Arberry). According to a saying of Prophet Muḥammad, this verse comprehends “the mothers of the metaphysical questions” (*ummahāt al-masā’il al-ilāhiyya*) (*TAK*, p. 290). As prolegomena to his commentary, Khafri summarized his cosmological, metaphysical, and theological views, revealing mixed Avicennian, Ishrāqī, and Akbarian influences (*TAK*, pp. 270–284).

Khafri divided the system of being in four words: the world of Kingdom (*al-mulk*), i.e., the sensible world; the upper Angelic World (*al-malakūt al-a’lā*), that of the Intellects; the lower Angelic World (*al-malakūt al-adnā*), that of the Souls; and the *mundus imaginis* (*‘ālam al-mithāl*), whose substantiality is uncertain. Except for the latter, this division corresponds to Plotinus’ hierarchy of realities: at the top is the One, identified to God the Creator, then comes the Intellect (*νοῦς*, *‘aql*), then the Soul (*ψυχή*, *nafs*), and then finally Nature, the world of matter (*TAK*, pp. 270–272). Khafri accepted Avicenna’s system of ten celestial spheres attached to ten souls and ten intellects, the tenth of them, i.e., the instrument of bringing into existence the world of generation and corruption, being identified to the Holy Spirit and Angel Gabriel. He also borrowed from Avicenna the conception of the immaterial souls dominating bodies, whether celestial or human. All souls have perceptions and will. The souls of the spheres are in love with the perfections of the Intellects which effused them and try to be at their semblance. The human rational soul has got two perfections, moral and theoretic. Its moral perfection is justice, i.e. the convenient balance between the appetitive, spirited and directive (rational) faculties of soul, according to Plato’s tripartite division. Its theoretical perfection consists in becoming an intelligible world where the forms of all the existents, whether spiritual or material, are reflected, as mentioned by Avicenna in the last part of *The Metaphysics of the Shifā’* (*TAK*, p. 276; Ibn Sīnā 1960, p. 425).

In his commentary of the verse II, 255, Khafri identified certain Qur’anic images, namely the Throne (*‘irsh*), the Pen (*qalam*), and the Tablet (*lawh*), to the respective philosophical concepts of God’s synthetic and analytic knowledge, First Intellect, and prime matter. Within the verse, he distinguished four kinds of divine attributes: the attributes of Essential Reality (*ḥaqīqiyya*), some of them being subjects to relation and others not; and the attributes which are not of Essential Reality, whether negative (*salbiyya*) or relative (*idāfiyya*) (*TAK*, pp. 286–297).

As witnessed in this commentary, Khafri was sharing with many Shī’i thinkers of the previous and following centuries, such as Sayyid Ḥaydar Āmulī, Ḥāfiẓ Rajab Bursī (d. after 813/1410–11) (see the relevant entries), and Mīr Dāmād (d. 1040/1631), a predilection for *gematria*, or what they called “the science of numbers and [Arabic] letters” (*‘ilm al-a’ dād wa-l-ḥurūf*). This trend, originated in Shī’i early esotericism, gained its philosophical respectability with a short epistle ascribed to Avicenna, *al-Risālat al-nayrūziyya*, which joints summarily the classical Neoplatonic hierarchy to the alphanumeric system (Ibn Sīnā 1999; Massignon 1952). Khafri made him this “philosophical alphabet”, mapping each letter and number to a level of reality or an ontological relation: first, the Necessary Being (*ālīf* = 1); then intellects (*bā’* = 2); then souls (*jīm* = 3); then natures (*dāl* = 4), each of them being considered in itself (from 1 to 4); then in relation to the lower stage (from 5 to 8 = *hā’*, *wāw*, *zā’*, *ḥā’*); and then finally the material things (*tā’* = 9), which is the lowest stage of the hierarchy of realities. In the favor of these speculations, Khafri also proposes an original etymology of the Supreme Name *Allāh*, as it opens the “Verse of the Pedestal,” in a way that reminds Ibn ‘Arabī’s theosophy (*TAK*, p. 277). Mīr Dāmād would eventually take on this development in two works devoted to Shī’i esoteric topics (Mīr Dāmād 1995, p. 84; 2001, pp. 124–125). Khafri’s interest toward “occult sciences” (*‘ulūm gharība*) was not limited to *gematria*, as indicated by his quotation of many Imāmi traditions upon the magic efficacy of the “Verse of the Pedestal” (*TAK*, pp. 289–290).

Additionally, he composed two works on geomancy (*raml*) (Saatchian 2011, p. 53).

Khafri also disclosed his mystical background while interpreting the pericope, “His Pedestal (*kursī*) comprises the heavens and earth.” He asserted that “the Pedestal is the substrate of the Knowledge, which is the heart (*qalb*),” an idea that would be resumed by both Mīr Dāmād and Mullā Ṣadrā. He wrote that “the Pedestal is similar to the heart as the substrate of the self-disclosure (*tajallī*) of God, the Truth, as long as nothing can be distinguished from Him, but everything vanishes (*yatalāshā*) in His manifestation. Since nothing exists except by His Existence, and nothing is distinguished from Him.” Furthermore, while proceeding to the esoteric commentary (*ta’wīl*) of the verse, Khafri quoted two famous mystical figures, referring to them familiarly: “Al-Ḥasan [al-Baṣrī] said, ‘the Pedestal is God’s Throne’, according to the saying of the Prophet, ‘The heart of the believer is the Throne of God’ (*qalb al-mu’min irsh Allāh*). And Ṭayfūr [Abū Yazīd al-Baṣṭāmī] said: ‘Shall the whole world occupy one of the corners of the heart of the Gnostic (*al-’arīf*) for thousand times, he would even not feel it’, in virtue of his knowledge of God, the Truth, and of the vanishing of all things in Him” (*TAK*, p. 288). According to his claim that God, the Necessary Being, is the principle of emanation of human knowledge (*IWW*, p. 28), this pericope means that the substrate of this emanation is the heart, i.e., the organ of spiritual unveiling. This statement clearly suggests a Gnostic, rather than intellectualist, meaning of philosophy.

In conclusion, Shams al-Dīn al-Khafri was not only a brilliant scientist and a philosopher of science but also a metaphysician and a theologian combining rationalistic and mystical approaches of different issues. By combining Avicennian tradition, its Ishraqī criticism, and the Akbarian doctrine of “Unity of Being,” he had a major influence on the thought of Mīr Dāmād and Mullā Ṣadrā, the two prominent figures of the “Renaissance of Islamic philosophy” in the eleventh/seventeenth century. Further studies could show to what extent Khafri’s speculations on metaphysics are fit with his epistemological conceptions as expressed in

the field of astronomy. In this respect, his thought remains a subject of investigation for a broadest approach of the early modern philosophy in Islam.

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## Khojazāda

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### Abstract

Khojazāda is a prominent Ottoman theologian who lived in the fifteenth century in Anatolia. He is best known for his work titled “Incoherence of the Philosophers,” which was written in the footsteps of Ghazālī to refute the theological stances of the philosophers. Not only he is the exemplar of the traditional Islamic sciences in his age, due to his accepted prominence among the official statesmen including the sultan, he arguably represents the attitude of the Ottoman State towards the nonreligious sciences in general.

## Life and Theological Teachings

Khojazāda, Musliḥuddīn Mustafā b. Yūsuf in his full name, was born in Bursa *circa* 1434. His famous name Khojazāda (literally means “the son of a *khoja*”) came from his father’s occupation who was a wealthy merchant, because such merchants

were given the epithet “*khoja*” (master) in the Ottoman community at that time. Khojazāda’s education in his early years was not easy, because his father did not want him to be a member of the Ottoman scholars (*‘ulamā*) and thus did not support his scientific endeavor. However, Khojazāda sought to complete his education in the basic Islamic sciences (language and jurisprudence) throughout Anatolia. He first became a student of Molla Mehmed Efendi (famously known by the nickname “Ayaslug Celebisi”) in Isparta. When he turned back to Bursa, he entered under the service of Molla Hizir Bey (d. 1459) in Sultaniye Madrasah in Bursa. After he completed his education, Khojazāda was introduced by Hizir Bey to Sultan Murat II, in order to serve as a *mudarris* (lecturer) in Esediyeh Madrasah in Bursa. As his scholarly erudition on Islamic sciences developed along with this official occupation, he was then introduced to Mehmed II (the conqueror of Constantinople), this time by the vizier Mahmut Pasha. This led Khojazāda to participate in scholarly discussions that took place in the Ottoman palace, and contribute to his fame among the Ottoman elite and statesmen. Finally, he was granted the title “*Mu'allim-i Sultānī*” (the lecturer of the sultan), one of the most important bureaucratic positions in the Ottoman State. Although Khojazāda’s relationship with the sultan attracted uneasiness among other scholars who sought certain political agenda and caused him to be suspended from some positions afterwards, he successfully regained Mehmed II’s respect in the following years. Khojazāda died in Bursa in 1488, while he was busy with working on his commentary on al-Jurjānī’s *Sharḥ al-Mawākif*, a work which was a cornerstone of the Ottoman madrasah curriculum.

Khojazāda’s scientific production covers many areas in Islamic disciplines, mainly in philosophy, theology, and Arabic linguistics; however, he is best known for his work *Tahāfut al-Falāsifa*, i.e., *Incoherence of the Philosophers*. This work is written as an evaluation of Ghazālī’s famous *Tahāfut al-Falāsifa*. Khojazāda wrote this treatise because he and his contemporary colleague Alāuddīn al-Tūsī were commissioned by Mehmed the Conqueror to comment on Ghazālī’s refutations of the philosophers and judge whether



Ghazālī was right in accusing the Muslim philosophers al-Fārābī and Avicenna of unbelief (*kufr*). In fact, we learn from the bibliographies of Ottoman scholars that Khojazāda studied canonical philosophical works such as Avicenna's *al-Shifā'*, in order to lay out his own theological argumentations (*ihtijāj*) (Tashkoprižāda, p. 89).

In the *Tahāfut*, Khojazāda mostly follows Ghazālī's general approach to the views of philosophers: philosophers are among those who opposed the religious doctrines of the divinely guided prophets. Their success in establishing the sound proofs in certain sciences, such as geometry and logic, does not give them the right to claim so in the field of physics and especially metaphysics. In fact, most of their claims in metaphysics and theology are liable to be rebutted on rational grounds. Thus, they must be rejected in their views by which they oppose the established religious doctrines. Although Khojazāda, with these statements, concurs with Ghazālī in his basic attack to philosophers, he differs in some significant details. First and foremost, he did not end his book with a concluding section, like his predecessor did, in which he juristically labeled the philosophers as unbelievers (*kuffār*). This attitude of Khojazāda shows that he saw the refutation of philosophers as a theoretical issue, not a judicial one. Khojazāda's stance was later supported by subsequent Ottoman scholars such as Kamalshazāda, who contended that there is no need to expel philosophers from the borders of Islam, just because their ideas contradict the theological argumentations supported by early theologians. This tolerant attitude towards philosophy was arguably coming from the great authority Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī, who himself sought to accommodate the philosophical argumentations in classical Islamic theology.

Khojazāda's attitude on Ghazālī's criticisms towards philosophers is best to be seen in his discussions of the eternity of the world, the most important subject in the *Tahāfut* genre, an issue which had caused heated debates and even accusations of disbelief between Muslim theologians and philosophers. Khojazāda holds that Ghazālī

was right when he contended that the logical terms "necessity," "contingency," and "impossibility" are solely mental concepts; thus, philosophers were wrong since they treated these terms as ontological entities. Khojazāda also supports Ghazālī on his views on the concept of "time" (*zamān*): time is an imaginary (*mawhūm*) thing and cannot be defined as the number of motions of the celestial spheres, as Aristoteles and his followers explained. On the other hand, Khojazāda criticized Ghazālī in some important aspects of the eternity issue. Ghazālī, according to Khojazāda, was in error when he stated that the idea of the eternal world must certainly be accepted in order to establish God as a creator. Khojazāda holds that were the world as eternal in time as God, this would not mean that it is free from the creating agency of God, because God is still the unique creator of something eternal. To put it more simply, God and the world can coexist eternally, without compromising God's creating power. This idea of Khojazāda was a huge step in the Ottoman philosophy, since it gave the way for later theologians to seek common grounds with the philosophical tradition, along with their established orthodoxy.

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## al-Kindī, Abū Yūsuf Ya‘qūb ibn Ishāq

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### Abstract

Al-Kindī (c. 800–870) was the first figure in the Arabic philosophical tradition to make explicit and extensive use of Greek ideas. He is thus often described as the first philosopher of this tradition. He also oversaw the work of translators who rendered works by Aristotle, Plotinus, Proclus, and others into Arabic. His own writings, usually in the form of epistles to patrons, range widely over the topics of Greek philosophy and science. His fusion of Aristotelianism with Neoplatonism was intended to be congenial to Islam, and this approach influenced several other authors of the early Arabic philosophical tradition.

Abū Yūsuf Ya‘qūb ibn Ishāq al-Kindī was probably born around 800 into an important family: his father was the governor of Kūfa in Iraq, and al-Kindī could trace his lineage back to a companion of the Prophet. To highlight his origins in the tribe of Kinda, and perhaps the failure of the Arabs to produce other prominent philosophers, he was later given the sobriquet “philosopher of the Arabs.” He himself was a highly placed intellectual, serving as tutor to the son of the Caliph al-Mu‘taṣim (who reigned from 833–842). We know that he died after 866, the date of an event mentioned in one of his astrological works; his death date is usually put at around 870–873.

Al-Kindī’s association with the caliphal family is connected to his important role in the translation movement (for which see Gutas 1998; Endress 1987/1992). He was apparently not himself a translator but coordinated and revised the work of a translation circle whose members seem to

have been mostly Christians of Syrian extraction. This so-called Kindī circle (see Endress 1997) produced Arabic versions of Aristotle (for instance, the first translation of the *Metaphysics*) and, famously, Plotinus and Proclus. A redaction of their version of Plotinus came to be known as the *Theology of Aristotle*, the most important source for Neoplatonic ideas in the Arabic-speaking world (see Adamson 2002b). Their version of Proclus (on which see Endress 1973) would be influential in the Latin world, in a version later called the *Book of Causes* (*Liber de causis*; see D’Ancona 1995).

This circle of translators seems to have produced two kinds of translations: painfully literal ones and remarkably free paraphrase versions. Of the literal type, the most significant is their version of Aristotle’s *Metaphysics*, ascribed to one Uṣṭāth and preserved in the lemmata of Averroes’ *Long Commentary* for some books of the *Metaphysics*. The paraphrase translations, which include their Arabic renderings of Plotinus and Proclus, revise and rework the philosophical content of the texts and also reorder the texts, though the extent to which the reordering was done already in Kindī’s circle is a matter of controversy. Part of the point of the reworking was to make these works seem useful for a contemporary audience. Most obviously, the Neoplatonic First Principle is assimilated to a Creator God.

The same motivation guides many of al-Kindī’s own philosophical works, which are edited in Abū Rīda (1950, 1953) (see also Rashed and Jolivet 1998) and translated in Adamson and Pormann (2012). These philosophical treatises, usually written as epistles to the caliphal family and other patrons or colleagues, constitute a sizable corpus, especially if they are taken together with extant works on a range of scientific topics. (Particularly well represented are astrology, optics, mathematics, meteorology, medicine, and music.) But much of his prodigious output is lost. We have a list of his works in the *Fihrist* of the tenth-century bookseller Ibn al-Nadīm. Like the extant corpus, this list indicates that al-Kindī worked in an astonishing variety of fields, ranging

from metaphysics to the production of perfume and swords. This eclecticism is in itself a sign of al-Kindī's desire to satisfy the needs of his cultivated audience (see Rosenthal 1942).

The most famous of al-Kindī's more narrowly "philosophical" works is *On First Philosophy* (translated in Ivry 1974 and Rashed and Jolivet 1998), which draws extensively on Aristotle, especially the *Metaphysics*, but also weaves in themes from Neoplatonic texts and borrows arguments from John Philoponus. *On First Philosophy* is only partially preserved: we possess the "first part," which is divided into four sections. Al-Kindī's best-known philosophical ideas are contained in this work.

In Section 1, al-Kindī mounts a spirited defense of the utility and acceptability of using ideas drawn from the Greek tradition and criticizes detractors of "foreign" philosophy. It is unclear who these detractors might be, though Ivry (1974) speculates that they were contemporary theologians, such as those collectively described as "Mu'tazilite." Adamson (2007a, p. 25) suggests that the opponents are more likely to be traditionalists who took a literalist attitude toward scriptural descriptions of God. One reason to think this is that al-Kindī's patrons in the caliphal court supported the Mu'tazilites in their argument against the traditionalists over the question of the eternity of the Qur'ān (see further Adamson 2003).

That debate may be somehow related to the topic of Section 2, where al-Kindī argues at length that the created world is not eternal. Here al-Kindī uses and reworks arguments drawn from John Philoponus' attack on Aristotle (see Davidson 1969). The thrust of these arguments is that if the cosmos were eternal *a parte ante* (i.e., if it has existed for an infinite time), then this would make the cosmos an "actual infinity," analogous to an infinitely large body. Al-Kindī thus argues, for instance, that if the cosmos is finite in magnitude, it cannot have an infinite quantity predicated of it. But time is a quantity, so only a finite amount of time can be predicated of the cosmos. Now Aristotle too regarded the actual infinite as impossible. He held, however, that an eternity of time would constitute only a potential infinity (the sort

of infinity involved in counting up through the integers: the process is indefinite but never actually reaches an infinite number). Thus, al-Kindī, following Philoponus, disagrees with Aristotle primarily in that he believes an *ex parte ante* eternal cosmos would constitute an actual, rather than potential, infinity.

In Sections 3 and 4, al-Kindī gives a complex argument for a "true One" who is the cause of unity in all other things. As is made explicit at the close of the extant text, this true One is the God of Islam. Al-Kindī also argues that this true One transcends characterization by the *maqūlāt*, that is, things that can be said. These terms include the predicables from Porphyry's *Isagoge* and also part, whole, relation, motion, and soul. Finally, the true One is higher than the intellect: this is a departure from Aristotle but agrees with Plotinus. The reason given for denying all these terms to God is that they imply both multiplicity and unity. Indeed, the argument for God's existence given in Section 3 is based on the claim that all created things are characterized by both unity and multiplicity. Al-Kindī then argues that some cause is required to explain this association of unity and multiplicity. The cause must be entirely one and not many at all, so that it is outside the set of things that are both one and many.

Al-Kindī also expresses this idea by saying that while God is "essentially" one, that is, one but not at all many, other things are "metaphorically" one, that is, both one and many. A similar idea is found in a very short, perhaps fragmentary text called *On the True Agent*. Here the point is that only God is truly an Agent, because other things are acted upon, even if they also act. Al-Kindī thus describes God's first effect as an intermediary for God's creative action. This too may be an inheritance from the Neoplatonic translations produced in his circle.

On the other hand, in works on cosmology, al-Kindī presents not a Plotinian intellect but the heavenly bodies, as the chief instrument by which God indirectly brings about a providentially ordered cosmos. Al-Kindī follows the Aristotelian tradition in seeing the world below the sphere of the moon as consisting of the four elements, air, earth, fire, and water. The heavenly bodies, by

contrast, are made of an indestructible fifth element. Al-Kindī devotes an epistle to arguing for this claim, apparently unconcerned or unaware that it was a key part of Aristotle's arguments for the eternity of the world, and was attacked by Philoponus in his *Against Aristotle*. He does, however, add the caveat that the heavens exist without being generated or destroyed, but only for as long as their Creator ordains.

Because heavenly motion brings about the mixture of the four sublunary elements, it is the heavens that are directly responsible for the well-ordered world we live in. As al-Kindī puts it, they are the "proximate cause of generation and corruption," while God is the remote cause, exercising His providence by commanding the heavens to move in the appropriate way. Though al-Kindī draws these ideas from Aristotle and his commentator Alexander of Aphrodisias, he extends the theory in several ways. For example, he uses the theory to interpret a verse from the Qur'ān which states that even the stars "prostrate" themselves before God. Al-Kindī also discusses in detail how the cosmological theory can work in practice, arguing for the effects of heavenly motions on weather and the tides. His extensive work in astrology presupposes the cosmology described in his more Aristotelian epistles. The same theory is used by his associate, the great astrologer Abū Ma'shar (see further Adamson 2002a, 2007a, chap. 8).

By contrast, al-Kindī is not clear on how God's creative activity relates to immaterial things, notably the human soul. He does describe the soul as a "light from the light of the Creator" in a doxographical work, the *Discourse on the Soul*. But the emphasis in this and other works of psychology is usually on the immateriality of the soul and its essentially intellectual nature. In one short epistle, for example, he uses ideas from Aristotle's *Categories* to prove that the soul is immaterial. The argument turns on an identification between soul as the form of the body and the form that is the species of mankind. Since, in general, species are immaterial substances (this follows Aristotle in the *Categories*, though al-Kindī omits the point that species are only "secondary" substances), the soul too will be an immaterial substance.

In the more famous *Letter on the Intellect*, a forerunner of works on the intellect by al-Fārābī, Avicenna, and others, al-Kindī classifies intellect ('*aql*) into four types: "first," potential, actual, and acquired. The "first" intellect is separated from human soul and is apparently to be identified with the maker intellect of Aristotle, *De Anima* III.5 (we know from *On First Philosophy* that this is not to be identified with God). The other three are aspects or states of the human intellect. Humans think by taking on an intellectual form which is seated in the first intellect. Before they do this, they have a merely potential intellect. Actual intellect refers to the human intellect when it is actually grasping such an intellectual form. For al-Kindī the term "acquired intellect" means simply the intellectual forms which one has already learned and can then think about at will – like a storehouse of intelligibles within the soul. This is in contrast with al-Fārābī's use of the term to mean the full attainment of all the intelligibles.

A puzzle about al-Kindī's epistemology is how this theory of intellect relates to his acceptance of the Platonic theory of recollection, which he discusses in a short epistle (see Endress 1994). More generally there is an unclarity about the role of sense experience in al-Kindī's epistemology. It usually seems that for him there is a strong divide between the intelligible and sensible realms and that the human soul properly belongs on the intelligible side. This picture is basically confirmed, though with greater nuance, in texts dealing with faculties between intellection and sensation. The most important of these is a work on prophetic dreams, based closely on the *Parva Naturalia*. Al-Kindī here makes dreams a product of the imaginative faculty and discusses the interaction of this faculty with the body. But significantly, and unlike Avicenna, for instance, he argues that the imagination does not use the brain or indeed any organ directly. Instead, it belongs to the immaterial soul. It is able to receive signs about the future precisely because it is ontologically closer to intellect than to the body. Despite these differences from Avicenna, he does anticipate the latter's theory of the internal senses, but only in a classification found in a work on music (Adamson 2007a, p. 142).

Music is one area where al-Kindī deploys his expertise in mathematics. This is unsurprising since music was considered part of the mathematical curriculum already in antiquity. More distinctive is his use of mathematical methods of argument in purely philosophical contexts; on this see Gutas 2004. Aside from methodology, one might think of the Pythagorean flavor of his portrayal of God as a pure One (though he is careful to contrast God to the one that generates number). Al-Kindī also uses mathematics in discussing cosmology, for instance, to demonstrate that the cosmos consists of concentric spheres (the heavens and elements), and in explaining why the ancients associated the heavens and elements with the Platonic solids. This latter point is clearly indebted to the *Timaeus*, though the means of influence is unclear. We do know that one Pythagorean work on mathematics was known to and used by al-Kindī, namely, Nicomachus of Gerasa's *Introduction to Arithmetic*.

He also brings his mathematical sensibilities to bear on medicine, in an influential work on calculating the effects of compound drugs (translated into Latin as *De Gradibus*). He applies geometry to problems of optics, in this following the tradition of mathematical optics already explored by Euclid and Ptolemy. His theory of light is an important precursor of the visual theory of Ibn al-Haytham (d. 1040). The success of geometry in optics may have encouraged him to extend a theory of "rays" to deal with a broad array of physical phenomena. We find such a theory on *De radiis*, a work preserved only in Latin and influential on medieval theories of magic. Though this work is ascribed to al-Kindī, its authenticity is disputed. (For further discussion of al-Kindī's mathematically inspired works, see Travaglia 1999 and Adamson 2007a, chap. 7. For his works on optics, see Rashed 1997.)

We know from the *Fihrist* that al-Kindī wrote extensively on practical philosophy, but unfortunately most of this output is lost. We are left with only a few relevant works, the longest and most influential of which is *On Dispelling Sorrow* (see Druart 1993; Mestiri and Dye 2004; Adamson 2007a, chap. 6). In general, al-Kindī's ethical

outlook is simple and uncompromising: turn away from the things of the body and concentrate on the "world of the intellect." This is already clear from the aforementioned *Discourse on the Soul*. But in *On Dispelling Sorrow*, al-Kindī adds to the intellectualist picture familiar from his psychological works, giving the reader encouragement with an abundance of anecdotes and maxims. A couple of these are drawn from his anthology of sayings and witticisms ascribed to Socrates, which is an early example of the so-called wisdom literature, an often-overlooked means of cultural contact between literary Arabic and the Greek philosophical tradition.

Finally, mention should be made of two pro-paedeutic works by al-Kindī or his circle, which are intended as guides to the Greek philosophical tradition for his Arabic-speaking audience. First, *On the Quantity of Aristotle's Books*, which provides a picture of al-Kindī's knowledge of the Aristotelian corpus. The structure into which he puts his overviews of each Aristotelian work tells us something about how he saw the Greek philosophical curriculum: he follows the tradition of seeing theoretical science as divided into three parts, dealing with bodies, immaterial things that are related to bodies (i.e., souls or mathematical entities), and wholly immaterial things (notably God). His summaries show an uneven knowledge of Aristotle's corpus, to the point where he can at times add nothing beyond the title. But there are longer discussions of the *Categories* and *Metaphysics*, for instance, works which we know he used in his own writings.

Second, there is, *On the Definitions and Descriptions of Things*, a work preserved in several very different versions. Each version comprises a list of philosophical terms with definitions. The terms defined seem to be drawn from Greek sources, but the terms themselves are Arabic. This shows that al-Kindī and his circle realized the need to produce a new Arabic technical vocabulary based on the Greek vocabulary of their source texts. They realized also that this new Arabic terminology would not be easily understood by their audience. *On Definitions* can thus be seen as a guide to the new language of philosophy in Arabic, or *falsafa* (which, as it happens, is

one of the two terms with the longest definitions, the other being “virtue”). The terminological innovations of the Kindī circle had mixed success. Some of their technical words were taken up in the later tradition, while others were dropped. But as mentioned above, the translations they produced were influential.

The influence of al-Kindī’s own thought was confined largely to a group of authors who might be called the “Kindian tradition” (see Adamson 2007b). These include, in the first instance, attested students and associates of al-Kindī himself: al-Sarakhsī (d. 899), Abū Zayd al-Balkhī (d. 934), and the aforementioned astrologer Abū Ma‘shar al-Balkhī (d. 886). Abū Zayd was an important conduit for the Kindian tradition, since he taught the well-known philosopher Abū l-Ḥasan al-‘Āmirī (d. 922) and the more obscure Ibn Farīghūn (tenth century). Apart from first- and second-generation students, figures influenced by al-Kindī include the Jewish thinker Isaac Israeli (d. c. 907) and the historian and Neoplatonist Miskawayh (d. 1030), both of whom quote from al-Kindī and texts produced in his circle.

The Kindian tradition is distinctive, first of all, geographically: most of the thinkers just mentioned were from Central Asia (e.g., Balkh and Sarakhs). Intellectually, they are distinguished by their openness to a wide range of disciplines, including Muslim speculative theology (*kalām*) and the finer literary arts. In both respects they can be contrasted to the tenth-century circle of Aristotelian thinkers in Baghdad, who included the famous al-Fārābī. But perhaps because of Avicenna’s disdain for the Kindian thinkers, al-Kindī’s influence seems to peter out around the end of the tenth century.

## Cross-References

- ▶ al-‘Āmirī, Abū l-Ḥasan
- ▶ Aristotle, Arabic
- ▶ al-Balkhī, Abū Zayd
- ▶ Isaac Israeli
- ▶ John Philoponus
- ▶ al-Kindī, Latin Translations of
- ▶ Miskawayh, Abū ‘Alī

- ▶ Philoponus, Arabic
- ▶ Philosophy, Arabic
- ▶ Plotinus, Arabic
- ▶ Porphyry, Arabic
- ▶ Proclus, Arabic
- ▶ Proofs of the Existence of God
- ▶ al-Sarakhsī, Aḥmad ibn al-Ṭayyib

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## al-Kindī, Latin Translations of

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### Abstract

Al-Kindī was known in the Latin West as an expert on astrology, weather forecasting, medicine, philosophy, and the theory of magic. In university contexts he ranked alongside al-Fārābī, Avicenna, al-Ġazālī, and Averroes as an Arabic philosophical authority, as a result of the translation of three of his philosophical “letters.” Two Latin works, not extant in Arabic, became classical texts in two practical subjects: weather forecasting and magic.

Conspicuous in his Latin works is the application of mathematics to natural science.

Because of the selection of texts written by al-Kindī and translated into Latin, and, in particular, because two texts popular in Latin (*De radiis* and *De mutatione temporum*) have no identified equivalent in Arabic, the figure of al-Kindī in the Latin West is rather different from that in the Islamic world. It is fairer to say that we find different figures in the Latin tradition. There is al-Kindī the astrologer, al-Kindī the principal authority on weather forecasting, al-Kindī the doctor, al-Kindī an interpreter of, and commentator on, philosophy, and al-Kindī an expert on the theory of magic. There is some overlap between these different personae, but distinctions remain, partly due to the different routes of transmission of al-Kindī's texts.

It is debatable whether “Alchandreus,” the Arabic authority whose name is associated with the earliest Arabic astrological texts translated into Latin (late tenth century), is a corruption of “al-Kindī.” Nevertheless it is in the field of astrology that al-Kindī first became known in the Latin West. In the mid-twelfth century, the translator Robert of Ketton quotes Hermann of Carinthia as saying that he is the “preeminent authority in astrology” (preface to Robert's translation of al-Kindī's *Forty Chapters*). His substantial work on astrological judgments known as *The Forty Chapters*, extant in Arabic, was translated into Latin both by Robert of Ketton (fl. 1141–1143) and, in all probability, by Hugo of Santalla (fl. 1145). The latter translator also promised a translation of al-Kindī's commentaries on Ptolemy's *Almagest* and *Tetrabiblos*, but there is no evidence that this promise was fulfilled. We do, however, have a Latin work on weather forecasting (*De mutatione temporum*), which is probably the translation of a lost Arabic summary of two letters on the theory and practice of forecasting the weather from the movements of the heavenly bodies which have survived in a double translation in Hebrew (*On the Causes Attributed to the Higher Bodies Which Indicate the Origin of Rains* and *On Moistures and Rain*). The *De mutatione temporum* brings together astrological doctrine on

the lunar mansions, of purported Indian origin, with speculation on how the heavenly bodies influence sublunar events, which matches the theories in al-Kindī's *Letter on the Proximate Efficient Cause of Generation and Corruption*. In conformity with the Aristotelian account of the fifth essence, al-Kindī denies that the heavenly bodies are themselves hot, cold, dry, and moist, but claims that they are rather states that cause variations in temperature by their movement. The Latin translator of *De mutatione temporum* (called "Azogont" in two of the 30 odd extant manuscripts) has not been identified; of the Hebrew versions one was made by Kalonymus ben Kalonymus in 1314, the other is anonymous. The comprehensive and scientific nature of the text ensured that it remained the most important authority on weather forecasting until the early modern period. Girolamo Cardano praised weather forecasting as "the most noble part of philosophy," and al-Kindī as one of the 12 "outstanding men in the scientific disciplines" (*De subtilitate*, bk XVI, Nuremburg 1550, pp 310–311 and 317), while Bernardino Baldi (1588) singled out for mention the *De mutatione temporum* in his account of al-Kindī as a mathematician (*Le vite de' matematici*, pp 120–121).

A small selection from al-Kindī's numerous "letters" (*rasā'il*) on philosophical topics was translated in Toledo by Gerard of Cremona (d. 1187) in conjunction with Aristotle's *libri naturales* and their Arabic commentaries. These are *De ratione* (*On the Intellect*), *De quinque essentiis* (*On the Five Essences*), and *De somno et visione* (*On Sleep and Dreams*). A second Latin version of *De Ratione*, called *De intellectu*, also exists. The Arabic original of *De quinque essentiis* has not been identified. These three letters take up questions raised in Aristotle's *De anima*, bk. 3, *Physics* bk. 4, and *De somno et vigilia*, respectively. Other Latin sources refer to a commentary by al-Kindī on *De generatione et corruptione* (a reference in a rubrication in Baltimore, Walters Art Museum, Ms. W. 66, fol. 82r: *Aristoteles Latinus, Codices*, no. 3) and "proofs and objections" concerning *De anima*, bk 3 (Cracow, Bibl. Jag., 742, fol. 193v: *probationes et improbationes Jacobi Alkindī*), but the existence of such texts in Arabic or in Latin cannot be

verified. These works gave al-Kindī a place, alongside al-Fārābī, Avicenna, Algazel, and Averroes, among Arabic authorities on Peripatetic philosophy.

Gerard of Cremona also translated a systematic treatise on optics by al-Kindī (*De aspectibus*). This is a mathematical text, dealing with the geometry of the projection of rays of light, rather than the physiognomy of vision. It is complementary to another treatise called the *De radiis*, which deals with rays at a cosmic and metaphysical level, and is also known as the *Theorica artium magicarum* (which we might translate as "the theory behind the arts of magic"). The origins of the Latin text are obscure: no Arabic original has been found, and the Latin shows no sign of the influences of the Arabic language, which are characteristic of the literal translations of the time, though a parallel in terminology and style has been noted in an anonymous translation from Arabic of the first few paragraphs of Aristotle's *Metaphysics* (Martini 2001). The *De radiis* follows the traditional Peripatetic line of ascribing all sublunar movement and change to the movement of the celestial bodies. However, al-Kindī takes up an astrological concept – the projection of rays – and tries to apply this universally. In astrology, the projection of rays refers to the influence exerted by one planet on another when the two planets are in a certain geometrical relation to each other (i.e., in one of the astrological "aspects"). Although hinting at these relations by using the usual technical term for aspect (*respectus*) and referring to the celestial "harmony," which is traditionally achieved by these geometrical relations, al-Kindī conceives of the rays as being cast on whatever object – celestial or elemental – falls within the range of the star's light. But he goes further: the objects in the world of the elements, containing the "species" of the sidereal world, also transmit rays. Sounds and colors, too, emit rays. Recalling the traditional definition of sound, the author writes that "the collision of bodies" makes a sound that flows out in all directions by the rays belonging to its kind. Above all, man produces rays; for he is a microcosm since the species of all mundane things are imprinted in his imagination, and therefore his "imagining spirit" (*spiritus ymaginarius*) has rays that conform to the rays

of the world, and hence he achieves the power to move things outside him by his rays just as the world (both upper and lower) moves things into different motions by its rays. Hence, when man conceives something corporeal in his imagination, that thing receives actual existence according to species in his imagining spirit. This accounts for the ability of the spirit to move objects outside it by its rays. Similarly, the voice can effect change in the outside world, through incantations. The *De radiis* provided the most philosophical and scientific justification for the effectiveness of magic in the Middle Ages, and as such was the object of attack of Giles of Rome in his chapter on al-Kindī in his *Errores philosophorum*.

Another area of influence of al-Kindī in Latin was due to his text on how to calculate the “degrees” in compound medicines (*De gradibus*), also translated by Gerard of Cremona. According to Galenic medicine, every simple medicine (be it a plant, animal part, mineral or “water”) was classified according to a range of one to four degrees of heat, coldness, dryness, and moisture. In his *De gradibus* al-Kindī explains how one should work out the effects of the combinations of simple medicines. His system was accepted by the influential Catalan medical authority, Arnald of Villanova.

If there is a leitmotif in the Latin works of al-Kindī it is the application of mathematics to natural sciences. The calculation of degrees of quantities appears in both *De gradibus* and *De mutatione temporum*. Weather forecasting itself cannot be approached unless one has a thorough grounding in the mathematical sciences. The effects of the projection of rays (*De radiis*) cannot be understood unless one first has a grounding in optics (*De aspectibus*).

## Cross-References

- ▶ [Arabic Texts: Natural Philosophy, Latin Translations of](#)

- ▶ [Aristotle, Arabic](#)
- ▶ [al-Fārābī, Abū Naṣr](#)
- ▶ [Mathematics and Philosophy in the Arab World](#)

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## Lambert of Lagny

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### Abstract

Lambert of Lagny (Lambertus de Latiniaco) (fl. 1250) (not to be confused with the Dominican Lambert of Auxerre) is the author of one of the main logic textbooks of the terminist logic (*Logica* or *Summa Lamberti*). He belongs to the Parisian tradition as opposed to the Oxonian one. The *Summa* is posterior to and independent from the corresponding works of Peter of Spain, William of Sherwood, and Roger Bacon. Lambert's semantic of terms is characterized by the acceptation of natural supposition (also in propositional context) and an original doctrine of appellation as a syntactic limitation of personal supposition.

### Life and Work

Lambert of Lagny's exact date of birth and death are not known. On the basis of indications found in some of the 15 manuscripts preserving his only known work – the *Logica* or *Summa Lamberti* – one can locate his period of main activity around the middle of the thirteenth century. Lambert of Lagny was a scholar (*clericus*) in the Diocese of

Meaux. Between c. 1250 and 1255, he was the preceptor of the young count Theobald V of Champagne (1238–1270, King of Navarre under the name of Theobald II the younger since 1253). Later on (1263–1265), Lambert became administrator of the Parisian possessions of the counts of Champagne. Lambert of Lagny is not identical with Lambert of Auxerre (*Lambertus de Autissiodoro*), the Dominican friar under whose name the *Summa* was transmitted. The confusion can be explained by the fact that the *Summa* played an important role as a logic textbook in the *studia* of the Dominican Order (de Libera 1982: 229–232, correcting the previous view held by Alessio 1971: XVI–XXXII as well as De Rijk 1969: 160–162).

The *Logica* or *Summa Lamberti* (noncritical edition by Alessio 1971; edition of part VIII of the *Summa*, *De appellatione*, based on five manuscripts by de Libera 1982) is likely to have been written between 1253 and 1257 probably in Troyes, possibly in Pamplona (De Rijk 1969: 161) or between 1250 and 1265 (de Libera 1990: 214). The work seems to have been produced in several phases: a first redaction was completed in Navarre and the final edition, augmented by different treatises on the properties of terms, was made later on in France. This hypothesis, originally indicated by Alessio (1971: XLVI), was confirmed and specified by the study of the relation between the last part of the *Summa* (*De appellatione*) and the *Appellationes* of the Parisian master Johannes Pagus. As de Libera (1982:

233) has argued, Lambert must have known the *Appellationes* of Pagus before editing the final version of the *Summa*. Besides its utilization as logical textbook within the *studia* of the Dominican Order, the *Summa* might have exerted an influence on subsequent terminism (traces of Lambert's logico-grammatical doctrine of *determinatio* as a means to solve paralogsms involving the *fallacia compositionis et divisionis* are present in tract VII of John Buridan's *Summulae* – de Libera 1990: 222).

### The *Logica* or *Summa Lamberti*

The *Summa* is one of the four main textbooks of the so-called terminist logic of the thirteenth century. It is both posterior to and independent from Peter of Spain's *Tractatus*, William of Sherwoods' *Introductiones in logicam*, and Roger Bacon's *Summulae dialectices*. The logical work of Lambert belongs to the Parisian tradition (as opposed to the Oxonian one). Two main characteristics of his semantics allow one to consider Lambert as a continental logician: his acceptance of natural supposition (*suppositio naturalis*) and, as a consequence, his conception of appellation (*appellatio*) as a restricted supposition. Accordingly, the main sources of Lambert's work are treatises pertaining to the Parisian tradition such as Johannes Pagus' *Appellationes* but also the *Summe Metenses* and the *Synkategoremata* of Nicolas of Paris.

The work is divided into eight parts. Alessio (1971) provides the following division:

1. De propositionibus
2. De predicabilibus
3. De predicamentis
4. De postpredicamentis
5. De sillogismo
6. De locis
7. De fallaciis
8. De suppositionibus et de significationibus

The tract *De appellatione* edited by A. de Libera in 1982 is the third section of part eight of the *Summa*, which is divided as follows:

- 8.0. Prologus
- 8.1. De significatione
- 8.2. De suppositionibus
- 8.3. De appellatione
- 8.4. De restrictionibus
- 8.5. De ampliacionibus
- 8.6. De distributionibus
- 8.7. De relationibus

This structure shows that the tracts 1–7 reflect the content of the Aristotelian *Organon*, whereas tract 8 consists of the so-called *parva logicalia* or treatises on the properties of terms (the last section on relations is not devoted to the category of relation, but to relative pronouns).

### Some Theoretical Issues of the *Summa*

#### Universals

On the background of the prologue of Porphyry's *Isagoge*, Lambert defines a universal as that which is naturally able to be said of many (*aptum natum dici de pluribus* – Alessio 1971: 51). He insists on the fact that not every universal is effectively predicated of many, for some universal, like *phenix*, is said of many but only successively (there is always and only one phoenix at a time) and some other, like *sol*, is just said of one individual (there is only one sun, but *sol* is not a proper name). Lambert seems to have a realistic conception of the universal: it is a universal form (*forma universalis*) multiplied in different substrates (*multiplicatur in plura supposita*).

#### Parts and Wholes

In the tract on categories (*De predicamentis*), commenting on Aristotle's distinction between *esse in* and *dici de*, Lambert identifies nine modes for something to be in something else (Alessio 1971: 66–67), which comes down to distinguish as many types of parts. Thus, we can have:

- (a) Integral parts (a finger as part of a hand)
- (b) A whole as part of its constituents (a house as part of its walls)
- (c) Specific parts (the species man is part of the genus animal)

(d) Generic parts (the genus as part of its species, the *definiens* of its *diffinitum*)

(e) Formal parts, subdivided in formal substantial parts (the soul as part of the body)

(f) Formal accidental parts (the accident white as part of its substratum)

(g) Effective parts, that is, an effect as part of its efficient cause (the kingdom as part of the king)

(h) Contained parts (something located as a part of space)

Thus, Lambert seems to have a physical and metaphysical mereology, including several possibilities for wholes to be parts of their constituents.

### Signification

According to Lambert, *significatio* is a semantic relation resulting from the free imposition of a sound (*vox*) on a concept (*intellectus rei* – Alessio 1971: 205–206). It corresponds to our contemporary notion of meaning. As many of his colleague logicians in the thirteenth century, he understands Aristotle in the first lines of the *De interpretatione* (16a6–7) as saying that spoken words are signs of concepts, which, in turn, are signs of things. Thus, for Lambert, signification is transitive: a spoken word is a sign of a sign (i.e., of a concept); and a concept is a sign of a significate (i.e., of a thing). The signification is analyzed in four constituents: a thing, a concept of a thing, a sound, and the union of the sound with the concept of a thing (*res, intellectus rei, vox et unio vocis cum intellectu rei*). The conjunction of the four results in a term (*terminus* or *vox significativa*). The conventional component of signification is only the union of the sound with the concept; the three other components are natural. Therefore, Lambert conceives of concepts as natural signs of things.

### Supposition

Supposition is a property of a term. It bears some affinities with our contemporary notion of reference, and it differs from signification insofar as signification is prior to supposition and only extends to the thing on which the sound was imposed (i.e., the universal nature “man”), while supposition can also concern the *supposita* contained under that universal nature (i.e., Socrates and Plato). Lambert’s definition of supposition

reads as follows: supposition is the understanding of a term for itself or for its thing or for some *suppositum* (or *suposita*) contained under its thing (*suppositio dicitur acceptio termini per se sive pro re sua vel pro aliquo supposito contempto sub re sua vel pro aliquibus suppositis contemptis sub re sua* – Alessio 1971: 206). This definition pertains to supposition generally speaking (*communiter dicta*) which is itself divided in supposition properly speaking (*proprie dicta*) and copulation, the difference being that the former amounts to the representation of an autonomous thing (*res fixa et per se stans*), whereas the latter amounts to the representation of a dependent thing (*res dependens*), a difference linguistically expressed by the opposition between substantive and adjective terms (Alessio 1971: 207). Lambert divides supposition as follows (the next division divides the second terms of the previous one): *naturalis/accidentalis; simplex/personalis; discreta/communis; determinata/confusa; mobilis/immobilis*. The acceptance of natural supposition is a clear mark of Lambert’s belonging to the Parisian tradition (Peter of Spain, Johannes Pagus) as opposed to the Oxonian one (William of Sherwood, Roger Bacon). Natural supposition is the semantic property that a term possesses per se and intrinsically to stand for all the things present, past, and future participating in the form (or universal nature) it signifies. Natural supposition is not necessarily a non-contextual property. Indeed, Lambert also allows for a term to stand in natural supposition within a proposition: it is the case, when it supposes for the totality of its present, past, and future *supposita*. In that sense, and since accidental supposition always amounts to a limitation of the range of considered referents, the propositional use of natural supposition is a case of *ampliatio* (de Libera 1981: 64–66).

### Appellation

Appellation is a supposition restricted to presently existing things: *appellatio est acceptio termini pro supposito vel pro suppositis actu existentibus* (de Libera 1982: 252). It corresponds to what we could call actual denotation. It is not an intrinsic property of a term, but a syntactical limitation of a certain type of accidental supposition, namely, of



personal supposition: contrary to Peter of Spain, Lambert does allow appellation only for common (and not for discrete) terms. Appellation is itself divided according to the divisions of personal supposition: we have determinate appellation when a common term stands only for one among its presently existing *supposita* (as in *homo currit*) and distributive appellation when it stands for all of them (as in *omnis homo currit* – de Libera 1982: 255–256). Furthermore, Lambert does not accept the rule of the *sufficiencia appellatorum* stipulating that at least three *appellata* are always required: according to him, a single *appellatum* is sufficient. And in case there are no *appellatum* at all, Lambert allows for a term to stand actually for a nonexistent entity (de Libera 1982: 257, as well as Goubier 2000: 50 and 57).

## Cross-References

- ▶ [Peter of Spain](#)
- ▶ [Roger Bacon](#)
- ▶ [Supposition Theory](#)
- ▶ [Universals](#)
- ▶ [William of Sherwood](#)

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## Landolfo Caracciolo

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### Abstract

Landolfo Caracciolo, the *Doctor Collectivus* (c. 1280/1285–1351), a member of an aristocratic family from Naples, entered the Franciscan Order and eventually lectured on the *Sentences* at Paris in 1318–1319, from which lectures stems his main philosophical writing, his questions on the four books of Peter Lombard's *Sentences*. After his academic career, Landolfo served in the administration of the Angevin dynasty in Naples and rose in the ecclesiastical ranks, ending his life as archbishop of Amalfi. Landolfo was a Scotist and spent most of his energy refuting the attacks that his immediate Franciscan predecessor at Paris, Peter Auriol, had directed at the Subtle Doctor. Yet Landolfo was no slavish follower, departing from “the Doctor” in various significant contexts, such as freedom. Landolfo placed particular emphasis on the distinction

between instants of time and instants of nature, maintaining that contradictories can be true in the same instant of time. For years, Landolfo debated this point with his Franciscan successors at Paris, Francis of Marchia and Francis of Meyronnes, and with scholars outside the Franciscan Order, such as Thomas Wylton and John of Jandun. Aside from an incunabulum edition of book II, few of Landolfo's questions on the *Sentences* have been published.

The Franciscan Landolfo Caracciolo, the *Doctor Collectivus*, belonged to the Rossi branch of the famous Neapolitan Caracciolo family, whose aristocratic roots go back to the first millennium. There are several prominent figures with the name "Landolfo Caracciolo," and the assertion that our Landolfo is identical to the one who held an office at the University of Naples from 1269 to 1284 and again in 1300–1301 is surely erroneous. Presumably, after joining the Franciscan Order at San Lorenzo in Naples, where he would have received his basic education, Landolfo was sent to study theology at Paris. According to an undocumented tradition, Landolfo was in the Capetian capital around 1305–1307, hearing John Duns Scotus' lectures, then returned to the Minorite *studium generale* at Naples, which with the patronage of King Charles II Anjou of Naples had been functioning de facto as part of the Faculty of Theology of the University of Naples since 1302. From 1310 to 1316, the story goes, Landolfo served as lector at San Lorenzo, after which he was sent to Paris to lecture on the *Sentences* of Peter Lombard. Contemporary sources in fact demonstrate that Landolfo did perform this task at Paris in 1318–1319, quoting and paraphrasing from the *Reportatio* version of Peter Auriol's questions on book I of the *Sentences*, which suggests that Landolfo had been in Paris attending Auriol's lectures in 1317–1318, while preparing for his own. If the above scenario is true, we can date Landolfo's birth to around 1280–1285.

Although many of Landolfo's sermons and biblical commentaries have come down to us, and he composed *Quaestiones in Metaphysicam* and probably at least one *quodlibet* that have not

been identified, his Parisian questions on the *Sentences* are virtually his only surviving philosophical work. Some 35 manuscripts preserve one or more of the four books of his questions, the most popular being book IV, extant in roughly 20 witnesses. There is an imperfect incunabulum edition of book II, but otherwise only sections have been published. Landolfo lectured in the traditional sequence, books I, IV, II, and III, and probably ran short on time, because his set of questions on book III is very brief. Landolfo therefore began an ambitious second redaction of his questions on book III, leaving it incomplete at the end of the fifth of the 40 distinctions, although even in its truncated form it is almost three times as long as the first redaction. Doubts have been expressed about the authenticity of the second redaction, but Landolfo's idiosyncratic use of "conclusions" as the equivalent of "articles" and his habit of asking several questions at once are evident here, and self-citations prove that the work is Landolfo's. Presumably, he abandoned the project because of other duties, since by 1325, as master of theology, he was Franciscan provincial minister of Terra di Lavoro in southern Italy; in 1327, he became bishop of Castellammare di Stabia, 30 km SE of Naples; in 1331, he was transferred to Amalfi, where he remained archbishop until his death, probably in 1351. All the while he maintained close ties to the Angevin dynasty, for example, serving King Robert the Wise on a mission in 1326, and acting as logothete and protonotary for Queen Joanna I as late as 1349.

Landolfo is attributed with bringing Scotism to the University of Naples and southern Italy in general, so it is not surprising that, on his own admission, Landolfo followed Scotus *plurimum*, for example, on the Immaculate Conception. Peter Auriol, Landolfo's immediate predecessor as Franciscan bachelor of the *Sentences* at Paris, was an independent thinker who quite often disagreed with the Subtle Doctor and frequently criticized him on basic points. Landolfo was left the task of refuting Auriol's attacks against the man whom Landolfo and many other Franciscans were already calling "the Doctor." Time and again we find Landolfo replying to an opinion that

runs contrary to Scotistic doctrine, an opinion identified in the margins of the manuscripts as that of Auriol. This Landolfo did on a wide range of issues, from epistemology to soteriology to physics. He did confront other challenges to Scotism, for example, Henry of Harclay's atomism, but since Landolfo was the first to oppose Auriol, the Italian's questions on the *Sentences* often read like one long attack on his French predecessor.

Sometimes Landolfo's rebuttals were compelling, but on occasion, he could not dissolve Auriol's criticism of Scotus. In these instances, Landolfo might remark that Auriol's own position was no better, but there are times when Landolfo disagreed with Scotus. On the fundamental problem of the freedom of the will, for example, theological considerations forced Scotus and his followers to admit that what is free, like the procession of the Holy Spirit via divine willing, can also be necessary. Auriol found an awkward way around the problem, maintaining that what is done "complacently" is done freely. Although Landolfo rejects Auriol's position, he cannot follow Scotus and instead seeks a univocal definition of freedom: "I hold the opposite conclusion, that a power is free because it can do one act and the opposite, and when this *indifference* has been removed, there will be no freedom." Turning to face the objection about the procession of the Holy Spirit, Landolfo tries to find another way out: "I respond that the will's not being able to do the opposite can be understood to stem from two things: either from the formal *ratio* of the operating will, or from the condition of nature in which it operates. Then I maintain that, inasmuch as it is of the formal *ratio* of the will in divine things, just as God loves Himself, He could not love Himself, and just as He produces the Holy Spirit, He could not produce [the Holy Spirit]. But this determination comes from the condition of nature in which He operates. This condition of nature is that all things in Him must necessarily be." Peter of Candia would attack Landolfo's position at length, in part because he found it "astonishing how this doctor – whose avowed teaching as a whole is the teaching of the Subtle

Doctor with clearer words – deviated from his master."

Landolfo was cited at least into the sixteenth century and clearly his impact on the Neapolitan ecclesiastical milieu has never faded from memory: when the Franciscan theological school of San Lorenzo, suppressed in the eighteenth century, was reestablished in central Naples in 1937, the library was named the Biblioteca Fra Landolfo Caracciolo. Among historians of philosophy, Landolfo is best known for his view that instantaneous change involves a contradiction: "In an instantaneous change each terminus exists in the same instant; but in such a change the termini are contradictory; therefore contradictories are true in the same instant." One could object that "these termini are neither in the same instant nor in different instants, but rather the entire preceding time measures and corresponds to one contradictory, namely the thing-to-be-generated's non-being, while the last instant of this time corresponds to the other contradictory, namely the being of the thing-to-be-generated." Landolfo replies that, "when everything that is accidental is removed, nothing is removed from what exists per se; but the entire time preceding generation is accidental to it; therefore, with this time removed, generation will still be in the last instant; but generation will not be without its termini; therefore in that last instant the thing will be and not be, and these are the termini of generation." Landolfo's explanation for how these contradictories can exist in the same instant of time relies on "signs" or "instants of nature," a device that Landolfo employs quite frequently. Each instant of time can be divided into conceptual instants of nature, which are "indivisible measures to which simultaneity and succession do not apply." These instants explain causation: at one and the same instant of time, the agent causes and the effect comes to be; the causing of the agent is logically prior to the coming-to-be of the effect, so it can be said that, in the same instant of time, the cause is in a prior instant of nature and the effect in a posterior one. Many thinkers before Landolfo, including Scotus himself, appealed to instants of nature, but it was Landolfo's predecessor, Hugh of

Novocastro, OFM, who, in the years before Peter Auriol's lectures at Paris, took the further step of claiming that ontological states corresponded to those instants of nature. In the prior instant, where the cause causes, the effect, Hugh argues, does not exist, and thus the effect does not exist and exists in the same instant. Landolfo adopts Hugh's innovation and publicizes it.

Landolfo's notoriety in this context is not a modern anachronism, because a number of scholastics attacked his position in the decade following his teaching. Landolfo himself placed great emphasis on his doctrine, since he returned to it repeatedly. The academic context in which he first treated the problem at length is quite interesting. Landolfo's questions on the *Sentences* seem to be the first to preserve both the sermons or *collationes* on each of the four books of the *Sentences* and the questions that constituted part of the running debate held with the other bachelors, together called *principia*. In the *principium* for book II, after a *collatio* beginning with his standard *Fundamentum primum jaspis*, Landolfo asks "Utrum contradictoria quae sunt termini creationis possint competere eidem in eodem instanti temporis secundum idem," and he specifically targets the doctrine of the Sorbonne master Thomas Wylton. A bachelor of the Sorbonne likely defended this doctrine, for in the *principium* to book III Landolfo asks: "Utrum, si proprietates Verbi sit idem quod essentia, ponere quod incarnatio terminetur ad proprietatem et non ad essentiam ponit contradictionem." Landolfo continued his attack against Wylton's circle, in his final lecture on the *Sentences* calling out by name Wylton and his student, Annibaldo di Ceccano, for failing to appreciate his doctrine of simultaneous contradictories. The notoriety of Landolfo's position spread, for the arts master (a client of the same patron as Wylton and Annibaldo) John of Jandun took up Landolfo's *principia* and provided his own refutation in a reply dated September 3, 1320, or a full year after Landolfo's *Sentences* lectures. Finally, in the second redaction of book III, Landolfo informs us that his famous Franciscan confreres Francis of Marchia and Francis of Meyronnes, who

succeeded Landolfo as Parisian bachelors of the *Sentences*, attacked his opinion, which Landolfo goes on to defend once again.

## Cross-References

- ▶ [Francis of Marchia](#)
- ▶ [Francis of Meyronnes](#)
- ▶ [John Duns Scotus](#)
- ▶ [John of Jandun](#)
- ▶ [Peter Auriol](#)
- ▶ [Peter Lombard](#)
- ▶ [Peter of Candia](#)
- ▶ [Thomas Wylton](#)
- ▶ [Time](#)
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## Laws of Nature

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### Abstract

Many historians of science consider laws of nature a modern category. Some, however, claim for the consolidation of a nomic conception of nature in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries. The first time that specific laws were formulated in medieval texts was in the scientific works of Robert Grosseteste (c.1175–1253), who stated the law of refraction and the law of reflection of light rays, and of Roger Bacon (c. 1220–1292/1293), who added the law of the gravity of water and the law of universal nature. It is probable that Bacon's concept of optical law had reached the modern times before Descartes. The nominalists-voluntarists of the fourteenth century, and most prominently William of Ockham (1288–c.1348), may have had an important part in the emergence of the concept of laws too. They rejected the realism of forms and immanent factors and stressed the sovereignty of God in creating and the contingency of his imposed decrees. This philosophy of nature provided a context within which the idea of a law of nature was comprehensible and natural. It had reached seventeenth-century scientists through Martin Luther (1483–1546).

### Laws of Nature

Laws of nature are defined as general statements about the properties of natural entities, relating various variables and constants. A law of nature is thought to have counterfactual implications, to presuppose certain idealized conditions, and to have quantitative aspects and explanatory power. Many historians of science hold to the view that laws of nature became an essential concept in

scientific practice and theory from the seventeenth and even eighteenth century onward (Needham 1969; Henry 2004). They contend that before that time, the use of “law” in connection with natural regularities had been in use – if at all – merely as a loose metaphor or a restricted statement of principles of mathematics, never as explanatory proposition in natural philosophy (Henry 2004). Order in pre-seventeenth century science was based on logical relations, hierarchy, forms, or similarities, so the story goes. Following Plato, Aristotle, and the Stoics, the distinction between ideal order and rough actuality was conceived as the distinction between celestial and terrestrial realms. Orderliness descends from higher to lower and is lost as one moves from higher causes to lower effects (Wilson 2008).

The contention that laws of nature are to be considered exclusively a modern category did not remain unchallenged. Leaving aside arguments in favor of an ancient Roman conception of laws of nature in Lucretius and Cicero, this entry reviews the claim for the consolidation of a nomic conception of nature in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, well ahead of the scientific revolution.

One finds several allusions to the term in the twelfth century. Writers on nature such as William of Conches (c. 1080–c. 1154) and the Platonist Bernard Silvester (fl. c. 1143–1148) had used “law” freely. In a metaphysical work by Hermann of Carinthia (fl. 1138–1143), *habitus* is defined as our means of knowing “qua lege [literally, by what law] things occur,” and in the poems of Alan of Lille (c. 1128–1202/3) a personified Nature lays down laws (Ruby 1986). In the thirteenth century, the phrase “laws of nature” (and also “of multiplication” and “of material forms”) is found in the writings of Roger Bacon (c. 1220–1292/3) and, in the fourteenth century, in the writings of William of Ockham (1288–c.1348), Nicole Oresme (1320–1382), and Henry of Langenstein (c. 1325–1397), who used the phrase “secundum legem agencium naturaliter” in his work on comets (*Questio de cometa*). At the end of the fourteenth century and the beginning of the fifteenth, one finds the phrase in Pierre d’Ailly (1350–1420) and Jean Gerson (1363–1429). The



use of the phrase, however, did not necessarily mean that the modern sense was present and that a fully grown conception of laws of nature was at stake. Moreover, in some cases, a nomic conception can be present but not accompanied by the expected terminology. Nevertheless, appropriate terminology could serve as an indication that some medievals were thinking of nature as governed by laws long before they were in a position to state any of the laws themselves.

An instance of a specific formulation of such laws is found in the thirteenth century. This is the first time that one finds not only the general statement that such laws exist but also the first formulation of specific laws. Their locus is the scientific works of Robert Grosseteste (c.1175–1253) and Roger Bacon.

Grosseteste developed an original light metaphysics, in which the universe is created out of a dimensionless point of light, which he called “the form of corporeity” (*De luce*). The form of corporeity multiplies itself infinitely, thus creating the material universe by inserting dimensions onto matter. It therefore exists wherever there is matter. The ability to provide explanations based upon a form present throughout nature enables a reduction to a minimal number of principles and renders those explanations universal: the same few principles can be used in different ways, in accounts of different phenomena. In this way Grosseteste was able to describe natural processes in general statements about the behavior of light, rather than by definitions of specific natures (Kedar 2016). Light, or the form of corporeity, multiplying equally in all directions in straight lines, introduces dimensions into matter in a way which can be described and measured by the laws of geometry. Light, the source of all causal action, became thus the key to the study of the material universe. Grosseteste believed that geometry provides *propter quid* knowledge of the physical aspects of natural phenomena, even though he could not always supply convincing geometrical explanations. This is why he is thought by some to have started the project of mathematization of nature and the move away from explanation by form to explanation by law (Crombie 1959). Grosseteste indeed set up some quantitative lawlike rules,

such as that natural force is more active when propagated in straight lines and that the force is strong in inverse proportion to the length of the line. In *De iride* Grosseteste formulated a law of refraction, according to which rays passing from one medium to another, which is denser, will be refracted at an angle equal to half the angle of incidence, and the law of reflection, stating that the incident and reflected angles are equal. Grosseteste was completely original in this formulation. No such law existed in any earlier known treatise on optics or natural science in general (Eastwood 1967). These laws were based on the principle of uniformity in nature, which states that a natural action will always occur in the same way, assuming identical conditions; in fact, the agent considered by itself will always act in the same way, but the effects may vary with change in external conditions (Eastwood 1967).

Roger Bacon took Grosseteste’s methodological convictions and developed them further. He was the first in the medieval period to invoke the concept “law of nature” as a comprehensive, unconditionally binding, and constitutive ordering of nature. His laws displayed a necessary, causal connection between geometrical properties and physical effects. He stressed the universal and uniform aspects of these laws. Bacon formulated laws of nature of several types, including the law of the gravity of water and the laws of the multiplication of species (Kedar 2016). “Wonderful,” Bacon declared, “is the power of this multiplication, since all things hidden and revealed happen in accordance with its laws” (Bacon *Opus majus* 4.4.3). His laws of multiplication (which included the laws of refraction and reflection) qualify for most of the properties of the modern conception of laws, such as an if/then formulation, counterfactual implications, independence of space-time, explanatory power, and systematicity (Kedar and Hon 2018). Most telling was Bacon’s treatment of the problem of the water remaining in the clepsydra in opposition to their natural inclination to flow downward. Bacon did not employ the Aristotelian terminology of substance, species, genus, and the four causes. Instead, he appealed to a “universal nature” of the continuity of matter,

without which the general order of the world machine would not hold on. The law of “universal nature” overpowers the “particular nature” of the water and provides nature with unity and order (Schramm 1981). It may be the case that Bacon’s concept of optical law had reached modern times before Descartes (1596–1650), through the *Perspectiva* of John Peckham (c. 1230–1292), which Johannes Kepler (1571–1630) read (Ruby 1986). John Peckham was to draw on Bacon in saying that in certain circumstances vision proceeds according to the “law of spirits” (*spirituum*) rather than the “law of diaphanousness.” In the fifteenth century, Regiomontanus (1436–1476) pointed to Bacon as an authority in optics and Lorenzo Ghiberti (1378–1455) paraphrased the *Perspectiva* in his *Third Commentary* without acknowledgment. In the sixteenth century, Francesco Maurolico (1494–1575), the astronomer from Messina, drew directly on Bacon’s *Perspectiva* in his *Photismi de lumine et umbra* and so did Giambattista Della Porta (1535–1615) in his *De Refractione*, even though he did not provide references or mentioned Bacon by name (Ruby 1986). All four used *lex* of optical phenomena, and Regiomontanus (1436–76) used *lex* also in astronomy and mathematics (Ruby 1986). The significant similarities between the concept of laws held by Roger Bacon and by Francis Bacon (1561–1626) and Robert Boyle (1627–1691), such as the distinction between the laws of universal nature from laws of a particular nature, strengthen the claim for historical continuity (Steinle 1995).

Even though they did not bequeath any formulation of specific laws, it is argued that medieval nominalists-voluntarists, of which the most prominent was William of Ockham, had an important function in the historical emergence of the concept of laws in the seventeenth century. Some goes further to claim that a complete conception of laws was in fact already there. The nominalist-voluntarist thesis holds that the major influence of Ockham and his successors was less on the content of the scientific ideas themselves than on the new metaphysics and philosophy of nature which they began and which was further developed by the advocates of the new mechanical philosophy.

It was this philosophy of nature that provided a context within which the idea of a law of nature was both comprehensible and natural (Milton 1981). The metaphysics which Ockham and his successors proposed was made of the following tenets: there exists an infinite gap between the omnipotent God and the created world; everything which exists is an individual – metaphysical realism is to be rejected altogether; God governs the world, not by means of intermediaries, but directly, by regulating the motions of every single body; creation, therefore, is radically contingent (Milton 1981). From all this, it follows that God’s rule of the universe is executed in a manner of decrees which take the form of laws of nature. Given God’s absolute freedom and omnipotence, these laws are imposed upon matter and do not arise out of nature’s internal structure. The laws are therefore contingent and can be discovered by empirical methods only.

The voluntarists devised explanations in terms which were opposed to the realist and organic Aristotelian outlook, which used essences and substantial forms as explanatory concepts, and placed laws of nature instead (Milton 1981). The dominant conception of laws of nature among seventeenth-century scientists working under the mechanistic hypothesis was that these laws are not immanent but imposed upon the universe by an omnipotent God. The voluntarists of the fourteenth century developed the conception of imposed laws, a conception which was carried further in time by thinkers of the voluntarist tradition such as Pierre d’Ailly, Jean Gerson, and Gabriel Biel (d. 1495) who influenced, among others, Martin Luther (1483–1546). The thesis is exemplified by figures such as Pierre Gassendi (1592–1655), Robert Boyle, and Isaac Newton (1642–1727) who were committed both to voluntarism and the empirical investigation of nature (Oakley 1961). This is especially the case in England, where Hobbes (1588–1679), Boyle, Locke (1623–1704), and Newton all show clear signs of the influence of nominalist or voluntarist ideas; it is also the case in France, where similar influences strongly affected the thought of Descartes, Gassendi, and Mersenne (1588–1648) (Milton 1981).

It would appear that in fact before Newton, there was no one concept of laws agreed by all scientific figures. Some (Galileo Galilei (1564–1642) and Descartes) held to laws of idealized conditions expressed in mathematical terms, while others (Francis Bacon (1561–1626) and Boyle) demanded no mathematical formulation and distinguished general from specific laws lacking absolute necessity (Steinle 1995). Some held to contingent laws discovered by experiments (Francis Bacon, Newton, and Boyle), while others believed in immutable and necessary laws (Descartes). It therefore could be the case that both strands of medieval philosophy – geometrical optics and nominalism – have contributed equally to the formation of the concept. Indeed, the variety of concepts of law in seventeenth-century science suggests different traditions of distinct origins (Wilson 2008).

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## Leo Magentenos

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### Abstract

Leo Magentenos (Leōn Magentēnos) was a Byzantine commentator on Porphyry’s *Isagoge* and Aristotle’s *Organon*.

## Biography

According to superscriptions in manuscripts containing his works, Leo Magentenos was Metropolitan of Mytilene. One of these manuscripts (Vat. gr. 244) is probably to be dated to c. 1200. On the other hand, one of his commentaries has been shown to be dependent on a collection of scholia that was compiled after c. 1150. This allows us to place Leo with some certainty in the latter half of the twelfth century. We have no further information about his life.

## Works

Leo wrote commentaries on Porphyry's *Isagoge* and all of Aristotle's logical works, not only those normally included in the curriculum for higher education in Middle and Late Byzantium (i.e., the *Categories*, the *De interpretatione*, the first seven chapters of *Prior Analytics* 1, and the first seven chapters of the *Sophistici elenchi*). Only parts and fragments of his commentaries have appeared in printed editions (in addition to the primary sources listed below, note that the commentary on *Posterior Analytics* B edited by Wallies under John Philoponus' name seems in fact to be by Leo, as suggested by Ebbesen 2012, 363–364), and consequently they have been little studied in modern times. In at least one case, his commentary on the *Sophistici elenchi*, it is clear that Leo did little more than rework older collections of scholia and compose a brief general introduction to the work. In other cases, such as his commentary on the *Topics*, he added much explanatory material that is not known from other sources. His mode of exposition is twofold: each new commentary starts with a general introduction, which purports to discuss all or some of eight preliminary issues inherited from the Alexandrian tradition of commentary, namely, the subject of the treatise, its usefulness, its authenticity, the reason for its title, its division into chapters, its method of teaching, its place in the curriculum, and the part of philosophy to which it belongs. After that follows a collection of notes on individual passages and words in Porphyry's or

Aristotle's text. The oldest manuscript containing Leo's works (Vat. gr. 244) also contains the texts on which they comment; Leo's notes are then keyed to the texts by reference numbers, much like modern footnotes. They are more philologically than philosophically orientated, offering little in the way of in-depth discussion. Their value has been harshly judged, and it is true that while Leo often fails to make Aristotle's meaning clearer, he sometimes happens to make it significantly more obscure as a result of elementary misunderstandings.

In the case of the *De interpretatione*, two commentaries attributed to Leo survive. One (Commentary 1) is a collection of notes preceded by a general introduction in the manner just described; this has never appeared in print. The other (Commentary 2) is a continuous text that was edited by Aldus Manutius in 1503. The authenticity of Commentary 2 has been contested (by Busse 1897), but on weak grounds. On the other hand, there might be positive reasons for thinking that it is after all authentic. In the first note of Commentary 1, Leo refers to another work in which he has enumerated the senses of *theastai* (*Int.* 16a1). It does not seem unlikely that the reference is to another commentary on the same Aristotelian text; looking in Commentary 2, one will find that six senses of *theastai* are indeed enumerated, approximately the ones given by Ammonius (*In Int.* 9.4–27). The styles of the two commentaries exhibit many similarities; and even if it is true that Commentary 2 is superior to Commentary 1, as Busse thought, this may be due to the use of different sources: Commentary 2 draws heavily on Ammonius on the *De interpretatione*, whereas Commentary 1 does not seem to make direct use of Ammonius. However, if Commentary 2 is authentic, it seems that Leo must have composed two series of commentaries on the *Organon*, since the author of this commentary refers back to earlier commentaries on the *Isagoge* and the *Categories* dealing with the prolegomena to philosophy and logic respectively, and the prolegomena to philosophy and logic are not dealt with in the commentaries on these works ascribed to Leo in the manuscripts.

## Cross-References

- ▶ [Aristotelianism in the Greek, Latin, Syriac, Arabic, and Hebrew Traditions](#)
- ▶ [Logic, Byzantine](#)
- ▶ [Natural Philosophy, Byzantine](#)

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## Logic in the Arabic and Islamic World

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### Abstract

The Arabic logical tradition emerged from the Graeco-Arabic translation movement from the eighth to the tenth centuries. In its initial stages, it was closely linked to the activity of translating and commenting upon Aristotle's *Organon*. By the early tenth century, a circle of Aristotelian scholars had emerged in Baghdad who saw themselves as a continuation of the Alexandrian tradition. Its most prominent representative was undoubtedly Al-Fārābī (d. 950), who wrote esteemed commentaries on Aristotle's logical works, as well as a number of treatises introducing logic (*mantīq*) to an environment that often viewed the Greek sciences with suspicion. The influence of the Baghdad circle eventually reached Islamic Spain, where Aristotelian philosophy and logic flourished in the eleventh and twelfth centuries, culminating in the monumental commentaries on Aristotle by Averroes (d. 1198). In other parts of the Islamic world, however, the influence emanating from Avicenna (d. 1037) eventually superseded that of Aristotle. Avicenna was less concerned with getting the interpretation of Aristotle right and more willing to make radical departures from the Aristotelian tradition. By the thirteenth century, his works had replaced those of Aristotle as the point of reference for



most logicians writing in Arabic. The prominent theologian Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī (d. 1210) approached the Avicennian tradition with the same irreverence with which Avicenna had himself approached the Aristotelian tradition. He also decisively reoriented the scope of logic toward a focused study of terms, propositions, and syllogisms, rather than the entirety of topics covered in the *Organon*. A number of thirteenth-century logicians working in the wake of Avicenna and Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī produced sophisticated and original summaries of formal logic. They also produced a number of condensed handbooks that formed the basis of logical studies at colleges throughout the Islamic world until modern times.

## Logic in the Arabic and Islamic World

The origins of the logical tradition in Arabic can be traced back to the Graeco-Arabic translation movement from the late eighth to the early tenth centuries. Recent studies have argued that this movement was more than just a matter-of-course translation of the Greek intellectual heritage into the new ruling language of the Middle East and that it was as much a process of active rediscovery of the Greek scientific and philosophical tradition (Gutas 1998). To be sure, the *Organon* had already been translated into Syriac and been the subject of commentaries by a number of Syriac scholars before the eighth century. This meant that basic Greek logical terminology was already available in a Semitic language prior to the Arabic translation movement. Arabic translations of philosophical works were sometimes based on Syriac intermediary translations rather than translated directly from Greek. The translators were usually eastern Christians versed in the Greek and Syriac intellectual tradition. Yet, the Arabic logical tradition, as it emerged in the late ninth and early tenth centuries, was arguably more than a continuation in Arabic of a preexisting Syriac or Greek tradition. Works were translated into Arabic that may not have been regularly studied for centuries. Of Aristotle's *Organon*, the *Categories*, *De Interpretatione*, and the first seven chapters of

Book I of the *Prior Analytics* (dealing with the assertoric syllogism) seem to have dominated the Syriac tradition of logic. By contrast, all the books of the *Organon*, along with many of the Greek commentators, as well as some of the logical works of Galen, were translated into Arabic – often more than once – between the late eighth century and the early tenth. Al-Fārābī (d. 950) claimed that the scope of logical studies had been considerably expanded in his time from what it had been in preceding centuries, to incorporate the latter parts of the *Prior Analytics* (dealing with modal syllogistic), the *Posterior Analytics*, the *Topics*, and the other books of the *Organon* (Gutas 1999). The accuracy of Al-Fārābī's claim is certainly not beyond question. There is evidence that at least some Syriac scholars from the sixth and seventh centuries were familiar with the later books of the *Organon* and considered them the pinnacle of the course of logical studies (Watt 2009). Nevertheless, Al-Fārābī's account is generally considered to have an element of truth, for there is also evidence, both in Syriac and in Latin, for an “abridged” *Organon* consisting of the *Categories*, *De Interpretatione*, and the first seven chapters of Book I of *Prior Analytics*, and it is this tradition that tends to loom large in independent Syriac presentations of logic. This focus on the early books of the *Organon* is also in evidence in the earliest extant Arabic overviews of Aristotelian logic, by Ibn al-Muqaffa' (d. ca. 757) and al-Kindī (d. 873). The tradition of the “abridged” *Organon* was consciously rejected by Al-Fārābī and played a marginal role in the later Arabic logical tradition.

In its earliest period, reflections on logic in Arabic were closely linked to the process of translating and commenting upon the works of Aristotle. The first important center for this activity was the Abbāsīd capital, Baghdad, in the late ninth and early tenth centuries, during which a circle of scholars emerged who saw themselves as a continuation of the Alexandrian Aristotelian tradition (Hasnawi 1985). The most important figure of this circle was undoubtedly the aforementioned Al-Fārābī, who wrote esteemed long and short commentaries on the works of the *Organon*, many of which are now lost (Zimmermann



1981; Rescher 1963a). He also wrote a number of popularizing works designed in part to introduce and fix logical terminology in Arabic and in part to advocate the advantages of the study of logic (*manṭiq*) in an environment that often viewed the “ancient sciences” with incomprehension or religiously motivated hostility (Lameer 1994; Dunlop 1958).

Other prominent figures in the Baghdad Aristotelian circle were Al-Fārābī’s student Yaḥyā b. ‘Adī (d. 974); the latter’s student Ibn al-Suwār (d. 1017), whose annotated copy of the *Organon* underlies the earliest extant manuscripts in Arabic; and Ibn al-Ṭayyib (d. 1043), whose commentaries on Aristotle’s *Categories* and on Porphyry’s *Isagoge* are extant (Ferrari 2006; Gyekye 1979). In the late tenth century, the influence of the Baghdad “school” was extended to Islamic Spain, where it flourished in the following two centuries, with such prominent scholars as Ibn Bājja (Avenpace, d. 1138) and – most famously – Ibn Rushd (Averroes, d. 1198), whose monumental commentaries on Aristotle’s works were to have a good deal of influence in the Latin West.

In the Islamic world, however, the approach of the Baghdad circle was gradually superseded by the influence emanating from Ibn Sīnā (Avicenna – d. 1037), who was active in Central Asia and Persia. With Avicenna, the Arabic logical tradition started a process whereby it became entirely divorced from the exegesis of Aristotle’s logical works. Avicenna was less concerned with getting the interpretation of Aristotle right and more willing to make radical departures from received views (Gutas 1988). For example, the Arabic Aristotelian commentators had inherited from the Greek commentators an acceptance of the Stoic schemata of propositional logic (*modus ponens*, *modus tollens*, and disjunctive syllogism) alongside the term-logical categorical syllogisms of Aristotle. Avicenna – while retaining this Stoic element – devoted a considerable part of the book on syllogism (*qiyās*) in his magnum opus *al-Shifā’* (*The Cure*) to developing wholly hypothetical syllogisms, that is, syllogisms in which both premises are either conditionals or disjunctions. Avicenna also took the apparently unprecedented step of “quantifying” conditionals, thus distinguishing

between the universal-affirmative “Always: if P then Q” and the particular-affirmative “Once: if P then Q” and their negations (Shehaby 1973). Avicenna’s distinctive approach to the Aristotelian corpus is also in evidence in his discussion of modal logic. The Arabic Aristotelian commentators had continued the efforts of their Greek predecessors to arrive at a satisfying interpretation of Aristotle’s modal logic (Elamrani-Jamal 1995). By contrast, Avicenna baldly stated that Aristotle’s remarks on the topic were tests for students, rather than considered opinions, and that what Aristotle really meant to state as a considered opinion was what he (Avicenna) would go on to expound at some length. Central to Avicenna’s modal logic was the distinction between a *waṣṫī* (descriptive) and a *dhātī* (substantial) reading of a modal proposition. On the first reading, the modality inheres in the description of the subject: in this sense, for example, it is true that “Every sleeper is necessarily asleep.” On the second reading, the modality inheres in the essence or substance of the subject: in this sense, for example, it is true that “Every sleeper is possibly not asleep” (Street 2002).

Besides the monumental *al-Shifā’*, Avicenna wrote a number of shorter works, including the highly condensed *Pointers and Reminders* (*al-Ishārāt wa-l-tanbīhāt*) that were much commented upon in subsequent centuries. The influence of these works was momentous. Within two centuries of Avicenna’s death, they had replaced Aristotle’s works as the point of departure for logicians writing in Arabic. After the middle of the thirteenth century, it is difficult to find a logician writing in Arabic who engaged directly with the writings of any logician before Avicenna.

In the course of the eleventh and twelfth centuries, the Arabic tradition of Neoplatonized Aristotelian philosophy (*falsafa*) came head to head with Islamic rational theology (*kalām*). A number of theologians attempted to refute – by rational argument – those aspects of Neoplatonic and Aristotelian physics and metaphysics that they perceived to be incompatible with the Islamic faith. Most prominent among these theologians were al-Ġazālī (d. 1111) and Fakhr al-Dīn al-

Rāzī (d. 1210). Both scholars had no trouble with the discipline of logic and in fact explicitly defended its usefulness (Marmura 1975). Their endorsement was important for getting logic accepted into mainstream Islamic intellectual culture, though pious opposition never died out entirely (see Hallaq 1993) and has been strengthened in modern times by the rise of the Sunni fundamentalist Salafī–Wahhābī movement (El-Rouayheb 2004).

Both al-Ġazālī and Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī wrote works on logic. al-Ġazālī confined himself to elementary and noncontroversial expositions intended for budding jurists and theologians, whereas al-Rāzī wrote lengthy, sophisticated, and influential logical works. He too took his point of departure in the writings of Avicenna, but approached them with a critical spirit similar to the way in which Avicenna had himself approached the preceding Aristotelian tradition. For example, al-Rāzī had no qualms about accepting the fourth figure of the syllogism, and that remained the mainstream view among Arabic logicians down to modern times. He also distinguished – more systematically than Avicenna did – between alethic and temporal modalities and between one-sided and two-sided modalities (e.g., between possibility and contingency). These distinctions, along with Avicenna’s distinction between *waṣfī* and *dhātī* readings, formed the core of a developed system of more than a dozen modal propositions that bore little resemblance to anything in Aristotle (Strobino and Thom 2016). al-Rāzī was also a pivotal figure in what the famous historian Ibn Khaldūn (d. 1406) noted was a thoroughgoing revision of the scope of logic. From al-Rāzī onward, Ibn Khaldūn observed logicians writing in Arabic ceased to be interested in covering all the topics of the *Organon* and started focusing almost exclusively on the five predicables, definition, propositions and their immediate implications, and the formal syllogistic, including modal and hypothetical syllogisms (Rosenthal 1958: vol 3, pp. 142–143). In the thirteenth century, logicians working in the wake of Avicenna and al-Rāzī subjected these topics to lengthy, critical, and sophisticated treatment, producing comprehensive summaries of formal logic

that have only recently started to receive the attention they deserve from historians of logic. Another logician mentioned as a pivotal figure by Ibn Khaldūn was Afḍal al-Dīn al-Khūnajī (d. 1248), a Persian-born scholar and judge in Ayyūbid Egypt. His lengthy *Kashf al-Asrār* clearly exhibits the turn toward an extensive and critical discussion of formal topics with little patience for exegetical questions. Among the many innovations of that rich work, which in many ways set the agenda for most other thirteenth-century Arabic works on logic, the following can be mentioned (see Khūnajī 2010):

- (a) Avicenna’s discussion of hypothetical syllogisms was expanded and modified. For example, hypothetical syllogisms were discussed in which the premises only share a term, rather than an entire antecedent or consequent, for example:  
 Always: If Every A is B, then J is D.  
*Always: If Every B is H, then W is Z.*  
 Once: If (Always: If A is H, then J is D), then  
 (Always: If A is H, then W is Z).
- (b) The logical relations between terms and propositions were explored systematically. Two terms can be related in one of the four ways: they can have identical extensions (*musāwāt*), they can have partially overlapping extensions (*‘umūm wa-khuṣūṣ min wajh*), they can have extensions that do not overlap (*mubāyana*), and one can be more “general” (*a‘amm*) and the other more “specific” (*akhaṣṣ*). Khūnajī went on to establish the relations between the contradictories of terms related in one of the four ways: for example, if A is more general in extension than B, then not-A is more specific in extension than not-B. Two propositions can be related in the same four ways: they can be such that the truth of either implies the truth of the other (*musāwāt*); or the truth of one implies the truth of the other but not vice versa (*‘umūm wa khuṣūṣ muṭlaq*); or they are compatible, but either can be true without the other (*‘umūm wa khuṣūṣ min wajh*); or they are incompatible (*mubāyana*). Khūnajī

discussed at length the relations that obtained between the more than dozen modal propositions presented by al-Rāzī. He brought these relations to bear on the discussion of conversion, contraposition, and the syllogistic, explicitly recognizing, for example, that if a proposition  $p$  implies another proposition, then any proposition more “specific” than  $p$  also implies that proposition. Similarly, if it could be shown that a proposition  $q$  does not imply another proposition, then any proposition that is more “general” than  $q$  also does not imply that proposition.

(c) The immediate implications (*lawāzim*) of conditionals and disjunctions were discussed extensively. For example, De Morgan’s laws were recognized: an “exhaustive disjunction” (*munfašila māni’at khuluww*) of the form “Either  $P$  or  $Q$ ” implies an “exclusive disjunction” (*munfašila māni’at jam*) consisting of the negation of both disjuncts: “Not both  $\sim P$  and  $\sim Q$ ,” and vice versa. Also, the implications of conditionals and disjunctions with complex antecedents, consequents, or disjuncts were investigated. For example, the universal-affirmative conditional “Always: if  $P$  then ( $Q$  and  $R$ )” implies the two universal-affirmative conditionals “Always: if  $P$  then  $Q$ ” and “Always: if  $P$  then  $R$ .” By contrast, the universal-affirmative “Always: if ( $P$  and  $Q$ ) then  $R$ ” only implies two particular-affirmative conditionals “Once: if  $P$  then  $R$ ” and “Once: if  $Q$  then  $R$ .”

(d) Avicenna had advanced the principle that the truth of a conditional implies the falsity of a conditional with the same antecedent and negated consequence (i.e., “Always: if  $P$  then  $Q$ ” implies “Never: if  $P$  then not- $Q$ ”). This was questioned by Khūnajī, who pointed out that any valid argument consisting of two premises and their conclusion could be turned into a complex *reductio* syllogism in which the two original premises and the negation of the conclusion imply both a proposition (the original conclusion) and its contradictory (the negation of the original conclusion). This in turn meant that one could construct a true

conditional having the three inconsistent premises as antecedent and both contradictories as consequences. Related to this point, what has come to be known as “Aristotle’s principle” that no proposition is implied by its own negation was challenged. Khūnajī pointed out that the apparently true universal-affirmative conditionals “Always: if ( $P$  and not- $P$ ) then  $P$ ” and “Always: if ( $P$  and not- $P$ ) then not- $P$ ” produce (by the first mood of the third figure of the hypothetical syllogism) “Once: if  $P$  then not- $P$ ” (see El-Rouayheb 2009). Incidentally, the idea that Aristotle’s principle is false and that two contradictory propositions may follow from the same impossible antecedent is the closest that Arabic logicians came to formulating the principle that any proposition follows from a contradiction (*ex falso quodlibet*) that was widely accepted in medieval Latin logic (and is widely accepted in modern logic).

(e) Avicenna had given a proof for the productivity of first-figure syllogisms with possibility minors, that is, the following syllogisms of the form:

Every  $J$  is possibly  $B$ .  
 Every  $B$  is necessarily  $A$ .  
 Therefore, Every  $J$  is necessarily  $A$ .

He did so by supposing the possibility in the first premise actualized (i.e., that “Every  $J$  is actually  $B$ ”) and then arguing that the mentioned conclusion evidently follows in such a case. This in turn meant that the conclusion also follows from the original first premise (“Every  $J$  is possibly  $B$ ”), for it is not possible that supposing a possibility actualized should lead to an impossibility such as the conclusion becoming necessary when it is not already so. It has recently been shown that Avicenna’s proof assumes the principle (accepted in modern modal system  $S5$ ) that modal propositions have the same modality in every possible world (Thom 2008): he in effect considers the possible world in which every  $J$  is actually  $B$  shows that in that world, the necessity conclusion follows and hence that in this world too, the necessity conclusion is true. His proof was

rejected by Khūnajī, who drew a distinction – following al-Rāzī – between understanding the subject term of a proposition such as “Every J is B” as applying to everything that is J in extra-mental existence (the so-called *khārijī* reading of a proposition) and understanding the subject term as applying to anything that would be J if it existed (the *ḥaqīqī* reading). The first reading, akin to the *de re* understanding of modality in the Latin tradition, interprets the proposition as saying that it is true of everything that is J that it is B with some kind of modality (possibly, necessarily, always, etc.). On this reading, the mentioned syllogism with a possibility minor is sterile: donkeys are possibly ridden by Zayd, and everything ridden by Zayd is necessarily a horse (if he in fact only rides horses), and yet it is not true that donkeys are possibly horses. The second reading interprets the proposition as saying that everything that is J if it exists is B (with some modality) if it exists. This seems to add an element of *de dicto* necessity to the previous *de re* reading: it is necessary that if something is J, then it is B with some modality. On this reading, the mentioned counterexample is not relevant, for the major “Everything ridden by Zayd is necessarily a horse” is false as a *ḥaqīqī* proposition. Khūnajī, while conceding that no counterexamples were readily available when the premises are taken as *ḥaqīqī* propositions, nevertheless objected to Avicenna’s proof, and he considered as illegitimate precisely the moves in the proof that presuppose S5 and would be impermissible from the perspective of other modern modal systems such as T: in the possible world in which every J is actually B, one cannot assume that the original major remains true.

Other prominent logicians of the thirteenth century include Athīr al-Dīn al-Abharī (d. 1265), Naṣīr al-Dīn al-Ṭūsī (d. 1274), Najm al-Dīn al-Kātibī (d. 1276), Sirāj al-Dīn al-Urmawī (d. 1283), and Shams al-Dīn al-Samarqandī (d. 1322). Besides writing lengthy summaries, these scholars also produced condensed and widely studied handbooks, such as Abharī’s *Īsāgūjī*, Kātibī’s *al-Risāla al-Shamsiyya*, and Urmawī’s *Maṭālī’ al-anwār*. Abharī’s *Īsāgūjī* is an elementary introduction to logic (and hence of wider scope than Porphyry’s *Isagōgē*). The latter

two handbooks are more advanced and clearly indebted to Khūnajī’s *Kashf al-Asrār*. Such condensed handbooks formed the point of departure for writings on logic in Arabic after the thirteenth century.

The notion of “the Middle Ages” has little application in the case of Islamic history. There was no cultural or intellectual upheaval in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries comparable to the Renaissance and the Reformation in Europe. This also meant that logical studies in the Islamic world could be pursued until the modern period without the shadow of the misgivings of humanists and reformers. After the twelfth century, logic (*manṭiq*) became an integral part of the education of Muslim scholars and continued to be studied at colleges like Al-Azhar in Cairo until the twentieth century. Neoplatonic/Aristotelian *falsafa* had fallen into disrepute in many parts of the Islamic world, but logic was still considered useful as an “instrumental” science (like grammar, semantics-rhetoric, and dialectic) without which one could not master jurisprudence (*uṣūl al-fiqh*) or theology (*kalām*). The latter disciplines became increasingly suffused with logical terminology and argument forms after al-Ġazālī (Hallaq 1990), and several influential handbooks on jurisprudence and theology started with an exposition of logic.

A vast amount of commentaries, glosses, and super-glosses on logical handbooks and treatises survive from what Europeans would call the late medieval and early modern period (Wisnovsky 2004). Important centers for logical studies included Persia and Central Asia, Ottoman Turkey, Northwest Africa (modern Morocco, Algeria, and Tunisia), and – from the seventeenth century – India. Influential later logicians include the following:

- (a) Quṭb al-Dīn al-Razī al-Taḥṭānī (d. 1365), a Persian scholar who settled and died in Damascus. He wrote widely used commentaries on Kātibī’s *Shamsiyya* and Urmawī’s *Maṭālī’* and a number of shorter treatises on logical topics, including a treatise on the division of knowledge into conception and assent (which was the typical starting point of handbooks on logic).

- (b) Sa'd al-Dīn al-Taftāzānī (d. 1390), active in Timurid Central Asia. He wrote a commentary on Kātibī's *Shamsiyya* and his own epitome of logic entitled *Tahdhīb al-mantiq*.
- (c) al-Sayyid al-Sharīf al-Jurjānī (d. 1413), Taftāzānī's rival in Timurid Central Asia. He wrote widely studied glosses on Quṭb al-Dīn al-Rāzī al-Taḥṭānī's commentaries on the *Shamsiyya* and the *Maṭāli'*.
- (d) Meḥmed Fenārī (d. 1431), one of the first prominent Ottoman scholars. He wrote a demanding and widely glossed commentary on Abharī's *Īsāgūjī* and prefaced his voluminous work on jurisprudence *Fuṣūl al-badā'ī'* with a lengthy and sophisticated exposition of logic.
- (e) Muḥammad b. Yūsuf al-Sanūsī (d. 1490), active in the town of Tlemcen in what is today Algeria. He wrote a commentary on an expanded version of Abharī's *Īsāgūjī*; a commentary on an epitome on logic by the Tunisian scholar Ibn 'Arafā (d. 1401), and his own epitome of logic (known as *Mukhtaṣar al-Sanūsī*); and a commentary on it that became a standard handbook in North Africa.
- (f) Jalal al-Dīn al-Dawanī (d. 1502), active in western Persia. He wrote an esteemed but incomplete commentary on Taftāzānī's *Tahdhīb al-mantiq*, glosses on Jurjānī's glosses on Quṭb al-Dīn al-Taḥṭānī's commentaries on *al-Shamsiyya* and *Maṭāli' al-anwār*, and a treatise on the liar's paradox.
- (g) 'Isām al-Dīn al-Isfarāyīnī (d. 1536), active in eastern Persia and Central Asia. He wrote extensive glosses on Quṭb al-Dīn al-Taḥṭānī's commentary on the *Shamsiyya*.
- (h) Mīr Abū l-Faḥ al-Ḥusaynī (d. 1568), active in Safavid Iran. He wrote esteemed glosses on Dawanī's commentary on *Tahdhīb al-mantiq*.
- (i) Mullā 'Abdullāh al-Yazdī (d. 1581), active in Safavid Iran. He wrote a commentary on Taftāzānī's *Tahdhīb* that was widely studied in Persia and India.
- (j) Mullā Ṣadrā al-Shīrāzī (d. 1635), active in Safavid Iran. He wrote extensive glosses on the logic section of *Ḥikmat al-ishrāq* by the philosopher Suhrawardī (d. 1191), a handbook on logic entitled *al-Tanqīḥ* and a treatise on the division of knowledge into conception and assent (Lameer 2006).
- (k) 'Abd al-Ḥakīm al-Siyālkūtī (d. 1657), active in Mughal India. He wrote extensive glosses on Quṭb al-Dīn al-Taḥṭānī's commentary on the *Shamsiyya*.
- (l) Mīr Zāhid al-Harawī (d. 1690), active in Mughal India. He wrote esteemed glosses on Dawanī's commentary on *Tahdhīb al-mantiq* and on the treatise on conception and assent by Quṭb al-Dīn al-Taḥṭānī.
- (m) al-Ḥasan al-Yūsī (d. 1691), active in Morocco. He wrote extensive glosses on Sanūsī's *Mukhtaṣar* and a treatise on the difference between the differentia (*faṣl*) and the unique property (*khāṣṣa*).
- (n) Muḥibbullāh al-Bihārī (d. 1707), active in Mughal India. He wrote a handbook on logic entitled *Sullam al-'ulūm* that was much commented upon by later Indian scholars.
- (o) Ismā'īl Gelenbevī (d. 1791), a Turkish Ottoman scholar who wrote a commentary on Abharī's *Īsāgūjī*, extensive glosses on Dawanī's commentary (and Mīr Abū-l-Faḥ's glosses) on *Tahdhīb al-mantiq*, a treatise on modality, and a handbook on logic entitled *al-Burhān* that was much commented upon by later Ottoman scholars.

For much of the twentieth century, it was assumed that the mere fact that school handbooks, commentaries, and glosses became the main form of logical writings after the middle



of the fourteenth century is an indication of “stagnation,” “decadence,” and “commentary mongering” (Madkour 1969; Rescher 1964; Inati 1996). This view has been challenged by scholars who argue, sensibly, that one should at least look at this material before making such sweeping judgments (Street 2004; Wisnovsky 2004). After all, the very same scholars who have made such damning judgments would presumably not want to say that Al-Fārābī and Averroes do not deserve the attention of historians of logic merely because they wrote commentaries. Preliminary samplings of later literature indicate that the basics of modal and conditional logic as outlined by the thirteenth-century handbooks were taken as settled. However, extensive and often sophisticated discussions continued on other topics: the division of knowledge into conception and assent (Lameer 2006); whether a proposition has three parts (subject, predicate, and propositional connector) or four (plus assertion or negation of the connector) (El-Rouayheb 2016); the liar’s paradox (*al-jadhr al-aṣamm*) (Qaramaleki 2007); the apparently self-refuting nature of the principle that it is not possible to make any judgment about “what is not conceived in any way” (*al-majhūl al-muṭlaq*), the problem being that the principle seems precisely to be a judgment about what is not conceived in any way (Lameer 2014); and inferences involving relational propositions (El-Rouayheb 2010).

Nevertheless, the change of literary form that Arabic writings on logic underwent in the course of the fourteenth century is striking. After around 1350, extensive summaries of logic, such as had been written by a number of thirteenth- and early fourteenth-century scholars, become exceedingly rare. Henceforth, almost all lengthy Arabic writings on logic assumed the form of commentaries and glosses (on condensed handbooks, didactic poems) or short treatises on particular topics. In this respect, the development of Arabic logic had come full circle. After the mid-fourteenth century, writing on logic in Arabic again became intimately linked to the exegesis of texts.

## Cross-References

- ▶ Aristotelianism in the Greek, Latin, Syriac, Arabic, and Hebrew Traditions
- ▶ Aristotle, Arabic
- ▶ al-Fārābī, Abū Naṣr
- ▶ al-Ġazālī, Abū Hāmid Muḥammad
- ▶ Ibn Bājja, Abū Bakr ibn al-Sā’ig (Avenpace)
- ▶ Ibn Rushd, Muḥammad ibn Aḥmad al-Ḥafīd (Averroes)
- ▶ Ibn Sīnā, Abū ‘Alī (Avicenna)
- ▶ Ibn Suwār (Ibn al-Khammār)
- ▶ Ibn al-Ṭayyib
- ▶ Philosophy, Arabic
- ▶ al-Rāzī, Fakhr al-Dīn
- ▶ Theology Versus Philosophy in the Arab World
- ▶ al-Ṭūsī, Naṣīr al-Dīn
- ▶ Yaḥyā ibn ‘Adī

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## Logic, Arabic, in the Latin Middle Ages

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### Abstract

C. Prantl argued in the mid-nineteenth century that the part of western logic nowadays called *logica modernorum*, that is, the so called

theories of the properties of terms, entered into the Latin world from translations of Byzantine and Arabic logical works. This was, as M.L. de Rijk showed in the 1960s, completely wrong. He argued convincingly that this part of medieval logic was partly due to Aristotle's *Sophistici elenchi* but foremost it was due to the creative minds of late twelfth-century logicians. His judgment of earlier views was so harsh, however, that Arabic logic in the Latin tradition has hardly been studied at all. Most scholars are of the opinion that Arabic logic had very little, if any, influence on western logic, but although Arabic logic did not revolutionize western logic as was once thought, it certainly is part of the western logical tradition and as such it had quite a significant influence, though not in the way previously thought.

The Latin logicians of the thirteenth century had quite a good grasp of Arabic logic. The major source for this knowledge was the *Maqāṣid al-falāsifa* (*Intentions of the Philosophers*) by Abū Ḥāmid Muḥammad al-Ġazālī (1058–1111). It was supposed to be a preparatory work for his later much more well known *Tahāfut al-falāsifa* (*The Incoherence of the Philosophers*). The whole of the *Maqāṣid* contains a presentation of logic, physics, metaphysics, and theology and has been claimed to be an intelligent reworking of Avicenna's *Dānesh-name* (*Book of Science*), which is a compendium of his doctrines written in Persian. Al-Ġazālī's work was translated in full into Latin early in the second half of the twelfth century, which is not more than 50 or 75 years after it was written. In one of the manuscripts the title is *Liber Algazelis de summa theoricæ philosophiæ*, but it was also printed in Venice in 1506 under the title *Logica et philosophia Algazelis arabis*. The twelfth-century translation was by Dominicus Gundissalinus and was commissioned by John, the Archbishop of Toledo (1151–1166).

The Latin translation of the *Maqāṣid* was very much read and became, at least in the thirteenth century, the basic text from which the Latin authors gained their knowledge of Arabic

philosophy. The reason it became so much read was because it mentions some of the “hot” topics of the period, for example, the divisions of the sciences, the distinction between essence and existence, the eternity of the world, the number of souls, etc. It was also a very controversial work. In his *Tractatus de erroribus philosophorum*, Giles of Rome lists 18 errors of al-Ġazālī taken from the *Maqāṣid*. They later found their way into the *Directorium inquisitorum* from 1376 by Nicholas Eymerich. The logic became very well known as well. Albert the Great used it quite extensively and it was used or copied by Ramón Llull.

Al-Ġazālī begins the *Maqāṣid* with a distinction between imagination (*imaginatio*) and belief (*credulitas*). An imagination is an apprehension of a thing, he writes, which is signified by a single mental utterance (*dictio*) in the intellect. Names like “stone” or “tree,” etc. signify these apprehensions or imaginations. A belief is on the other hand a sentence or a complex utterance, that is, that which says or expresses something, like “the world begins.” A belief is always a composition of at least two imaginations. The kind of knowledge that is mediated by imagination is arrived at through definitions and descriptions and the kind of knowledge that is mediated by belief is arrived at through arguments. It is logic that gives the rules by which we are able to give good and true definitions and arguments. Hence, logic is the very foundation of knowledge and all science, argues al-Ġazālī.

The division of logic is done to show the aim or intention of logic. The aim is to define and prove. He gives the following fourfold division:

1. On terms and how they signify understandings (*intellectiones*).
2. On concepts (terms) and their divisions.
3. On propositions and their composition.
4. On proofs, which are subdivided into material and formal syllogisms.

The main thing to note about this division is the close connection between mind and logic. The view of logic as being about intentions is derived from Avicenna and it was very influential. It gave

rise to a major controversy in the thirteenth century between those who argued that logic was a science of discourse (*scientia sermocinalis*) and those who argued that it was a science of reason (*scientia rationalis*). Albert the Great argues, for example, that logic is a science of mental intentions.

The Arabic discussion of the matter of the syllogism found in al-Ġazālī’s logic is of particular interest. His division of the matter had an influence on several Latin logicians and among them on Thomas Aquinas. The matter of a syllogism consists in its premises. If they are credible and true, then the conclusion will be credible and true, but if the premises are false, then the conclusion will not be credible. Al-Ġazālī tries to explain what he means by the distinction between the matter and form of a syllogism by an analogy with a coin. The matter of the coin is the gold it is made of and its form is its roundness. If the form is destroyed or falsified in some way, we will not call it a coin anymore. Sometimes the matter of the coin is also changed, that is, a coin, he notes, might be made from iron or silver. It is then not worth as much, but it is still a coin. In the same way, the form and matter of a syllogism can change. If the form changes so that it is not in accordance with any of the figures, then it is no longer a syllogism and presumably not an argument anymore, but sometimes the form is the correct one, but the matter is different and the premises are only opinions or even sometimes false.

He gives the following division of the matter:

1. Demonstrative premises
2. Topical premises
3. Rhetorical and legal premises
4. Sophistical premises, and
5. Poetical premises.

Logic is hence subdivided into these five kinds.

Although the *Maqāṣid* was a summary of al-Fārābī’s and Avicenna’s doctrine, the Latin medieval logicians also had some knowledge of al-Fārābī’s and Avicenna’s logic directly. A twelfth-century translation of the beginning of Avicenna’s encyclopedic work *Kitāb al-Shifā’*

(*The Book of Healing*), namely the part on Porphyry's *Isagoge*, was circulating, and also a fragment of the part on the *Posterior Analytics* from the same book existed in Latin. Small fragments of some of al-Fārābī's logical works have also been discovered in Latin. Salman (1939), argues that there was knowledge of a commentary of the *Posterior Analytics* by al-Fārābī in the thirteenth century.

In the early thirteenth century, some of Averroes' commentaries on the *Organon* were translated into Latin. William of Luna translated the middle commentary on Porphyry's *Isagoge* and the middle commentaries on Aristotle's *Categories*, *De interpretatione*, *Prior Analytics*, and *Posterior Analytics* between the 1220s and 1230s, but Latin writers seem to have had knowledge of other logical works by Averroes than these.

Averroes' commentaries were important for a general understanding of Aristotle's very difficult texts. They are generally helpful in expounding the text and clearing up mistakes otherwise easily made, but the middle commentaries, unlike the major commentaries, do not really go beyond Aristotle's own text. In reading them carefully, however, an interpretation is usually indicated, but what influence, if any, they had in the subsequent thirteenth-century commentary tradition has not been carefully studied.

In many commentaries on Aristotle's logical works in the thirteenth century, a heavily metaphysical interpretation of logic is defended. There has been some discussion in the secondary literature about the source of this interpretation and one suggestion is that it has its source in Averroes' commentaries. His view of *differentia* can be found in Robert Kilwardby's commentaries on the *Isagoge* and the *Categories*. It can also be read into Aquinas' *De ente et essentia*. Averroes' treatment of modal syllogistics is also very interesting and strengthens his general metaphysical interpretation of Aristotle's logic. It seems also to have had some influence in the thirteenth century, particularly on Kilwardby's commentary on Aristotle's *Prior Analytics*. A detailed study of the logical theories in Arabic logic works accessible to Latin logicians has not been written yet. It is clear, however, that these doctrines never were as

influential as Prantl assumed, but neither did they exert no influence whatsoever.

## Cross-References

- ▶ [Albert the Great](#)
- ▶ [al-Fārābī, Abū Naṣr](#)
- ▶ [al-Ġazālī, Abū Ḥāmid Muḥammad](#)
- ▶ [Giles of Rome, Political Thought](#)
- ▶ [Ibn Rushd, Muḥammad ibn Aḥmad al-Ḥafīd \(Averroes\)](#)
- ▶ [Logic in the Arabic and Islamic World](#)
- ▶ [Robert Kilwardby](#)
- ▶ [Thomas Aquinas](#)

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## Logic, Byzantine

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### Abstract

The Byzantine attitude toward the study and use of logic was ambivalent. Although some Byzantine thinkers argued that logic is of no value in the search for true knowledge, and so logical studies should be dismissed, some others treated logic as the preliminary stage of the philosophical curriculum as well as an instrument in defending Christian doctrines or

in rejecting heretic and pagan views. Thus, there were Byzantine philosophers who wrote commentaries and paraphrases of the Aristotelian *Organon*, small essays on specific logical issues, and brief introductions to logic. Their interpretations of Aristotle's texts are not always original, but they are worth studying as important sources of ancient logic and as stepping-stones in the history of logic.

The Byzantines' engagement in logic focused mainly on the explanation and interpretation of the different treatises of the Aristotelian *Organon*. The Byzantine philosophers wrote commentaries and paraphrases of Aristotle's logical writings, small essays on specific issues raised in Aristotle's logic, as well as brief introductions to logic covering sketchily the whole of the *Organon*.

For instance, on the *Categories*, we have Photios' and Arethas' comments from the second half of the ninth century and George Scholarios' extensive commentary from the fifteenth century; on the *De interpretatione*, two paraphrases by Michael Psellos and Leo Magentenos, from the eleventh and thirteenth century respectively (only in their Renaissance editions), and again an extensive commentary by George Scholarios; on the *Prior Analytics*, Michael Psellos' and Leo Magentenos' paraphrases; on the *Posterior Analytics*, and in particular on the second book, the twelfth-century commentaries by Eustratios of Nicaea and by Theodore Prodromos; on parts of the *Topics*, the comments by John Italos from the eleventh century and by Leo Magentenos; and on the *Sophistici elenchi*, the twelfth-century commentary by Michael of Ephesus, wrongly attributed to Alexander of Aphrodisias, and by Sophonias from the thirteenth century. Moreover, on the margins of manuscripts in libraries all over the world, there are many Byzantine logical comments by anonymous authors, which are unfortunately still unedited and need to be carefully studied.

Among the numerous Byzantine essays on logical issues, we have, for instance, a small essay by Theodore Prodromos which systematically argues against Aristotle's doctrine in the

*Categories* that “great” and “small” are not quantities but relatives; Michael Psellos’ *opusculum* no.6 on whether the two Basils or the two Gregories are homonyms or synonyms; and John Italos’ paragraph 38 of his *De arte dialectica* which is devoted to an account of *reductio ad impossibile* as a kind of hypothetical proof.

Finally, there are many Byzantine introductions to logic, for instance, the short synopsis by the so-called ‘Anonymus Heiberg from the beginning of the eleventh century, Nikephoros Blemmydes’ thirteenth century *Epitome logica*, and George Pachymeres’ still unedited compendium of the *Organon* from the late thirteenth century. It is worth noticing that in their logical introductions, the Byzantines often added short accounts of the hypothetical syllogisms, in which Stoic elements can sometimes be detected, although their Stoic origin is hardly ever acknowledged.

The Byzantine philosophers were interested in the study and interpretation of Aristotle’s logic as the preliminary stage of the philosophical curriculum. During the eleventh century, the standard syllabus of a course at the advanced level of the Byzantine educational system started with Porphyry’s *Isagoge*, Aristotle’s *Categories*, the *De interpretatione*, and *Prior Analytics* 1.1–7. Thus, we also have Byzantine comments on Porphyry’s *Isagoge*, like those by Arethas and by George Scholarios, but also a short Plato-style elenctic dialogue by Theodore Prodromos on topics from the *Isagoge* under the title *Xenedemus*.

The explanations and interpretations of Aristotle’s logical texts suggested by the Byzantine scholars are not always original. There is no doubt that the Byzantines made ample use of the ancient logical commentaries, especially of those by the Neoplatonic commentators (e.g., Porphyry, Ammonius, Simplicius, Olympiodorus, Philoponus). They also tried to incorporate into their logical writings views expressed by the Christian Fathers (e.g., John of Damascus, Gregory of Nazianzus), in order to show that logical theories are in perfect agreement with the Christian dogma. Finally, right at the end of the Byzantine era, George Scholarios’ logical commentaries

show a strong dependence on Western scholasticism both in terms of their content and in terms of their structure.

It is not the case, however, that the Byzantine authors slavishly follow their sources, for there are occasions on which they explicitly criticize Aristotle’s logical theories or proudly stress their own contribution to logic. Indeed, sometimes they give a slightly different argument to support an established position, sometimes they make a small but interesting addition to an ancient doctrine (for instance, by supplying a logical diagram), and sometimes they considerably diverge from the generally accepted view and introduce their own ideas which often aim at reconciling the Christian tradition with ancient philosophy. The Byzantine works on logic, therefore, are quarries for information about ancient logical theories and offer explanations or modifications of Aristotle’s doctrines, many of which are interesting and some of which are surprisingly subtle.

But it was not only for teaching purposes that the Byzantines read Aristotle’s logic and commented on it. In their attempt to defend Christian doctrines and reject the views both of the heretics and of the pagans, logic seemed, at least to some of them, to be a helpful instrument. For the Byzantine attitude toward the study and use of logic was rather ambivalent. Although some Byzantine thinkers praised and themselves made use of, to a lesser or greater extent, Aristotle’s logic, there were others who fiercely rejected the logical doctrines of pagan philosophers and their use, especially in theology.

In particular, there are two periods in the history of Byzantine thought that clearly attest to the centrality of the debate concerning the value of logic. At the end of the eleventh century, John Italos was put to trial and condemned by the Orthodox Church for defending the view that logical reasoning should be applied to theological questions. His student Eustratios of Nicaea also tried in his theological treatises to prove the truth of Christian doctrines by using logical arguments and even stated that Christ himself had argued with the help of Aristotelian syllogisms. On the other hand, during the first half of the fourteenth century, Nikephoros Gregoras argued that logical



studies should be altogether dismissed and logical theory should be regarded as completely useless. His contemporaries, however, Barlaam of Calabria and Gregory Palamas, claimed that logic is indeed useful in defending Christian belief, but they disagreed between them as to its precise use; for although they both stressed that neither demonstrative nor dialectical syllogisms yield any knowledge of God's essence, they debated over the question whether God's attributes can be the subject of demonstrative syllogisms.

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- ▶ [Barlaam of Calabria](#)
- ▶ [Eustratios of Nicaea](#)
- ▶ [George Pachymeres](#)
- ▶ [George Scholarios \(Gennadios II\)](#)
- ▶ [Gregory Palamas](#)
- ▶ [John Italos](#)
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## Logic, Jewish

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### Abstract

The study of Aristotelian logic was widespread among medieval Jews who studied even a rudimentary amount of profane science. Jews in Islamic lands appear to have learned logic mostly from the Arabic translations of Aristotle and the works of the Muslim Peripatetics. In Southern Europe, especially Spain, Southern France, and Italy, the earliest logical texts translated from Arabic into Hebrew were by al-Fārābī, followed by Averroes, whose paraphrases (Middle Commentaries) on the Aristotelian *Organon* were the authoritative texts that spawned commentaries. Beginning in the fourteenth century, Jews became familiar with the works of Scholastic logic, especially the *Tractatus* of Peter of Spain, and in the fifteenth century, Scholastic writings were translated into Hebrew, and one can speak of Hebrew Scholastic logic. Aside from the elementary primers that covered most of the *Organon*, the focus of the study was the *logica antiqua* (Isagoge, Categories, *De Interpretatione*); some authors were also interested in the *Posterior Analytics*. With the exception of Levi Gersonides (1288–1344), none embarked on an independent analysis of syllogistic, including modal syllogistic. Physicians, as well as rabbis engaged in religious disputations, had practical motives for the study of Scholastic logic, but some Jews simply were attracted to logic for its own sake. Because of its ideological neutrality, logic was studied not only by Aristotelian philosophers but by kabbalists as well.

The study of Aristotelian logic was widespread among medieval Jews who were educated even a rudimentary amount of profane science. Jews in Islamic lands appear to have learned logic mostly from the Arabic translations of Aristotle and the works of the Muslim Peripatetics. Aside from a short logical treatise attributed to Maimonides, little is extant in Judaeo-Arabic, the language of Jews living in Islamic lands. In Christian Europe, the earliest philosophical texts translated from Arabic into Hebrew were al-Fārābī's short treatises on the books of the *Organon*. These texts can be divided into three categories: (a) introductory works with sections on logic, (b) introductory essays to the study of logic, and (c) short treatises on individual books of the *Organon*. There is evidence for Hebrew translations of al-Fārābī's long commentaries on the *De Interpretatione* and the *Topics*; fragments of his long commentary on the *Prior Analytics* are preserved in Averroes' *Logical Questions*, some of which were translated into Hebrew, and in the last chapter of Maimonides' *Medical Aphorisms*. Some passages from the long commentary on the *Categories* are preserved in a commentary by the fifteenth-century Judah b. Isaac b. Moses Cohen on Averroes' *Middle Commentaries* on the *Categories*. These may have belonged to a commentary on the *Categories* by the fourteenth-century translator-savant, Samuel b. Judah of Marseilles, whom Judah considered his "teacher." The Hebrew translations of al-Fārābī's logical writings are extant in a significant number of copies, especially the *Enumeration of the Sciences*, the incomplete Hebrew translation of the short treatise on the *Topics*, and the *Sophistics*.

Two highly popular thirteenth-century Hebrew works that show clear influence of Farabian doctrine are Samuel Ibn Tibbon's glossary of foreign and original terms his Hebrew translation of Maimonides' *Guide for the Perplexed* and the Hebrew translation of the aforementioned logical treatise attributed to Maimonides under the name *Logical Terms*. The glossary includes several extended definitions of terms in logic, including the five predicables, ten categories, kinds of statements, and terms. Entire paragraphs from al-Fārābī's *Short Treatises* on the *Isagoge* and *Categories*

are “appropriated” without attribution, a practice that occurs frequently in Hebrew logical texts. Samuel also shows familiarity with Averroes’ *Epitome* of the *Organon* and his *Middle Commentaries* on Aristotle’s books. The *Logical Terms* appears to have been one of the most widely read works of Jewish logic: it is extant in over 80 manuscripts and 30 printed editions and was translated into Hebrew from Arabic three times. The work was used mostly as a primer for students before beginning the study of logic and is sometimes found in manuscripts with more advanced works. There is no evidence that the *Logical Terms* had any impact on Jewish intellectuals until late in the thirteenth or early in the fourteenth centuries, but since this work owes so much to al-Fārābī, ascertaining such impact would be difficult. Fourteenth-century savants Joseph Ibn Kaspi and Moses of Narbonne commented on it; the work is also mentioned by their contemporary Gersonides. Other medieval commentaries are attributed to Joseph Albo and Mordecai Comtino in the fifteenth, Abraham Farissol and Moses b. Shem Tov Ibn Habib in the sixteenth, and Samuel b. Saadia Ibn Danan in the seventeenth centuries, in addition to anonymous commentaries.

Between Samuel Ibn Tibbon’s glossary and the *Logical Terms*, one finds a somewhat more ambitious exposition of logic in Judah ha-Cohen Ibn Matqah’s encyclopedic work, the *Investigation of Wisdom*. It is the first Jewish compendium of the books of the *Organon*, or more precisely the first five books of the *Organon*. Judah was only interested in that part of Aristotle’s logic that led up to and included the theory of demonstration, since his work dealt with the sciences. Although the section on logic is mostly an abridgment of the Averroes’ *Middle Commentaries* on the relevant books, it also contains many elements from al-Fārābī’s introductory works and commentaries, as well as from Averroes’ *Epitome* of the *Organon*. Averroes’ *Middle Commentaries* on the first five books of the *Organon* were translated into Hebrew by Jacob Anatoli in 1232. The remaining four books of the *Organon* were translated in the next century by Qalonymos b. Qalonymos (*Topics*

and *Sophistics*) and Todros Todrosi (*Rhetoric* and *Poetics*).

By the mid-thirteenth century, Jewish intellectuals in Provence and Italy had at their disposal an array of Hebrew logical texts of varying difficulty. The doctrines to which they were exposed stemmed mainly from the introductory works and short treatises by al-Fārābī, although increasingly students were studying the texts of Aristotle themselves in Hebrew translation “as understood by the sage Averroes,” i.e., Averroes’ *Middle Commentaries*. The second half of the thirteenth and early fourteenth centuries saw translations of two other works that were destined to become popular vehicles for the transmission of Arabic Aristotelian logic into Hebrew: Averroes’ *Epitome* of the *Organon* in 1288–1289 by Jacob b. Makhir in Provence and Al-Ġazālī’s *Intentions of the Philosophers* by Isaac Albalag (late thirteenth century). Both works differ in order, structure, and occasionally content from Aristotle’s logical writings as presented in Averroes’ paraphrases. The *Epitome*, like other works of Arabic logic, is organized around the two types of knowledge, conception and assent. Under the former are subsumed the components of conception (signification of terms) and what leads to conception (the doctrine of the predicables), as well as what is useful, though not necessary, for conception (the doctrine of the *Categories*). Under the latter are subsumed the structure of assent (the doctrine of the proposition) and what leads to assent (the doctrine of the syllogism), as well as the rules according to which syllogisms are constructed (the doctrine of topical inferences). Having covered the broad outlines of conception and assent, Averroes applies them in the second half of the work to the five logical arts – demonstrative, sophistic, dialectic, rhetorical, and poetic. Jacob b. Makhir’s translation of the *Epitome* was criticized by Samuel b. Judah of Marseilles, who retranslated it in 1329, but the sole extant manuscript of the latter’s translation shows few significant divergences. Under the shortened and misleading title *The Entire Art of Logic* (at title appearing in manuscripts for various texts), the work was printed in 1559, one of the

few works of Hebrew logic to be printed in the premodern period.

In addition to Isaac Albalag's translation of the *Intentions of the Philosophers*, which he supplemented with his Averroistic "emendations," there were at least two other translations: one by an anonymous writer around the same time as Albalag and the other by the Provençal physician Judah Nathan in the mid-fourteenth century. The first section of this tripartite "encyclopedia" deals with logic, and, because of the popularity of the work as a whole, it became one of the most popular presentations of logic among the Jews through the Middle Ages and Renaissance. The section on logic is also constructed around conception and assent and is divided into five parts: terms, concepts, propositions, and syllogisms in their formal and material aspects. These parts correspond roughly to the five subsections, except that the material aspect of the syllogism, i.e., the epistemic value of syllogistic premises, is treated in the fourth subsection and the theory of demonstration in the fifth. The *Intentions* was appreciated by Jews both as an introduction to philosophy, albeit a popular one that needed emending (Albalag), and as a convenient manual that would obviate the need for further study (Nathan).

In the fourteenth century, especially in Southern France, the translation of Arabic manuals, encyclopedias, and commentaries gave way to the production of Hebrew compendia and commentaries. The Provençal Jewish savant, Joseph Kaspi, wrote his own abridgment of logic, *The Bundle of Silver*, while living in Spain (c. 1332–1333), for his son and his contemporaries. Kaspi writes that he only includes logical doctrines necessary for understanding the Scripture, drawn from the first five books of the *Organon* and the *Sophistics*, and not the *Topics*, *Rhetoric*, or *Poetics*, which, he claims, are for idle thinkers. While he was familiar with the short works by al-Fārābī and Averroes, these were too difficult for the beginning student. Kaspi follows and drastically abbreviates Averroes' *Middle Commentaries* in the early books, but he borrows from Averroes' *Epitome* and al-Fārābī's short treatises throughout the work, adding examples of his own

and from the Scripture to illustrate logical doctrine. The part corresponding to the *Sophistics* is an abbreviation of al-Fārābī's short treatise and not Averroes' *Middle Commentaries*, which had been translated into Hebrew in 1313 by Qalonymos ben Qalonymos (who later attacked Kaspi for misunderstanding Maimonides). In general, Kaspi relies on Averroes' *Epitome* and al-Fārābī's short treatises when the text in Averroes' *Middle Commentaries* becomes too challenging for beginners.

Al-Ġazālī's *Intentions of the Philosophers* was commented upon twice in the late thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, first by the translator Isaac Albalag and then by Moses of Narbonne, both Averroists. Albalag only devotes a handful of his emendations to the section on logic; some of the manuscripts, however, have two interpolated comments attributed to "Abner" that defend the need to posit a fourth syllogistic figure and criticize the Christian practice of adding five "indirect moods" to the first figure. G. Vajda identified the author of the glosses with the fourteenth-century Jewish philosopher and later convert Abner of Burgos; whoever the author is, he seems to be unaware that Galen had posited a fourth figure or that Averroes had criticized it; both points are contained in Averroes' *Middle Commentaries* and *Epitome*. Moses of Narbonne comments sporadically on the text, occasionally using examples from the Bible and Talmud. In addition to Moses' commentary, there are commentaries by the fifteenth-century Italian poet Moses da Rieti, the sixteenth-century Karaite scholar Abraham Bali (c. 1510 – the commentary is only on the first section), his younger contemporary the Salonican philosopher Moses Almosnino entitled *The Tower of Strength*, and two anonymous commentaries, one of Provençal origin.

The *Intentions of the Philosophers* presented to its readers the doctrines of Avicenna, little of whose own work was translated into Hebrew during the Middle Ages, as far as we know. Excerpts from Avicenna are preserved in a philosophical anthology of texts translated by Todros Todrosi in a single manuscript. In the section dedicated to logic, Todrosi presents excerpts from Fakhr

al-Dīn al-Rāzī's *Eastern Investigations*, al-Fārābī's short treatises on logic, and Chapter 8 of the long commentary on the *Topics* (extant only in this Hebrew excerpt). Avicenna's *Cure*, Themistius' paraphrase of the *Prior Analytics* and the *Posterior Analytics* (extant only in this Hebrew excerpt), Al-Ġazālī's *Criterion of Knowledge*, and Averroes' *Middle and Long Commentaries* on the *Posterior Analytics* and the *Middle Commentaries* on the *Topics*.

Critical gloss-commentaries on the first seven books of Averroes' *Middle Commentaries* on the *Organon* were completed between c. 1321 and c. 1323 by Levi Gersonides, the first part of his project of writing gloss-commentaries on the writings of Averroes available to him. These may have originated as oral comments in his lectures, but he wrote them down and in some cases revised them significantly. Gersonides assumed that his readers would have access to Anatoli's translation of the first five books, but not necessarily to Qalonymos' translations of the *Topics* and *Sophistics*. For the former he presented just his own gloss-commentary; for the latter, he weaved his commentary together with the translation.

Gersonides' commentary on the first three books of Averroes' *Middle Commentaries* takes the form of notes, explanatory and critical; only in the commentary on the *De Interpretatione* does one encounter longer quotations from Aristotle, with brief explanations inserted within the text. In his introduction he informs his reader that he is not writing a commentary for its own sake, since, in his opinion, the contents of Aristotle's logical works need no explanation. His intention is threefold: to explain Averroes' abridgments in the books of logic summarily, to mention the places where his views differ from those of Aristotle "according to what Averroes understood from his words," and to investigate matters not investigated. Since the original works really need no explanation, he writes, composition and not commentary is his primary aim. At first glance, that statement seems odd since there is much commentary in the work. But what Gersonides appears to be saying is that the aim of his commentary is not so much to explain Averroes' commentary on Aristotle, although there is some of that as well.

Rather, he wishes to provide his readers with the correct teachings of logic by means of commenting on the canonical texts of the ancients and correcting and completing them when necessary.

In the commentary on the *Prior Analytics* and the *Posterior Analytics*, the commentary is expanded because of the purported "difficulties" of the former and the "great usefulness" of the latter. His commentary on the *Posterior Analytics* was initially planned to be even more extensive. Gersonides' sources are mostly Averroes' commentaries, both *Middle Commentaries* and the *Epitome*, although he mentions al-Fārābī's commentaries and refers to the *Logical Terms* obliquely. There is no indication that he was familiar with Scholastic logic, but, like other philosophers in Provence, he makes occasional remarks about the "language of the Christians."

Gersonides' commentaries on the *Organon* "as understood by Averroes" were much studied by subsequent Jewish students, beginning already with his contemporaries, if we may judge from the large number of extant manuscripts and references to it in other works. Textual evidence from an anonymous commentary on the *Isagoge* and the *Categories* and from the aforementioned excerpts of a lost commentary by Samuel b. Judah of Marseilles preserved by Judah b. Isaac b. Moses Kohen in his commentary indicate that Gersonides was read and much criticized by contemporaries such as Jedaiah ha-Penini and Samuel, who appear to have corresponded with him after his commentary was disseminated. This is especially true of the commentaries on the first three books of the *Organon*, which formed the core of logical studies for Jewish intellectuals. If Averroes' *Middle Commentaries* became canonical works for the Jews, then Gersonides' commentaries became the canonical commentaries to Averroes. The Italian Jewish poet Moses da Rieti actually versified in Hebrew (and in *terza rima*!) some of the *Middle Commentaries* on the *Isagoge* "with the objections of Gersonides." It is small wonder that when Jewish savants in the Renaissance translated the commentaries of Averroes into Latin for the Venice Juntine edition of Averroes (1562–74), they included Gersonides'

commentaries on *Isagoge*, the *Categories*, and the *De Interpretatione*.

In fact, a critical note from Gersonides' *De Interpretatione* commentary in Jacob Mantino's Latin translation was discussed several centuries later by Sir William Hamilton and J. S. Mill. Hamilton had included the note in a list of authorities who purported to defend the doctrine of the quantification of the predicate. J. S. Mill pointed out in *An Examination of Sir William Hamilton's Philosophy* that according to the note, while one could theoretically quantify the predicate, the resulting sentence would express two propositions, e.g., "All As are Bs" and "All Bs are As," which violated the linguistic custom of one sentence expressing one proposition, a position that Mill endorsed. In subsequent editions, Mill referred to Levi's note as "an excellent passage from a Jewish philosopher of the fourteenth century, which exactly confutes Sir W. Hamilton's doctrine."

Gersonides' independent positions in his logic commentaries earned him more censure than praise. Fifteenth-century critics in Europe included Judah Kohen, probably in Northern Italy (according to Zonta); Judah b. Jehiel Messer Leon, one of the central figures of Italian Jewry during the Renaissance and, as we shall see below, the chief representative of what may be termed, "Hebrew scholastic logic"; and "the sage Eli," whom Steinschneider identified with the fifteenth-century Spanish Jewish translator and philosopher, Eli Habillo, although this identification has recently been questioned. Other anonymous commentaries cite Gersonides' commentary, one occasionally defending him against the criticisms of "Eli, known as Geronimo." Abraham Bibago, an older contemporary of Eli Habillo, wrote a commentary on Averroes' *Middle Commentaries* on the *Posterior Analytics* in which he criticizes Gersonides. More than any other commentator, he remarks, Gersonides had been led by confusions and mistakes to disagree with Averroes on several points and "to spout nonsense upon nonsense" in his commentary. In the second half of the fifteenth century, the Byzantine scholar Elijah Mizrahi wrote a highly penetrating series of animadversions on Gersonides' *Isagoge* commentary.

Gersonides' most interesting work from the standpoint of the history of logic is *The Book of the Correct Syllogism* (or *The Correct Book of the Syllogism*), which contains his treatment of syllogistic and non-syllogistic inference. Gersonides took it upon himself to "correct the errors" of Aristotle's modal logic, notably in the validity of the conversion of modal premises and modal syllogisms and the assessed modality of their conclusions. But to do this, he broadened the scope of the book to deal with all inferences: immediate and mediate (i.e., syllogistic). The treatment of inference is by far the most formalized among the Jews and arguably the most formalized in premodern logic. First positing and defending a set of rules that yield "consequences by virtue of the whole and the part," he deduces through them the laws of conversion and subalternation, justifies the various conditions of the syllogism, investigates the concludent premise pairs, and constructs the rules of inference for arguments with modal premises. Along the way he provides a spirited defense of the fourth syllogistic figure against the criticisms of Averroes and considers inferences with quantified predicates, as well as relational terms and prepositions, and two different interpretations of modal operators in the two editions of the book. Unlike Gersonides' commentaries on the *Organon*, the *Correct Syllogism* made little impact upon subsequent Jewish intellectuals, although the work was translated into Latin during the Renaissance.

The study of Arabic-Hebrew logic continued in Provence well into the fifteenth century, even after the general decline of philosophy among the Jews there. Two works testify to the enduring interest of this material: *The Royal Treasure*, a compendium of logic, metaphysics, and physics, in verse form, by Abraham Abigdor, and a lengthy commentary on Averroes' *Epitome* on the *Organon* by Mordecai Nathan. In the latter work, the influence of Scholastic logic is felt, especially in the section on the syllogism, where Mordecai cites the *Tractatus* of Peter of Spain. By the fifteenth century in Provence, a classic like Averroes' *Epitome* had been supplemented with a commentary that takes the Scholastic tradition of logic for granted.



Beginning in the fourteenth century in Provence and Italy and the fifteenth century in Spain, one finds a growing acquaintance with Scholastic logic among the Jews and then Hebrew Scholastic logic, itself. Much of this logic was familiar, since both Arabic and Latin logic derived in large part from the Aristotelian canon. Yet there were whole areas of Latin logic that had no counterpart in the Arabic tradition, such as supposition and syncategorematic theory, or the theory of consequences and insolubles.

The earliest dated work that draws on Scholastic logic is a translation and adaptation of a Latin gloss-commentary on the *Tractatus* of Peter of Spain, by Hezeqiah bar Halafta in 1320. In the introduction Hezeqiah writes that he had come across a Latin gloss-commentary on that popular work. Hezeqiah translated the commentary because of its usefulness in disputations with Christians, its value for sharpening the mind, and its brevity and comprehensiveness. As is the practice of other Hebrew translators of this period, Hezeqiah does not translate word for word; rather he introduces glosses that cite freely from the Jewish and Arab philosophical traditions and “Judaizes” the material when possible.

A more telling example of literary appropriation through adaptation is found in Abraham Abigdor’s translation of the *Tractatus* in the late fourteenth century. Abraham replaces Peter’s definitions with others taken from the Arab Aristotelian tradition and waves into the text long passages of Averroes’ *Middle Commentaries*, substituting them for the Latin text where possible. In the work’s only gloss, Abraham informs his audience of the Christian practice of listing the major premise first; he needs to mention the divergence from the Arab tradition in order to explain the Scholastic “Barbara, Celarent” mnemonic, which assumes the priority of the major premise. The fourteenth-century scriptural exegete Shemariah the Cretan translated the *Tractatus* and passed it off as his own work, saying that he would write a book containing “all that is necessary for the readers of my books and commentaries to know.” The “author” tries as best as he can to disguise the book’s foreign origin by writing in the first person and substituting Hebrew linguistic

phenomena for Latin. Shemariah may have translated this book in his youth at the court of Robert d’Anjou.

Jewish treatments of logic written in Byzantium in the late fourteenth and early fifteenth centuries, such as Elijah b. Eliezer’s *Book of Logic*, the relevant chapters of the Karaite Aaron b. Elijah of Nicomedia’s *Tree of Life*, and Joseph b. Moses Kilti’s “the Greek’s” *Offering of Judah*, show no evidence of Scholastic logic. Only later, in the commentary on the *Logical Terms* by Mordecai Comtino (Khomatiano) do we find some familiarity with Latin logic manuals of the Renaissance, perhaps because of the ties between Venice and Constantinople. Comtino is one of the first Jewish logicians who mentions the so-called “false” fourth figure of the Renaissance logicians, which is really nothing other than a first-figure syllogism with transposed premises. He allows for their being four possible figures, but he holds that only the first three are significant. Comtino wrote a philosophical commentary on the Torah “containing Logic and Grammar, whereby the Torah is elucidated.” Like Shemariah, if less enthusiastically, Comtino believed in the importance of logic for the study of Scripture.

The study of medicine provided one impetus for Jews to study manuals of Scholastic logic; another was to engage in religious disputations with Christians, especially in Spain and in Italy. Moses da Rieti lists the Latin names of the 14 direct syllogistic moods, with examples, in order to aid Jewish religious disputants, “so that their syllogisms not be rejected [by the Christians] as ill-formed, although their opinions are correct.” He makes the important remark that the order of the premises in the syllogism does not matter, provided that the syllogistic rules are observed, a logical point that was disputed as late as the nineteenth century. But rather than provide a more detailed explanation of the information contained in the mnemonic, da Rieti refers his reader to the *Tractatus*, presumably in one of its Hebrew versions.

While these practical motivations for the study of logic from Latin sources were of importance, some Jews were simply attracted to the new kind of logic, though not to all aspects of Scholastic

logic. Jewish readers were interested mainly in the *logica antiqua*, the standard material of the Aristotelian *Organon* (less the *Posterior Analytics*) because it corresponded by and large to the subject matter of logic as reflected in the popular works of the Arabic-Hebrew logical tradition and it was not bound to the peculiarities of Latin. In contrast, the *logica modernorum* developed by the Scholastic logicians in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries was of considerably less interest. The exception was the “Barbara, Celarent” mnemonic, which seems to have been quite important, considering the number of attempts to render it in Hebrew.

More advanced works of Scholastic logic were translated into and composed in Hebrew in the fifteenth century. In Spain, Abraham Shalom translated a series of disputed *quaestiones* on the *Isagoge*, the *Categories*, and the *De Interpretatione*, which he attributed to “the sage Marsilio.” Abraham Shalom’s acquaintance and philosophical correspondent, Eli Habillo, translated several Scholastic tracts of logic concerning the problem of universals. One of these has been shown Zonta to be identical with the version of the *De unitate universalis* of Vincent Ferrer used by Petrus Niger. Two others are the four chapters on universals from Ockham’s *Summa Logicae* (I:14–17) and the *De Universalibus* mistakenly attributed to Aquinas. The four chapters from the *Summa Logicae* are the only known Hebrew translation of Ockham’s popular textbook.

The full impact of Scholastic influence on Hebrew logic was felt in Italy, first in the writings of isolated individuals and then in the education of Italian Jewish youth. We noted above Shemariah the Cretan’s ties to the court of Robert d’Anjou; another translator who had been associated with the court was Judah Romano, whose anthology of philosophical questions includes excerpts from the commentaries on the *Posterior Analytics* and the *Rhetoric* by Giles of Rome and commentaries and writings on the *De Interpretatione* and the *Categories* by Angelus de Camerino. Another of Romano’s anthologies includes a translation of an excerpt from the *De fallaciis ad quosdam nobiles* mistakenly attributed to Aquinas.

With Judah Messer Leon (Italy, d.1498), we encounter something new: a Jewish Scholastic logician writing in Hebrew. Messer Leon’s works include an introductory textbook on logic, *The Perfection of Beauty* (based to some extent on Paul of Venice’s *Logica Parva*); commentaries on the *Isagoge*, *Categories*, and *De Interpretatione* according to Averroes (dependent, according to Husik, on Burley’s *Super Artem Veterem Expositio*); and commentaries on the *Prior Analytics* and the *Posterior Analytics*, according to Averroes. His student, David the Sefaradi, calls the latter a translation of Paul of Venice. In the introduction to the *Perfection of Beauty*, Messer Leon adds to the conventional motives for writing a new logical textbook the need to combat the “sophistries and deceits” of the “pseudo-philosophers among our co-religionists,” namely, Gersonides. It should be emphasized that Messer Leon’s use of Scholastic logic was not directed against the older logical tradition of the Arab Peripatetics. On the contrary, he saw himself as a defender of Averroes and Aristotle against the bold and audacious attacks of the heterodox Gersonides. The *Perfection of Beauty* encompasses almost the entire range of elementary Scholastic logic, including obligations and insolubles. It is extant in around 13 manuscripts, and an abridgment was made of it by the translator-philosopher Abraham Farissol, who had studied at Messer Leon’s academy. Messer Leon, or one of his students, may have written a compendium and questions on Porphyry’s *Isagoge*, followed by a compendium on the *Categories*. Some of the questions and discussions show a marked similarity to the *Quaestiones in Veterem artem* of Radulphus Brito.

By the mid-sixteenth century, logical works by Jews had become increasingly rare, especially in Europe. One important work is by the physician-philosopher, Moses b. Judah Galiano, a translator from both Arabic and Latin, which covers the material from the *Isagoge* and the *Categories*, and in which the author wishes to defend Aristotle and Averroes against the objections of the some of the “recent” authors; he cites Boethius, Albertus Magnus, Thomas, Scotus, and Burleigh “the sophist” among others.

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## Lorenzo Valla

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### Abstract

Valla was one of the most important and interesting humanists of fifteenth-century Italy. Not only did he give the humanist program some of its most trenchant and combative formulations, but also made numerous positive contributions to scholarship. He translated Herodotus and Homer, commented on Livy and Quintilian, and exposed the famous Donation of Constantine as being a forgery. He approached critically for the first time the Greek text of the New Testament, an approach that had an immense

influence on Erasmus. He also wrote a highly influential textbook on the *Fine Points of the Latin Language (Elegantiae linguae Latinae)*, in which he discussed a host of semantical, syntactical, and morphological features of classical Latin. Philosophically the most interesting work is his *Repastinatio dialectice et philosophie*, a heavy critique of some basic tenets of scholastic-Aristotelian philosophy and dialectic. What connects all these contributions is his central idea that language lies at the basis of our intellectual endeavors. Rejecting the scholastic, scientific approach toward language, he argued that the study of language – from the meaning of singular words to the analysis of extended forms of argumentation – should be thoroughly based on a close empirical study of language. For Valla it was important that words and arguments should not be taken out of context, for this invariably brings with it a change in meaning, and consequently gives rise to philosophical problems where none existed. He insisted that we should follow the linguistic custom of the ancients rather than construct abstract theories about language and argumentation in general. But he was no slavish follower of one particular brand of classical Latin, for example, Ciceronian Latin, and often treated classical Latin as a common language in opposition to the technical vocabulary of the scholastics.

### Life

Lorenzo Valla (1406–1457) did not have an easy life. Equipped with a sharp and polemical mind, an even sharper pen, and a sense of self-importance verging on the pathological, he made many enemies not only among his scholastic contemporaries but also among his humanist colleagues. Born in Rome in a family with ties to the papal curia, Valla hoped to succeed his uncle as papal secretary, but he had already aroused the anger of some major humanists at the court. In 1431, he moved to Pavia where he taught rhetoric and wrote the first version of his controversial dialogue on pleasure. He also started to work on

his attack on scholastic philosophy and on his handbook of the Latin language. After having attacked the jurists for their mediocre learning and lack of the linguistic skills necessary to study law, he had to flee Pavia. He then worked in the court of King Alfonso of Aragon who was campaigning against Pope Eugenius IV. As court humanist, Valla wrote a series of anticlerical treatises, the most famous of which was *On the Donation of Constantine*, in which he exposed that document to be a forgery, thereby exploding one of the pillars of the papal claims to worldly power. In 1447, Valla returned to Rome to work at the Papal curia, first as apostolic scribe and later as a papal secretary. He taught rhetoric and translated Thucydides and Herodotus. His last years were marred by further unedifying polemics with other humanists. He died in 1457 and was buried in the Lateran, somewhat surprisingly for a man who had spent so much time fighting the clerical establishment.

### Valla's Thought: Some Basic Convictions

Valla's thought is shaped by the following basic convictions; most of them are typical for a humanist but Valla was much more conscious about them. They shaped his critical review of scholastic-Aristotelian philosophy.

1. Valla's world is the world of things we see and experience. It is pretty much a world of things with their qualities that do or undergo things. In order to explain or analyze this common sense picture of the world we do not need theoretical constructs, metaphysical notions, elaborate theories, or technical vocabulary.
2. This world – including human beings with their mental and spiritual inner life – naturally finds expression in language. But language is not just a piece of garment or a neutral medium that leaves the contents of what is being said unaffected. Language shapes the way we think about the world and how we categorize it. Whoever does not understand the workings of language falls prey to muddled thinking.
3. For a humanist such as Valla, this language could only be the Latin as used in Antiquity, especially that of the great authors. Valla was not wedded to one particular brand of classical Latin – for example, Ciceronian Latin – but considered postclassical developments to be detrimental to a common sense expression and explanation of the world. He was not against the introduction of new words as new things were being discovered unknown to Antiquity (e.g., “bombarda”), but the language of the scholastics was something wholly different.
4. Valla's aversion against scholastic Latin was thus not solely aesthetic. The study of language as pursued by the scholastics and speculative grammarians was misguided in a fundamental way. Of course, the scholastics had a wholly different program of study: they wanted to lay bare the logical forms inherent in language, being interested, for example, in the properties of terms and how terms were related to things in the world. They tried to formalize patterns of reasoning in order to establish truth conditions and rules of inference. But they had to do this in Latin, even though in a particular brand that was only vaguely related to its classical form. Their Latin was not only a metalanguage, a technical device, but was also used as an object-language, as an object of study. According to the humanists, the scholastics imposed artificial rules on Latin rather than examined the linguistic practice of the great Latin writers in order to determine the meaning of terms and rules of grammar and syntax. In this, they often erred in their judgments and opinions. They analyzed, for example, the behavior of words such as “all,” “some,” “not,” “possible,” and “necessary” without first making a proper study of how these words were actually used by Latin authors. Indeed, it was not simply a matter of making a mistake here or there. The scholastic language fundamentally distorted our view of reality, and confounded people.
5. Moreover, it had confounded people in a very essential way. According to Valla, the scholastics tried to explain Christian dogma's by

superimposing their theories and technical vocabulary on religious faith. Scholastic terminology had functioned as a kind of Trojan horse, bringing within the citadel of Christian faith pagan elements that had spoiled, defiled, and needlessly complicated its purity. As part of Valla's program to return to the sources of Christianity he inaugurated a program of study of the New Testament and patristic sources that had a great impact on biblical studies by later humanists. The explication of Christian faith had to appeal to the hearts of men. It had to turn to rhetoric and grammar rather than to logic and metaphysics.

6. Closely related to the previous point was Valla's critique of what he saw as the stifling atmosphere of the scholastic establishment. The scholastics recognized only one master whom they followed not only in philosophy but also in theology. Valla attacked this ipse dixit attitude: if Aristotle has said so, it is true. This is a gross distortion of scholastic practices, but it is of course true that Aristotle was often regarded as "the master who knows." Safeguarding his authority was a major task of scholastic exegesis. Valla however held that the true philosopher does not follow any one master. The true philosopher does not belong to a sect or a school but sees it as his task to critically examine even the greatest authorities. That is why in Antiquity, Pythagoras modestly claimed not to be a wise man but a lover of wisdom. What the scholastics had forgotten was that there were many alternatives in Antiquity to "The Philosopher," many sects and many other types of philosophers.

These basic convictions found expression in many of Valla's works. In what follows, his *Repastinatio dialectice et philosophie* will be singled out because it is widely considered to be the most philosophical of his works. But his other works too, such as his advanced handbook of Latin, his dialogue on the highest good, and his critical work on the New Testament, proceed from the same convictions. Obviously, the notion of "philosophy" in a humanist thinker such as Valla should be taken in a wide, flexible sense.

## The Critique of Aristotelian-Scholastic Thought

In his *Repastinatio*, Valla tries to shaken the foundations of the Aristotelian edifice. The term "*repastinatio*" not only means "re-ploughing" or "re-tilling" but also "cutting back" and "weeding out." Valla wants to weed out all that he thinks is barren and infertile and to recultivate the ground by sprinkling it with the fertile waters of rhetoric and grammar. The term *repastinatio* is therefore an indication that Valla considers his program one of reform rather than one of destruction in spite of his often aggressive and polemical tone. The ten categories of Aristotle, for instance, are reduced to three (substance, quality, and action) rather than abolished entirely. At the back of his mind was the grammatical triad: noun, adjective, and verb, even though Valla realized that there was no simple one-to-one correspondence between nouns and substances or between verbs and actions. (A verb, for example, can also signify a quality.) From a grammatical point of view, words like "father," "tall," "at home," and "grey-haired" all describe a quality of someone: hence, there is no need to keep separate categories for place, time, relation, etc. Valla went on to apply his analysis of things in terms of substances qualified by qualities and actions to the soul and God. The result of his reduction of the ten Aristotelian categories to his triad is a very lean ontology that has reminded scholars of William of Ockham's nominalism. But while Ockham wants to keep the categories as long as we realize that they categorize terms rather than things, Valla wants to reduce them to substance, quality, and action because only this triad points to really existing aspects of things. Valla's grammatical analysis has hardly anything in common with Ockham's terminist-logical approach. On a similar note, Valla reduces the six transcendental terms – "being," "thing," "something," "one," "true," and "good" – to "thing" (Latin *res*).

Another well-known example of his grammatical approach is his rejection of scholastic terms such as "entity" (*entitas*), "this-hood" (*hecceitas*), and "quidity" (*quidditas*) because they do not conform to the rules of word formation, rules that can be gleaned from a detailed study of

classical texts. Related to this analysis is Valla's repudiation of what he presents as the scholastic view of the distinction between abstract and concrete terms, that is, the view that abstract terms ("whiteness," "fatherhood") always refer to quality only, while concrete terms ("white," "father") refer to substance and quality. In a careful discussion of this distinction, taking into account the grammatical categories of case, number, and gender, Valla rejects the ontological commitments, which such a view seems to imply, and shows, on the basis of a host of examples drawn from classical Latin usage, that the abstract term often has the same meaning as its concrete counterpart (useful/utility, true/truth, honest/honesty). In other words, there is no need to posit abstract entities as referents of these terms; they refer to the concrete thing itself, that is, to the substance, its quality, or action (or a combination of these three components into which a thing can be analyzed). Hence, one of his main concerns throughout the first book is to determine to which category a word refers.

Valla further criticizes the Tree of Porphyry for putting nothing on top but substance, a notion that is barely intelligible: bare substance does not exist as a thing is always already a qualified substance. Moreover, it is difficult to place a human being, which consists of soul and body, in a Tree that divides substance into something corporeal and spiritual. In the rest of Book I of the *Repastinatio*, Valla criticizes distinctions such as matter and form and potency and act, using as weapons grammatical analysis and common sense.

In a long chapter in the same book, Valla takes up themes he had developed in an earlier work, *On Pleasure* (c. 1431). This was a dialogue between three interlocutors, a "Stoic," an "Epicurean," and a "Christian." The result of this confrontation between pagan and Christian moral thought is a combination of Pauline fideism and Epicurean hedonism, in which the Christian concepts of charity and beatitude are identified with hedonist pleasure, and the philosopher's concept of virtue is rejected. In taking "Epicureanism" (used in a rhetorical rather than a historical sense) as a stepping stone for the development of a Christian morality based on the concept of pleasure, Valla repudiated the traditional synthesis

between Stoicism and Christianity, popular among scholastics and humanists alike. He found the Stoic notion of virtue as something to be aimed for its own sake abstract and unrealistic. He also criticized in a lengthy passage the Aristotelian notion of virtue as a mean between two vices as unduly dogmatic and inflexible. A similar attitude informs his critique of Aristotelian natural philosophy. While his interests are clearly not those of a natural philosopher, he insists on common observation and experience as criteria for testing ideas and hypotheses. Hence, many of Aristotle's contentions, so Valla argues, are not true to the facts. In arguing, for instance, for the existence of a fiery sphere below the moon, Aristotle had claimed that leaden missiles shot out by force melt in the air. Valla rejects this claim by appealing to common experience: we never see balls – whether leaden, iron, or stone shot out of a sling or cannon – heat up in the air. A similar argument was used later by Galileo.

The attack on Aristotelian-scholastic metaphysics, natural and moral philosophy is often couched in a highly polemical tone, but it carries a serious message. Valla is in effect sounding a serious warning against abstraction and theory: philosophers purport to analyze the world, but as soon as they start philosophizing they often leave that world far behind and play a game of their own making, with their own rules. This conviction recurs in books II and III of the *Repastinatio* when Valla turns to dialectics. This is the more constructive part of Valla's attempt to reform what he considers to be the scholastic-Aristotelian paradigm. In these books he discusses propositions and their indicators of quality and quantity ("every," "any," "not," "no one," etc.), the square of contraries, proof and argument, and various forms of argumentation. His approach is oratorical rather than logical. What counts is whether an argumentation works, which means whether it convinces one's adversary or public. Formal validity is only one way of looking at argumentation, and a rather narrow way of looking at that. Rejecting the formal approach of the scholastics, Valla wants to base dialectic on real language by studying arguments in context, and what counts as



context is much broader than the single sentence structure of the scholastic example. He thus rhetoricizes dialectic by stating that it is no more than a species of confirmation and refutation, and as such merely a part of one of the five parts of rhetoric: invention. Compared to rhetoric, dialectic is said to be an easy subject, which requires not much time to master, since it considers and uses the syllogism only in abstracto; its sole aim is to teach. The rhetorician, on the other hand, uses not only syllogisms, but also enthymeme (incomplete syllogism), epicheireme (a kind of extended reasoning), and example. The orator has to clothe everything in persuasive arguments, since his task is not only to teach but also to please and to move. This leads Valla to downplay the importance of the Aristotelian syllogism and to consider forms of argumentation that are not easily pressed into its straightjacket. Among these are captious forms of reasoning such as dilemma, paradox, and sorites (“heap argument”). Valla offers a highly interesting analysis of these types of arguments, which betrays his common sense approach and close attention to the common meaning of words and their context.

He regards the syllogism as an artificial type of reasoning, unfit to be employed by orators as it does not reflect the natural way of speaking and arguing. What is for example the use of concluding that Socrates is an animal if one has already stated that every man is an animal and that Socrates is a man, thus that he is one of them? Valla rejects the additional moods of the first figure of the syllogism as wholly artificial. For the same reason the third figure should be utterly rejected. The first and second figure, however, can be accepted within limits, but Valla refuses to grant the first figure priority as Aristotle had done. Valla’s oratorical point of view leads him to reject the logical rules for transposing premises and converting terms as useless. Logicians used these rules in order to prove the validity of moods. When a syllogism can be reduced to one of the four of the first figure the syllogism is valid. But Valla thinks this technique absurd as it legitimizes syllogistic forms that lack any practical utility. Moreover, the traditional account unjustly ignores other syllogistic forms

that might be accepted as valid, for example: God is in every place; Tartarus is a place; therefore God is in Tartarus. Here the “all” or “every” sign is added to the predicate in the major proposition. An all singular syllogism can also be valid: Homer is the greatest of poets; this is the greatest of poets; therefore this man is Homer. Valla gives many other examples of such deviant schemes, thus deliberately ignoring the criteria employed by Aristotle and his commentators. In his view, they unnecessarily restrict the number of possible valid figures.

Valla’s insistence on studying and assessing arguments in terms of persuasion and usefulness leads him to criticize not only the syllogism but also other less formal modes of argumentation. These arguments usually involve interrogation, leading to an unexpected or unwanted conclusion, or to an aporetic situation. Valla was one of the first to study and analyze types of arguments such as the heap argument (*sorites*) and dilemma. The heap argument is supposed to induce doubts about the possibility of determining precise limits especially to quantities. If I subtract one grain from a heap, is it still a heap? Of course. What if I subtract two grains? And so forth, until the heap consists of just one grain, which of course is an unacceptable conclusion. It seems impossible to determine the moment when the heap ceases to be a heap, and any determination of such a moment seems to be an ad hoc decision, for the difference between heap and no-longer-a-heap cannot be caused by the subtraction of just one single grain. Valla discusses a number of similar cases. He recognizes the fallacious nature of this sort of arguments, even though he does not clearly state what the solution would be or what a respondent should answer during such an interrogation.

Another type of argument is dilemma. Dilemmatic arguments had been widely studied in Antiquity. The basic structure is a disjunction of propositions, usually in the form of a double question in an interrogation, which sets a trap for the respondent, since whichever horn of the dilemma he chooses he seems to be caught up in a contradiction and will lose the debate (“If he is modest, why should you accuse him who is a

good man? If he is bad, why should you accuse him who is unconcerned by such a charge?”). It was also recognized that the respondent could often counter the dilemma by duplicating the original argument and “turn it back” (*convertere*) to the interrogator, using it as a kind of boomerang (“if he is modest, you should accuse him because he will be concerned of such a charge; if he is bad, you should also accuse him because he is not a good man”). Alternatively, he could escape the dilemma by questioning the disjunction and showing that there is a third possibility. There were many variations of this simple scheme. Based on Cicero, Quintilian, the Greek text of Aristotle’s *Rhetoric*, Aulus Gellius and George of Trebizond’s *Rhetoric* (c. 1433), Valla analyzes a series of such dilemma’s and the maneuver to counter a dilemma by converting it, called *antistrephon* in Greek and *conversio* in Latin. In all these cases he thinks, for various reasons, that the conversion is not a rebuttal at all but at best a correction of the initial argument (but a correction is not a refutation), at worst a simple repetition or illegitimate shift of that initial position. Valla’s reasonable suggestion then is that it was a product of the schools of rhetoricians, when the study of arguments could easily lead to an examination of their structure and strength without taking into account their wider context and the normal meaning of words. It had no real place in the oratorical practice.

### Philosophical Relevance

Valla’s attempt to transform or reform the scholastic study of language and argumentation, and indeed an entire mode of doing philosophy, will likely be met with hostility by the historian of medieval philosophy who is dedicated to the scholastic enterprise and argumentative rigor and conceptual analysis. It is not difficult to point to howlers in Valla’s argumentation, to superficial and unfair criticisms, to straw men types of arguments. For the logician, for example, who defines the rules of the game first and then – so to speak – starts to play, it is unfair or illegitimate to ignore

the rules while playing (one is then no longer playing the same game as one’s opponent) or change the rules while playing and then accuses the others of cheating. This is what Valla often seems to do. He takes an Aristotelian doctrine in a way it was not designed for, for example, the syllogism, hypothetical syllogism, modal propositions, and the square of contraries. In all these cases we can see Valla starting, as it were, from the inside of the Aristotelian paradigm, from some basic assumptions and ideas of his opponents, in order to refute them by using a kind of *reductio ad absurdum* or submitting them to his own criteria that are external to the opponents’ paradigm. It makes his critique often seem unfair and inconsistent but such an interpretation only tells half of the story. It would miss a fundamental point, namely that in order to criticize a piece of established Aristotelian doctrine, Valla has to move in and out of the Aristotelian paradigm, so to speak. This moving inside and outside the Aristotelian paradigm can also explain (and perhaps excuse) Valla’s inconsistency, for it is an inconsistency that is closely tied to his tactics and agenda. Valla did not want to be consistent if this notion means only to comply with the rules of the scholastics, which in his view amounted to rigorously defining one’s terms and pressing these into the straightjacket of a syllogistic argument no matter what common sense and linguistic custom teach us. Behind this inconsistency thus lies a consistent program of replacing philosophical speculation and theorizing by an approach based on common linguistic practice and common sense. Its historical importance in the development of humanism is beyond doubt. But arguably it has also philosophical relevance. For throughout the history of philosophy a cautionary warning can be heard against abstraction, speculation, and formalization. One need not endorse this cautionary note in order to see that philosophy thrives on the creative tension between these two basic views on philosophical analysis – a tension between, on the one hand, abstraction and speculation and, on the other hand, a salubrious warning that the object of philosophical analysis should not be lost from sight.

## Cross-References

- ▶ [Aristotelianism in the Greek, Latin, Syriac, Arabic, and Hebrew Traditions](#)
- ▶ [Categories](#)
- ▶ [Syllogism, Theories of](#)

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## Manuel Chrysoloras

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### Abstract

Manuel Chrysoloras (c. 1350–1415) was a Byzantine writer and scholar better known as professor of Greek language in Florence after 1397, the first one to hold public teaching office of Greek in Italy. His audience included famous Italian humanists like Guarino da Verona (his most loyal pupil), Jacopo Angeli da Scarperia, Coluccio Salutati, Roberto Rossi, Niccolò Niccoli, Leonardo Bruni, Carlo Marsuppini, Pier Paolo Vergerio, Uberto Decembrio, Poggio Bracciolini, and others. After 1400, Chrysoloras left his teaching position and carried out mainly diplomatic missions in the service of the Byzantine emperor Manuel II Palaiologos. He converted to Catholicism and died in 1415 in Constance, Switzerland, while attending the Synod in an effort to convince the Westerners to save Byzantium from the Ottoman threat. He used a personal method of teaching that consisted in part in the discussion between the students of the translation of Greek works. He translated Plato's *Republic* with the help of his student Uberto Decembrio and his son Pier Candido and he authored a Greek Grammar that had a

wide circulation as textbook. His teaching influenced the art criticism of Renaissance by relating art works to literary works and by insisting on the importance of the artist as the efficient cause of Art and the public as the intelligent agent. As to his ideology, this scholar who is said that his teaching had a strong political motive, in his work on the *Comparison of the Old and the New Rome*, he insisted on Constantinople's lineage to Ancient Rome. His posthumous fame was somehow limited because the Italian humanists' scholarly activity to which he had greatly contributed had grown strong autonomously.

### Biography

The Byzantine author, professor, and scholar Manuel Chrysoloras was born in Constantinople around 1350 in a noble family. Very little is known about the first half of his life until he came to Venice in 1390–1391 with a diplomatic mission. Later he was invited to teach Greek in Florence where he started professing in 1397 with a contract of 5 years. But he was not to spend all this time in Florence because in 1400 he left his position probably in order to join the emperor Manuel II Palaiologos who came to the West seeking help to save the Byzantine Empire from the Ottoman threat. For the rest of his life, Chrysoloras will carry out mainly diplomatic missions, traveling in the service of his country, and

only secondarily will assume scholarly and teaching work. In late 1405 or in 1406 he will ask the papal permission to be converted to the Latin dogma and perform the Latin rite; the permission was granted but Chrysoloras never undertook any priestly duties. He died in 1415 while attending the Council of Constance in Switzerland in a last effort to convince the Westerners to help Byzantium.

His fame rests principally on his teaching activity in Florence as the first Greek to hold public teaching office in Italy. Neither Barlaam the Calabrian nor Leonzio Pilato, who preceded him and taught Petrarch and Boccaccio, could equal him in importance and fame. As it has been noted, “from at least the eighteenth century, when scholars first began to discuss the ‘Italian Renaissance’ as a cultural phenomenon, the importance of Manuel Chrysoloras, the first notable professor of Greek in western Europe, has been widely recognized. Writers such as Carlo Rosmini, Jacob Burckhardt, John Addington Symonds, and Remigio Sabbadini have given him, deservedly, honorable mention as the teacher of a number of influential humanists” (Thomson 1966:63). But it was a monograph by Cammelli published in 1941 that permitted the modern evaluation and scholarly appreciation of his life and activity. Chrysoloras’ coming to Italy marks the real beginning of Greek studies in Italy. Thanks to him, the Italian humanists of various scholarly interests were able to focus on the rich classical tradition of Byzantium. Among his famous pupils and those attending his lessons we can name Guarino da Verona, Jacopo Angeli da Scarperia, Coluccio Salutati, Roberto Rossi, Niccolò Niccoli, Leonardo Bruni, Carlo Marsuppini, Pier Paolo Vergerio, Uberto Decembrio, Poggio Bracciolini et al. Jacopo Angeli da Scarperia described Chrysoloras as “*eruditissimus (et) suavissimus literarum Graecarum. . . praeceptor.*”

It has been said that the teaching activity of Chrysoloras was auxiliary to his principal mission and that it had a political motive. His very first voyage to Italy was of diplomatic nature and his invitation to a teaching position may have been a response to a need for a more profound

rapprochement than the establishment of good diplomatic relations between the East and the West. As professor of Greek he was always related to influential people and his subsequent career was clearly that of a diplomat. His conversion to Catholicism must also be seen as part of the Byzantine politics of reconciliation with the West. In Andrea Giuliano’s funeral oration on Chrysoloras we read that his true task was rather “to save his country from danger than give delight to Italy” (Thomson 1966:81).

### Thought and Works

It seems that Chrysoloras had a natural charisma for communicating and a friendly and warm character. His reputation was not based solely on his teaching ability but also on his methodology, and furthermore on his ideas on education. His approach marked a rupture with the tradition of medieval education; as Paolo Vergerio’s *De ingenuis moribus* (1404) shows, Chrysoloras has given the learned men in the West a vigorous inspiration as to the ideals of Greek education while Leonardo Bruni’s *De studiis et litteris* (c. 1425) gives a detailed exposition of the pedagogic technique that Chrysoloras had brought from Constantinople. The technique stressed accurate pronunciation, the use of mnemonics, constant and regular revision of each lesson’s topics and the preparation of copious notes under the headings of *methodice* (grammar, syntax, and vocabulary) and *historice* (what we should call “background material”) (Thomson 1966:66–67). Chrysoloras insisted that for the students to discuss the subject of every lesson was part of a learning technique; he also insisted on the pedagogical value of translating from Greek into Latin. He criticized the literary, word by word, translation as well as the free translation that betrayed the original; he promoted a midway between these two practices, a mean that would accomplish the comprehension of an author’s spirit and its rendering to another language (*transfere ad sententiam*).

His work as an author has been less valued, but this view is beginning to change. His writings are

not many but they give insight to the profile of a scholar that was more than the right man at the right place for the right job. His most known work is a Greek Grammar, the first in the western world, which under the title *Erôtêmata* had a very wide circulation as a manuscript and later was repeatedly published in numerous editions. He translated Plato's *Republic* with the help of one of his pupils, Uberto Decembrio (and this one's son Pier Candido), since Chrysoloras' use of Latin was rather moderate. The rest of his work consisted mainly of letters, some extensive, that give an image of his philosophical, literary, and educational ideas. Chrysoloras appears to have influenced the art criticism of the Renaissance mainly through his pupil Guarino da Verona. We see in him the idea of the visual arts' inferiority as to the written word through a transposition of the Byzantine *ekphrasis* (rhetorical description of works of art). Although the rhetoricism of *ekphrasis* does not help the establishment of critical categories about the fine arts, it nevertheless facilitates the connection between visual representations and the literary universe. Furthermore, Chrysoloras wrote that "the representations are praised in proportion to the degree in which they seem to resemble their originals...[but they] rather do indicate a certain nobility in the intellect that admires them;" what he is actually saying is not proper to Byzantine icons' aesthetics and although the frame is traditional, Chrysoloras' conclusions are related neither to commonplaces of Byzantine Aristotelianism nor to the views of the Iconophiles (the supporters of the icons) of Byzantium. It is the artistic sensibility, the efficient cause of art, that takes, thus, priority over the subject matter, a turn that conforms perfectly to the highly valued role of the artist in the Renaissance Art (Baxandall 1965:198–199).

Regarding the content of Chrysoloras' "philosophy," it has been said that he belonged to the Palaiologian revival of letters in Byzantium, which nonetheless covered more than one ideological tendency and thus Chrysoloras' position has to be further elucidated. He was close to Demetrios Kydones, a key figure in the Latinophile Party of Constantinople, who translated Thomas Aquinas in Greek; Kydones had

escorted Chrysoloras to his first trip in the West. Chrysoloras' work *Synkrisis tês palaias kai neas Romês* (a letter known by the title *De comparatione veteris et novae Romae = On the Comparison Between Rome and Constantinople*) that was designed to foster good relations between the East and the West shows Chrysoloras' position. He wrote on the Graeco-Roman origins of Byzantium: "two were the most powerful and wise nations... Romans and Greeks who by joining up they made Constantinople"; he was translating in these terms Manuel Palaiologos' politics of reconciliation with the West. His recently published *Discourse Addressed to the Emperor Manuel II Palaiologos* is more revealing as to Chrysoloras' philosophy of education: he states there his faith in the value of Greek *Paideia*, its great importance if the Byzantines were to ensure the safety and the well-being of their country and his confidence in his homeland's autarky as to the quality of its scholars. In the same discourse, he develops the idea of natural virtue to which the education is complementary.

Although Chrysoloras' impact on the Italian intellectual scene is certain and most of his pupils were ready to acknowledge his influence, only Guarino da Verona showed a life-long devotion to him. The later praise of Chrysoloras by the Humanists never reached the enthusiasm and this is due to the fact that in the meantime the Italian scholars discovered the value of Latinity and were progressively feeling more assured as to their knowledge of Greek Letters.

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► [Demetrios Kydones](#)

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### Abstract

Marsilius of Inghen belonged with William of Ockham and John Buridan to those thinkers who substantially shaped late-medieval Nominalism. He taught in Paris and Heidelberg and left behind a significant number of writings that were used as set texts at many universities in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, especially in the German Empire. Characteristic was his rejection of real universals outside the human mind (Realism) and his distinction between the approaches of natural reason and faith. He was also known for his dismissal of the notion of *suppositio simplex*, his defense of an eleventh category, and his criticism of the Aristotelian theory of motion. His thought was appreciated by humanists and Spanish scholastics.

### Biography

Marsilius of Inghen, born in or around Nijmegen (Netherlands) in the 1340s, was one the most

influential thinkers of the late-medieval period. His lectures drew large audiences and his writings were read at many universities. He received his philosophical education at the University of Paris, where he became active as a Master of Arts in 1362, purportedly remarkably young of age. Nicolas Prowin, in his funeral speech, highlighted that Marsilius was not yet 20 when he earned his Master's degree. As a Master, he had many students, especially from the region around Nijmegen, who went on to become teachers at local schools. It was perhaps for this reason that the City of Nijmegen honored him with a copious banquet in 1382. Marsilius was rector of the University of Paris in 1367 and in 1371, and procurator of the so-called *natio anglicana* from 1373 to 1375. He also represented the University at the Papal Court in Avignon in 1377–1378. Most likely due to troubles related to the Great Schism, he left Paris for an unknown destination following his visit to Avignon. In 1386, he became the first rector of the University of Heidelberg, which he shaped substantially, serving as rector nine times in 1386–1392 and 1396. In Heidelberg, he was a Master of Arts and student of theology, the study of which he had begun in Paris around 1366. He obtained his theological degree in 1395–1396, being the first theologian to earn a doctorate in Heidelberg. Soon afterwards, on August 20, 1396, the day of Saint Bernhard, he died and was buried in the Church of Saint Peter in the choir before the main altar. Regrettably, his grave no longer exists; however, both a small square next to the University and a Centre for Advanced Study carry his name.

Soon after his death in 1396 he was labeled a “Nominalist” and bracketed together with William of Ockham and John Buridan. To be sure, however, he himself never used this nor any other label to characterize his thought. At points he was even critical of Ockham and Buridan, although he shared their conviction that universals were only names or concepts and that the object of knowledge was not the thing but the proposition that referred to the thing, hallmarks of late-medieval Nominalism.

Since the early sixteenth century, historiography has considered Marsilius to be a pupil of Buridan, induced from the fact that Marsilius

often referred to Buridan as his master, and even once remarked that he may have been guided by a passionate predisposition towards the latter. Modern research, however, seriously questions whether Marsilius was a pupil of Buridan, since the two belonged to different nations at the University of Paris. It appears that Marsilius was not educated by Buridan, even though he admired his teachings or writings. His teacher was in fact William Buser of Heusden, who, like Marsilius, belonged to the *natio anglicana*. That he referred to Buridan as his master, therefore, must be considered a mark of honor, as was not unusual at the time.

## Writings

Marsilius' writings were the product of a medieval academic. Most important are (1) a collection of small logical treatises that deal with the properties of terms such as supposition and ampliation, and which later were referred to under the general title of *Parva logicalia Marsilii*; (2) several commentaries in various forms on the *Logica vetus* and the *Logica nova*; (3) commentaries on Aristotle's physical treatises, such as the *Physica*, *De caelo*, *De generatione et corruptione*, *De anima*, and the *Parva naturalia*; (4) a commentary on Aristotle's *Ethica Nicomachea*; (5) a commentary on Aristotle's *Metaphysica*; (6) commentaries on two books from the Scriptures, namely, Daniel and Matthew; and finally (7) a commentary on Peter Lombard's *Sentences*.

All of these works arose out of his teaching, which is to say, his reading of the works of Aristotle, Peter Lombard, and the Scriptures in the classroom. Notably, his commentaries on Aristotle were structured in a manner very similar to those of John Buridan and Nicholas Oresme. Even the titles of the many questions addressed were similar, although the solutions differed. As a rule, these questions followed the text of Aristotle sequentially, though not all parts were discussed. Marsilius followed the same structure in his commentary on Lombard's *Sentences*, although the arguments in it were much more elaborate and referred to a wide array of sources.

Only a small number of his writings are available in a modern critical edition. Several of his treatises were printed in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. Approximately 35 modern libraries contain manuscript copies of his works, particularly libraries in Erfurt, Krakow, Munich, and Vienna. The strict format of his writings may create the impression that their content is uniform and formalistic; however, this is not the case. Marsilius imbued his writings with a personal outlook through the sharpness of his mind and his individual approach to a number of problems.

## Main Thoughts

### Universals and Supposition Theory

A clear theme throughout Marsilius' works is the conviction that there are no real universals. Reality consists only of individuals, which can be signified by written or spoken words or by concepts in the human mind. Things that are similar can be signified and made known by the same name or concept. This is, for example, the case with the concept of "tree," which refers both to an oak and to a beach. Universality, therefore, is a property of names and concepts that refer to like individuals. These names and concepts are themselves individual: each human being has his own concept of "tree" even if this concept signifies the same tree as that of another human being.

This theory, which he shared with William of Ockham, John Buridan, and many other contemporaries, had a direct impact on his theory of logic. In his treatise, *On supposition*, for example, he maintains that older logicians (like Peter of Spain) used a special kind of supposition, namely, *suppositio simplex*, to refer to the use of a term or concept that stands for a universal thing. Since, to Marsilius, there are no universal things, this type of supposition was senseless and should be abolished, since it confused students. To refer to the universal use of a term or concept in phrases such as "Tree is a genus," another traditional type of supposition, namely, *suppositio materialis*, would suffice, as this kind of supposition takes the term or concept as referring to itself. In the above phrase, it is the term or concept "tree" itself which signifies universally and therefore is a

genus, and not something in the trees outside in the yard.

In this connection, Marsilius explicitly criticized some of his contemporaries (he may have been thinking of Albert of Saxony), who, even if they did not accept the existence of real universals, still wished to retain the notion of *suppositio simplex*. They would say, like the old logicians, that the word or concept of “tree” in the given example has *suppositio simplex*, rather than *suppositio materialis*. Marsilius, however, saw no need to retain the vocabulary of the old logicians. The use of the term *suppositio simplex* was entirely arbitrary, he argued. Therefore, there was no reason not to replace it with *suppositio materialis*, which was moreover preferable, in that it avoided confusion.

This celebrated passage has important historical significance, as here Marsilius linked the acceptance of real universals with the old logicians (*antiqui*) and their denial with the modern logicians (*moderni*). However, though tempting, his remarks cannot be regarded as an early example of the fifteenth-century “*Wegestreit*” between *Antiqui* and *Moderni*. The *antiqui* of whom Marsilius spoke were no contemporary Realists, but rather logicians from earlier generations, as evinced by the fact that he referred to them also by the term *antiquitus*, that is, from ancient times. Nevertheless, this passage reveals why the Realists of the fifteenth century who based themselves on these older logicians were labeled as *Antiqui*, even if they themselves were not from the old days.

### **Aristotle, Natural Reason, Faith**

A second feature the reader will encounter at several points in Marsilius’ works, and which also foreshadows the “*Wegestreit*,” is the sharp distinction between faith and natural reason. This occurs not only in his theological works but also and especially in his commentaries on Aristotle. At several places in these commentaries, Marsilius juxtaposes two different answers to one and the same problem, the one according to Aristotle and natural reason, and the other according to truth and faith. He leaves no doubt that for him truth and faith gives the right answer

and should judge Aristotle and natural reason, not only in theology but also in philosophy. Yet this does not prevent him from carefully setting out what should, according to natural reason, be regarded as possible or impossible in each particular case, even if this is in opposition to faith. Nor is his approach to these two views in his commentaries on Aristotle always the same. In some cases both views are dealt with extensively, in others he merely comments that according to faith things are different, but that he would not enter into the view of faith, as that was not the task of the philosopher, but of the theologian.

For Marsilius, natural reason is human thought based solely on sense-perception (*experientia*) and on self-evident principles (*principia per se nota*). To him this is essentially identical to what Aristotle said in his writings, for example, that nothing can come from nothing. Only very rarely are there instances in which he criticizes Aristotle for saying something not in agreement with sense-perception or self-evident principles — most prominently, in the case of the theory of movement, as we will see below.

The juxtaposition of the views of natural reason (Aristotle) and of faith occurs so frequently, both in his philosophical and theological writings, that it indeed seems programmatic. This is most clearly observed in his *Abbreviationes librorum physicorum*, which were written in Paris (as can be deduced from examples in which he repeatedly referred to the towers of Notre Dame and of St. Geneviève). In this treatise, both views are often presented in different sets of statements intended to make clear what their presuppositions are and under which conditions they could be accepted. A good case in point is the discussion of the eternity of the world. Here, Marsilius begins with a number of statements accepted both by Aristotle and by the believer. He then continues with statements held by Aristotle and rejected by the believer, such as that the movement of the heavens is eternal. At the end of this list, he remarks that although these statements must be accepted by all who use only the senses, nonetheless, the opposite is in fact true, as faith maintains.

Marsilius also follows this procedure in his discussion of other topics in the *Abbreviationes*

*librorum physicorum*. For example, he argues that for Aristotle and natural reason (1) creation from nothing is impossible, (2) the first principle cannot act on earth without the assistance of the heavens, (3) an imaginary space outside of the heavens must be infinite, (4) the existence of a vacuum cannot be accepted, (5) the heavens cannot move faster than they actually do, (6) the first principle has no infinite power, and (7) the first principle is not everywhere. On all of these points, he explains that faith, since it accepts divine omnipotence, asserts a differing or opposite position. Remarkably, for Marsilius, natural reason alone is not able to accept the position of faith. It must indeed reject all of those views that would presuppose the existence of something beyond sense perception and self-evident principles.

To be sure, Marsilius did not defend the theory of double truth. For him there is only one truth, namely, that of faith, which partially, but not completely, covers the claims of natural reason. However, and this is crucial, natural reason cannot judge on its own whether that which it necessarily has to accept according to its own principles is also true. To do this, natural reason requires faith. Marsilius therefore maintained a position which was very different from that, for example, of Thomas Aquinas. According to Thomas, regarding any tenet of faith whatsoever, natural reason can at least show that it is not impossible. For Marsilius, natural reason cannot do this. On the contrary, at crucial points it leads human reason in the opposite direction.

In his commentaries on Aristotle, Marsilius does not discuss the background of this radical view. His commentary on the *Sentences*, however, provides a clue. As a consequence of the Fall, human reason is bound to the senses and can no longer by itself give a sound judgment of what is true. Its evidence is evidence of the bodily, fallen man, not that of the spiritual man assisted by divine grace.

Marsilius defended his reading of Aristotle not only in Paris but also in Heidelberg, as can be judged from his commentaries on the *Metaphysics* and the *Sentences*, both of which were composed in Heidelberg. Testifying to his influence as rector there, this interpretation of Aristotle found its way

into the vows the masters were required to take at their inception. At most other universities, the master was obligated to refute, to the best of his ability, those of Aristotle's opinions that were contrary to faith. However, in Heidelberg the situation was different. There, the master was required to tell students that in such cases, the position of Aristotle was based solely on natural reason and therefore was deficient, although his position could not be refuted, since using sense-perception and self-evident principles one must necessarily reach the same conclusion as Aristotle.

This way of dealing with Aristotle was to become typical of late-medieval Nominalism, for which Marsilius was one of the main sources of inspiration. It provoked harsh criticism especially from the Thomists, who were of the opinion that, principally, there were no points on which Aristotle was against faith, provided that he was understood correctly – which is to say, in the manner of Thomas Aquinas. Herein is rooted the historiographical myth that Nominalism destroyed medieval scholasticism by questioning the harmony of faith and natural reason (Aristotle).

### **Categories, Motion, Univocity of Substantial and Accidental Being**

There are also other striking views put forth by Marsilius in his commentaries on Aristotle. For example, commenting on the *Logica vetus*, he argues that alongside the ten traditional categories, an additional eleventh must be accepted, namely, the category of signs. This view was much discussed in the late Middle Ages. Some thinkers saw it as rooted in the works of John Duns Scotus, although there was general agreement that Marsilius was the inventor of the eleventh category. Among its main defenders, next to Marsilius, was the Nominalist Johannes Parreut, who discussed the problems attached to this view elaborately in his *Exercitata veteris artis*, with reference to Marsilius. Realist authors, however, saw in it a deviation from Aristotle, and accordingly rejected the view as completely absurd.

In his commentary on the *Physics*, Marsilius follows Buridan in asserting that the motion of a projectile is not caused by air being pressed away

from the top of the projectile and then pushing the projectile from behind or by air set into more rapid motion by the original impact, as Aristotle had thought. According to Marsilius, this runs counter to the observation that a projectile hitting the ground bounces upwards, even though, on the ground, there is no air to move the projectile. Its motion therefore needs to be explained otherwise, namely, by assuming that the mover transfers to the projectile a certain quality, which in turn causes the motion — a quality which some, he adds, call “*impetus*.” At the same time, Marsilius was fully aware that this theory too had its difficulties, although it was the better alternative.

Also noteworthy is a passage from his commentary on the *Metaphysics*, in which he argues that there is no univocal concept of substance and accident. In itself, this theory was unexceptional and quite in accordance with the traditional interpretation of Aristotle. However, in this case, things are more complicated. Marsilius writes that on this point he disagrees with Buridan, who had followed the common view held by many theologians. According to this common view, it is possible to have a univocal concept of substance and accident if transubstantiation is taken into consideration, as is the case with faith. During transubstantiation, the accidents of the substances of bread and wine (their shape, taste, and color) remain for a short moment without a bearer, as the substances are replaced by the substance of Christ. These accidents do, therefore, rightly exist by themselves, just as do substances by nature. Therefore, it is possible to have a univocal concept of both, notwithstanding the fact that accidents cannot exist naturally without a bearer. However, Marsilius does not agree with this view. When commenting on the *Metaphysics*, he claims, one must argue according to natural reason and not according to faith. Applying the principles of natural reason to the concept of being, therefore, one must conclude that it cannot be univocally said of substance and accidents, since both have a different kind of being. Marsilius thus contrasts the common view with what he calls the “metaphysical” view. However, he makes clear that neither of these can be proven demonstratively, but are only probable. Nevertheless, the

fact that he argues for the second view shows that in his mind the philosopher should not be distracted by the miracles of faith when there is no immediate necessity to do so. Indeed, whereas the eternity of the world and the limited power of God stand in direct opposition to the wording of the Creed, with the statement that there is no univocal concept of substances and accidents, this was not the case. For, as Marsilius states in his commentary on *De generatione et corruptione*, even if God miraculously changes substances, by virtue of his divine power he could do this in a such a way that the accidents would not remain without a bearer.

### **Commentary on the *Sentences*, Multiple Sources, Eternity of the World**

When reading Marsilius of Inghen’s commentaries on Aristotle, his personal views are not always clear. This is especially the case when Marsilius applies both the solution of faith, which he calls the truth, and that according to natural reason, adding that the solution of faith should not bother the natural philosopher or metaphysician. Does this mean that, as a natural philosopher and metaphysician, Marsilius asserted solutions which he knew were not true? However it may be, in his theological works, and in particular in his commentary on the *Sentences*, things were different. Here we find the most elaborate exposition of his ideas, both philosophical and theological. Even if his commentary on the *Sentences* was a theological work, he discusses in it a whole range of philosophical issues also dealt with in his other works, including the eternity of the world and God’s infinite power. In this work, Marsilius attributes a crucial role to natural reason in explaining matters of faith, but thinks that its role is only partial, since it uses principles different from those of faith. Only if natural reason accepts the principles of faith — for example, that things can be created from nothing — can it clarify issues of faith.

The commentary on the *Sentences* is an enormous work that discusses all four books of Lombard’s original work and covers more than a thousand narrowly printed pages in the edition of 1501. Marsilius most likely began preparation for

this work in Paris in the late 1360s and early 1370s, leaving the work unfinished when he died in Heidelberg. Striking is the wide range of sources he used to construct his arguments. He not only quoted William of Ockham, Adam Wodeham, Robert Holcot, and Gregory of Rimini – authors considered to be forerunners of late-medieval Nominalism – but also Bonaventure, Thomas Aquinas, Giles of Rome, and Thomas of Strasbourg, the principal authorities of the Realists. The modern reader may be confused by the fact that an alleged Nominalist author quoted so many Realist authorities. However, Nominalist authors prided themselves on using all important authors who had contributed to the solution of the problem, even those used by their adversaries – something which they claimed Realists were unwilling to do.

Due to the immense number of problems addressed, the work may be considered an encyclopedia of late-medieval knowledge. The themes addressed range from the divine nature and problems related to the creation of angels and human beings, to Christological issues, the sacraments, and the final judgment. Marsilius shows a strong awareness of scientific methodology and applies logical tools throughout the book, despite remarking that one should not overvalue the use of logic in theology. It is difficult to distinguish one particular line of theological reasoning, since he builds upon very different traditions, even Neoplatonic ones, as in his discussion of the theory of divine ideas. However, here too, as in the commentaries on Aristotle, the reader is struck by the careful distinction made at certain points between faith and natural reason. According to Marsilius, it is possible to prove that the heavens are not coeternal with God, provided one accepts that God is omnipotent, as does faith. The concepts of “heaven” or “creature” and “coeternal with God” exclude each other as much as those of “horse” and “bullock,” Marsilius writes. This is noteworthy, since in his commentaries on Aristotle he gave one to understand that, for the unaided natural reason, the concepts of “heaven” and “coeternal with God” are necessarily linked. From this, it once more becomes clear how different his approach was from that of Thomas

Aquinas, even though he regularly quoted the Angelic Doctor on other occasions. According to Thomas Aquinas, whether illuminated by faith or not, human reason has to admit that both statements are possible, namely, that  $P$  “The heavens are coeternal with God” and  $\neg P$  “The heavens are not coeternal with God.” But for Marsilius, this is not the case. If natural reason is illuminated by faith, it must admit that  $P$  is impossible and, hence  $\neg P$  is necessary. If, on the other hand, it does not accept faith, it must hold the opposite, namely, that  $P$  is necessary, and hence  $\neg P$  impossible. If Luther, in his famous *Disputatio theologica* of 1539, rebuked Parisian theologians for claiming that the same thing was true in theology which was also true in philosophy, he may have been thinking of authors like Thomas Aquinas, but surely not Marsilius of Inghen.

## Influence

Marsilius had a substantial impact on the late-medieval and early-modern period. His works were read at many universities with a Nominalist signature, or where Nominalism was taught next to Realism. In Vienna and Freiburg, his *Parva logicalia* were compulsory. On the title page of the *Modernorum summulae* of Florentius Diel, printed in Mainz about 1490, he was mentioned in one breath with Aristotle, Augustine, and Boethius. Not even Ockham, Albert of Saxony, or Buridan were mentioned in this prominent place. Marsilius’ commentaries on Aristotle were used in classrooms of Heidelberg, Vienna, Freiburg, and Prague, as can be concluded from the colophons in the manuscripts and the protocols of the Arts faculties. His commentary on the *Sentences*, edited by Jacob Wympfeling and printed by Martinus Flach in 1501, was quoted by Spanish theologians like Domino de Soto, Luis de Molina, and Francisco Suárez. Exemplary of Marsilius’ strong influence is a booklet published in 1499 by Peter Friedberg in Mainz, commemorating his birthday. This booklet is notable for containing a fictitious speech of Marsilius defending Nominalism and answering the attacks of Realism. One of the main points was a



quotation from John Gerson, saying that the Council of Constance had condemned the thesis that there are real universals in the extramental world. Noteworthy was the humanist form of the treatise. It contained more than 50 epigrams by students and masters singing the praises of their divine Master Marsilius. Obviously, the humanists in Heidelberg and Mainz advocated the Nominalism coined by Marsilius even a century after his death.

## Cross-References

- ▶ [Albert of Saxony](#)
- ▶ [Aristotle, Arabic: Physics](#)
- ▶ [De generatione et corruptione, Commentaries on Aristotle's](#)
- ▶ [Impetus](#)
- ▶ [John Buridan](#)
- ▶ [Natural Philosophy](#)
- ▶ [Parva naturalia, Commentaries on Aristotle's](#)
- ▶ [Realism](#)
- ▶ [Supposition Theory](#)
- ▶ [Thomas Aquinas](#)
- ▶ [Universals](#)
- ▶ [William of Ockham](#)

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## Marsilius of Padua

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### Abstract

Marsilius of Padua (1270/1290–1342) was a seminal late medieval political thinker. In 1313 Marsilius went to Paris to study medicine. During his stay in the French capital, he befriended John of Jandun, a leading commentator of Aristotle and adherent of many of Averroes' positions. In 1324 Marsilius published his magnum opus, the *Defensor pacis* (*Defender of the Peace*), a work containing a fierce attack on papal interference

in temporal affairs. In 1326, Marsilius and John, who was considered the coauthor of the *Defensor pacis*, fled to Louis of Bavaria's court. In 1327 John XXII issued the bull *Licet iuxta doctrinam*, in which he condemned Marsilius and John for heresy. In the same year, Marsilius and John joined Louis' expedition to Italy. After the failure of the expedition, Marsilius returned to Germany, where he spent the remainder of his life at Louis' court. Marsilius' professed goal in the *Defensor pacis* is to reveal a singular cause of civil strife, that is, the papacy's involvement in temporal affairs. The first part is to a large extent a patchwork of quotations from Aristotle's works, in particular the *Politics*. Marsilius articulates there a scheme of political organization with ultimate power for making laws and appointing the government residing with the "*legislator humanus*," that is, the entire body of the citizens or its "weightier" part ("*pars valentior*"). In the second part of the treatise Marsilius argues for the community of the faithful being the highest authority within the Church and possessing the power to appoint and monitor the clerics and to interpret Scripture. In the thorny issue of papal-imperial relations, Marsilius is an advocate of the pope's and the general council's, being subject to the emperor. Marsilius takes up a number of these issues in the *Defensor minor* (c. 1342), a large portion of which deals with questions of excommunication and the *plenitudo potestatis*.

## Biography

Marsilius de' Mainardini (1270/1290–1342) was born in a family with a tradition in the legal profession in the Northern Italian city of Padua (Miethke 2000; Pincin 1967). Information about Marsilius' youth is scarce and derives from a poem that Albertino Mussato (1261–1329), the famous Paduan poet and historian, dedicated to him. Mussato relates there in a jocular tone Marsilius' dilemma whether to study medicine or law and how the latter sought Mussato's advice concerning his future studies. Marsilius went to

Paris to study arts and medicine probably after a period of studying in his home town with Peter of Abano (1257–c. 1316), one of the major figures in the history of medieval natural philosophy and medicine and professor at Paris and since 1307 in Padua. In December 1312, Marsilius was elected rector of the University of Paris for a period of 3 months. As a holder of that office, he had access to the French royal council as well as to the papal curia in Avignon. The most significant event in Marsilius' stay in Paris was his association with John of Jandun (between 1285 and 1289–1328), a foremost commentator on Aristotle and Master of Arts at the Collège de Navarre, who has been considered one of the leading figures of Latin Averroism (Brenet 2003; MacClintock 1956). Between 1316 and 1318 Marsilius was promised by John XXII a benefice in Padua, but this was not realized. In 1319, he was sent as the emissary of Matteo Visconti and Cangrande della Scalla I, the signori of Milan and Verona, respectively, to Charles de la Marche (the future Charles IV of France), soliciting for the latter's support against Robert of Naples and offering him the captaincy of the Ghibelline league. The negotiations bore no fruit and Marsilius returned to Paris.

In 1324 Marsilius completed his *chef-d'œuvre*, the *Defensor pacis* (*Defender of Peace*), which he dedicated to Louis IV of Bavaria. The *Defensor pacis* contains a fierce attack on papal power and was regarded as a joint work of Marsilius and John of Jandun. Despite its polemical intent, it did not provoke immediate reactions on the side of the papacy and Marsilius and John lived undisturbed in the French capital for a certain period after its publication: Marsilius borrowed money and announced courses in 1326, and John signed a lifetime lease on a house. In the summer of 1326, Marsilius and John fled to the court of Louis of Bavaria, in Nuremberg, which would host a galaxy of eminent excommunicated Franciscans, such as Michael of Cesena, Bonagratia of Bergamo, William of Ockham, and Francis of Marchia. In 1327 John XXII issued the bull *Licet iuxta doctrinam*, in which he condemned Marsilius and John, as the authors of the *Defensor pacis*, for heresy. As noted before, John was

considered both in the Middle Ages as well as in earlier modern scholarship coauthor of the *Defensor pacis* (Valois 1906). However, between the political teaching of the *Defensor pacis* and John's political ideas, as pieced together from his commentaries on Aristotle, there exist crucial differences with regard to, for example, the purpose and the unity of the political community and the notions of the lawgiver, natural law, world monarchy, and natural slavery (Syros 2007; Gewirth 1948, 1951).

In 1327, Marsilius and John joined Ludwig's expedition in Italy. Marsilius was appointed *iudex clericorum et amministrator archiepiscopatus Mediolani in temporalibus pro regia maiestate* in Milan. It is possible that he had a hand in organizing Louis coronation in Rome in 1328, the deposing of John XXII, and his replacement by the Friar Minor, Peter of Corbara, who was elected pope as Nicholas V. In 1328, Louis and his army returned to Germany. Marsilius spent the remainder of his life at Ludwig's court in Munich. Around 1342 he wrote the *Defensor minor* as well as a memorandum dealing with the legitimacy of the marriage between Margaret Maultasch, countess of Tyrol and Carinthia, and Louis son, Louis of Brandenburg. In 1342 Pope Clement VI mentioned that Marsilius was dead. The *Defensor pacis* was also intensively used during the Great Schism. Its *editio princeps* appeared in 1522 in Basel (Piaia 1977). In 1535 Thomas Cromwell sponsored its translation into English, although the English version exhibits a number of excisions (Simonetta 2000).

## Political Ideas

The *Defensor pacis* is divided into three parts: in the first part Marsilius expounds the chief principles of his political thought by drawing on various treatises of Aristotle, most notably the *Politics*, and inquires into the origins and the nature of a well-ordered political community. In the second part, which is about four times longer than the first, he discusses and refutes a number of claims in favor of the church's possessing temporal authority. The third part contains a summary of

the main arguments of the entire work in the form of forty-two conclusions. As short as the first part of the *Defensor pacis* may be, its interpretation poses several difficulties. Marsilius' intensive use of the *Politics* has led to the conclusion that he chose the *Politics* as an authoritative basis for articulating his own ideas (Sternberger 1985). Yet, a closer comparison between the political ideas of Marsilius and of his Greek predecessor reveals marked differences (Syros 2007; Nederman 1995a; Miethke 1989; Gewirth 1951).

Marsilius' declared purpose in the *Defensor pacis* is to lay bare the singular cause of strife and dissension that afflicted the cities of Italy in his own time, that is, the papacy's attempt to involve itself in and controls temporal affairs. The quest for the efficient cause of political phenomena assumes a normative importance in Marsilius' thought. For instance, he identifies the efficient cause of the political community, its laws and its government. Following Cicero, rather than Aristotle, Marsilius ascribes the creation of human communities to the human need for self-preservation and mutual assistance. Departing from Aristotle, Marsilius does not depict the establishment of the community as the work of a single individual; under the influence of Cicero's views on the civic function of rhetoric, he presents it as the fruit of the collective will of the first "*patresfamilias*," who were summoned and persuaded by prudent individuals to band together into human associations (Nederman 1992). Families were administered according to the will of the father and villages were governed according to the judgment of their eldest members. The creation of a perfect community, on the other hand, presupposes the diversity of its constituent parts, which generates inner discord and strife. Its maintenance depends, thus, on the existence of laws and of a government with the task of regulating the relations among its members. Along these lines, peace is defined by Marsilius as the orderly function of the parts of the political community, as is the case with a well-formed living organism: whereas Aristotle looks upon strife as originating from the conflict between rich and poor, for Marsilius strife is the result of the attempts of the church to gain control over temporal affairs.

Human acts are classified by Marsilius into two categories: transient, that is, those that can benefit or harm someone other than the agent, and immanent, that is, those whose impact concerns solely the agent himself. This classification serves Marsilius as a starting point for the demarcation of the spheres of human and divine law: human law is concerned with transient acts, divine law with the immanent acts, although these two spheres may overlap. On the basis of the aforementioned distinction of human acts, Marsilius illustrates the *raison d'être* and the function of the various parts of the political community, that is, to moderate the acts and passions of its members. The principal six parts of the political community are the agricultural, artisan, financial, military, judicial or deliberative, and the sacerdotal. In allowing for the possibility that farmers, artisans, and mechanics are an integral component of the political community, Marsilius deviates from Aristotle, according to whom farmers and craftsmen are to be excluded from any healthy form of constitution. In his classification of constitutions, Marsilius adopts the Aristotelian criteria of the number of those governing and of the extent to which a constitution takes into account and advances the common good. To these he adds a third one, that is, the degree to which a constitution comes into being and exists in accordance with the consent of the citizens and the laws. Marsilius takes this criterion as a key condition for the legitimacy and longevity of any sort of government, and gives it primacy over the other two. In keeping with this, Marsilius, in his account of the different types of kingship, looks on elective kingship as the best one, and makes a strong case for the limitation of royal authority. In this regard, he departs from Aristotle's notion of the absolute ruler who exceeds the other members of the political community in virtue and political capacity and governs according to his will without laws.

Marsilius' notion of justice approximates Aristotle's concept of corrective justice, whose task is to correct potential excesses in the acts of the citizens and to bring them into equality. Consequently, Marsilius depicts the ruler as judge, whose function consists in repressing excesses

and guaranteeing the due proportion of the acts of the citizens in conformity with the laws. Laws are not the product of a single lawgiver à l'Aristotle, such as Lycurgus or Solon, but of the collective prudence and experience of a number of people or even generations. The *legislator humanus* is the entire body of the citizens or the *weightier part (pars valentior)* that has to represent them. Marsilius draws on Aristotle's doctrine of the collective wisdom of the multitude, according to which many people coming together can make better judgments than a small group of experts or wise men. Yet, although Aristotle's theory applies to the appointment and correction of office holders, Marsilius extends its validity to legislation and regards the entire body of the citizens as the sole legitimate source of legislative and governmental authority within the political community. This model exhibits certain affinities to the organization of the city-states of medieval Italy, in which ultimate authority resided with the council of the citizens and the appointment of the *podestà* and the other office holders and the preparation of drafts of laws was entrusted to committees that acted on its behalf.

The Marsilian view of the exemplary prince is premised on the medieval notion of the ruler as judge and guarantor of justice. In enumerating the ruler's virtues and attributes, Marsilius relies on Aristotle's account of the qualifications requisite in the possessors of the highest offices of the government. The prince should epitomize prudence and justice, virtues that are indispensable for the administration of justice, and equity, which enables the him to make decisions in case the laws exhibit gaps (contrary to Aristotle, Marsilius does not define equity as the modification of deficient laws). Moreover, the would-be prince should be motivated by love for the existing constitution. Further, he needs coercive force (Aristotle speaks of the great capacity for running the affairs of the political community, but due to a mistake in William of Moerbeke's translation of the *Politics*, Marsilius interprets this as military force), in order to be able to enforce his decisions and to punish transgressors of the laws.

In illustrating the relationship between the *legislator humanus* and the government or the ruler,

Marsilius employs Neoplatonic motifs: the *legislator humanus* is the primary cause and the government the secondary. Moreover, in terms of Aristotle's biology, Marsilius sees the function of the *legislator humanus* as analogous to that of the soul during the creation of a living organism; the *legislator humanus* appoints the government as the counterpart of the heart, which is in charge of setting up, differentiating and sustaining the other parts of the political community just as the heart is in charge of creating of the other parts and organs of a living organism. Marsilius differs from the majority of medieval thinkers in being rather indifferent to the question of the best form of government, although he does mention in passing that kingship might be the best one. His aim is rather to provide the outlines of a universal model that would be applicable to various political realities. In this sense, Marsilius makes the unity of the political community contingent not on the existence of a single ruler but on the proper and harmonious functioning of its parts under a single government.

The first part of the *Defensor pacis* provides much of the basis for Marsilius' teachings about the organization of the church in the second part, although there are a number of discrepancies between them. The community of the faithful constitutes the highest authority within the church and possesses the power to nominate and appoint the clerics and to monitor them in the performance of their duties. It also has the right to decide and determine the interpretation of Scripture. The latter is the task of a general council, in which the faithful or their delegates voice and discuss their opinions and vote. Marsilius views the priesthood as an integral part of the political community that performs, like the rest, a civic function. Marsilius denies the pope the right to issue decrees of coercive character and reserves for him solely the power to call an ecumenical council and to reinforce the decisions and interpretations of the latter. With regard to the relations between the emperor and the pope, Marsilius argues that the pope and the general council are subject to the power of the emperor that the sovereign pontiff receives power over other men only with the permission of the emperor. Marsilius expatiates on these issues in



the *Defensor minor*, which is a sort of epitome of the chief principles of Marsilius' political theory, as set forth in *Defensor pacis*. At the outset of that work, Marsilius explicates the term *iurisdictio* and, afterwards, denies the coercive power of the clergy. Large portions of this work deal with questions of excommunication and the *plenitudo potestatis*.

Marsilius' ideas on the precedence of temporal over spiritual power animated scholarly debates on the republican or imperialist interpretation of Marsilius' political thought. Marsilius' views on the superiority of emperor to the pope served to underpin an "imperialist" reading of the *Defensor pacis*, which found its strongest advocate in Quillet 1970. A number of scholars, on the other hand, saw Marsilius as an ardent apologist of republican ideas and have related his political theory to the political realities that prevailed in late medieval Italy (Gewirth 1951/56, 1979; Skinner 1978; Syros 2007; cf. also the discussion in Nederman 1995b).

## Cross-References

- ▶ [Ibn Rushd, Muḥammad ibn Aḥmad al-Ḥafīd \(Averroes\)](#)
- ▶ [John of Jandun](#)
- ▶ [Political Aristotelianism](#)
- ▶ [Political Philosophy](#)
- ▶ [William of Ockham](#)

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## Martin Luther, Political Thought

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### Abstract

Martin Luther (1483–1546) was a German Reformer, theologian, translator of the Bible into German, priest, theology professor (from 1512) at the university of Wittenberg in Electoral Saxony, preacher and pastor, prolific author in both German and Latin, former Augustinian monk, and excommunicated by the papacy in 1521. His best known political doctrines are the *Zwei Reiche/Regimente Lehre* (*Two Kingdoms and/or Two Governments*); political obedience and hostility to rebellion and millennialism; endorsement of princely “absolutism”; the territorial “prince’s church” (*landesherrliches Kirchenregiment*). Slightly less well known are his opposition to usury, his anti-Jewish attitudes, his very “secular” interpretation of marriage and divorce, his doctrine of the three estates (the military, economic, and ecclesiastical), his “congregational” tendencies in church government, and his belief that his was the “end-time” when Satan and Anti-Christ ruled the world. His principal political doctrines were not unfamiliar; they resemble Augustine’s conception of the two *civitates*, the medieval “two swords” controversy, and conventional doctrines of obedience and good order of his time. Luther, moreover, set out his political ideas in pamphlets prompted by specific emergencies, and never consolidated them in a definitive text. Some interpreters see them as an expression of “social conservatism” rather than as inferences from his theology.

Luther’s personal and pastoral concerns from the first centered on the right understanding of how the Christian is saved (or “justified,” accounted or

rendered just). They gained a Europe-wide reception from 1517 in the controversy over indulgences, a practice that for Luther symbolized the pernicious misrepresentations of true doctrine afflicting Christianity. The main themes of his theology were salvation by God’s grace alone, experienced in faith (*sola fide*), and rejection of what he regarded as the received doctrine of the “sophists” (the scholastic theologians) that salvation was a reward “merited” (earned) by “good works.” For Luther, good works, which to be truly good must be done freely and not out of self-interest or fear, are the product and not the cause of justification (*On Good Works*, 1520). A right understanding of Scripture thus frees Christians from trying to achieve salvation by their own efforts, an impossible burden imposed by the “tyranny” of Rome. Even God’s law is no longer a coercive, external imposition for Christians but is obeyed freely and willingly. All this Luther summarized as “Christian liberty.” He regarded Scripture alone (*sola scriptura*) as the source for these teachings, especially its “core,” the Pauline Epistles, St John’s Gospel and the First Letter of St Peter. Its authority is unconditional, irrespective of traditions and popes, although Luther acknowledged the value of the church fathers, especially Augustine, and works such as Tauler’s *Theologia Deutsch*. The Christian must continually “search” Scripture for him/herself. Luther rejected any distinction in spiritual dignity between a “higher” spiritual estate, bound by duties of “perfection,” and a lower lay estate of which less was demanded (his “priesthood of all believers,” that is, their *equality*). He acknowledged that every community (*Gemeinde*, with *Reich* or *Land* his nearest approximation to “state”) must have an ecclesiastical “estate,” along with a ruling (protecting) and an “economic” (nourishing) estate. But ecclesiastics merely occupy a distinct office (*Beruf, Amt*), not a higher spiritual status. Duties previously incumbent only on those in “holy orders” vowed to spiritual perfection, therefore, now bound every Christian, or ceased to enjoy esteem, such as celibacy.

These doctrines undermined the authority of the established ecclesiastico-political order and its personnel. Given the hostility of the papacy

and its supporters to the fundamental reform of the whole of Christendom that Luther came to demand, only territorial “Protestant” or “evangelical” churches could be established (“evangelical” meaning gospel or good news, “Protestant” alluding to the princes and estates that protested against the second Diet of Speyer’s (1529) decision to ban any further reformation). Luther became increasingly convinced that the opposition of the pope and his theologians to reformation demonstrated that the pope was the Antichrist. Provisional remedies such as territorial churches were therefore appropriate in this “end-time.” Evangelical churches depended on rulers for political support, and for protection against the papacy and Catholic princes bent on eradicating “heresy,” but also against those who wanted to advance reformation by violence and iconoclasm. The most serious occurrences of this sort were the religio-political “Peasant Wars” of 1524–1525 and millennialist Münster between 1534 and 1535. The “Romanists” blamed them on the “heresiarch” Luther. Princely protection was, however, often neither unconditional nor disinterested. Luther had no intention of replacing “Romanist tyranny” with that of territorial overlords. His attitude to secular rulers was distinctly ambiguous. In his *Appeal to the German Nobility* (1520) he called on the rulers of the Holy Roman Empire to use their authority to advance reformation, since as rulers they had the right and as Christians the duty to do so. But in *On Secular Authority* (1523), prompted by rulers banning his German translation of the New Testament (published 1522), he condemned secular rulers generally (“a good prince is a rare bird in heaven”), and attempted to safeguard true faith and doctrine by contending that the Christian inhabits two realms (*Reiche*), each with its own government (*Regiment*), the spiritual and the secular or “worldly” (*weltlich*). The two have entirely distinct competences and instruments of rule. The spiritual *Reich* is the invisible community of all true Christians, governed by God through Christ and the Word alone. Its members neither need nor use the protection of law or the sword (Luther’s symbol for coercive, secular government) for themselves, since they do not resist evil and expect no advantage or protection from rulers.

The worldly or temporal *Reich* is composed of those not justified in the sight of God. They would tear each other apart, but for the fact that secular government coerces them into behaving in a purely “externally just” manner by means of laws and punishments. Insofar as no Christian is a perfect Christian in this life, they too require the law and secular government. Secular government is thus a divine institution, which also protects true Christians, since they voluntarily do what is right – Luther assumed that legal and moral obligations were much the same – and are therefore obedient subjects. Christians may also exercise temporal authority themselves, out of love for their neighbor, even if that love means extreme harshness. This was the case when Luther subsequently exhorted rulers to show no mercy to the rebellious peasants in his *Against the Murderous, Thieving Hordes of Peasants* of 1525. However, when rulers command what is incompatible with the will of God, Christians may not obey but may not rebel either: they must disobey and suffer. However, the Lutheran justification of political resistance in the *Magdeburg Confession* of 1550 has a basis in some highly circumstantial concessions in terms of the right of self-defense by Luther himself (*Warning to His Dear German People*, 1531). He had little regard for secular laws, less for lawyers, none at all for canon law. Even though the Reformation was mainly urban, he had no interest in republican institutions or questions of the best political form; his instincts were monarchical and he normally simply equated secular authority and “princes” (*Fürsten*). His theology of spirit versus letter tended to minimize the significance of “externals” and “forms” in general.

The “true church” cannot be a this-worldly institution, since the true Christians that alone compose it cannot be known. All the same, Luther treated it as a template for the “physical” or “external” church (i.e., the institutional church) as a voluntary association of believers governed only by Christ, Scripture, and the moral authority of pastors which it chose itself, complete with schools and provision for the poor (see *Right and Power of a Christian Assembly*, 1523). Secular rulers have (according to this version) no role

whatever in bringing men to true justice or true faith, contrary to what he taught in his *Appeal* and subsequently. In practice he endorsed an ecclesiastical order in which political subjection and religious allegiance are coterminous. He never resiled from his position that true faith could not be coerced, and indeed that coercion was counterproductive in dealing with “weak” Christians. Large sections of his *On Secular Authority* were later reprinted verbatim in justifications for religious toleration. Equally, however, he discerned dangers to souls from bad laws, institutions and practices, and urged their forcible abolition or prevention, either out of “charity” to neighbors, or as matters of “natural law” which he regarded as, for example, prohibiting “blasphemy,” which covered many “Romanist” practices.

Luther tended to posit apparently mutually exclusive antitheses (spiritual/worldly, spirit/letter, external/internal, freedom/law, gospel/traditions of men). His mode of expression was often confrontational, vituperative, and in his vernacular writings scatological. Disagreements with humanists like Erasmus over free will, and with other nonsectarian reformers, for example, Zwingli, over the sacrament of the Lord’s Supper, proved irresolvable, since the mere fact of disagreement despite the supposedly plain meaning of Scripture itself compromised the reformers’ authority. Luther’s intention had, however, never been to found a new church, still less a denomination, but to reform the old one.

## Cross-References

- ▶ [Jesuit Political Thought](#)
- ▶ [John Calvin, Political Thought](#)

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## Martin of Dacia

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### Abstract

Martin of Dacia, Danish Master of Arts and theologian of the last quarter of the thirteenth century, attempted to establish a new grammar that could be considered as an autonomous science. This grammar would be universal and grounded on ontological reality, its aim being the study of the properties of language.

Martin of Dacia was a Danish Master of Arts and theology at the University of Paris. What is known about his life and intellectual activity can be summarized as follows: he was active as a university teacher and wrote his works before 1287–1288, when he became Chancellor to the Danish King Erik VI Menved, whom he served for the rest of

his life. A canon first in Paris, he obtained the same office at Roskilde, Lund, and Slevig, as a reward for services rendered to the King. He died in 1304.

Martin is the author of a grammatical work and logical commentaries. The former, the *De modis significandi*, includes two parts, of which the first, on the parts of discourse (*Etymologia*), leads on to the second part, on syntactic analysis (*Dyasynthetica*). In this work Martin leaves aside two other sections, the *Orthographia* and the *Prosodya*, which deal with accents and syllables. These two sections, which were part of the traditional writings on grammar, were usually placed before the sections of *Etymologia* and *Dyasynthetica*. Martin's *De modis significandi* was very well known and influential, judging by the number of manuscripts in which it survives and the many references to it by later grammarians. It became so important that several authors wrote commentaries on it in the following decades. As for Martin's logical work, it consists of a set of questions on the *old logic* (*logica vetus*), that is, Aristotle's *Categories* and *De interpretatione*, the *Isagoge* of Porphyry, Gilbert of Poitiers' *Liber sex principiorum*, and Boethius' commentary on Aristotle's *Topics*. His logical work is extant in only one manuscript, which suggests that it was much less widely distributed than the *De modis significandi*.

His prominence as a medieval philosopher relies almost entirely on his *De modis significandi*. If we assume as certain Martin's chronological priority over Boethius of Dacia, as scholarship tends to do (see Marmo 1994), this work is the first systematic treatment of the logical aspects of language. Along with Boethius of Dacia, Martin was one of the outstanding exponents of the first generation of the "speculative grammarians" or *modistae*.

Martin's project was to establish a new grammar departing from the existing descriptive approach and the reading of classical authors that had constituted the discipline's traditional curriculum. For Martin, as for Boethius of Dacia, grammar should no longer be considered as a mere introduction to the other domains of the *Trivium* (such as rhetoric and logic) and the *Quadrivium*, but as an autonomous field of research. To this end, he developed a

theory of the formal aspects of language concerned solely with the correctness of propositions and concepts and, unlike logic, not with their truth or applicability to reality. In this way he attributed a scientific status to grammar, considering it an autonomous science with its own subject matter. This autonomy had been endorsed as early as the eleventh century, but it gained further consistency under the influence of Aristotle's *Posterior Analytics*, as this work defined the criteria for any possible science: the subject matter has to be necessary and universal.

As far as the criterion of necessity is concerned, Martin shares with Boethius of Dacia the view that grammar is a science even though its principles are not absolute at the same level of the principles of other sciences, such as metaphysics. As for the criterion of universality, it is assured by establishing as its object "modes of signifying" (*modi significandi*), that is, ways in which a lexical notion, in addition to its essential reference, can express different values, just as the verb *dolere* and the noun *dolor* or the noun *domum* and the participle *datum* refer to different aspects of the same notion. In other words, the same idea can be signified through various parts of speech as long as its "modes of signifying" are not in contrast with that idea, or, again, the lexeme (*dictio*) is suitable to receive the form of a noun, pronoun, verb, participle, or adverb. By means of this form or "mode of signifying," it is possible to express categories belonging to extralinguistic domains, as in the case of verbs or participles and nouns or pronouns, which express the metaphysical categories of change and permanence, respectively.

Establishing the "the modes of signifying" as the object of grammar guarantees the universality of grammar, as these modes are considered to be linguistic universals. Thus this science focuses on a universal grammar, valid for all languages, on which the grammars of each particular language are grounded. The difference between the diverse languages consists in the different way through which each language forms its vocal expression (*vox*). This fits into the domain of the accident and thus involves a devaluation of the level of vocal expression; yet, because the *vox* is a sign of the thing which must be signified, and given that is

more proper (*habilius signum*) than other signs such as a nod or a glance, grammar includes it, though only as an accident, as it falls more properly under the realm of natural philosophy. This view was followed by John of Dacia, but not by other *modistae*, such as Boethius of Dacia.

A further reason to assert grammar's universality, which allows an understanding of the underlying connection between the grammatical–logical level and the epistemological–ontological one, is that “modes of signifying” reflect corresponding “modes of being” (*modi essendi*) of some existing entity through the mediation of an intellectual act, which understands and conceptualizes it, giving rise to the corresponding “modes of understanding” (*modi intelligendi*). This, along with the Aristotelian characterization of the intellect in the act of knowing as a passive faculty, justifies the claim of grammar to be a science by rooting its object in reality: each thing has its properties or “modes of being” that determine the corresponding modes in which it can be understood (*modi intelligendi*), while the ways in which the intellect conceptualizes it determine the modes of signifying (*modi significandi*). The correspondence between the three “modes” rests on the assumption that any of the parts of speech is a hylomorphic compound, in which the matter (the *vox*) receives its signification through the form (the “modes of signifying”). Martin is clear on how the correspondence between modes is achieved, though he left some unresolved problems for the succeeding *modistae*: the “modes of signifying” derive from the “modes of understanding” as from their immediate cause and from the properties of things, the “modes of being,” as from an indirect cause, as this is made through the mediation of the intellect. This narrow derivative chain provides a grammar well anchored in reality, which avoids the risk of attributing arbitrariness to the object; yet it raises further problems, as in the case of empty or privative names such as “nothing” or “blindness,” or in the case of names of fictitious beings, such as “chimera.” If the relationship between the three kinds of modes is conceived as a narrow chain, there is no answer to the question as to the derivation from “modes of being” in the case of an object that does

not exist in reality or without the properties denoted by its “modes of signifying.” This is one of the main points that Boethius of Dacia and the succeeding *modistae* attempted to solve (see the entry on ► “[Radulphus Brito](#)” in this volume). Their solutions are varied, but they all departed from Martin by rendering more complex the process of derivation of the “modes of signifying” from the “modes of being.” In fact, later authors broadened the ways in which the “modes of signifying” can be attributed, as in the case of their attribution to other objects – whether existing or fictitious – by reason of supposed similarities of the “modes of signifying” with existing objects.

*Modistae* of later generations inherited a further divergence between Martin and Boethius on the relationship between the three modes. While Boethius argued for a relationship of similarity between the modes – they cannot be one and the same thing, otherwise each property or “mode of being” of a thing would have a corresponding “mode of signifying” – Martin rejected the notion that one mode can signify another: the three modes are, in his view, completely one and the same thing, being only accidentally different, just as Socrates remains one and the same person regardless of the places where he might be. Each mode cannot be a sign for the other two modes, because it would be a sign of something equal to itself, and nothing can be a sign of itself.

For Martin, the “modes of signifying” reside in the *vox* as in a sign, though they inhere in the signified thing like accidents in a substance. In this case too, Martin's solution, in contrast to that of Boethius, is probably carried out – as Marmo (1994) suggests – to prevent a hypostatization of the “modes of signifying”: in the act of giving a name, the intellect does not create anything really existent to be added to the substance of the *vox*; the “modes of signifying,” as well as the “modes of understanding,” reside in external things, and only in a weaker sense do they reside in the intellect and in the *vox*. In the ontological frame, each kind of mode has its peculiarity and autonomy, making possible an autonomous inquiry of each kind, and this tripartite structure does not involve the production of something new when an act of intellection or signification occurs.



The differences between Martin and Boethius of Dacia extend further to logical matters. This can be noted regarding their response to the question of signification and the truth value of general assertions (see Mora-Márquez 2014, 2015). Unlike Boethius of Dacia, Martin sticks to the Boethian traditional interpretation of the key passage of Aristotle's *Perihermeneias* (I.16a3–8) championed by most of the commentators on the *Perihermeneias* in the first half of the thirteenth century. According to this view, an utterance (*vox*) signifies first a concept and only subsequently a thing. In his commentary on the *Perihermeneias*, Martin maintains that in the case of things that exist both inside and outside of the soul, a *vox* signifies both a concept or passion in the soul and a thing outside it. However, as just mentioned, it primarily signifies the concept and only secondarily the thing by means of the signification of concepts, for words are imposed on things insofar as they are represented in the intellect. The signification of concepts precedes that of things because there is no proportion between a material being and a *vox*: as a product of the rational faculty, thoughts are the only thing that can be proportionate to the *voces* (see Mora Márquez 2014, p. 32), and therefore, names first and foremost have to necessarily signify concepts. For Martin, truth belongs to the intellectual domain: an assertion can have a correspondent in reality, but its truth value rests primarily upon the human intellect. In this sense, an assertion with empty terms can be true, even though it refers to nothing existent: in the domain of logics, what matters is the truth of the utterance, not its semantic congruity (*congruitas*) – which is instead relevant in the domain of grammar. For this reason, even an utterance such as “chimaera est chimaera” is true, for it expresses an intellectual composition of elements that fit together.

## Cross-References

- ▶ [Boethius of Dacia](#)
- ▶ [Modistae](#)
- ▶ [Radulphus Brito](#)

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## Mathematics and Philosophy in the Arab World

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### Abstract

In the Arab world, the real cultivation of science and philosophy in the form of academic disciplines began in the second/eight century, after the period of the great conquests, as a result of the translation movement that was fostered by the 'Abbāsids of Baghdad. The "translation" into Arabic of the scientific and philosophical knowledge of the Ancients (Greeks, Persians, and Indians) was not uncritical, as the necessity (for religious reasons) of synthesizing this cultural heritage and the Islamic religious thought led to the foundation of a gnoseological itinerary, the final aim of which was God. It was on the basis of this purpose that the recovery of the ancient knowledge and the study of all disciplines, both philosophical and scientific, were justified.

Arab scholars generally used to present science as a branch of philosophy, since the process of inquiry into the nature of science was the same as that used to inquire into the nature of philosophical knowledge. In turn, science was generally distinguished into two main groups: mathematical sciences and natural sciences.

Mathematical sciences included arithmetic, geometry, astronomy, and music. Regarding mathematics, it seems that there were two different systems of thought in the school of Baghdad. One system was influenced by the classical heritage and tried to recover the Greek and Mesopotamian knowledge. The other system, more practical, was influenced by Indian sources, which had its champion in the beginner of algebra, Muḥammad b. Mūsā al-Khwarizmī.

As for philosophy, it played a fundamental role not only in the process of absorption and synthesis of "foreign" sciences and the formation of the Islamic ones, but also in the cultivation and the development of sciences in general, to the extent that this process would have been impossible without the contribution of the *falsafa* or *ḥikma* (wisdom).

As for the role of science and its relationship with theology, the Arabs maintained that science, in its general meaning, was useful in order to understand and implement the divine law.

The Arab contribution to the development of science and philosophy has been remarkable. After the period of the great conquests, the Arabs showed a particular interest in other cultures and civilizations they came in contact with and whose intellectual outcome they wanted to assimilate through the translation movement. Started under the Umayyads (661–750) of Damascus, the translation movement reached its apex during the first centuries of the long history of the 'Abbāsids (750–1258) of Baghdad who fostered this process, which was not only a cultural one.

The main reasons for supporting this kind of "diachronic encounter" between the Arabs and the Ancients were due to both political and social changes and the development of a new ideology that took place in the 'Abbāsids period. In a social and political climate such as that of the 'Abbāsīd Baghdad, the need for theoretical sciences became more and more pressing. On the other hand, the necessity (for religious reasons) of synthesizing the heritage of the Ancients and the Islamic religious thought led to the foundation of a gnoseological itinerary, the final aim of which was God.

It was on the basis of this purpose that the recovery of the ancient knowledge and the study of all disciplines, both philosophical and scientific, were justified. In this regard, it is worth noting that the "curriculum" of the school of Baghdad was inspired by Greek sources, although it also included Islamic sciences such as law (*fiqh*) and theology (*kalām*).

With regard to scientific disciplines, the Arab scholars generally used to present science as a branch of philosophy, so that al-Kindī (801–873), in defining the epistemic position of science within the philosophical knowledge, maintained that the process of inquiry into the nature of science was the same as that which is used to inquire into the nature of philosophical knowledge.

In turn, science was generally distinguished into two main groups: mathematical sciences (*al-'ulūm al-riyādiyya*) and natural sciences (*al-'ulūm al-ṭabī'iyya*). Mathematical sciences included arithmetic, geometry, astronomy, and music.

Like the other disciplines studied by the Arabs, also the mathematical sciences, which developed in Baghdad around the third/ninth century, experienced remarkable progress, thanks to the translations of Greek texts into Arabic; the translation of Euclid's *Elements* by al-Ḥajjāj seems to go back to the fifth 'Abbāsids Caliph Hārūn al-Rashīd (786–809), who encouraged this kind of translations. His son, al-Ma'mūn (809–833), who succeeded to him in the caliphate, encouraged learning even more strongly than his father. To this aim, he founded in Baghdad a centre for translation and research: the House of Wisdom (*Bayt al-ḥikma*).

The most important Greek mathematical texts that were translated are Euclid's works, including, besides *Elements*, the *Data*, the *Optics*, the *Phaenomena*, and *On Divisions*. As far as Archimedes, although among his works only two texts seem to have been translated, that is, *Sphere and Cylinder* and *Measurement of the Circle*, their influence was remarkable, since they stimulated original researches. Instead, almost all of Apollonius' works were translated, as well as Diophantus' *Arithmetica* and Menelaus' *Sphaerica*. The development of mathematics was also encouraged by the necessity of respecting religious prescriptions: the duty of observing the holy days, and the related ritual practices, represented a stimulus for the study of astronomy. On the other hand, the need of applying the Islamic law to some situations concerning

problems of inheritance, dowry, or tithe (*zakāt*), for example, required the development of algebra, an Arabic invention.

Regarding mathematics, it seems that there were two different systems of thought in the school of Baghdad. One system was influenced by the classical heritage, and tried to recover the Greek and Mesopotamic knowledge. The other system, more practical, was influenced by Indian sources which had its champion in the beginner of algebra, Muḥammad ibn Mūsā al-Khwarizmī (d. 850), as he wrote a treatise on the Indian numbers, preserved only in its Latin version, *De numero Indorum*.

The name of al-Khwarizmī, however, is linked to his famous treatise *Ḥisāb al-jabr wa-l-muqābala*, later translated into Latin by Robert of Chester and Gerard of Cremona (*Liber algebrae et almucabala*). Here he turned the Greek concept of mathematics, which was essentially geometric, in a revolutionary way. In fact, the Greeks, as they felt the impossibility of conceiving in an analytical way the idea of the irrational numbers, gave geometry the function of studying "immeasurable" greatness. From this standpoint, the Arabs went over the Greeks and, in applying the same procedures of the rational numbers to the irrational ones, contributed to the progress of mathematics in a remarkable way.

The Arab mathematicians Thābit ibn Qurra and 'Umar Khayyām were influenced by the Greek mathematical heritage. Thābit ibn Qurra (826–901), one of the most important translators from Syriac and Greek, did not only translate the major Greek mathematicians (Euclides, Archimedes, Apollonius, and Ptolemy) but also wrote a mathematical treatise on the solution of problems of algebra through geometric demonstration. He was also influenced by the Neoplatonic doctrines and recovered their ideas, as showed by his translations of Proclus and Nicomachus of Gerasa (*Introduction to Arithmetica*). As for 'Umar Khayyām (1050–1122), although he is considered one of the major Persian poets, he was also a scientist. He also wrote a *Kitāb al-jabr* in which, unlike al-Khwarizmī, he dealt with cubic equations.

Although the Arab mathematicians are famous for their works on algebra, number theory, number systems, geometry, and trigonometry, they also gave their contributions to astronomy. In this respect, the translation of Ptolemy's *Almagest* provided important astronomical material.

As a result of the study and the practice of astronomy, during this period two observatories were founded in Baghdad and in Damascus: here the astronomers, entrusted by the Caliph himself, carried out a program of astronomic observations. The aim of this program was to verify the theories explained by Ptolemy in his *Almagest* and to improve the astronomical tools. Historical sources also report of private observatories. Particular attention deserves the private observatory of the Banū Mūsā who, besides being important translators in the *Bayt al-Ḥikma*, completed, from 840 to 869, some studies about the sun and the fixed stars. The Shī'ite Persian dynasty of the Buyids, too, encouraged several astronomical projects in Persia where they founded permanent observatories equipped with sophisticated instruments. From one of these observatories, the astronomer 'Abd al-Raḥmān al-Sūfī (903–986), the author of *The Book of the Fixed Stars*, began the measurement of the ecliptic in the presence of several astronomers, as referred by the versatile scholar al-Bīrūnī (973–1048). The Buyid 'Aḏūd al-Dawla (936–983), when he became the governor of Baghdad, founded in the garden of his house a building, which Ibn al-Qiṭī (1172–1248) called *Bayt al-raṣad* (the house of the astronomical observation), to promote a program of observation of the planets.

As for philosophy, it played a fundamental role not only in the process of absorption and synthesis of "foreign" sciences and the formation of the Islamic ones, but also in the cultivation and the development of sciences in general, to the extent that this process would have been impossible without the contribution of the *falsafa* or *ḥikma*. As a matter of fact, the term *ḥakīm* was used to denote a physician, a scientist, as well as a philosopher.

With regard to its definition, the Arabs used two terms to translate the Greek word "philosophy": *falsafa* and *ḥikma*. *Falsafa*, a calque from

Greek, was understood according to its original meaning, which the Arabs perfectly knew, of *ḥubb al-ma'rifa* (love for knowledge). As for its function, al-Kindī, one of the first philosophers of the Arab world (and of Arab origin), interpreted philosophy as the knowledge of the reality of things according to human possibility. Since this kind of knowledge is both theoretical and practical, *falsafa* has a double aim: to reach the truth and to behave in accordance with this truth. Starting from this definition, some philosophers like al-Fārābī (870–950) drew a distinction between *falsafa yaqīniyya* and *falsafa maẓnūna*; the first was based on demonstration (*burhān*) while the second, deriving from opinion, was based on dialectics.

On the other hand, *ḥikma*, a Qur'ānic term that occurs 20 times in the Sacred Book and appears in the *Ḥadīth* literature too, had several meanings. The majority of Muslim authorities, who debated its exact meaning in the Qur'ān as well as in the Tradition, identified it with theology (*kalām*), as well as with the "intellectual sciences" (*al-'ulūm al-'aqliyya*) or with "traditional philosophy" or, even with the so-called *ḥikma ilāhiyya*, literally "theosophia." *Ḥikma* may imply a connection between knowledge and practice of knowledge, through which man can realize his happiness and bring his being to perfection, as was stated not only by al-Fārābī but also by another eminent *ḥakīm*, Ibn Sīnā (known as Avicenna, 980–1037) and the Ikhwān al-Ṣafā' (The Brethren of Purity, fourth/tenth century). With the *Ishrāqī* school represented by Suhrawardī (1155–1191), *ḥikma* combined the formal religious sciences and the essence of pure gnosis: in this way, it acquired the connotation of both theoretical knowledge and spiritual vision.

In the Shī'ite circles, *ḥikma*, being connected with the "cycle of initiation" that follows the "cycle of prophecy," would be identified with the esoteric dimension of religion, as stated by the *Ismā'īliyya*. In this way, *ḥikma* had a soteriological aim insofar as it involved not only theoretical knowledge but also the direct vision of the Truth that implied the salvation of man's soul.

Regarding the development of philosophy and its diffusion in the Arab world, it should be noted

that although it goes back to the translation movement, philosophical schools existed in the East long before the appearance of the Arabs in the history of the world. After the advent of the Islam and thanks to the translations from Greek, the Arabs, after having assimilated the classical heritage, developed their personal and independent system of thought in which, because of religious conditioning, Aristotelian theories were interpreted in a Neoplatonic way. One of the main reasons of this “misinterpretation” is linked to the works that introduced Neoplatonism in the Arab world; in this regard, it is worth noting that the diffusion of Neoplatonism was due not to Plotinus’ *Enneades* but to some of its later and adulterated versions, among which was the so-called *Theology of Aristotle*. This was an epitome of Plotinus’ *Enneades* akin to another pseudo-Aristotelian treatise based on Proclus’ *Element of Theology*, which, in turn, was known in the Arab world with the title of *Kitāb al-īdāh fī khayr al-mahd* (*The Book of the Absolute Goodness*). A further reason for Neoplatonic tendencies in Aristotelian theories was religious influence. From this standpoint, the recovery of Greek philosophy, especially of Neoplatonism, was functional to a cosmological and gnoseological system hierarchically structured, at the top of which there was God.

With the historical development of Islam, the real nature of *falsafa* changed from a system of rational thought to a kind of wisdom that played a pivotal role in theology; nevertheless, philosophy, although it was interpreted as theosophy sometimes connected to illumination or gnosis, did not disdain the use of rational thought. So, philosophy in the Arab world, even when interpreted as “Greek philosophy,” did not concern Greek doctrines only, insofar as it developed a system of rational thought which made use of analysis, logic, and rational inquiry. If these philosophical tools were adopted and developed by different Islamic sciences (grammar, rhetoric, classification of tradition, geometry, arithmetic, etc.), on the other hand, philosophy would also give the Arabs the appropriate intellectual background, which enabled them to encounter other civilizations and cultures and to integrate the Arabic

(Islamic) heritage into the new ideas they came in contact with.

A paradigm of this is the emanatistic solution proposed by al-Fārābī and Ibn Sīnā who, establishing also the ontological foundations of science, influenced the subsequent history of Islamic sciences and philosophy.

Regarding the role of science and its relationship with philosophy–theology, it is worth noting that jurists as well as theologians generally maintained that science, in its general acceptance, was useful in order to understand and implement the divine law. As for mathematical sciences, the theologian al-Ġazālī (1005–1111), to mention the most representative thinker, did not attribute to them any function in spiritual and metaphysical matters. On the other hand, the Ikhwān al-Ṣafā’ praised Pythagoras not only because he was considered “a wise man” but also because the Pythagorean doctrine, unlike other doctrines on number, considered existing things as ruled by the nature of numbers, the knowledge of which here implies the knowledge of their origin. On this assumption, the authors of the most ancient encyclopedia of the Arab world known so far, the *Rasā’il Ikhwān al-Ṣafā’ wa-Khullān al-Wafā’* (*The Epistles of the Brethren of Purity and the Loyal Friends*), made the arithmetic a part of the propaedeutic disciplines; for this reason they started their *Rasā’il* with the epistle on number. In particular, in two of the 52 epistles of the *Rasā’il* (namely the 32nd and the 33rd, which belong to the third section of the encyclopedia), they argued that the knowledge of numbers equals the knowledge of God, since the origin of numbers from the “one” represented a way to prove the origin of the universe from God. Moreover, echoing the Pythagorean doctrine, the Ikhwān al-Ṣafā’ compared the number one to God; just as the number one is not similar to the other numbers, although it is the origin of numbers, God is not similar to His creatures although He is the Creator of the universe. In this respect, Pythagoras could be considered a “monotheist.” Finally, the way in which numbers come from the one may be compared with the way in which created beings come from God. This assumption involves a kind of symmetry between the numerical progression from the number one and the

emanation (*fayḍ*) of the universe from God, according to the following correspondences: 1 = God; 2 = Intellect; 3 = Soul; 4 = matter; 5 = nature; 6 = body; 7 = stars; 8 = elements; 9 = generated beings.

The use of mathematical sciences, in particular of arithmetic, as a metaphorical reading of Neoplatonism is also found in the Ismāʿīlīs, who adopted numbers in their metaphorical interpretation (*taʿwīl*) of the Scripture. In particular, they recovered the so-called *sīmīyāʾ* (or “esoteric science of the letters”) which drew upon the Pythagorean tradition for its symbolic numerology, just as they used the Neoplatonic tradition as a framework of their cosmology. The result of the application of this particular science is a kind of exegesis of the Soul, achieved through a process of transmutation of the words and letters into numbers thanks to a variety of techniques such as, and first of all, the *ḥisāb al-jummal* (i.e., the calculation made by giving to each letter of the Arabic alphabet a numerical value). Thus, the application of the *sīmīyāʾ* and the recovery of numerological techniques become a “sign” (one of the literally meanings for *sīmīyāʾ*) not only of the Ismāʿīlī *daʿwa* (propaganda) but also of the intrinsic unity of all levels of reality (cosmological, epistemological, and imamic), recognized within the Ismāʿīliyya.

By the end of the fifth/eleventh century, philosophy was attacked and criticized by the most important champion of the orthodoxy, al-Ġazālī. If his polemical treatise *Tahāfut al-Falāsifa* (*The Incoherence of the Philosophers*) has been considered as a mortal blow for philosophy, on the other hand, it provoked a very interesting reaction, like the one that took place in the western lands through the main philosophers of the Andalusian school: Ibn Bājjā (known as Avempace, d. 1138) and, especially, Ibn Rushd (known as Averroes, 1126–1198), the great commentator of Aristotle, who undertook the defense of philosophy with his *Tahāfut al-tahāfut* (*The Incoherence of the Incoherence*), a polemical answer to al-Ġazālī’s attack. With the death of Ibn Rushd and the subsequent power shift from Muslim to Christian, the philosophical activity in western Islamic countries came down.

In eastern Islamic countries, after the fall of the ʿAbbāsīd caliphate (1258) and the subsequent end of the symbolic political unity of the Islamic world, philosophy was dominated, in general, by the heritage of Ibn Sīnā and Suhrawardī. Their ideas and influences stimulated the rise of several philosophical schools such as that of Sadr al-Dīn al-Shīrāzī (d. 1640) known as Mullā Sadrā, the founder of the so-called “transcendent theosophy” (*ḥikma mutaʿāliyya*). His idea of an “existence preceding essence,” which goes back to Ibn Sīnā and Suhrawardī, made the transition from essentialism to the existentialism possible. Moreover, in dividing the way to knowledge into four parts (metaphysics, physics, theology, and psychology), he gave a further demonstration of the intrinsic unity between philosophy and science in general.

## Cross-References

- ▶ Aristotle, Arabic
- ▶ Essence and Existence
- ▶ al-Fārābī, Abū Naṣr
- ▶ al-Ġazālī, Abū Hāmid Muḥammad
- ▶ al-Kindī, Abū Yūsuf Yaʿqūb ibn Ishāq
- ▶ Ibn Bājjā, Abū Bakr ibn al-Sāʿig (Avempace)
- ▶ Ibn Rushd, Muḥammad ibn Aḥmad al-Ḥafīd (Averroes)
- ▶ Ibn Sīnā, Abū ʿAlī (Avicenna)
- ▶ Ikhwān al-Ṣafāʾ, Encyclopedia of
- ▶ Ismāʿīlī Philosophical Tradition
- ▶ Medicine and Philosophy
- ▶ Plato, Arabic
- ▶ Thābit ibn Qurra
- ▶ Translations from Greek into Arabic

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## Matthew of Aquasparta

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### Abstract

Matthew of Aquasparta (c. 1237–1302) was a theologian who made a considerable career in the Franciscan order. In his theory of the human soul, he accepted the plurality of forms and opposed the conception of the unity to the soul and its powers. Among epistemological issues, he developed the elements of the theory of intuitive knowledge which became important in the thought of John Duns Scotus and William Ockham. Matthew pointed out that Augustine refuted the ancient skeptics by the soul’s certain knowledge of its own existence. He also defended the Augustinian theory of illumination in his epistemology and the freedom of the will over the intellect.

Matthew of Aquasparta was born of the noble Bentivenghi family and made a strong ecclesiastical career in the Franciscan order. He entered the order as a child in Umbria but moved to Paris for university studies at about 1268, becoming a student of Bonaventure and John Peckham. He taught at Bologna, Paris and the Papal Curia. In the year 1287, he became the minister general of the order.

Matthew’s university studies were no doubt influenced by the doctrinal quarrels between Thomas Aquinas and other Aristotelian thinkers on the one hand, and the Bonaventure and other Augustinians on the other. While Matthew of Aquasparta was not really a highly original mind, he was a clear and acute Franciscan thinker continuing on the lines set by Bonaventure. In his theory of the human soul, he accepted the plurality of forms and thereby opposed attributing strong unity to the soul and its powers. Among epistemological issues, Matthew defended the capability of human intellect to directly perceive individuals. He divided intellectual knowledge into three classes: acquaintance by sign (*per ratiocinationem*), by direct apprehension (*per inspectivam contuitivam; per intuitionem*), and by understanding the essence (*per quidditatis speculationem*), and thus developed the theory of intuitive knowledge that became very important in the accounts of intellectual knowledge of singulars by later Franciscans John Duns Scotus and William Ockham. Matthew also pointed out that Augustine refuted the ancient skeptics by the soul’s certain knowledge of its own existence. He defended the Augustinian theory of illumination in his epistemology, and defended the freedom of the will over the intellect.

### Cross-References

- ▶ [Consciousness](#)
- ▶ [Intuitive and Abstractive Cognition](#)
- ▶ [John Duns Scotus](#)
- ▶ [Will](#)
- ▶ [William of Ockham](#)



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## Maximos Planoudes

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### Abstract

Maximos Planoudes (1255–1305) was a Byzantine scholar and writer, an influential teacher, learned in many fields, a copyist and “editor” of numerous Greek texts, and a translator of Latin works. His efforts have enriched the manuscript tradition of a considerable part of Greek literary and scientific production. He was the most eminent scholar of his time and probably the most productive Byzantine classical scholar. Planoudes was the first Byzantine with sufficient knowledge of Latin and of Latin culture. He translated systematically theological and secular Latin works (among them Augustine’s *On the Trinity* and Boethius’ *The Consolation of Philosophy*) and made possible, after a long time, the communication of

Greek- and Latin-speaking worlds. Planoudes is one of the leading figures of the Early Palaiologan Renaissance.

## Biographical Information

Nikomedea 1255 – Constantinople 1305. Byzantine scholar with impressive range of interests, grammarian, productive “editor” of Greek texts and translator of Latin works, monk, representative of the intellectual movement in the Early Palaiologan Renaissance (mid-thirteenth- mid-fourteenth-century), and the most outstanding Latin scholar in the East. Manuel Planoudes was born in Asia Minor and settled in Constantinople where he completed his higher education and learned Latin.

Quite young (c. 1280) Manuel entered the Imperial Court as a state official and began to teach, perhaps in the imperial Chora Monastery. He abandoned a promising career in the civil service, became a monk (1283/1292) and changed his name to Maximos. He devoted himself to the monastic life of a scholar. Through his teaching activity, within the monasteries of the capital, he became famous and attracted many scions of noble families. Among his pupils were scholars like Manuel Moschopoulos, Georgios Lekapenos, Demetrios Triklinios, the Zarides brothers, and Ioannes Zacharias. Except philosophy, he taught grammar, poetry, and rhetoric (*trivium*) but from late 1280s he started to teach astronomy, mathematics, and geography (*quadrivium*). His teaching was based on the best ancient sources available to each field: Plato and Aristotle, Strabo, Pausanias, Diophantus, Cleomedes, Euclid, Nicomachus, Ptolemy, and many others. Planoudes was an outstanding member of a wide circle of well-educated Byzantines like George of Cyprus, Nikephoros Choumnos, Manuel Bryennios, and many other future Patriarchs and state officials. As many Byzantine thinkers and scholars, Planoudes had close relations to the imperial court and even to the emperor himself, Andronikos II.

At first Planoudes supported the pro-union policy of the emperor Michael VIII and within the West-friendly atmosphere that followed the

unionist Council of Lyon (1274) he showed his enthusiasm for the Latin culture and started to translate works of Latin theology and literature. Later on he supported the anti-union policy of Andronikos II and, finally, he decided not to participate into state and ecclesiastical missions and to avoid his involvement into theological questions. So he preferred to confine himself to activities such as the teaching and the editing of ancient Greek texts. He entered the Monastery of Akataleptos where he taught from 1299 until his early death in 1305.

Planoudes was really a man of books, a devoted reader of the entire corpus of Greek literary and scientific texts, an owner of many codices, and a systematic copyist of numerous works with a constant concern to provide appropriate texts for himself and for his students. His scholarly achievements cannot be underestimated though he was not an editor exactly in the modern sense. The main bulk of his writings were done for didactic purposes. He wrote grammar and syntax manuals and translated a Latin grammar. He edited and/or commented on Greek poetry, tragedy and comedy, and historiography. He reintroduced nine plays of Euripides, started an edition of *Moralia* of his favorite writer Plutarch (that was completed after his death), accomplished the voluminous *Anthologia Planudea* (1299, a version of the *Greek Anthology*), and compiled collections of various Greek texts. Planoudes' extensive work contains also a corpus on rhetoric, encomia, canons, hymns, scientific writings, and translations of Latin texts. His extensive letter-writing (1292–1300) is a valuable source for the political and intellectual events of this period as well as for Planoudes' life and personality.

## Thought

During the Early Palaiologan period, a decisive (re)turn to the ancient Greek tradition took place, not for the first time in Byzantium. In spite of the economic and military decay of the empire, the Byzantines developed a vivid intellectual life. Many scholars seemed to find relief from the

calamities of the present and from the uncertainty for the future by turning to what they considered as their glorious past and their natural heritage, that is, ancient Greek civilization. Without repudiating their Christian identity they were lovers of (pagan) antiquity that they had to rediscover for themselves. It was also the military and trade presence of the Catholic Westerns in the Orthodox East, and the possibility of the Church union, that made the Byzantines to realize the necessity to learn more about Latin/western civilization. In this context we can understand Planoudes' project (a) to preserve as many ancient texts as he could, to write commentaries on them and treatises on all the sectors of higher education, and (b) to translate Latin works and offer, for the first time, a reliable access to the otherwise unknown intellectual Latin world.

Planoudes probably taught philosophy but he did not write anything on Aristotle; he could use the textbooks on the *Organon* written by his contemporaries, George Pachymeres, Maximos Holobolos and John Peditasimos. As for Plato, he included excerpts of Platonic works in one of his collections and collaborated in the copying of a manuscript of Plato. Planoudes' preferences are perhaps to be found in his choice to translate Cicero's *The Dream of Scipio* and Macrobius' commentary. In the *Dream* there are views acceptable for Christians, as the omnipotence of God and the immortality of human souls, together with political thoughts about the love of justice and the ideal of devoting one's life to the service of one's state that were suitable for a Byzantine emperor like Andronikos II. The reminiscences of Plato are evident throughout both Latin texts. The same can be said for another choice of Planoudes, namely, his translation (before 1296) of Boethius' *Consolation of Philosophy*, where the Christian confrontation to impending death resorted to non-Christian sources.

Byzantine scholars' interest in Greek scientific writings went together with their interest in Greek philosophy and literature. Planoudes' interests and teaching activity covered also the sciences of the *quadrivium*. Around 1292/93 Planoudes was interested in mathematics and specifically in Diophantus, whose work Pachymeres had already

used in his *Quadriuvium*. He made a manuscript of Diophantus' *Arithmetic* (with comments) and it is thanks to Planoudes that the work of Diophantus survived in the history of mathematics. He also wrote the *Calculation according to the Indians* (1292/3), preserved in forty-one manuscripts. It is an important work that shows the diffusion of Hindu arithmetic in the Byzantine world and contains the first use of zero as a place holder at the right of the other symbols. For his teaching Planoudes prepared scholia on Euclides' *Elements* and he edited Aratus' *Phenomena* (c. 1290) and the circular theory of the Stars of Cleomedes. He was interested also in the geography of Ptolemy (1295) and music or harmonics; he wrote a book on harmonics and collected nearly all the relevant works (1294).

Planoudes proved to be a pioneer in the eastern Christendom and with his systematic translations of both profane and Christian Latin authors he contributed to the restoration of the contact between the two parts of Christendom that their ways had parted long ago. Except the philosophical works, he translated the anonymous' *On the Misdeeds of the Age*, Ovid, Caesar and grammatical works, as well as many others. The quality of his translations is generally more than satisfactory. In this activity Planoudes is probably unique in Byzantium and, though appreciated, he found no imitators until Demetrios Kydones (1324–1397/98).

Planoudes was the first Byzantine to study Augustine and his major achievement was the rendering into Greek of *On the Trinity* (completed before 1282). That was a thoughtful choice, because the western conception of Trinity, a much debated issue between East and West, derived mainly from Augustine. Thus, Augustine after centuries of ignorance was put on the map of Byzantine theology with Planoudes' widespread translation. And the Augustinian text had significant influence on Byzantine theologians; for instance, the hesychast Gregory Palamas made use of Planoudes' translation. Few years after this translation Planoudes wrote two anti-Latin treatises about the procession of the Holy Spirit and then he decided to withdraw from such debates considering himself as a classical scholar and not as a theologian.

Planoudes' ethical-political views are conventional and they are expressed in his epistolography and in the *On King* that was addressed both to the young emperor Michael IX Palaiologan, few days after his coronation in 1294, and to his father Andronikos II. It is an idealized portrait of the emperor who should have all the classical virtues. Planoudes declared that their race (*genos*) is a "Roman" (*Rhomaïos*) and exhibits a kind of patriotism common to the Byzantines after their liberation from the Latins and under the threat of the Ottomans. It is interesting that the monk Maximos is against pacifism when he considers the circumstances of his country. He justifies the war insofar as it is a liberating war of the pious against the impious who threatened the homeland and the faith of *Rhomaïoi*.

Planoudes gained his reputation as a teacher and a scholar. His work influenced Byzantine philosophers and thinkers like Metochites, Demetrius Kydones, Joseph Bryennios, and cardinal Bessarion. His teaching and his writings covered nearly every aspect of Byzantine learning and played a significant role during the Early Palaiologan Renaissance. Planoudes' manuals were used for a long time and, translated into Latin, were used even by Italian humanists. His meticulous efforts in finding, copying, and editing ancient texts facilitated their use and helped the re-appreciation and the recovery of the Greek heritage by the Byzantines. Finally, his translations broadened the horizon of Byzantine thought through the approach of the Latin culture – a path that only few followed in the Orthodox East.

## Cross-References

- ▶ [Augustine](#)
- ▶ [George Pachymeres](#)
- ▶ [Natural Philosophy, Byzantine](#)

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## Maximus the Confessor

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### Abstract

Maximus the Confessor (c. 580–662) was a Byzantine ascetic theologian who advanced an integrative theology borne out of the monastic circles he inhabited – the Chalcedonian Definition of 451 (i.e., two natures of Jesus Christ) and the church fathers – whereby, he advanced a spiritual theology that placed humanity and creation in a salvific relationship with the Word of God. Maximus, in alliance with the Roman Church, challenged the imperially backed Monothelite teachings that stated the one divine will subsumed the human will in Jesus Christ. In response to monothelitism, Maximus taught Jesus Christ possessed two faculties of the will within the one modality of willing. In the midst of the contestations against ecclesiastical and political authorities, Maximus coalesced teachings from the church fathers, often preserved and circulated in anthologies (i.e., *florilegia*), thereby reframing their teachings to address interrelated questions related to theology, cosmology, ontology, and anthropology. Steeped in the monastic networks of the seventh century, Maximus developed an ascetical theology centered on Jesus Christ and the Triune God as the divine reality that provided the ontological ground for dynamic movements of human divinization (i.e., *theosis*). The uniting of the human and divine natures in Jesus Christ (i.e., *hypostatic union*), according to Maximus, placed human

beings as the mediators between the world and God. Humanity and creation becomes deified through participation in the divine as the cosmos receives by grace what belongs to God by nature. Maximus recapitulated traditional concepts, hypostasis, *idiomatum communicatio*, and *perichoresis* to explicate a doctrine of Christ that was fully connected to his anthropology and teachings on creation. Having stood strong in his convictions even after being exiled and maimed, Maximus, the Byzantine monk and ascetical theologian, is known in sacred memory as the Confessor.

### The Life of Maximus the Confessor

Many of the biographical details for Maximus the Confessor (c. 580–662) are derived from the Syriac and Greek *Lives*. In the Syriac *Life* (written during the lifetime of Maximus; published in the 1970s by Sebastian Brock), George of Reshaina, who served in the court of Emperor Heraclius, provided an unflattering portrayal whereby he asserted Maximus was conceived within an adulterous relationship between a Samaritan man and a Persian slave girl. Contrary to this inflammatory Syriac account, the laudatory Greek *Life of Saint Maximus*, composed in the tenth century by the Studite monk, Michael Exaboulites, recounts that Maximus was of noble birth and received an excellent education befitting of a high social status. The Greek *Life* asserts that Maximus rose to head of the Imperial Chancery under Emperor Heraclius until becoming dissatisfied with civic life in 614, when he chose to enter the monastery at Chrysopolis. Around a decade later, between the years 624 and 625, Maximus relocated to the monastery of Saint George at Cyzicus. During the Persian invasion of 626, Maximus fled from Saint George to settle at a Greek monastery in Carthage sometime around 630.

In 654, at the monastery in Carthage, Maximus and Pyrrhus, the former was the exiled patriarch of Constantinople (r. 638–641), entered into the debates on the nature of the will in Jesus Christ. In the seventh century, to reach agreement

between ecclesiastical factions, Sergius (patriarch of Constantinople) advanced the Monothelite teaching that asserted there are two natures (see the Chalcedonian Definition of 451) along with a new position, that is, there is only one divine will or energy (known as monenergism) in Jesus Christ. Having affirmed the two nature Christology of the Council of Chalcedon (451), which professed Jesus Christ is fully human and fully divine, Maxentius asserted that to teach there was only one divine will (as the Monothelites had done) was incompatible with the orthodox faith of the Chalcedonian Definition. Prior to Maximus entering into the debates on the nature of the will in Jesus Christ, the ecclesiastical and political authorities sought to reunite two factions that emerged after the Council of Chalcedon (451), that is, the Chalcedonian (e.g., Rome) theologians, who affirmed two natures in Jesus Christ, and Monophysite (e.g., Antioch) theologians, who professed one nature in Jesus Christ. In 624, to encourage rapprochement, Emperor Heraclius and the Monophysites, produced a doctrinal formula that declared there was two natures and one will in Jesus Christ. Notably, the patriarch of Constantinople, Sergius, argued that Cyril of Alexandria had taught there was two natures and one will in Jesus Christ, which initially, persuaded many of the Monophysites to reconcile with the imperial Church that held to the two-nature Christology of Chalcedon. Yet, at the same time, opposition emerged, initially, from Sophrinus of Jerusalem who sent correspondence to Pope Honorius to condemn Monothelitism. Responding to Sophrinus, Honorius approved of Monothelitism and included the term “one will” in Jesus Christ, which thereafter, replaced the language of “one energy (monoenergism) within the preferred doctrinal formula of the Monothelites, known as the Ecthesis, which was promulgated by Emperor Heraclius in 638. Whereas the Eastern churches largely accepted the Ecthesis, the Roman papacy (after Pope Honorius) condemned this Monothelite profession, therefore, Emperor Constans replaced the Ecthesis with a new profession, known as the Typos. The Typos, which was probably composed by Paul II, the

patriarch of Constantinople, condemned Monothelitism and the alternative teachings that affirmed the two wills in Jesus Christ. The Typos did not resolve the issue, indeed, in 649, at the Lateran Council, the council fathers condemned this opaque doctrinal document.

In response to Pyrrhus and other opponents, Maximus affirmed the Chalcedonian Definition of 451 (<http://anglicansonline.org/basics/chalcedon.html>), which taught the two natures (divine and human) in the one person of Jesus Christ. Emperor Constans II demanded a recantation from Maximus, who was first exiled and after two additional refusals during imperial summons in 658 and 661 was increasingly persecuted. Maximus has been memorialized with the title Confessor after enduring intense persecution for the orthodox faith, including the cutting off of his right hand and tongue according to the tradition. Maximus died in Georgia on 16 August 662.

### The Literary Works of Maximus

In his literary corpus, Maximus wrote on a wide range of theological topics related to the spiritual life, anthropology, creation, Jesus Christ, and the Trinity. His writings may be divided into theological commentaries (*The Ambigua*, *Quaestiones to Thalassium*, *Quaestiones to Theopemptum*, *Quaestiones et dubia*, and *Exposition of Psalm 59*), ascetical writings (*The Ascetic Life*, *Two Centuries on Knowledge*, and *Four Centuries on Love*), and liturgical writings (*Mystagogia* and *Exposition of the Lord's Prayer*). There are several extant epistles of Maximus (*Epistle to Abbot Thalassius*, *Epistle to Anastasius*, and *Second Epistle to Thomas*). One of Maximus' favorite literary forms was "centuries" (*hekatontas*), which consisted of one hundred "chapters," typically the length of a paragraph. Maximus has four *Centuries on Love* and two *Centuries on Theology and the Incarnation*. Maximus preferred the traditional intellectual method of progressing in understanding through questions and responses, known as *erôtapokriseis*. Maximus' *Ascetic Life* is an example of this intellectual technique.

### Maximus' Synthesis

Reflecting the approach of many learned theologians, who appropriated the church fathers, Maximus synthesized a diverse range of intellectual sources to connect his teachings into a singular vision of the spiritual life, salvation, the Triune God, and the cosmos. Maximus recast various traditions into an ascetic spiritual theology that spoke to his own community. Maximus advanced a mystical vision that synthesized dogmatics and the spiritual life to explain how humanity moves to close communion with God. Maximus' intellectual sources reach back from Plato, to the Cappadocian fathers, and to Leontius of Byzantium. Maximus borrowed from Neoplatonic thought in developing his theological worldview. His relationship to Origen of Alexandria remains more of an open-ended question (Sherwood 1955; Balthasar 2003). Maximus had to navigate his relationship to the teachings of Origen when Emperor Justinian's condemnation of Origen, which marked the high watermark of the Origenist controversy. Thus, Maximus was intentionally opaque albeit his theology may be read as a synthesis of Origen's theology, the degree of interrelatedness is often difficult to assess. Maximus' doctrines often moved beyond Origen and Neoplatonism. For example, Maximus' concept of the eternal state of humanity involves an ongoing restful movement, whereas Origen stresses an absolute rest. Beyond Origen, Maximus drew from the "scholastic" Aristotelianism of the seventh century. Leontius of Byzantium and Sophronius (patriarch of Jerusalem) shaped Maximus' intellectual life. Furthermore, Maximus' work is preoccupied with affirming the Councils (Nicea, Chalcedon, and Chalcedon II). Maximus' Christology is articulated within the imperial philosophical circles of the late sixth and the seventh century. Maximus' employment of philosophical terms, discourse, and the complexity of his thought were borne out of Neo-Chalcedonianism of the seventh century that affirmed the Chalcedonian Definition of 451 (i.e., two nature Christology) and Cyril of Alexandria's teachings (i.e., single nature Christology and doctrine of divine suffering).



### Maximus' Christology

While Origen influenced Maximus' early thought on the Logos, Neo-Chalcedonian Christology was the starting point for his more mature thought. In agreement with the Ecumenical Councils (Ephesus 431; Chalcedon 451), Maximus affirmed the Incarnation as a hypostatic union, where the human and divine natures coexist in the God-Man. The term hypostasis was one of the most controversial terms during the Christological debates that had dominated Maximus' life. For Maximus, the Christological question was not merely an academic concern; rather as an ascetic monk, he understood that Christ impacted the spiritual life and the entire cosmos. Christ's hypostatic union provided the primordial synthesis that makes the deification of humanity possible. The person of Christ is the foundation and goal for all creation moving toward perfection through participation.

One of Maximus' greatest achievements was his appropriation of philosophical terminology (such as hypostasis, *communicatio idiomatum*, and *perichoresis*), in order to advance a dynamic Christology, which reflected the Neo-Chalcedonian position. Maximus' explication of Christ's hypostasis begins by drawing a parallelism within the human composite of body and soul. For Maximus, the nature of the union between the soul and body is a pivotal concept. Maximus insists that the whole is nothing else but its parts and that there is no other existence without these unified parts (*Opuscula*, PG 91, col. 117D). Furthermore, it is the totality of the parts in their mutual indwelling that has prominence over all divergence (*Opuscula*, PG 91, col. 521 BC). The whole of the human being in the sense of their person and existence is the hypostatic unity (*Ambigua*, PG 91, col. 1044D). Following this course of reasoning, the human nature of Christ, on account of having being in the Logos, consequently derives personality and existence from the Logos (*Epistles* 11, PG 91, col. 468AB). In additional writings, Maximus further explicated Christ's hypostasis through the concepts of *communicatio idiomatum* and *perichoresis*.

Maximus was probably the first theologian to employ the term *perichoresis* in order to

express the *communicatio idiomatum* of Christ's divine and human nature (Thunberg 1995). According to the Scholies to Ps.-Denis, Gregory Nazianzen's *Letter to Cledonius* (*Letter 101*) influenced Maximus' concept of *perichoresis*. For Maximus, *perichoresis* conveyed a double penetration where the divine penetrates humanity (*Quaestiones ad Thalassium* 59, CCSG 22, p. 51 ff. and humanity penetrates into the life of God (*Ambigua* 5m PG 91, col. 1053 B). Maximus' doctrine of *perichoresis* provides the foundation for all activity whereby the unity of the human and divine in Christ provides a redemptive framework for humanity. The Incarnation makes dynamic "modes of existence" possible, where true human nature becomes open to relationship with God. This mode of participation leads to deification through Christ, who is the perfection of humanity and the world.

In the fifth session of the Council of Chalcedon in 451, after reaffirming the Nicene Creed (325), the Niceno-Constantinopolitan Creed (381), Pope Leo's *Letter to Flavian*, and Cyril's synodical letters, the council fathers received the Chalcedonian Definition, declaring that the two natures of Jesus Christ are without confusion, change, division, and separation even as they (divine and human natures) remain in mutual communication. The Chalcedonian Definition significantly contoured Maximus' cosmology and anthropology. Furthermore, Irenaeus' doctrine of recapitulation, in collaboration with monastic writings and the Cappadocian fathers, informed Maximus' understanding of the relation between the *logoi* of humanity and the Logos (i.e., Word) of God that both participate in the story of salvation or deification (Blowers 2016). In the opening section of *The Centuries on Charity* (*Book 4*), Maximus provides his fullest discussion on a theology of creation, wherein, Thunberg delineated eight elements in Maximus' cosmology: (1) *creatio ex nihilo*, (2) creation because of God's will, (3) creation because of God's benevolence, (4) creation by the Word, (5) creation because of God's prudence, (6) creation as divine condescension introducing an element of motion, (7) every creature composite of substance and

accident, and (8) creation, not of qualities but of qualified substances that need divine providence (Thunberg 1995). The primary principle in all of creation, for Maxentius, is the synthesis of binaries expressed in the hypostasis of Christ. The Incarnate One is reconciling all of the polarities between God and the world. All nature finds fulfillment in God, where the Logos brings unity out of diversity through movements of contraction and expansion.

Maximus' approach may be characterized as proto-scholastic without being rationalistic or systematic. Ultimately, Maximus' spiritual theology belonged to the monastic circles he inhabited, working from the starting point of apophatic love (Blowers 2016), continually pushed the boundaries of articulation outward into the darkness of mystery (Balthasar 2003) as he pointed to the mystery of the incarnation of the Word of God.

## Cross-References

- ▶ [Natural Philosophy, Byzantine](#)
- ▶ [Philosophical Theology, Byzantine](#)
- ▶ [Trinitarian Logic](#)

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## Medicine and Philosophy

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### Abstract

The question of the connection between philosophy and medicine raised in Antiquity remains a serious bone of contention in the Middle Ages. The problem, which stems from the acceptance of the Galenic synthesis as the foundation of medicine in late Antiquity, is the discrepancy between the concrete, empirical foundations of medieval medical practice and the cosmological model that is supposed to integrate it. While the first authors are circumspect, the eminent Arabic doctors and philosophers Avicenna and Averroes propose solutions, one through a strictly instrumental view of medicine, the other through a drastic limitation of its field of experience. Translated into Latin in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, these developments lead scholastic doctors to construct a more autonomous medical discipline that distinguishes itself more neatly from natural philosophy and delineates its own goals and methods. Thus, at the birth of the Renaissance, medicine loses its ambition of being a “second philosophy” but secures greater independence.

From the time of Hippocrates, the proper relation between medicine and philosophy has been the

subject of great debate. In simple terms, the central problem is whether medicine must appeal to philosophical principles to determine the model of human nature that grounds the conditions of its practice, or whether it must be wholly autonomous and draw its knowledge solely from its experimental resources. In the first case, philosophy provides information on the elements that constitute human beings and thus situates them in a cosmology; in the second, doctors settle for perceptible information gathered empirically. In the Hippocratic corpus, we find two opposite answers: *Ancient Medicine* or *Nature of Man* states that the doctor does not need to rely on the principles of natural philosophy to establish its art, while for the treatise *Regimen* (I.10), human beings are said to be “a copy of the whole.” Galen’s answer, in the second century CE, sets the context for subsequent medieval discussions. Indeed, he asserts in his *That the Best Physician is Also a Philosopher* that “if, then, philosophy is necessary to doctors with regard both to preliminary learning and to subsequent training, clearly all true doctors must be philosophers.” Galen insists, moreover, on the necessity, for the practitioner, of mastering the three parts of philosophy defined by the Stoics, namely, logic, physics, and ethics: the first to understand the science of demonstration, the second to have an understanding of nature in general, and finally the third to instill a contempt for wealth and the love of work. However, the links that Galen highlights between medicine and philosophy do not lead him to adopt a precise cosmology: on the contrary, he borrows as much from Plato as from Aristotle, for instance for the division of matter in four elements, and does not hesitate to contradict these authors on many important points. The result is a balanced synthesis, however fragile, between the most important ancient philosophers.

### Alexandrine Teaching and the Ancient Heritage

This heritage is adopted and systematized by the authors of late Antiquity, and in particular by those active around the school of Alexandria,

chief center for the teaching of traditional ancient Greek philosophy. One of the characteristics of this school is that medicine and philosophy are frequently, if not systematically, associated during the sixth and the seventh century. In this school is born a figure destined to remain in the Arab and Byzantine world, the iatrosophist, a doctor-philosopher capable of providing care as well as mastering grammar and dialectic. The thought of Galen is linked by the Alexandrians more strictly, and often more inaccurately, to the great philosophical systems of Antiquity. To justify their reasoning, the iatrosophists rely on the statements of Aristotle, who insists in his *On Sense and Sensible Objects* on the necessary link existing between the philosophy of nature and medicine: “Most natural philosophers, and those physicians who take a scientific interest in their art, have this in common: the former end by studying medicine, and the latter base their medical theories on the principles of natural science” (*On Sense and Sensible Objects*, I, 436a19–436b2). The Alexandrians go even further, attributing to Aristotle many definitions that depict medicine as a “philosophy of the body” or the “sister of philosophy.” The echo of these Alexandrine’s conceptions is found in the encyclopedist Isidore of Seville (d. in 636). In his *Etymologiae* (IV, XIII 5), he asserts that medicine deals with the whole human body, and therefore is rightly called a “second philosophy,” in the image of the first, which pertains to the soul. Though the Latin medicine of the time is in full intellectual decline, this mention reveals the influence of conceptions developed by the last heirs of ancient philosophical teachings. However, integrating the two domains of knowledge in a single system is not without important difficulties. On many points, Galen and Aristotle are in clear opposition. The most famous example of these conflicts involves the organic origin of the functions of the soul. For Aristotle, the heart is their unique seat; but Galen, thanks to vivisections, notices that brain or nerve lesions can cause paralysis, and logically places the seat of sensation in the brain. Thus, Galen favors a return to the platonic conception of the tripartite soul, whose functions are placed in the heart, the brain, and the liver. Another famous case is the role

attributed to the woman in generation: for Aristotle, she has the passive role of providing matter, while Galen credits her also, as he does the man, with the active role of giving the embryo’s form. Embarrassed by these contradictions, Alexandrian thinkers prefer to sidestep these problems or to approach them indirectly. Thus, on the question of the existence of a neutral state between health and sickness, stated by Galen at the beginning of *Medical Art* and contradicted by Aristotle who affirms in the *Categories* that these two terms are an example of contraries that admit no intermediate, Agnellus of Ravenna (sixth century) avoids citing explicitly Aristotle but answers objections from anonymous critics – plainly Aristotelian – by relying on other passages from the Stagirite. Stephanus of Athens, iatrosophist from the sixth century, is equally cautious in his commentary on Hippocrates’ *Prognostics* when he addresses the question of the origin of sensation: enumerating the reasons that lead some to place it in the brain, and those that lead others to place it in the heart, he concludes his presentation of opposing arguments by a simple sentence: “The question remains unresolved up until now, whether the governing principle is situated in the brain or heart.” In this way, the authors of late Antiquity had provided a framework to the relation between philosophy and medicine, but without answering the essential problems the relation raises.

By conquering the principal intellectual centers of Late Antiquity, like Alexandria, the Arabs integrated a large part of Greek science, in particular through translations carried out in the eighth and ninth centuries. Hence, it is not surprising that we find, in the first medical texts written in the language of the Qur’an, the same categories and the same problems, than those that had preoccupied the iatrosophists. Thus, Yuḥanna ibn Masawayh (l. 777–857), in the eighth aphorism of his *Medical Axioms*, declares that “when Galen and Aristotle agree upon something, it is true; when they are in disagreement, it is exceedingly difficult for the mind to determine the truth of the matter.” Al-Majūsī (d. at the end of the tenth century) represents the synthesis of these Alexandrine teachings revisited by the Arabic authors. In his *al-Kitāb al-Malakī* (*Royal Book*), he takes up

again the distinction between theory and practice, by specifying that the first is a science, that is, a true knowledge necessary for action. This science divides, in turn, into things that are natural, those that are nonnatural and those that are against nature. Though al-Majūsī does not point it out, he is certain that this scientific part of medicine must tackle the problems posed by the correspondence between the two disciplines. For the rest, when he treats certain questions concerning the connection between medicine and philosophy, he prefers to suspend judgment: thus, when he wonders if the soul that we find in the brain is the soul itself or if it is merely its instrument, since the soul is not a body, he prefers not to argue the point stating that it “belongs to philosophy more than to medical art.”

## The Systems of Arabic Authors

### The Instrumentalism of Avicenna

However, from the tenth century, conflicts between Arabic philosophers and doctors intensify, and this attitude of avoidance seems no longer tenable. Certain scholars, often philosophers, devote themselves to finding a general solution to the problem, in order to provide a general principle to mediate conflicts between the two disciplines. The first to propose a solution of this kind is the philosopher al-Fārābī (872–950). His comments come down to an attack against the philosophical pretensions of the doctors, especially Galen’s. For al-Fārābī, Aristotle, who draws on logical reasoning, prevails against Galen and his empirical observations. This clear choice for Aristotelianism leads al-Fārābī to place medicine among the practical arts, with agriculture or cooking, and to divide it in seven parts, of which the first three (knowledge of the organs, health, and diseases) are totally or partially common to natural philosophy and medicine, while the next four (symptomatology, nutrition and medication, hygiene and dietetics, and therapeutics) are part only of the second.

Still, this solution does not resolve the problem completely, since it has no answer to an essential question: how must the doctor act in a

controversial case? Must he, despite their incorrect theoretical origin, apply against his better judgment all the treatment methods that Galen heartily recommends? Faced with this difficulty, Avicenna (980–1037) goes further than al-Fārābī and proposes an original solution, developed in particular in the *Canon of Medicine*. Avicenna gives first a definition of medicine that reduces neatly his ambition, since for him medicine is concerned with the human body solely qua healthy or sick, and not, as does natural philosophy, in itself. From this model follows logically another way of looking at the relation between the two subjects. Avicenna explains often that “the physician does not need to proceed following a demonstrative argument that will lead him from this disagreement to the truth, nor qua physician will he see the path to this, nor does this impede him in his investigations and actions.” Avicenna’s position is simple: the doctor must not take an interest in the causes of phenomena and search for the principles of natural mechanisms, since this search is within the purview of the philosopher alone; he must be content to take an interest in the remedies that he uses against illness without wondering about their first causes: only the immediate causes are for him relevant, and if they seem to contradict the claims of natural philosophy, he is not authorized to search for a reconciliation that only the philosopher is able to achieve. However, Avicenna takes care to specify that the doctor’s actions, that is, his concrete activities as a therapist, must not be changed according to debates that arise in another discipline.

This attitude is called “instrumentalism” (McVaugh), because it regards medical theories as adequate instruments for predicting and evaluating phenomena, but ill-suited for attaining truth. Instrumentalism, in the work of Avicenna, goes hand in hand with a model of the doctor that confine him to the restoration of health without exploring the true nature of things, and merely studying sensible and manifest entities on which he can act. It is interesting to note that this position does not forbid doctors from being philosophers as well, like Avicenna was himself, because the important element is the expression “as a doctor”: in reality, a doctor can, as philosopher, ask himself

questions concerning the true nature of things; but he must then refrain from basing himself on medical empirical observation and, thus, to conduct himself as a doctor. We see that Avicenna establishes a neat distinction between philosophy and medicine, each having its proper objectives and methods. Such a conclusion might seem to subordinate medicine to natural philosophy; in reality, we must instead insist on the great autonomy conferred on a medical discipline that, while on a more restricted domain, can henceforth develop with fewer restrictions.

### **Averroes and the Subordination of Medicine to Philosophy**

Averroes (1126–1198) pushes even further the distinction between medicine and natural philosophy. In his *Colliget*, one of his rare medical works, he defines the discipline thus: “Medicine is an effective art, based on true principles and concerned with preserving man’s health and abating disease, as far as possible” (*Colliget*, I, 1). Comparing medicine with navigation or military affairs, he states explicitly that the “true principles” on which it must be established are those of natural philosophy. The two domains of knowledge are thus completely separate and placed in a clear and restrictive hierarchical relationship, since the doctor must, according to Averroes, deduce from the principles expounded by the philosopher the practical applications that he carries out. Where Avicenna affirms clearly the autonomy of medicine as a science, Averroes, who returns partially to al-Fārābī’s solution by radicalizing it, makes medicine into a simple practical application of philosophical theories.

So, as a faithful Aristotelian, Averroes attacks Galen repeatedly, not hesitating to renounce established treatments for their theoretical incompatibility with natural philosophy, all the while trying to justify certain biological claims of the Stagirite. If we consider Avicenna’s an *instrumentalist* position, we can rightly call Averroes’ own a *realist* position insofar as it insists on the coherence between philosophical theories and their concrete medical applications; the definition of the *Colliget* emphasizes the fact that medicine cannot even aim for complete recovery but only

try to do what is possible to help nature take its course. In this way, Averroes reinforces the importance of the prognostic art and of the pure practical art of the doctor, and limits drastically its theoretical pretensions. It is tempting to compare Averroes’ position on medicine to the one he adopts in his commentary on *De caelo* concerning Ptolemy’s theories; in fact, he does not hesitate to reject them despite their usefulness, as they seem to him not to comply with the Aristotelian philosophy that predicts uniquely circular movements for stars, when the Ptolemaic system, to save appearances, introduces a complex system of epicycles and eccentrics. In astronomy as in medicine, Averroes’ object is to make all knowledge coherent with Aristotelian philosophy, which is the only one to be authorized to research and expound truth.

### **The Salernitan Masters and the *Physica***

The texts of Avicenna and Averroes are not known in the West before the thirteenth century. However, the Latin scholars have access, before this date, to some of the thoughts of Greek and Arabic authors, notably due to the translations of Constantine the African in the eleventh century. These translations, mostly of medical texts, push Latin doctors of the following century to take a closer look at philosophy, especially since the texts then available make medicine a part of natural philosophy. For the rest, it is the thought of the twelfth century on the whole that aims to replace the study of the human body, and so its diseases, in a global analysis of Creation. This tendency, which develops at a moment where most of the Aristotelian corpus is still unknown, is most prevalent among the doctors of Salerno. The texts studied in this great center of teaching are of Greek or Arabic origin: for example, *The Isagoge* by Johannisius, the *Aphorisms, Prognostics et Regimen of Acute Diseases* by Hippocrates, the *Medical Art* by Galen, or the *Pantegni* by Constantin, adapted from the *al-Kitāb al-Malakī* by al-Majūsī.

In their commentaries on *The Isagoge*, the Salernitan masters strive to situate medicine in the general organization of knowledge, while it



belongs neither to the *trivium* nor to the *quadrivium*. Contra Hughes of Saint-Victor, who around 1120 makes medicine a purely mechanical art, the Salernitan authors divide all knowledge into three branches, logic, ethics, and physics, and place medicine in the latter, with physics and meteorology. Medicine is then considered a full-fledged science, divided itself into theory and practice on the Arabic model.

In this way appears in the West the idea that medicine includes a theoretical part, which is grounded in natural philosophy. The definition of medicine given by Bartholomew of Salerno (twelfth century) is in this regard emblematic:

The science of medicine deals with the actions and passions of the elements in mixed bodies. Although it has been invented for the human body, it considers every thing that can change it, as the nature of animals, herbs, trees, spices, metals, stones, because all of them can change the human body.

Medicine has, thus, for most Salernitans, a universal reach, which expresses itself in particular by the use of the term *physicus*, which designates the doctor-philosopher at Salerno.

But the relation between medicine and philosophy goes even further than this connection established between medicine and natural philosophy. Indeed, the Salernitan and the authors of the twelfth century, such as William of Conches, could not know the zoological works of Aristotle, which had not yet been translated; so they strive, from available texts such as the *Physics*, *On Generation and Corruption* but also from the commentary of Plato's *Timeus* by Calcidius, to reconstitute a natural philosophy coherent with medical data, in a process that reverses the trend that had until then dominated. This trend ends with doctor Urso of Salerno, who dies around 1200. The latter strives to connect, in one systematic theory, the contributions of medicine and natural philosophy. His thought develops around the question of the elements: Urso tries to show how elements shaped by the Creator from prime matter combine to form the "*elementata*" in bodies. These "*elementata*," which can transform under the effect of the interactions between the essential and accidental qualities of the elements that compose them, are at the base of all natural

phenomena, in the human body (through the intermediaries of complexions) as in the sublunary world in general. Through his detailed study of the theory of elements, Urso aims to provide a single explanation for natural phenomena that come under medicine or philosophy; his goal is to be an *inventor*, that is, a founder like Hippocrates was for medicine, to whom the qualifier was traditionally attributed, and to found a new discipline synthesizing contributions of doctors and philosophers. This discipline constitutes, for Urso, the *Physica*, whose ambition largely exceeds medicine in the strict sense, since its investigations spread to all things in nature.

However, this ambitious project has no immediate sequels in the West for two main reasons: first, the arrival of new translations, notably of Aristotle, Avicenna, and Galen, modify clearly from the beginning of the thirteenth century the idea of the relation between medicine and philosophy; second, the decline of the Salerno school does not permit the pursuit of the intellectual tradition established in the city. Of course, the Salernitan's works are not completely forgotten and continue to be studied, but the reception of the great philosophical systems provokes important reconsiderations in the West. Many debates on the relation between medicine and philosophy then repeat the terms of the question that Arabic authors had already tried to resolve; but the new conditions of the practice of medicine, and especially its teaching in universities, are eventually going to modify radically this perspective.

## Scholastic Teaching and the Synthesis of Greek and Arabic Contributions

### The Search for an Agreement

For Latin authors, the problem was always the same: harmonize Aristotle's physiological and biological information with Galen's, all the while according, as much as possible, the philosophical systems of the two scholars. However, the question presents itself in a new light, since at the same time were translated the Arabic interpretations, notably those of Avicenna (*Canon*, translated in the twelfth century by Gerard of

Cremona), of ‘Alī ibn Ridwān (commentary of *Tegni* translated by Gerard of Cremona) and of Averroes (*Colliget* translated in 1285 by Bonacosa in Padua). The assimilation of all these works in the first half of the thirteenth century leads to a period of important debates between 1270 and 1320, a period that has been called the “times of controversies” (Jacquart and Micheau 1990). The two most debated questions are the primacy of the heart as a first principle of the body, and the existence of a feminine seed. Contrary to what is often claimed, these debates are not limited to a simple controversy with the “doctors” on one side and the “philosophers” on the other. The double quality of many authors, notably in Italy, prevents us from a too cut-and-dried opposition between the followers of the two disciplines. Thus, Pietro Torrigiano, medical doctor active in Paris in the first decades of the fourteenth century, defends the Aristotelian position that makes the movements of the heart a simple physical process, while the majority of doctors of the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries go along with Aristotle’s denial of the existence of a female seed. However, beyond the diversity of views, it is possible to find a certain number of constants, particularly in some centers of teaching. In Italy, the problem is more acute because medicine and philosophy are often taught in the same faculty, and by the same person, as in the case of Iacopo da Forlì (d. 1404) who teaches natural philosophy from 1384 to 1386, moral philosophy and medicine in 1392–1393 and 1395–1396, and finally logical and natural philosophy in 1398–1399. The *Conciliator* of Pietro d’Abano, written between 1303 and 1310, must be considered an attempt to bring solutions to these debates that then stimulate the medical community. The acuity of these questions, as institutional as intellectual, doubtlessly explain in part the success obtained in Italy by the *Canon*, which becomes over the course of the fourteenth century the almost unique source of all medical teaching: it was the only one to give a solution allowing to conserve the benefits of Galenism and the great principles of philosophy. It is therefore not surprising that the Averroist doctor and philosopher Antonio da Parma proposes, in the first years of the fourteenth

century, a solution to the problem based on Avicennian instrumentalism, by distinguishing, in accordance with Aristotle, two types of arguments: the first one, the dialectic argumentation, is the philosophers’, and is true and necessary; the second one is the rhetorical argumentation, which is “much less probably” (comm. *Canon*, I.1.6.2.): it is the doctors’.

In the following generation, Gentile da Foligno (d. 1348) deepens this distinction by trying to show, for each of the controversial questions, that the contradiction between the discourse of philosophers and doctors does not prevent the latter from acting to maintain health. He concludes that the physicians can content themselves with the assumptions of their discipline, even if they appear false. We must note, however, that Avicennian instrumentalism does not lead these authors to abandon the debates between Galen and Aristotle. On the contrary, the distinction between the doctor acting “as a doctor” and the doctor reflecting “as a philosopher” allows them to engage these questions without confusing the two disciplines, and without substantially modifying the modes of treatments left by the Galenic tradition: the theoretical questions still remain, in the first half of the fourteenth century, an essential part of medical education.

### The Influence of Averroes and the Decline of Philosophy in Medicine

The introduction of Averroes’ *Colliget* in the West has a determining role in the subsequent evolution. While the position of the Andalusian doctor and philosopher can seem totally opposed to Avicennian instrumentalism, the Latin authors succeed in integrating it to a coherent global vision. Averroes considers, as we have seen, that all medicine is practical, and that theoretical aspects come under another discipline, superior to it, that is, natural philosophy. Such a presentation goes against the stated willingness of Latin authors of bestowing on their discipline the status of a science, and, in Italy, against the separation, in the medical curriculum, of theoretical and practical medicine. However, the integration of medicine as a university discipline at the end of the thirteenth century, as well as the progressively

more important place granted to the doctor in society, permits authors to cast a critical eye on accepted definitions, and in particular on the distinction between theory and practice. Wondering about the legitimacy of this distinction, Gentile da Foligno maintains that medicine can be divided in this way, but the theoretical part then coincides with a part of natural philosophy, since medicine is “a science made up of numerous other sciences” (comm. *Canon*, I.1.1.1). For him, medicine is composed of a theoretical part, which corresponds to natural philosophy, and a practical part of its own; contra Avicenna, he abandons the existence of a distinct and specific medical theory. The consequence of such a presentation is evident: the medical theory no longer constitutes a proper part of medicine, and while the doctor must know it, he must not learn it as a science that forms an integral part of his discipline.

The influence of Averroes on the relation between philosophy and medicine appears to be even more evident in Paris and Montpellier, probably because the two disciplines are more distinct in these particular universities. During the trial of the empiricist Jean de Domprémi (1423–1427), the masters of the faculty of Medicine in Paris declare “*ubi desinit phisicus incipit medicus*” (“where the philosopher ends, the doctor begins”), while in the preceding century Évrard de Conty uses a similar formula in his *Livre des eschez amoureux moralisés*: “*ou philosophie fine, medicine commence.*” Jacques Despars, in the first half of the fifteenth century, comes to a synthesis between the Avicennian instrumentalism and the Averroist definition slightly different from those of contemporary Italian authors: he tends to insist on the practical character of medicine, to distinguish it from theoretical questions that must come under natural philosophy, and thus must not influence recommended modes of treatments. For Despars, as claims Arnaud de Villeneuve in Montpellier at the beginning of the fourteenth century, the doctor is foremost a *sensibilis artifex*, whose explanations are hypothetical constructions founded on sensible experience, necessary for practice but only approximating truth without ever corresponding to it perfectly.

So, in most of the Latin world, Avicennian instrumentalism is adopted to resolve difficulties

connected to the relation between medicine and philosophy, since it permits the conservation of the advanced therapeutic ideas of the first while it respects the truth expounded by the second; however, we must note that the precise interpretations vary from one place to another, in that they integrate more or less the restrictive definition of medicine given by Averroes in his *Colliget*. It seems reasonable to relate, in this case, these differences to institutional conditions then prevalent in universities: strong connections between the disciplines in Italy, more distant links in the rest of Europe. Anyway, it must be said that the originality of western thinkers is that they propose a synthesis of the different solutions that have been advanced before them.

The end of the Middle Ages is traditionally considered a period during which the philosophical side of medicine is gradually neglected, to the benefit of a renewed interest in practical observations, *experimenta* and other *mirabilia*. In reality, theoretical discussions lose their keenness, and are no longer treated, even in Italian universities, as routine questions. Significantly, the most famous Paduan doctors of the second half of the fifteenth century abandon their theoretical chairs to occupy those *in practica*. Medical theory then becomes a simple foundation course for first-year students, one that coincides largely with natural philosophy, while the renewed interest for observation and experimentation paves the way for the important developments of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. If the social and cultural conditions had an important role to play in these changes, it is certain that the synthesis realized by the Latin masters from the *Colliget* and the *Canon* contributed to, if not presided over, this tendency. In this way, we can say that the construction of the philosophical and medical models of the Middle Ages played an essential role in the progress of experimentation and observation that characterize the beginnings of Renaissance science.

## Cross-References

- ▶ [Alexandrian Tradition into Arabic: Medicine](#)
- ▶ [Alexandrian Tradition into Arabic: Philosophy](#)

- ▶ Arabic Texts: Natural Philosophy, Latin Translations of
- ▶ Arabic Texts: Philosophy, Latin Translations of
- ▶ Aristotle, Arabic
- ▶ Arnaldus de Villanova
- ▶ Epistemology
- ▶ al-Fārābī, Abū Naṣr
- ▶ Galen, Arabic
- ▶ Ibn Rushd (Averroes), Latin Translations of
- ▶ Ibn Rushd, Muḥammad ibn Aḥmad al-Ḥafīd (Averroes)
- ▶ Ibn Sīnā, Abū 'Alī (Avicenna)
- ▶ Ibn Sīnā (Avicenna), Latin Translations of
- ▶ Medicine: Byzantine
- ▶ Medicine in the Arab World
- ▶ Natural Philosophy
- ▶ Natural Philosophy, Arabic
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## Medicine in the Arab World

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### Abstract

Medicine in the classical Islamic world was basically shaped by three different traditions, sometimes interacting with each other: pre-Islamic Bedouin folklore; the so-called Prophetic medicine, the diagnosis and therapy of which was informed by the alleged practice of the Prophet Muḥammad; and Hellenistic medicine. Prophetic medicine must have enjoyed a considerable share in everyday life, since a large number of compilations, all of them by traditionists, jurists, historians, rather than physicians, is extant in numerous manuscripts (and continues to be reprinted until today). However, far more productive and representative of medicine in Islam is the Hellenistic tradition,

as it was standardized mainly by Galen (d. c. 216 CE), translated from Greek into Arabic and developed from the ninth century onwards. Arabic medical compendia which reflect this tradition in structure and contents are Abū Bakr al-Rāzī's *Comprehensive Book on Medicine*, al-Majūsī's *Complete Book on the Medical Art*, and Avicenna's *Canon of Medicine* that by its comprehensiveness and sophisticated organization dominated the field for centuries and gave rise to a long series of commentaries and adaptations. Apart from general handbooks such as these, there is a rich and, to a degree, innovative literature on special disciplines, notably ophthalmology, *materia medica*, and general surgery – although highly invasive operations would seem to have been performed comparably rarely. Actual medical attendance may be witnessed in larger towns, preferably political centers, which offered doctors to have an office of their own, to visit the patient in his own house, to perform their services in public places – this activity was ideally controlled by the municipal authorities – or, most honorably, to be part of a team in a hospital which constituted the center of public medical welfare, medical instruction, and research. The ideals of professional ethics are represented in a considerable number of works on the history, state, and demands of the medical art, on examinations, and on the business of quacks and charlatans; they reflect discussions of late Antiquity on the relation between medicine and philosophy.

Treatises on “Prophetic medicine” emerged in the ninth century, flourished in the period of Sunni anti-Hellenistic traditionalism, the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, and are quite popular today, as can be seen from numerous modern printings. Their authors were religious scholars rather than physicians. One of the earliest specimens of Prophetic medicine is the ninth-century *Medicine of the Imams* by al-Ḥusayn b. Bisṭām b. Sābūr and his brother, writing in Iran, which collects medical advice of the Prophet and of Shīʿite religious

authorities, magical expedients, and prescriptions of compound drugs. Another example is the contemporaneous *Summary on Medicine* by the Andalusian Ibn Ḥabīb (d. around 853). From the heyday of this type of compilations, we have the works of the scholars of Ḥanbalī jurisprudence, Ibn al-Jawzī (d. 1200), Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya (d. 1351), and of al-Suyūfī (d. 1505). *The Medicine of the Prophet* by the Damascene historian and Shāfiʿite traditionist al-Dhahabī (d. 1348) again compiles medical sayings from religious authorities, but also from Greek medical authors such as Hippocrates, Galen, and Dioscurides along with Arabic authors in this tradition, for example, al-Rāzī and Avicenna. The peculiar fusion of this tradition and that of *al-ṭibb al-nabawī* (Prophetic medicine) is evident in a passage in the beginning of this work, which presupposes the Galenic definition of health as the right balance (Greek *eukrasia*, Arabic *iʿtidāl*) of the four humors and then goes on to attribute the progressively perfect balance to, first, man among the animals, then to the believers among the humans, the prophets, and so on, and finally the most perfect balance to the Prophet Muḥammad. It is difficult to determine the exact share of Prophetic medicine in the medical care of the medieval Islamic world and to know the names of its practitioners, but, apart from the Hellenistic admixtures that one notes not only in al-Dhahabī's book, the sheer bulk of works of this type, multiplied by a great number of manuscripts (and in modern times, printings), attests to the fact that Prophetic medicine coexisted with the Hellenistic tradition – as did popular magical medicine whose evidence consists not only of texts but also of amulets, talismans, magic squares, and magic-medicinal bowls. The pious fringe of Prophetic medicine, however, maintained that all human medical measures are to be considered as an impairment of God's omnipotence and that care and cure should be limited to a healthy diet, simple medicines, prominently honey, and recitations and prayer.

Far more productive and prestigious than Prophetic medicine, and clearly better to evaluate in modern scholarship, were Hellenistic medicine and pharmacology, translated and appropriated

from the early days of the 'Abbāsīd empire by the middle of the ninth century. It can safely be said that the whole of Greek medicine was translated into Arabic and was to dominate Islamic medicine – as well as long centuries of the Latin medical tradition. (For the translation movement, the role of the Alexandrian tradition in shaping the medical curriculum and the principal genres of medical literature, and the impact of "Galenism," see the entry on ► ["Alexandrian Tradition into Arabic: Medicine"](#) in this volume.) One of the most obvious features of medical literature both in Late Antiquity and in classical Islam is the compendium, or encyclopedia, endeavoring to present all medical knowledge in systematic order. Two early specimens of such compendia are 'Alī b. Sahl Rabban al-Ṭabarī's (fl. c. 850) *The Paradise of Wisdom*, which predominantly uses Greek authors such as Hippocrates, Galen, Aristotle, Dioscurides, but appends an exposition of the system of Indian medicine (available through Persian and Arabic translations) and displays a characteristic mix of information also on natural philosophy, climate, astronomy/astrology, magic, the human soul, and popular customs, and Abū Bakr Muḥammad b. Zakariyyā' al-Rāzī's (d. 925, or 935?) *Comprehensive Book on Medicine* (in medieval Latin translations *Continens* or *Comprehensor*), a large collection (compiled and roughly ordered *a capite ad calcem* posthumously by his students) of quotations from Galen and other authors and observations of his own. Another compendium by al-Rāzī, more systematized than the former, is his *Book for al-Manṣūr*, dedicated to the Sāmānīd ruler Abū Ṣāliḥ al-Manṣūr b. Ishāq in Rayy (south of today's Tehran), where al-Rāzī directed a hospital. The two most famous medical encyclopedias in medieval Islam are 'Alī b. al-ʿAbbās al-Majūsī's (around 980) *Complete Book on the Medical Art* (Latin: *Liber regius*, after another version of the Arabic title, *Royal Book*) and Avicenna's (Ibn Sīnā, d. 1037) *Canon of Medicine* (Latin: *Liber canonis*). In accordance with the ancient classification, al-Majūsī divides medicine into theory (part 1) and practice (part 2); the first part dealing with the fundamental concepts of elements, humors, natures, faculties, anatomy, the natural



and non-natural causes influencing the human body and soul, the doctrines of symptoms and diagnosis, pathology, the second part with hygienics and therapy. In his introduction, the author interestingly evaluates at length the works of his predecessors, duly praising Hippocrates and Galen, but critically noting the former's terseness and the latter's prolixity, and pointing out omission of entire medical disciplines and lack of systematic order in other Greek and Arabic works. The most famous medical encyclopedia in Arabic is certainly Avicenna's *Canon of Medicine*, whose rigorous and sophisticated arrangement of material shows the author's mastery of logic and philosophy in general and helped to dominate the medical theories in the Islamic world and later in Latin Europe. The *Canon* consists of five "books"; the first covers much of what al-Majūsī's *Complete Book* treats in its first part, the second book treats the simple medicinal substances (in alphabetical order), the third and fourth books basically deal with illnesses concerning only one part of the body and more than a single organ (like fevers), respectively, and the fifth book contains a formulary of compound substances. The systematic rigor of the *Canon* has necessitated various forms of vulgarization. Already the author himself published an epitome of its core material in didactic rhyme, and the list of subsequent commentaries, supra-commentaries, and summaries is indeed long. Perhaps the most influential commentator and epitomator of the *Canon* is Ibn al-Nafīs (d. 1288) who, in the section on the anatomy of the heart, famously asserted, against Galen's prevalent doctrine of a passage connecting the ventricles of the heart, that there is no such connection, visible or invisible, and that the blood in the right ventricle must arrive at the left one by way of the lungs – thus intimating, though not precisely formulating and proving, the model of the so-called "lesser" circulation. In the Islamic West, a noteworthy medical encyclopedia was compiled by Abū l-Qāsim al-Zahrāwī (d. soon after 1009), putting medical knowledge at the disposal of those unable to compile it for themselves. Besides Chaps. 1 and 2 on physiology and pathology, this compilation's most extensive, and most famous and influential, part is the last

Chap. 30 on surgery, an art which, the author says, was largely obliterated on its way from Antiquity to Arabic medicine and is in need of a new anatomical foundation and accurate descriptions of operations such as cauterization, section, extraction, amputation, and the therapy of fractures and luxations. This chapter in particular had a considerable influence, through its translation by Gerard of Cremona, on anatomical and surgical literature of the Latin West down to the eighteenth century, as well as on early Ottoman medicine. Another interesting feature of this chapter is its abundant illustration with drawings of surgical instruments.

Notwithstanding the extensiveness and long afterlife of al-Zahrāwī's exposition (and some of his colleagues' books, prominently the *Foundation of the Art of Medicine* by a student of Ibn al-Nafīs, the Damascene Christian physician Ibn al-Quff, who died in 1286), it is a matter of debate whether the numerous and detailed surgical procedures described in the literature reflect real practice. From the lack of actual descriptions or realistic illustrations one may surmise that highly invasive operations, like surgically treating abdominal wounds or amputation, were performed very rarely, and the Caesarian section, during parturition or post-mortem, never. Surgical measures that are attested included – apart from minor measures such as bloodletting and cauterization, the latter used to seal bleeding wounds, but also to treat a great variety of complaints, including mental ones – removal of tumors and growths, treatment of wounds, such as extraction of arrows, excision of cysts, ligation, or sclerotization of hemorrhoids, and of course circumcision.

A surgical discipline of remarkable variety and innovation was developed in ophthalmology; in fact, the works on the anatomy of the eye and the therapy of eye diseases can be seen as a distinct branch of Arabic medical literature. Already in the ninth century the famous translator from Greek into Arabic and medical author in his own right, Ḥunayn b. Ishāq, and his teacher Ibn Māsawayh wrote influential ophthalmological works, advancing beyond their Greek forerunners (Galen, Oribasius, Paul of Aegina, et al.). 'Alī b. 'Īsā (d. after 1010) is the author of a highly regarded *Memorandum for Oculists*, which

systematically treats 130 eye diseases with their symptoms, causes, and therapies. A close contemporary of his was ‘Ammār al-Mawṣilī whose *Book of Selection on the Treatment of Eye Diseases* was dedicated to the Fatimid sultan al-Ḥākim and presents less than half of ‘Alī’s inventory of disorders, but contains a number of original observations and measures, for example, actual reports on six operations on a cataract, including his invention of a metallic hollow needle used to suck the cataract from the eye, and on the examination of the pupil’s reaction to light incidence before operating a cataract. Other authors describe an operation to treat corneal vascularization, a complication of trachoma, which is called peritomy today and which involved the use of hooks to keep the eye open during surgery and of a thin scalpel for excision.

Another flourishing field of Arabic medical literature and practice was pharmacology. As for Arabic authors Galen was the chief authority in general medicine, so was Dioscurides (d. around 90) the leading author on *materia medica*, whose work was translated into Syriac and Arabic at a very early stage and was repeatedly commented upon by authors such as Ibn Juljul (d. after 994) and Ibn al-Bayṭār (d. 1248). The latter composed also a work on “simple” drugs and their use against illnesses *a capite ad calcem*, and thirdly, the most famous compilation of pharmacognosy and dietetics, based on his own observations and excerpts from over 250 works and describing, in alphabetical order, more than 1400 medicaments, the *Comprehensive Book on Simple Drugs and Foodstuffs*. In pharmacology, one may say that Arabic writers excelled over their Greek forerunners, because their wider geographical horizons introduced them to a vast variety of new plants and drugs, and because of their descriptive sophistication and not least their keen interest in linguistic and terminological matters.

Medical attendance in the medieval Arab and Iranian world depended, like any other public service, on the economic and political situation in a given place and period. Urban settlements were privileged over rural areas, and political centers offered more opportunity to claim and dispense medical treatment than provincial

towns. Principally, doctors could operate in their own office, or visiting the patient in his own house, or in the streets and on the markets, or in a hospital. Administering treatment in a public place was the business of popular practitioners – bone-setters, cuppers, quacks pretending to heal eye and tooth complaints, and often was the object of control by the official inspector of the market (*muḥtasib*). Hospitals, on the other hand, are a manifestation of a continuous respectable concern of Muslim society with public welfare. Generally, the foundation of hospitals was due to the initiative of the ruler and the high officials surrounding him and was part of their aim – often in the initial phases of new dynasties which wanted to manifest their profile and splendor – to further the public weal by establishing religious and secular institutions – in addition to hospitals, schools, libraries, fountains, rest houses for travelers, etc. The origin of hospitals in the Islamic realm is not quite clear; the hospital in seventh-century Sasanian Gondēshāpūr was already famous in the seventh century, and the Christian Bokhūshū’ family of physicians, summoned from there by the ‘Abbāsīd Caliph al-Manṣūr (d. 775) to the court in Baghdad, may have been instrumental in importing this institution (the term *bīmāristān* is of Persian origin) and, generally, a Christian concern for public charity. At any rate, in the classical period of Islam every major city had one or more hospitals: Baghdad (since the first half of the tenth century, prominently the ‘Aḍudī hospital, founded in 982), Damascus (the Nūrī hospital around 1150), Cairo (the Manṣūrī hospital, founded in 1284), as well as in Iran and al-Andalus. A full-fledged hospital consisted of an outpatient clinic and an infirmary and housed departments for the specialists – surgeons, oculists, pharmacists –, an asylum for the insane, a home for elderly patients without a family, and a lecture yard and library for medical education.

Despite the fact that medicine and its practitioners enjoyed such a high status in Muslim societies – to be judged by the social eminence and high salary of the top-rank physicians and the impressive endowment of the large hospitals – we have numerous examples of invectives against the professional failings of the physician as an

individual and against the pretensions of medicine as a discipline. The rich deontological branch of Arabic medical literature, basing itself on the professional ethics and example of Hippocrates and on the programmatic treatise by Galen, “*That the Best Physician is Also a Philosopher*,” is full of lamentations over the present state of the art. Physicians are blamed as arrogant, incompetent, and, more often than not, greedy for money. A small essay by one ‘Abdalwadūd (late eleventh/early twelfth century) on “*The Blameworthiness of Making Money by the Craft of Medicine*” presents a number of examples of the decline of medicine: prescription of, and trade with, expensive drugs regardless of the specific climate and humoral disposition of the patient, conflict between worldly power and the physician’s professional ethics, lack of cooperation between colleagues, where a complex diagnosis would call for more than one specialist, and plain practical and theoretical ignorance. ‘Abdalwadūd’s main argument is that incompetence and love of money are two sides of the same coin and that practicing medicine merely with regard to making money perverts the idea of this noble art. Other noteworthy works on the physician’s professional ethics are Ishāq b. ‘Alī al-Ruhāwī’s (probably working in the second half of the ninth century) *The Ethics (Arabic adab) of the Physician*, ‘Alī b. Riḍwān’s (d. 1068) treatises *The Useful Book on How to Teach the Art of Medicine*, *On the Path to Happiness by Medicine*, and *The High Rank/Dignity (Arabic sharaf) of Medicine*, and Ṣā’id b. al-Ḥasan’s (writing in 1072) *Arousing the Desire for Medicine*. These programmatic monographs are complemented by handbooks for the examination of the student of medicine (al-Rāzī’s *On Examining and Appointing the Physician* contains several quotations from Galen’s corresponding work) and for the control of the physician practicing in public by the *muḥtasib*, and by polemical treatises exposing the tricks of medical charlatans, as contained in al-Jawbarī’s (around 1240) *Book of Selection on Disclosing Secrets and Lifting Veils*.

Both the claims of medicine to constitute a “noble art,” founded on philosophical authority, and the lamentations over its shortcomings and

present decline have their roots in Late Antiquity. In its Athenian phase, philosophy had enjoyed the eminent status of a religion for intellectuals and in Alexandrian scholarship a central position as art (Greek *technē*) and as science (*epistēmē*), which furnishes the other sciences with their principles (medicine, according to Ammonius son of Hermias, receiving from philosophy its system of elements). In later Alexandrian scholarship, beginning with the fifth century, philosophy as an academic career lost its basis; whereas rhetors, grammarians, particularly physicians after their examination found a flourishing job market, philosophy graduates had to look for openings in rhetoric, teaching grammar, and not least in medicine: many of the sixth and seventh-century Alexandrian commentators on Aristotle’s works worked as doctors – a lucrative profession, which drew the jealousy of the few advocates of “pure” philosophy and which, in turn, explains the remarkable self-image of medicine as a philosophical discipline. In Arabic medicine, this characteristic persisted: all medical encyclopedias and many monographs on special subjects display their theoretical basis at length and organize their subject matter in strict hierarchy; even the “practical part” of these works obeys the – highly speculative – theory of humoral pathology, and references to Aristotelian logic and natural science and Galenic ethics are ubiquitous. As in Alexandria (and in Byzantium) the philosopher-physician was a prominent figure in Islam: al-Rāzī, Ibn al-Ṭayyib (a commentator on works by Aristotle, Hippocrates, and Galen, who was a physician at the ‘Aḍudiyya hospital in Baghdad and d. in 1043), Avicenna, and Ibn Rushd (Averroes, d. 1198) are well-known examples. On the other hand, representatives of “pure” philosophy have disputed the philosophical aspirations of medicine. Al-Fārābī (d. 950), a scholar working in Baghdad and disdaining any financial gain from a non-philosophical practice and refusing any public position, did not include medicine in his *Enumeration of the Sciences*, doubted Galen’s competence in logic, and granted only a limited validity to the *generalialia* of medicine, the doctrine of the human organism, and the theory of health and illness as subjects of the natural

sciences. In his preface to a short *Epistle on Medicine*, al-Fārābī defined medicine as a “productive craft, which is not concerned with treating its objects as *intelligibilia* for the soul, as in (philosophical) reflection, but to produce effects on the objects and to provide them with qualities and other *accidentia*.” Medicine is, al-Fārābī implies, not concerned with the human soul and is not a science (Arabic *‘ilm*, Greek *epistēmē*). Comparable to the fields of agriculture or rhetoric, medicine is concerned with the particular and the contingent, not the general and logically demonstrable, and it leads to “opinions,” not to “certainty.”

## Cross-References

- ▶ [Abū Bakr al-Rāzī, Muḥammad ibn Zakarīyā’ \(Rhazes\)](#)
- ▶ [Alexandrian Tradition into Arabic: Medicine](#)
- ▶ [Aristotle, Arabic](#)
- ▶ [al-Fārābī, Abū Naṣr](#)
- ▶ [Galen, Arabic](#)
- ▶ [Ibn Rushd, Muḥammad ibn Aḥmad al-Ḥafīd \(Averroes\)](#)
- ▶ [Ibn Sīnā, Abū ‘Alī \(Avicenna\)](#)
- ▶ [Ibn al-Ṭayyib](#)
- ▶ [Medicine and Philosophy](#)
- ▶ [Translations from Greek into Arabic](#)

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## Medicine: Byzantine

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### Abstract

The Byzantine period saw a massive rise in the production of medical encyclopedias. These were mostly based on earlier models, mainly Galen. Only in few cases these models were criticized. The language of these texts was mainly learned Byzantine Greek; the vernacular was rarely used. Overall, there was a certain tendency toward the practical application of medicine rather than a development of new models. Medical practice centered around hospitals. Some of these institutions also had the facilities to offer a specialized treatment, for instance, for gynecological problems.

## Medicine in Byzantium

The medical history of the Byzantine age (roughly speaking fourth to mid-fifteenth century CE) is not easily described. If one understands “Byzantine” as being part of the eponymous empire, one has to bear in mind that this same empire changed its geographical boundaries over the centuries. If, on the other hand, one assumes that Greek language was the main characteristic of Byzantine culture, this raises the problem that the geographical extension of the Byzantine empire never coincided with the area in which Greek was spoken, as the vernacular in everyday life or as the lingua franca of learned academic discourse. In the case of medical writings, it is often impossible to decide from where the text originated or where it was revised, and beyond doubt there was an exchange between the different parts of the Greek-speaking world.

A variety of sources give us insight into the medical practice of the Byzantine period. Archaeological sites allow us to understand the structure and capacity of hospitals; numerous written accounts tell us about the date of their foundation and their history. Other literary sources describe the role of medicine in the society, perceptions of illness, death, and medical treatment. Some hospitals issued their own manuals; these texts were custom made to suit their specific needs. Apart from texts like these, other popular genres of medical literature were *florilegia* of ancient sources, medical encyclopedias, and collections of recipes. Byzantium also saw a flourishing book production, which led to a number of revisions or editions of texts. The sheer amount of text involved in this process is tremendous, and very little of it has, as yet, been made accessible in printed editions. The fall of Constantinople was not the end of Byzantine medicine – genres as the *iatrosophion* lived on, and later medical authors used medieval sources for their works.

Health care was widely available in the Byzantine empire and usually centered around hospitals, of which a large number are accounted for, founded between as early as the fifth century and the fourteenth century. They had their roots in charitable institutions, which offered shelter to the poor and homeless, or pilgrims. The most

detailed information we have is on the Pantocrator hospital in Constantinople. Its statutes (*typikon* in Greek) have survived, along with copies of the medical books which were either held or produced there. The hospital had several wards, offering among other services specialist treatment for eye diseases. A woman physician attended to gynecological problems. The surgical instruments from the period bear strong resemblance to the classical instrumentarium. The same applies to pharmaceutical ingredients. However, in both cases, a certain simplification can be noted, with a tendency toward the practical and ordinary rather than the sophisticated.

Throughout the Byzantine period, medicine kept a strong interest in earlier writings, either by preserving them in a copy or by transforming and adapting them to the needs of their audience. Oreibasius (fourth century CE) epitomized Galen’s works. Aetius of Amida (sixth century CE) compiled an extensive medical encyclopedia on pharmacology, diseases, and dietetics. Although his work is, strictly speaking, an amalgamation of diverse excerpts, it forms a readable and well-balanced corpus. Paul of Aegina (seventh century CE) wrote a shorter yet comprehensive medical handbook that is partly based on excerpts but does also contain original material. It covers all common diseases along with an extensive chapter on surgery. Similar in length and style is the *Therapeutics* by Alexander of Tralles (sixth century CE). The main characteristic of this author is an especially humane and careful way in dealing with the patients. Other works attributed to Alexander are texts on ophthalmology, fevers, and intestinal worms. Paul of Nicaea (date not entirely clear) wrote a handbook in form of an *erotapokrisis* (or “question and answer” style). All of these texts were suitable as reference books for an educated medic.

Another group of texts has a similar aim but differs from the aforementioned in a crucial point: their authors remain obscure, and we only have a vague idea about the date and the history of these texts. The shortest and most learned is Leo’s *Synopsis*, definitely written before the tenth century, which shares a large amount of content with an encyclopedia by Theophanes Chrysobalantes.

From this text, or a cluster of material with a similar content, the *Therapeutics* of John the Physician was derived. John's work was then translated into the vernacular, and a commentary was added. Later on, probably in Constantinople, an unknown reviser attempted to translate the text back into the learned idiom.

Some parts of these works coincide with the so-called *xenonika*, medical texts associated with hospitals; also their scope is similar. Theory is disappearing or taken for granted, and these texts are largely focusing on therapy. This means that an author might mention phlegm or bile and offer a treatment but does not explicitly refer to the theoretical background of the humoral pathology or in any other way explain why he chose this very remedy.

One of the typical genres of the Byzantine period is that of the so-called *iatrosophion*; these are compilations which can be based on earlier or contemporary authors or both and can either fill an entire volume or just a few pages. The *iatrosophia* usually have a thematic structure (although this might not be apparent at first sight) and are personalized to the extreme: from what was available to him, the compiler selected anything he believed to be useful and organized it in a way that made sense to him.

At the other end of the spectrum, we might rank some highly sophisticated writings produced in the mid to late Byzantine period. Theophilus Protospatharios (probably ninth or tenth century CE) wrote a Christian interpretation of human anatomy mainly based on Galen's *de usu partium*. Meletius, probably a contemporary, also wrote on anatomy, but with a more strongly teleological approach. His work contains numerous quotes from literary sources. Nicolaos Myrepsos (thirteenth century AD) and Symeon Seth (eleventh century) wrote on antidotes. Stephanus of Athens (sixth century CE) is the most prominent commentator of the time. He wrote on Hippocrates and Galen. Ioannes Zacharias Actuarius (fourteenth century CE) is commonly regarded as the most intellectually refined medical author of the period. His works deal with urine diagnosis and therapeutics. Ioannes Actuarius and Alexander of Tralles sometimes question earlier models.

On the whole, medical history of Byzantium bears strong characteristics of the continuation of earlier models, with emphasis on practice. Medical education and publishing were highly developed and had an impact on medicine in the entire western world. Throughout the time of the Byzantine empire, medicine was influenced by foreign, mainly eastern writings, which even led to Arabic works being translated into Greek; a prominent example is the treatise on smallpox and measles by Rhazes, which was incorporated into a canon of medical texts together with Alexander of Tralles and Artemidorus.

## Cross-References

- ▶ [Medicine and Philosophy](#)
- ▶ [Medicine in the Arab World](#)

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## Meister Eckhart

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### Abstract

Eckhart of Hochheim (c. 1260–1328), a leading figure within the Dominican order, was a professional theologian and as such he performed all the three duties related to his profession: lecturing on the Bible and on the *Sentences*, disputing questions, and preaching sermons. He was twice appointed as theology professor at the University of Paris. Eckhart's reputation is confirmed by the several senior posts he held in the administration of his order.

One original characteristic of Eckhart's work lies in the fact that he carried out a large part of his literary activity in Middle High German by reframing for wider audiences the issues discussed during disputations in class and the themes explored in his specialist lectures on the Bible. In so doing, he contributed to the creation of a German technical philosophical vocabulary. Eckhart's effort to present the arduous contents of scholastic speculation to common people seems to have been a crucial factor in the proceedings for heresy to which he was subjected toward the end of his life and which led to a posthumous condemnation of some propositions drawn from his works.

Eckhart of Hochheim (c. 1260–1328) was born into a family of the lower aristocracy in Tambach, a town south of Gotha in Thuringia. It is not known when he entered the Dominicans; the earliest evidence indicates that in 1293–1294 he acted as Bachelor of the *Sentences* (*lector sententiarum*) in Paris. From 1294 through 1298, he served simultaneously as prior of the Dominican convent at Erfurt and as vicar of Thuringia. In 1302–1303, he was called to Paris to teach theology as *magister actu regens*. In 1303, he was elected first provincial of the newly created province of Saxonia, to which he added the office of

vicar-general for Bohemia in 1307. The 1310 provincial chapter held in Speyer elected him provincial of Teutonia, but Master General Eymerich of Piacenza did not confirm the election. In 1311, Eckhart was sent to Paris as theology professor for a second time, an honor which only Aquinas among Dominicans had received before him and which shows how distinguished his reputation was during his lifetime. Eckhart remained in Paris until 1313, thereafter returning to Germany.

The widespread assumption that between 1314 and 1322 Eckhart resided in Strasbourg with the special office of spiritual counselor and preacher to convents of Dominican nuns and houses of Beguines lacks evidence. In fact, this idea is due to the misinterpretation of three documents which attest Eckhart's presence in or near Strasbourg at three different times (1314, 1316, 1322), but from which nothing can be inferred regarding Eckhart's alleged official appointment as responsible for the so-called *cura monialium* (see Sturlese, in Querosánchez and Steer 2008).

In 1324, Eckhart was certainly in Cologne, where he has long been conjectured to have carried out the office of lecturer at the *Studium generale*. In 1326, following the accusations of two of his brethren, inquisitorial proceedings for heresy against him were started by the Archbishop of Cologne, Henry II of Virneburg. The trial, which continued at the Papal Court in Avignon after Eckhart's appeal to the Holy See in 1327, would eventually lead to the bull "In agro dominico" by Pope John XXII (1329), condemning 28 excerpts from Eckhart's works. In the meantime, Eckhart had already died (1328). Despite the condemnation, his thought did not cease to be influential and themes characteristic of his teaching found their way into the writings of John Tauler, Henry Suso, and Berthold of Moosburg.

The idea that man, in the deepest ground of his soul, is intimately conversant with God lies at the heart of Eckhart's thought. The human intellect is an image of God and therefore stands in a relationship of coessential univocity with Him, from Whom it goes forth and to Whom it comes back in a timeless movement and in a dialectic of identity

and difference. In his writings Eckhart explores the metaphysical, anthropological, ethical, and religious aspects and implications of this privileged connection God-ground of the soul, a connection which constitutes an exception to the general rule of analogy predominant in the God-creatures relation. Moreover, since people usually live plunged in the dimension of creatureliness and estranged from their authentic self, Eckhart's preaching aims at making them become conscious of their inner union with God.

Recent scholarship has shed light on the dependence of Eckhart's speculation about the nobility of the soul on the noetics and the anthropology of Albert the Great, whose name appeared in Eckhart's first work, the *Sermo Pasqualis*, and whose teachings set the intellectual background in Germany from the mid-thirteenth to the mid-fourteenth century. It has also been rightly emphasized how relevant some teachings of Dietrich of Freiberg (e.g., the doctrine of image), with whom Eckhart was personally acquainted (between 1294 and 1298 Eckhart was the vicar of Dietrich, provincial of the Dominican province of *Teutonia*), were for his thought.

## Works

An Easter sermon in Latin (*Sermo Pasqualis*: LW V, 136–148) and the *Collatio in Libros Sententiarum* (LW V, 17–26), which depends in some ways on the *Collatio* of the Franciscan Richard Rufus of Cornwall, are all that remain of Eckhart's early teaching activity as Bachelor of the Sentences in Paris (1293–1294). Both texts are noteworthy for the large number of references to philosophical and scientific literature: Avicenna's *De animalibus* and *De anima*, the pseudo-Hermetic *Liber XXIV philosophorum*, Ptolemy's *Almagestus*, al-Fargānī's *Rudimenta astronomica*, Maimonides' *Dux neutrorum*, Aristotle's *Physica*, Boethius' *Philosophiae consolatio*, etc., are quoted, either implicitly or explicitly. The use of al-Fargānī and Maimonides is very unusual in the context of a *Collatio*, a lecture serving as a prologue to Eckhart's commentary upon Lombard's *Sentences*.

Even this early in his career, Eckhart showed himself fully aware of the exegetical value of philosophical authorities and also persuaded that there is substantial harmony between the Holy Scriptures and the Fathers, on the one hand, and philosophical learning, on the other.

*The Talks* (*Die Rede*, DW V, 185–309; the more common title *Die rede der unterschiedunge* is not original), are the result of table-talks given by Eckhart to the novices of the convent at Erfurt. They are the earliest evidence of Eckhart's literary activity in German, dating from when he served as prior in Erfurt (1294–1298).

Formerly these were often disregarded as examples of devotional literature without speculative ambitions, but recently *The Talks* have been given increasing scholarly attention. Eckhart offered a new and philosophically based interpretation of the traditional monastic virtues. Obedience, the foremost virtue, does not mean only subordination to the superior but implies an existential breakthrough which consists of forsaking oneself, annihilating oneself's will, giving up what is one's own; in a word, detachment (*abegescheidenheit*). The denial of self is strictly related to the possibility of establishing a more intimate relationship with God because a man able to reach detachment will necessarily enjoy the presence of God in himself and will be transformed by it. So portrayed, obedience looks like an attitude of openness toward God rather than to other men, an attitude whose adoption requires considerable and continued hard effort.

*The Talks* also present a few other points on which Eckhart was later to expand further: the ethics of intention (the idea that sanctity does not lie in works but in the perfect and righteous will of human agents); the related conviction that what counts for Christian life is inner self-denial rather than external practices of asceticism; the view that to the human intellect God is by nature very close and present.

Very little is still extant from the period of Eckhart's theological mastership in Paris: three disputations plus a sermon on St. Augustine date probably from his first period as theology professor (1302–1303), and another two disputations probably from the second period (1311–1313).

The first two disputations focus on the relationship between intellect and being, in God as well as in angels, and provide valuable insights into Eckhart's teaching on intellect.

In the first disputation (*Utrum in deo sit idem esse et intelligere*, LW V, 37–48) – actually, it postdates the second one – Eckhart departs radically from Aquinas' doctrine. After having reported Aquinas' arguments in favor of the identity of intellect and being in God, Eckhart claims that God exists because He understands, and not the converse – that He understands because He exists. Such a claim is tantamount to saying that God is intellect and understanding and that understanding is superior to being. Being qualifies the mode of existence of creatures, which are all formally (*formaliter*) beings, and therefore does not apply to God the creator. Yet, though not formally, being is in God as in its cause (*sicut in causa*), for God causes with his science everything. In other words, God is *puritas essendi* since He, as intellect, pre-contains everything in purity, plenitude, and perfection.

The otherness of intellect from being is clearly established in the second disputation (*Utrum intelligere angeli, ut dicit actionem, sit suum esse*, LW V, 49–54), where Eckhart expands further on the concept of intellect as intellect (*intellectus, in quantum intellectus*), on which Albert the Great and Dietrich of Freiberg had already worked. Being pertains to those substances which exist in space and time and are determined according to genus and species. Intellect can also be taken as a being, namely as a natural power of the soul which is a principle eliciting single acts of intellection. However, if considered in its proper nature, intellect is something which escapes any kind of determination, whether by time or by space or by genus and species, and is therefore radically different from all other substances which are given a being localized in space and time and restricted to one genus and species.

Probably around 1304, or even earlier, Eckhart started working on an original theological summa, the *Opus tripartitum* (the *Three-Part Work*), which, however, he left unfinished. According to the original project, the work would have had three parts: the *Work of General Propositions*

(*Opus generalium propositionum*), the *Work of Questions* (*Opus quaestionum*), and the *Work of Expositions* (*Opus expositionum*). The first part would have contained a thousand or more propositions concerning the transcendental terms (Being, Unity, Truth, and Goodness) and other metaphysical concepts. The *Work of Questions* was to solve some of the questions discussed in the *Summa theologiae* of Aquinas. The *Work of Expositions* was subdivided into two parts: one consisting of an exegetical commentary on the authorities (*auctoritates*) contained in the books of the two Testaments and the other of a series of sermons (*Opus sermonum*).

To Eckhart's mind, the general propositions were clearly to provide the fundamental philosophical principles according to which a theologian should both solve disputed questions and interpret Sacred Scriptures. In the *General Prologue* (LW I, 148–165), Eckhart offers a concrete example of his way of proceeding in the *Opus tripartitum*: he first formulates the general proposition "Being is God" (*Esse est Deus*); then, on this basis, he goes on to answer the question "Whether God is" (*Utrum Deus sit*) and elucidate the meaning of Genesis 1,1 (*In principio creavit deus caelum et terram*).

Of the original project Eckhart accomplished, besides the prologues (a *General Prologue*, a prologue to the *Opus propositionum*, and two different prologues to the *Opus expositionum*), only some of the third part (*Work of Expositions*): commentaries on a few books of the Bible (two on Genesis, one on Exodus, on Wisdom, on Canticle – of which only a fragment is preserved – and on the Gospel of St. John), two lectures, two sermons on Chapter 24 of the Book of Sirach, and some 50 model Latin sermons.

Eckhart worked on the *Three-Part Work* for several years and at least three different redactional stages are documented in the manuscript tradition. This means that the surviving parts were composed at different times.

The two lectures and two sermons on Chapter 24 of the Book of Sirach (LW II, 231–300), for example, date more or less from the same time of the first three Parisian questions. These texts seem to have had a programmatic value

because Eckhart gave the lectures and the sermons in front of the German intellectual elite of the order on the occasions of two provincial chapters.

The second lecture is one of the places where Eckhart sets forth his original teaching on analogy. Analogates, Eckhart maintains, have nothing positively rooted in themselves of the form according to which they are in a relation of analogy. Being and all other general perfections (One, True, Good, Light, Justice, etc.) are predicated in an analogical way of God and creatures. Therefore, each creature has its being, its being true, its being good, etc. not in itself, but in and from God alone. Eckhart goes so far as to say that all creatures, insofar as they are outside God, are nothing in themselves, for God only is Being. Eckhart's doctrine of analogy serves thus to show that creatures stand in a relationship of total dependence on God.

Apparently the doctrine of analogy, to which Eckhart was to keep throughout the course of his life, runs counter to the views he had put forward shortly before in the first two Parisian questions, where he had maintained that creatures are beings, while God is not being but intellect. As a matter of fact, the contradiction can be explained away as a shift from a "physical" to a "metaphysical" perspective: in both the disputations and the lecture on the Book of Sirach Eckhart is concerned with stressing the radical difference between God and creatures, but whereas in the disputations by "being" Eckhart means the imperfect mode of existence of creatures (which are localized in space and time and determined according to genus and species), in the lectures on Sirach he takes Being as one of the general perfections which properly belong only to God but are participated in also by creatures.

In the *Commentary on the Gospel of St. John* (LW III), one of the latest sections of the *Opus*, Eckhart expresses in a programmatic fashion how he conceives of his exegetical work by pointing out that in his scriptural commentaries his purpose is to explain on the basis of the natural reasons of the philosophers what Christian Faith and the Bible teach. Such a view of exegesis was the obvious result of the conviction about the unity of Truth: Moses, Christ, and Aristotle, Eckhart

maintains, teach the very same things, the only difference being in the way they do it.

The second commentary on Genesis (one of the last parts, if not the very last, of the *Opus tripartitum* to have been written) marks a substantial change in the original project of the *Opus* because, unlike the first commentary, it focuses only on the explanation of the parables – hence the title *Liber parabolarum Genesis* (LW I,1, 447–702). One scholar has claimed that the commentary could be the first book of an entirely new project: the *Liber de parabolis rerum naturalium* (*The Book of the Parables of Natural Things*) (see Sturlese 2007).

The *Liber Benedictus*, consisting of the *Book of Divine Consolation* (*Daz buoch der götlichen troestunge*, DW V, 8–61) and a sermon *On the Nobleman* (*Von dem edeln Menschen*, DW V, 109–119), is generally dated after 1318.

It is more difficult to date the German sermons, because Eckhart had always with him a “book” of his sermons, composed at different times, on which he continually kept working by adding, revising, etc. Some of them seem to have been composed quite early (e.g., those forming the so-called *Gottesgeburt* cycle [sermons 101–104] seem to date back to the time of the *Rede* (1294–1298)). Those belonging to the *Paradisus animae intelligentis* collection may date from the time of his provincialate (1303–1311).

It is generally assumed that Eckhart’s vernacular preaching should be seen in light of the movement of female piety and Beguine spirituality flourishing at that time in Germany; Eckhart’s sermons, in other words, would have been an attempt to face the challenge represented by various forms of Beguine mysticism and to reconcile them with the orthodoxy. Whatever may be the nature of his relationship with the Beguine movement, it is certain that in his German treatises and sermons Eckhart discusses and analyzes the same contents and motifs as in his Latin scholastic writings. From what Pope John XXII states in the bull “*In agro dominico*” it can be argued that one of the chief reasons for Eckhart’s legal misfortunes was that he had preached highly speculative concepts in front of an audience of simple people, thereby confounding the true faith in their

hearts. Even before the proceedings took place, Eckhart seems to have been reproached for writing or preaching such ideas to the untaught. At the end of the *Book of Divine Consolation*, he replied that the untaught were exactly the people needing instruction with a view to making them become learned, and that he could not worry about being misunderstood because he was aware that what he had said or written was true. Given these reactions, it is no surprise that the two lists on which the accusation against Eckhart was based contained many excerpts from the *Liber Benedictus* and from the German sermons.

Among other doctrines censored is that of the spiritual perfections (Goodness, Justice, Wisdom, etc.), a doctrine which is dealt with in great detail in the *Liber Benedictus*. Between Goodness and the good man exists a relationship of univocal causality, or reciprocal relationality: Goodness, which is neither created nor made nor begotten, begets the good man, who is neither created nor made but is the son born and begotten of Goodness. Goodness and the good man, in other words, are identical and the action of begetting of the former is one with the latter’s being begotten, the only difference between them being that the former begets and the latter is begotten. Whatever pertains to the good man, he has in and from Goodness. This doctrine is a radical transformation of Aristotelian metaphysics: it is not a quality (goodness) that lies in and is supported by an underlying subject (i.e., the good man), but the subject that is in the spiritual perfection. Insofar as he is good, namely, insofar as he abandons the dimension of creatureliness, the good man is nothing but pure and simple Goodness.

The two most characteristic and interrelated issues of the vernacular sermons are detachment and the birth of the Word or Son in the soul. Detachment, as has been said, is the way man has to go in order to recover consciousness of his inner union with God. The origin of this crucial concept of Eckhart’s thought has been traced back to the philosophical tradition, notably to the Anaxagorean-Aristotelian view of the intellect as something separable, pure from all admixture, simple, having nothing in common with anything else.

The birth of the Word in the soul is an idea which Eckhart could find in the Christian tradition, but which he modified in an original fashion. Indeed, he conceived of the generation of the Word in the soul as a timeless process: the Father is always bearing the Son in the soul, provided the soul realizes that its ground is identical with God's ground.

## Recent Publications

In the last decade scholars have focused their attention on new or so far neglected aspects of Eckhart's thought, adopting new perspectives of research and opening up new fields of analysis.

Eckhart's sources have been one of the domains most intensively studied by scholarship. Unlike the studies conducted in the past, the present investigations are mainly characterized by a doxographic approach and often endowed with statistic analysis of quotations. Usually, this kind of research is aimed at identifying Eckhart's direct sources and at describing the way in which he actually used them, rather than at reconstructing his supposed adherence to a general philosophical tendency (Platonism, Aristotelianism, Stoicism, etc.) (Löser 2009; Schiewer 2017; Sturlese 2011, 2013; Vinzent 2013).

Language cannot but play a crucial role in a thinker that, like Eckhart, is a bilingual preacher and exegete. Accordingly, many topics related to language were already dealt with in the past: Eckhart's bilingualism; the process of translation; his views on logic and semantics; the linguistic features of his sermons; the issues concerning the hidden meaning of Scriptures; etc. Recent conferences and publications have showed a shift in the scholarship's interest in linguistic matters, for two new specific subjects have been addressed: the relationship between Eckhart's views on logic and the grammatical treatments of the so-called Modistae, and the content, use, meaning, and context of the images and metaphors present in Eckhart's sermons (Dietl and Mieth 2015).

Interestingly, Eckhart's views on nature ("naturalia"), which, with very few exceptions, had been a neglected side of his thought, have

recently begun to be explored. Independently of each other, a few scholars have cast light on different aspects of Eckhart's reflections on concepts and topics related to the natural and physical world: the mechanism of sight; celestial causality and astrology; space and time (Beccarisi 2017; Gottschall 2015; Palazzo 2016; Vincent and Wojtulewicz 2016).

It is also noteworthy that modern categories, such as interreligious dialogue and individualism, have started to be used in order to interpret Eckhart's thought and its context. Rather than being a mere anachronistic modernization, this hermeneutic move is intended to combine solid historiographic research with the appraisal of how Eckhart's legacy, rightly understood from a historical and philological perspective, may have an impact on today's world (Büchner et al. 2016; Löser and Mieth 2014).

## Cross-References

- ▶ [Albert the Great](#)
- ▶ [Dietrich of Freiberg](#)
- ▶ [Peter Lombard](#)
- ▶ [Richard Rufus of Cornwall](#)
- ▶ [Thomas Aquinas](#)

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## Mental Language

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### Abstract

William of Ockham has been considered the first thinker to develop a theory of mental language with grammatical structures. Ockham's early views built upon Augustine's and

Boethius' twofold concept of a mental word: a concept common to all people and a resemblance of words to actual spoken and written languages. Ockham understood mental language to be identical with thinking. The spoken and written words are subordinated to their mental counterparts and therefore share their signification. According to Ockham, mental language does not contain figurative speech, grammatical genders, synonyms, or equivocations but does contain most other features of external languages, including suppositions of terms and certain fallacies related to the suppositions. John Buridan diverged from Ockham's view at this point and used the notion of modes of thinking to discuss related problems. Gregory of Rimini modified the view of mental language in several respects. He considered the major part of mental language to consist of a mentalized conventional language, with only the act of assenting to a mental proposition, which he considered to be the mental proposition itself, being independent of conventional languages. Peter of Ailly further developed Gregory's and Ockham's ideas. In Italy, Peter of Mantua and Paul of Venice discussed the problems of word order and mental language that William of Heytesbury had raised earlier. The former was mainly critical of Heytesbury, while the latter for the most part shared Heytesbury's views. Several later fifteenth- and sixteenth-century logicians continued the discussions.

William of Ockham's starting point in developing a theory of mental language was the traditional notion of mental word. In particular, he adopted the idea, developed in diverse ways by Aristotle, Augustine, and Boethius, that some phenomena of the human mind are closely related to the words in conventional languages, yet are common to all people despite their diverse spoken and written languages. Ockham's claims about the nature and function of mental speech having an idiosyncratic grammatical structure, however, justify the oft-repeated statement that he was the first to present a comprehensive theory of mental language. In addition to human mental language, Ockham

also discussed the problems his theory poses for the language of angels (*Rep.* II.20; *Quodl.* I.6). On the development of different views of mental words and concepts before Ockham, see the entry Mental Word/Concepts.

Ockham began to develop his view of mental language in his early writings by adopting Augustine's distinction between two types of mental words: those that are the same for all human beings and those that are mental renderings of actual spoken words (*Ord.* I.27.2). He considered the first type to be mental words in a proper sense, whereas he considered latter to be mental words only in an improper sense. The first type of mental word had several characteristics of Ockham's later, mature concept of a syncategorematic mental word: such word was unambiguous and could be the subject or the predicate of a mental proposition. Ockham conceived of these words as being produced by intuitive cognition, and, according to him, as concepts they were proper objects of the acts of knowledge. The formation of a mental sentence with the help of this type of mental word seems to imply a nonlinear rather than a discursive act of understanding, where the conceptual *facta* of subject and predicate are combined by a syncategorematic act. During this stage, Ockham seems to have excluded syncategorematic and connotative concepts from the group of proper mental words, considering such terms as belonging to the second type of mental words, those derived directly from spoken and written languages (*Ord.* I.2.8). Walter Chatton criticized this view, since according to him syncategorematic concepts are not conventional, as mental words of the second type were supposed to be. Rather they are produced naturally, as are the categorematic concepts.

At the heart of Ockham's mature concept of mental language, outlined in his *Summa logicae*, was the priority of mental terms vis-à-vis written and spoken terms in regards to signification. The terms of conventional languages derive their signification from the terms of mental language. Ockham conceived of signification in a specifically propositional context. A term signifies when it directs the mind's attention to the external objects and at the same time stands for those objects in a proposition. Accordingly, Ockham

conceived mental terms as signs in addition to written and vocal terms. With such a primary logical notion, Ockham began to construct a view of mental language by eliminating certain features of the conventional spoken and written languages that were not essential for signification. These included metaphorical expressions and genders but not such features as numbers, cases, declensions, and so on. Ockham also raised the question of whether participles and pronouns are needed in *Mentalese*.

Generally it seems to hold that, according to Ockham, there are no synonymous or equivocal terms in mental language. However, according to Ockham, there are fallacies, which also occur in mental language. These include some fallacies that he classified as equivocations, such as those arising from a confusion between simple and personal supposition. However, most mental language fallacies are fallacies of accident, some sort of logical mistakes.

The explanation of synonyms elucidates how Ockham understood the relationship between mental language and conventional languages in general. Synonymous terms in conventional languages correspond generally only to one term in the mental language. The synonymous terms share the signification of the corresponding mental term, and their signification is asymmetrically dependent on the signification of the latter. This is what Ockham meant when he stated that conventional terms are subordinated to mental terms. Ockham did not believe, as did Walter Burley and John Buridan, that terms of conventional languages signify their corresponding mental terms, but rather the spoken and written terms share the extension of the mental terms and signify the objects immediately.

Against the representatives of modist or speculative grammar, Ockham argued that signification is a linguistic phenomenon restricted to mental and conventional languages, and therefore the modes of signification do not reflect the constitution of the extramental world. In Ockham's view, the structures of spoken and mental languages are clearly distinguished from the structures of external reality. This line of argument is consonant with and closely connected to Ockham's program of ontological parsimony, and it marked a line that was

still visible in fifteenth-century disagreements between modists and nominalists.

There has been long-standing debate among scholars on whether there are or should be connotative terms in the mental language according to Ockham's theory. One of the main problems in admitting connotative terms into a mental language has been that it seems to contradict the rule that there is no synonymy in a mental language. The possible coexistence of connotative terms and their complex nominal definitions seem to violate this basic rule, which many scholars have considered an essential feature of Ockham's idea of mental language. Claude Panaccio has argued that Ockham considered connotative terms a natural part of the mental language. According to Panaccio, Ockham did not consider connotative terms and their nominal definitions to be synonymous (for arguments for and against this view, see Panaccio 2004).

Ockham believed that the categorematic terms of a mental language are passively acquired through the psychological processes of sense perception, abstraction, and intellectual cognition rather than being either innate or learned. According to Ockham's mature theory, the syncategorematic terms are not passively acquired as are the categorematic ones. Rather they are caused by the innate capabilities of the rational soul.

A particular problem that led to wide discussion concerns the structure of mental propositions. Ockham noted that there are propositions that do not have the same truth-values, although they consist of the same terms, but in different order. Since the terms of a mental sentence are simultaneous acts that take place in an unextended mind, they cannot be ordered either temporally or spatially. As a solution, Ockham proposed that a mental proposition is either one cognitive act, which is equivalent to an ordered combination of terms, or that it is composed of parts, which are not identical to individual spoken and written words. A similar problem was also raised by William of Heytesbury. He concluded that whereas spoken and written propositions are distinguished by their constituent words and their order, mental propositions may be distinguished by cognitive acts that do not correspond exactly to individual words in the written sentences.

A categorical proposition must have at least two mental concepts of things and one that composes or divides the concepts, but there can be more acts that link the concepts together in different ways.

In fourteenth-century Oxford, Ockham's theory was immediately criticized by Dominican thinkers. Hugh Lawton objected to the very idea that there are propositions in the mind and consequently held that, properly speaking, propositions exist only in written and spoken languages. Lawton argued that it can be shown that at least some propositions of external languages do not have mental counterparts, that external speech and the operations of the mind are generally incommensurable, that there is no way to account for the formation of mental propositions, and that mental similitudes cannot serve the linguistic functions necessary for a proper language.

Lawton's fellow Dominican, William Crathorn, launched similar criticism against the idea of a mental language based on natural similitudes of things. However, unlike Lawton, Crathorn developed the notion of a mental language that is composed of the mental similitudes of the words in the spoken and written languages. Another Oxford Dominican, Robert Holcot, responded to Crathorn's criticism and defended Ockham's position.

In Paris, Ockham's theory was received in various ways. Buridan never developed a fully elaborated theory of mental language as did Ockham, but the idea of mental language was nevertheless an integral part of his thinking. Buridan's view of mental language largely resembles Ockham's mature theory, but there are also significant differences. According to Buridan, mental terms have personal rather than material suppositions, even when they refer to other mental concepts. Only vocal and written terms have a material supposition, which is the case when they refer merely to mental concepts rather than objects of the external world. Buridan distinguished diverse modes of thinking (*modi intelligendi*), which correspond to different suppositions of the conventional languages on the mental level.

Unlike Ockham, Buridan did not believe that there are fallacies of equivocation in the mental language, and consequently, he opposed to Ockham's broad definition of equivocation, which included the confusion between simple

and personal supposition. Buridan discussed the problem of differing word order discussed by Ockham and Heytesbury by referring to differing modes of thinking about mental concepts, which result in diverse word orders and consequently diverse suppositions of the terms in written and spoken propositions. Like Heytesbury, Buridan considered compositive and divisive acts of the mind to correspond to positive and negative copulas in the spoken and written categorical propositions. Buridan called them "complexive concepts," distinguishing them from "simple" concepts such as subject and predicate. According to Buridan, the principal parts of a categorical proposition included a copula.

Gregory of Rimini recognized the problem of considering the mental proposition as one compositional act in a proper sense. For him such a view did not sufficiently address the problems of word order that Ockham and Heytesbury had discussed. Therefore, he concluded that the mental proposition must be one undivided mental act, which he identified with the act of assenting to the mental proposition. Based on Ockham's view of lying, Gregory also argued that there are no insoluble paradoxes in the mental language, since no proper mental sentence is self-referential.

Gregory revived Augustine's view of the dual nature of mental words. According to Gregory, a major part of thinking consists of mental language, which is based on spoken and written languages. Only the act of assenting to or dissenting from a proposition belongs to the mental language common to all people. Similarly, Peter of Ailly followed Ockham's early views in distinguishing mental language in the proper and improper senses. Peter also developed Gregory's view of insolubles and adopted his view of the mental proposition as one undivided act. Like Buridan, Peter considered the personal supposition the only option for mental terms (Peter of Ailly, *Concepts and Insolubles*: 67–68).

In Italy, the discussion proceeded in a slightly different manner. Peter of Mantua construed a view where each written term of a proposition, be it categorematic, syncategorematic, absolute, or connotative, was subordinated to a single, non-complex term in the mental language. Thus, "is" in the proposition "man is not an animal"

corresponds to an act that links the subject with the predicate, but does not affirm the latter of the former, whereas “not” corresponds to an act that denies that the predicate inheres in the subject. As Gaetano of Thiene did later, Peter directed many of his critical comments against the views of William of Heytesbury.

In contrast, Paul of Venice espoused the view that was close to Heytesbury’s in several points. Aware of the problems of transferring the word order of external sentences to their mental counterparts, Paul stated that there must be an order of mental acts in a mental proposition that are metaphysically understood as possessing a discrete quantity and that do not contradict the mind’s nonextensionality, which is only incompatible with continuous quantity. The order can be a temporal succession, but the intellect is also capable of thinking of one or more propositions simultaneously. Unlike Gregory of Rimini, Paul considered a mental proposition to be a compositional whole. Similar views are also found in Blasius Parmensis. In discussing the word order of mental propositions, Paul noted on modal terms that in propositions taken in a compound sense, the modal term comes first in the mental proposition, even though it stands at the end of the corresponding written or spoken sentence.

Many fifteenth- and sixteenth-century logicians carried on lively discussions of several themes concerning mental language and commented on positions represented by authors such as Ockham, Paul of Venice, and Gregory of Rimini. At the beginning of the sixteenth century, Gregory of Rimini’s view of the mental proposition as one undivided act was adopted by very few authors, but later during the same century it gained many supporters, including Domingo de Soto and many Spanish Jesuit philosophers, to the point that the view eventually became the dominant one.

## Cross-References

- ▶ Augustine
- ▶ Boethius
- ▶ Gregory of Rimini
- ▶ Insolubles

- ▶ John Buridan
- ▶ Mental Representation
- ▶ Mental Word/Concepts
- ▶ Modistae
- ▶ Paul of Venice
- ▶ Philosophical Psychology, Jewish Tradition
- ▶ Sophisms
- ▶ Supposition Theory
- ▶ Syncategoremata
- ▶ Terms, Properties of
- ▶ Walter Burley
- ▶ Walter Chatton
- ▶ William Crathorn
- ▶ William Heytesbury
- ▶ William of Ockham

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## Mental Representation

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### Abstract

The concept of mental representation played an important role in late medieval cognitive theories. It was primarily introduced in the Latin translation of Avicenna and became a central

concept by the mid-thirteenth century. It was developed in several ways and all the features we now attribute to this concept were more or less already present in the Middle Ages.

### The Ancient Background and the Formation of the Concept

The English words “representation” and “to represent” derive via Old French from the Latin words “repraesentatio” and “repraesentare,” but these are by no means commonly used words in classical Latin. In late Ancient thought it is foremost Quintillian and Tertullian that uses the terms in a philosophically interesting way. It is not until the twelfth century Latin translation of Avicenna's *De anima* that these terms become frequently used in connection with cognition and the mind (see Lagerlund 2007).

Early logic works like Garlandus Compotista's *Dialectica* (17) and Abelard's *Dialectica* (II, 188) discussed a distinction between a word's signification by imposition and representation. A denominative term such as “white” signifies by imposition a substance that is white, but it signifies by representation the whiteness inhering in the substance. The white thing stands in for or is an instantiation of whiteness – white is re-presented in the object. Garlandus mentions the example of a traveler (*viator*) who can be said to represent a road (*via*). The term “traveler” signifies by imposition the human being who is a traveler, but also represents the road the traveler travels on. It is exactly this usage of representation applied to mental signs that becomes important with Ockham and Buridan.

### Thomas Aquinas and the Conformality View

The most influential theory of thought in the thirteenth century goes back to Aristotle and has its foremost medieval defender in Thomas Aquinas. It rests on viewing mental representations or intelligible species, as Aquinas calls them, as sameness in form. The explanation for why thoughts



are about something, exhibit intentionality, or represent is that the form of the object thought about is in the mind of the thinker.

On Aquinas' view, the mind is nothing before it thinks of something. The active intellect abstracts the intelligible form from the particular sensitive form in the internal senses and places it in the potential intellect. The form placed there by the active intellect hence actualizes the potential intellect. The thought is also always universal on this view since it is immaterial and matter is the individuating principle, according to Aquinas. The immaterial intelligible species in the potential intellect constitutes the thought.

There are many problems associated with this view of mental representation. A famous problem is: why do the daffodils outside my soul not represent my thought about the daffodils? The forms inside and outside my mind are the same, suggesting that mental representation is symmetrical. Aquinas has a famous answer to this problem, which is that the daffodils in the garden do not represent my thought because of the mode of the form's presence in them. The forms in the daffodils are really present whereas in my mind the universal form is spiritually or intentionally present.

The distinction between forms being really or spiritually present is central to Aquinas' physics and natural philosophy. A form may be present somewhere without literally making whatever substance it informs into something else. Colors in the air, for example, do not make the air really colored: we see colors in the objects around us but not in the intervening air, although they must be there spiritually if sensation is to be a causal process. This means, of course, that the air must also represent the color, which entails that intentionality is not a mark of the mental for Aquinas. The air is not in itself a mind (for discussion, see Pansau 1997, Chap. 2).

### **Peter John Olivi and the Rejection of the Conformality View**

One of the first to criticize the conformality or species theory of cognition, in the late thirteenth

century, was Peter John Olivi. He argued, contrary to Aristotle and Aquinas, that the mind is active in its cognition of the world; it attends to the object, and it is this move on his part that puts the species theory of cognition in a completely different light. In fact, there seems little point in postulating a species through which the object is cognized. He argues:

Third, because the attention will tend toward the species either in such a way that it would not pass beyond so as to attend to the object, or in such a way that it would pass beyond. If in the first way, then the thing will not be seen in itself but only its image will be seen as if it were the thing itself. That is the role of a memory species, not a visual one. If in the second way, then after the inspection of the species it will inspect the object in itself. In this way it will cognize the object in two ways, first through the species and second in itself. It will indeed be like when someone sees an intervening space and then beyond that sees the fixed object. (Peter John Olivi, *Quaestiones in secundum librum Sententiarum*, III, q. 74, 123)

In this passage, it seems clear that for Olivi the species is a thing in itself and that there really are three things involved in the cognition of an object: the object, the species, and the cognizer. The species is on his view a re-presentation, namely a thing that stands in for the object in the mind. The main problem he sees with the theory is hence epistemological. How can we be sure we are cognizing the object and not the species. Ockham will later repeat this objection (see Toivanen 2009, Chap. 4). Olivi hence argues that this third representing thing is not needed and that the mind can attend to the object directly.

### **Henry of Ghent and John Duns Scotus and the Introduction of Mental Content**

For various reasons, the late thirteenth century saw an increased interest in epistemology. One of the reasons for this were certain developments of new theories of mental representations and intentionality. Some of these developments were due to problematic features of, on the one hand, Aquinas' view of mental representation and on the other, of Henry of Ghent's interpretation of Augustine's view of divine cognition. Aquinas

seems to have held that the intelligible species is supposed to play a dual role both as a universal common to all of us thinking it and as my individual thought. One and the same entity seems not to be able to fulfill both these roles. Henry on the other hand reinterprets Augustine's doctrine of divine ideas and introduces a distinction between the ideas and the divine nature. The ideas are *possibilia* or the natures of possible things to be created (de Rijk 2005, pp. 81–84). Both of these views contribute to the introduction of a distinction between the vehicle and the content of a representation.

The distinction developed by Henry in relation to the divine nature was almost immediately taken up into the debates about human cognition. It was applied to Aquinas' theory of mental representation, taking the conformality view a step further by introducing a distinction between the thing representing and the thing represented. John Duns Scotus was instrumental in adapting this view to human cognition. Scotus' implemented Henry's distinction and treated the thing that does the representing as a mental act or concept, which ontologically speaking is an accident of the mind, and the thing represented as the form of the object thought about (which is why this is still a conformality account of mental representation).

Scotus claimed that the accident or mental act is subjectively in the soul, whereas the object being represented is present objectively, or has objective being in the mind. He also said that the object exists *sub ratione cognoscibilis seu repraesentanti* or "in keeping with the nature of something cognizable or represented" (Ord. I, d. 3, pars 3, q. 1, n. 382) to express the content side of the mental representation. Scotus thus had a clear way of expressing what Brentano later called intentionality, that is, the way the object of thought exists in the mind. It has objective existence in the mind on his view, which later came to be regarded as the mark of the mental (see Normore 1986; Pasnau 2003; King 2007).

Although the advantages of this approach over Aquinas' are clear, problems remained concerning the ontological status of these mental contents. The medieval debate here is famous and features a wide variety of opinions (for a survey,

see Tachau 1988). Scotus himself says that thought objects have a diminished kind of being, which is supposed to be a state between real being and no being at all. Ockham would later subject this view to much criticism.

## William of Ockham and Mental Language

Foremost William of Ockham developed the theory of mental language in the fourteenth century. It rests on a theory of mental representation that combined the notions of cause and signification. A concept or a mental term on this view represents because it was caused efficiently by a thing in the world. It signifies that thing also because of the causal relation between them. The object and the concept are said to covary. On Ockham's view, a mental representation or concept is caused by an intuitive cognition:

Intuitive cognition is the proper cognition of a singular not because of its greater likeness to one thing more than another but because it is naturally caused by one thing and not by another; nor can it be caused by another. If you object that it can be caused by God alone, I reply that this is true: such a visual apprehension is always apt to be caused by one created object and not by another; and if it is caused naturally, it is caused by one thing and not by another, and it is not able to be caused by another. (*Quodlibeta septem* 1.13)

According to Ockham's metaphysics there are only individuals in the world so that when an individual causes a concept to exist in the mind, it causes an individual concept and hence a singular conception of itself. Nothing else can cause that concept (except perhaps God). The singular concept functions as the word of the object that caused it in our language of thought. It is an atomic constituent that can then be combined to form more complex concepts or sentences in the language. In this way, one can say that Ockham develops a kind of medieval functionalism, since the determinate content of a concept is fully specified by the input (covariance) and the output (linguistic role) (see King 2007).

Ockham's notion of concept acquisition and mental representation is developed as part of a

very sophisticated theory of thought involving not only a theory of signification, but also a whole range of logico-semantic properties such as connotation and supposition. It explains how concepts, which in turn are the direct objects of belief and knowledge, are assembled into mental sentences describing the world (for the details, see Panaccio 2004).

### John Buridan and Vague Concept

Ockham and John Buridan's accounts of thought are on the one hand very similar, but on the other hand there are fundamental differences between them. This is particularly true when it comes to their view of mental representation. A case in point is their views of singular thought. It starts out from the same idea, that is, that thinking something singularly is having a singular concept in mind, but they disagree fundamentally on what a singular concept looks like and foremost on how it manages to latch onto the world. On Ockham's account, as mentioned, a concept is singular because its cause was proper, as he calls it, and proper causes are necessarily tied to one object. But on Buridan's account, a singular concept is singular because of its complexity. It has a descriptive content that enables it to narrow down its signification to only one thing.

Buridan thinks that we always cognize or conceive of something first as singular, but this also means that we first conceive of it as this or that, that is, we conceive of it as something. For him, this also means that our concepts are from the very beginning loaded with some content and a proper singular concept picks out whatever it is of or represent in all circumstances. Such a concept is not vague, since it applies to only one thing, but it is also not what we first acquire. The first singular concepts we acquire are the so-called vague singulars. A vague concept is singular because it is about only one thing, but it is not determined what thing that is; examples of such concepts are "this human," "this cup," hence the name "vague singulars." It is from these we arrive at determinate singular concepts by adding content and to universal concepts by abstracting away from singularizing circumstances.

To explain how the process he is advocating works, he uses an example that, after him, became a standard example used to explain singular cognition. In the example, Socrates approaches from afar. At first, I cannot tell exactly what I see approaching; something (a substance) is coming closer and closer to me. After a while, I see that it is an animal of some sort, but I cannot tell exactly what kind of animal it is. As it comes closer, I realize that it is a human being, and, finally, when he is close enough, I recognize Socrates. Although this example seems to have had a long tradition, nowhere else did it play as important a role as it does for Buridan and some of his followers. Cognition, it shows, is always in the first instance about "that thing," "that animal," "that human being," and finally about "Socrates." Hence, it is always about a singular thing in the first instance. The example can be found in John Buridan, Nicholas Oresme, Marsilius of Inghen, Peter of Ailly, Gabriel Biel, and later authors, and all these authors used it in virtually the same way. The example can thus be said to reform the theory of thought developed by Ockham (see Lagerlund 2006, forthcoming).

### Cross-References

- ▶ [Garlandus the Computist](#)
- ▶ [Henry of Ghent](#)
- ▶ [Ibn Sīnā, Abū 'Alī \(Avicenna\)](#)
- ▶ [Intentionality](#)
- ▶ [John Buridan](#)
- ▶ [John Duns Scotus](#)
- ▶ [Mental Language](#)
- ▶ [Peter Abelard](#)
- ▶ [Peter John Olivi](#)
- ▶ [Species: Sensible and Intelligible](#)
- ▶ [Thomas Aquinas](#)
- ▶ [William of Ockham](#)

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## Mental Word/Concepts

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### Abstract

The medieval thinkers did not have any one agreed-upon term for concept as a mental entity, but it was generally assumed that there are some such units and they were often viewed as mental words of some kind. In contrast to the words of spoken languages, which vary from nation to nation, the concepts were taken to be the same for all people. Issues related to concepts or mental words were discussed in several fields of inquiry, including logic, theology, and philosophical psychology. In logic, concepts were traditionally called “understandings” (*intellectus*), and they were supposed to have a mediating role between words and things in signification. This view goes back to Aristotle’s *De interpretatione* and Boethius’ commentaries on it. In theology, the mental word (*verbum*) was a prominent theme because Augustine had elaborated an analogy between the human interior word and the Word, that is, the second person of the Trinitarian God. In the tradition of philosophical psychology starting from Aristotle’s *De anima*, the acquisition of concepts was a central theme. These and other influences led to intricate discussions in the medieval

universities about what kind of entities in the mind relating to concepts one should postulate and how they should be described. Thomas Aquinas developed a model that includes a distinction between the intelligible species, the act of understanding, and the concept proper. There was extensive dispute about issues related to concepts in the late thirteenth and early fourteenth century, and much of it revolved around ideas presented by Aquinas. William of Ockham developed an alternative to the *De anima*-based approach on the basis of his nominalist philosophy. The concept or mental word, identified as an act of understanding, became the basic unit in the theory of mental language that Ockham advocated.

An important source for the medieval understanding of concepts was the opening passage of Aristotle's *De interpretatione* (16a3–9). The text was available in the Latin translation that Boethius had prepared at the beginning of the fifth century, and in medieval logic courses, it was usually read together with Boethius' two commentaries on the treatise. Following Boethius' translation, the pertinent lines can be rendered as follows:

What are spoken are signs of the passions in the soul, and what are written are signs of those that are spoken. And in the same way as written letters are not the same for everyone, so the spoken sounds are not the same. But the primary things of which these are signs, the passions of the soul, are the same for all; and those of which these are likenesses, namely, the things, are also the same (English translation from Knuuttila and Sihvola 2014, p. 266).

Aristotle here speaks of concepts as “passions in the soul,” but Boethius' preferred terms for concept are “understanding” (*intellectus*) and, less frequently, “conception of the soul” (*conceptio animae*). Boethius' discussion of the passage contains a number of ideas about concepts that would be influential in the Middle Ages. (1) There are concepts in the human mind that correspond to the words (in particular, nouns) of spoken language. (2) The concepts are natural in the sense that they are the same for all people. In contrast, the spoken words are conventional and vary from nation to nation. Speakers of different

languages use different words to express the same concepts. (3) Semantically, the concepts mediate between words and things. Boethius explains that spoken words primarily signify concepts and only secondarily the things in the world. (4) Concepts are likenesses (*similitudines*, sing. *similitudo*) of things. To explain this idea, Boethius discusses the example of a geometrical figure and its image in the mind. (5) Referring to earlier commentators, Boethius maintains that there is a kind of inner speech which makes use of concepts, but he does not develop the idea.

Boethius did not use the word *verbum* to refer to concepts. He reserved that expression for another use: *verbum* in the meaning “verb” is one of the basic terms discussed in *De interpretatione*. There were other sources where *verbum* was used of words in general and of mental words in particular. The most influential of these was Augustine's theological treatise *De trinitate*, where the author develops an analogy between the human interior word (*verbum interior*) and the Divine Word (*Verbum*), that is, the second person of the Trinitarian God (see *De trinitate* XV:10–16).

The analogy about the word is part of a more extensive analogy between the three powers in the rational mind and the three persons in God. The three powers in question are memory (*memoria*), intelligence (*intelligentia*), and will (*voluntas*). The memory is a treasure-house of latent knowledge, whether it is innate or based on reasoning, sense perception, or testimonies of others. The intelligence is the power that brings pieces of knowledge into the focus of actual attention. The distinction between memory and intelligence is the context for the analogy between the interior word and the Word. The human interior word is an act of intelligence born from a piece of knowledge in the memory, and in the same way, the Word (the Son) is born from the Memory (the Father). According to this analogy, then, there is a *verbum* only when something known is actually uttered in the mind. Augustine declares that the interior words do not belong to any particular language and are the same for all people. He also characterizes the act of intelligence as a kind of intellectual seeing.



Aristotle's *De interpretatione* and Boethius' commentaries on it were widely used at least since the eleventh century. They were the main source for discussions about concepts within the early medieval "old logic." Peter Abelard's *Tractatus de intellectibus* (*A Treatise on Understandings*) offers an innovative treatment of concepts within this framework, but it did not have any notable influence on the later scholastic discussions.

Already before Abelard, Anselm of Canterbury had commented on mental words in the treatise *Monologion*. This is a theological treatise that draws much of its inspiration from Augustine's *De trinitate*, but Anselm was also familiar with the sources of logic and his treatment of mental word brings together Augustinian and Boethian ideas. In *Monologion* 10, Anselm distinguishes three kinds of words (*verba*) and three kinds of speaking of a thing. First, we can speak of a thing by uttering a word of a spoken language, for example, "man." Second, we can speak of a thing by uttering the word of a spoken language (e.g., "man") silently within our mind. Third, we can inwardly utter the thing itself either by imagining the image of its body (*imago corporis*) or by understanding the thing's "reason" (*ratio*), for example, by imagining the perceptible shape of man or by thinking of the universal essence of man as "rational, mortal animal," respectively. Anselm says of the words of the third type that they are natural and the same for all nations, and he characterizes them as likenesses of things. Anselm's synthesis affected the way in which Augustine's remarks about the interior word were construed in later discussion. The connection between one kind of mental word and the definition of the thing is noteworthy.

The tradition of philosophical psychology starting from Aristotle's *De anima* entered the Latin discussions gradually during the latter half of the twelfth century and the first half of the thirteenth century. It became the dominant framework for the discussions about concepts until Ockham. In addition to *De anima* itself, the basic sources included a work by Avicenna, also known as *De anima*, as well as Averroes' Long Commentary on Aristotle's *De anima*.

In the *De anima* model, the intellectual cognition of an external object, for example, a horse, is based on the presence of the object's form in the intellect. The intellect can think of a horse because it becomes actualized by the same form that makes the horse into a horse. There was a complex story to be told about how the form of the object gets into the intellect.

A standard account of concept acquisition in the latter half of the thirteenth century would begin with a description of how the forms are transmitted through the medium (e.g., air) to the organs of external senses (e.g., sight or hearing) and are received in these organs as sensible species (*species sensibilis*). The species received will be further processed by the internal senses – a group of cognitive faculties that Avicenna had described, including common sense, imagination, and (sensory) memory. One of the tasks of the internal senses is to store the sensory information as phantasms, which are sensory likenesses or representations of things.

For Augustine or Anselm, a mental image of a man would count as a *verbum*. The Aristotelian model in *De anima* puts more stringent conditions on what qualifies as a concept. An image in the mind is a phantasm, and the phantasms are not concepts but the raw material for concepts. The phantasms are in the internal senses, which belong to the sensitive part of the soul, whereas the concepts are in its intellective part. The phantasms also differ from concepts in that they are about particular things, real or imagined, whereas concepts are universal.

The internal senses make use of a material organ, whereas the intellect is immaterial. It was assumed that the material cannot affect the immaterial, and hence the emergence of concepts in the intellectual soul could not be explained in terms of plain reception. To circumvent this, the Aristotelian model assumed a mechanism involving two intellectual powers, the active intellect and the possible intellect. The same mechanism explained how the concepts are universal even though the phantasms are particular.

The distinction between the active intellect and the possible intellect goes back to a not particularly clear passage in Aristotle's *De anima* III, 5



(430a10–25). There had been considerable discussion about the nature and function of these two powers in the Greek and Arabic commenting tradition. For example, Avicenna held that the active intellect (or agent intellect) is a separate substance from which the forms of the things emanate into the human soul when it has intellectual cognition. The usual thirteenth-century Latin position was to take both the possible intellect and the active intellect as powers within the individual human mind. What happens in concept formation is that the active intellect illuminates the phantasms in the internal senses and abstracts the intelligible content in them by stripping them of their accidental features. The universal forms thus abstracted will be imprinted in the possible intellect as intelligible species (*species intelligibilis*), and the intellect can then use them in intellectual operations.

The preceding paragraphs describe the late thirteenth-century standard view about how the forms of the things are acquired in the possible intellect, which is the power of intellectual thinking in humans. When we move on to consider what takes place within the (possible) intellect, the picture will get complicated. There were competing views about what kinds of entities in the mind relating to concepts one should postulate and how they should be described. The psychological *De anima* tradition provided the main framework for the discussions, but other influences were also involved. Importantly, attempts were made to relate the *De anima*-based model to the theologically oriented doctrine of the interior word (*verbum*).

The intelligible species are universal representations of objects in the intellect, and some scholastic thinkers identified them as concepts. However, the standard view in the late thirteenth and early fourteenth century was to consider the intelligible species and the concept as two distinct entities. The writings of Thomas Aquinas were instrumental in the development of this view, even though the details of his account vary from one work to another. In some important passages, he distinguishes (1) the intelligible species, (2) the act of understanding, and (3) the concept (see, e.g., *De potentia*, q. 8, a. 1, co.). Here, the

intelligible species precedes the act of understanding and makes it possible, whereas the concept (*conceptio intellectus*) is seen as the end product of the act. Aquinas identifies the concept as the *verbum*, and it is the likeness and representation that mediates in signification between the spoken word and the extramental thing.

There was extensive dispute about issues related to concepts in the late thirteenth and early fourteenth century. Much of the argument revolved around Aquinas' ideas, but there were also some highly original contributions. Peter John Olivi was among the early critics of Aquinas' views. He identified the act of understanding as the concept and denied that there are either intelligible species preceding such acts or some end products terminating them. Other critics of the intelligible species included Henry of Ghent and Godfrey of Fontaines. Against these criticisms, John Duns Scotus defended the necessity of postulating intelligible species that are distinct from concepts and precede the acts of understanding. Scotus and some others discussed the mode of existence that concepts, as end products or objects of acts of understanding, have. It was assumed that concepts have a special mode of being: they exist "objectively" or "intentionally" by being objects of understanding, whereas the intelligible species are forms inhering in the intellect.

The thought of William of Ockham opens a new phase in the medieval discussion about concepts. He developed an alternative to the *De anima*-based approach on the basis of his nominalist ontology. Ockham rejected the idea that intellectual cognition requires the presence of the object's form in the intellect, and he rejected the doctrine of species in its all forms, including intelligible species. In his mature thought, he also rejected the idea that concepts are objects of thought having merely objective or intentional existence. (Ockham referred to such objects as *ficta*. In earlier phases of his career, he considered the *fictum*-theory of concepts a genuine option.)

For Ockham, concepts are acts of understanding. More precisely, concepts are abstractive acts of understanding, as opposed to intuitive acts. An intuitive act of understanding is about a present particular object as existing, whereas the

abstractive act of understanding does not require the presence of the object and is universal in the sense that it is applicable to many objects (say, to all the members of a species). In Ockham's view, the human mind is so constructed that it is capable of forming concepts of the things it encounters under suitable conditions. When a person sees a horse for the first time, he or she will have an intuitive act of understanding about the particular horse as existing, and this intuitive act will automatically be followed by an abstractive act of understanding, which is applicable to all horses. Ontologically, concepts are qualities: they are states in which the intellect can be. In addition to concepts or abstractive acts of understanding, there are also habits related to them. These habits are also qualities in the intellect.

In Ockham's approach, there is a strong emphasis on the viewpoint of logic and semantics. He developed a theory of mental language, and concepts or mental words are among the basic units of that language: they are terms of the mental language. As terms of a language, the concepts are signs, and they have the kind of semantic properties that terms have. In fact, the concepts are the primary signs, and the words of spoken language signify because they are subordinated to concepts. Ockham maintains that this is what Aristotle had meant in the opening passage of *De interpretatione*. He also follows Aristotle in saying that concepts are likenesses of things, but he is not explicit about what kind of likenesses they are.

## Cross-References

- ▶ [Anselm of Canterbury](#)
- ▶ [Augustine](#)
- ▶ [Boethius](#)
- ▶ [Epistemology](#)
- ▶ [Intentionality](#)
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- ▶ [Peter Abelard](#)
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- ▶ [Sense Perception, Theories of](#)

- ▶ [Species: Sensible and Intelligible](#)
- ▶ [Terms, Properties of](#)
- ▶ [Thomas Aquinas](#)
- ▶ [William of Ockham](#)

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changes in parts. Second, the fact that a whole depends upon its parts entails that God must be absolutely simple. The final section examines the question whether an integral whole is identical to its parts.

## Introduction

The concepts of part and whole are two of our most basic and prevalent concepts. We reason with these concepts all the time and in many different contexts. When we step back and reflect on the logical and metaphysical nature of parts and wholes, we are engaged in mereology. Critical reflection on parts and wholes has a long history. (For a way into this history, see the survey by Burkhardt and Dufour (1991), the collection of essays edited by Mann and Varzi (2006), and Harte's (2002) study of Plato.) Medieval philosophers used the concepts of part and whole liberally. But there is also a medieval tradition of mereology.

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## Mereology

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### Abstract

This article is a survey of medieval treatments of parts and wholes. The first section covers the medieval taxonomy of parts and wholes. The second section examines some of the ways that medieval philosophers distinguish one class of parts and wholes from another class. The rest of the article focuses upon metaphysical issues concerning parts and wholes. The third section examines the common medieval supposition that the whole depends upon its parts and considers two ramifications of this supposition. First, it seems that if the whole depends upon its parts, the whole cannot persist through

## Types of Parts and Wholes

A theory of parts and wholes should tell us what items can be parts. Since something is a part only if it is a part of a whole, a mereology will tell us what items can be wholes. Essentially, the medieval answer is that a part is either anything that is the product of a division or anything that composes something else. Accordingly, a whole is either anything that is divisible or anything that is composite.

Medieval Aristotelian treatments of parts and wholes tend to start by distinguishing between different types of whole. The source of these distinctions ultimately comes from Aristotle's *Metaphysics* (V, 26). The proximate source for the medieval version of the division of "whole" is Boethius' *De divisione* where he proclaims that a whole can be a continuous thing (such as a body or a line), a discrete thing (such as a crowd or pile), a universal, or a thing that consists of "powers of some kind" (such as a soul) (887d–888a). Boethius' treatment of the division of "whole" is

refined by subsequent medieval philosophers into a standard threefold division (*Compendium logicae Porretanum* III.12, 72–79):

Among wholes, some are universal, some are integral, and some are potential. An example of a universal whole is Animal. An example of an integral whole is a house. An example of a potential whole is a soul. And among integral wholes, some are aggregated out of their parts – for example, a tree – while some are disaggregated – for example, a flock. And among the aggregated wholes, (a) some are continuous – for example, a stone – (b) some are contiguous – for example, a fence – and (c) some are successive – for example, a time.

Almost without exception, medieval philosophers divide “whole” into these three classes: the universal whole, the potential whole, and the integral whole. Some, like the author of the *Compendium*, provide a further elaboration of the integral whole. The better medieval philosophers tend to endorse something like the *Compendium*’s thoroughly articulated division of wholes.

Different parts correspond to these different wholes. Again, the sources are ultimately Aristotle’s *Metaphysics* (V, 25) and Boethius’ *De divisione* (888a–c). Anyone who examines medieval treatments of parts will quickly find that there are some differences in terminology. But at root, the framework is essentially the same. According to this framework, there are three basic types of whole and at least three basic types of part:

1. Subjective parts of universal wholes
2. Potential parts of potential wholes
3. Integral parts of integral wholes

A wide variety of objects can be integral wholes. Piles, flocks, artifacts, and substances are all integral wholes. Aquinas even argues that the virtue of prudence and the act of penance have integral parts (*Summa theologiae* II–II, q. 48, and III, q. 90, articles 1–3, respectively), and Ockham thinks that complex mental acts (such as “Every man is animal”) are composed of parts (namely, “every,” “man,” “is,” and “animal”) (*Quaestiones in physicam* q. 6 [*Opera philosophica* VI, 407–410]; *In De int.* I, prooemium, 6 [*Opera philosophica* II, 354–358]). This prompts later authors to distinguish between a number of types

of integral part, including most often what we will call substantial parts (substantial form and matter), functional parts (such as fingers, skin, and hearts), and material parts (such as the stones that compose a pile or the geese that constitute a flock).

There is some disagreement among medieval philosophers whether substantial parts are really integral parts. Aquinas, in some passages, suggests that substantial parts are a type of integral part (*Summa theologiae* I, q. 8, a. 2, ad 3; III, q. 90, a. 2). But Aquinas seems ambivalent about the status of form and matter, for in other passages he calls matter and form “parts of an essence” and he distinguishes these “parts of an essence” both from parts of a quantity and from parts of a potential whole (*Summa theologiae* I, q. 76, art. 8). If parts of a quantity are integral parts, then it seems that Aquinas is saying that form and matter are not integral parts. Other philosophers take a less ambiguous position. They insist that only parts that constitute some quantity or other can be integral parts (Lambert of Auxerre *Logica* 126, Peter of Spain *Tractatus* V, 14:64; Walter Burley *De toto et parte*, 302; Albert of Saxony *Sophismata* 45, 25rb–26vb). These latter philosophers believe that substantial parts are a different species of part, not a type of integral part.

Functional parts and material parts are generally accepted to be integral parts. They differ, however, with respect to their ontological status. Functional parts are defined by the role that they perform for the whole. This role, in turn, is defined by the form of the whole. For this reason, medieval philosophers sometimes call functional parts “parts *secundum formam*,” or parts with respect to the form (Walter Burley *De toto et parte*, 301). For example, this thing is a hand because it belongs to a thing that is imbued by the form of a human. It follows from this fact that if the form of the whole is removed, the part ceases to exist. This part of a corpse, even though it looks like a hand, is not a hand, for it no longer performs the functions of a hand.

Some functional parts and some material parts are heterogeneous parts – that is, they are not divisible into parts belonging to the same type. For example, a hand is not divided into hands. But

other functional parts and other material parts are homogeneous parts. Divide up a quantity of blood and you still have bits of blood; divide up the bronze of the statue and you still have bits of bronze.

No matter how medieval philosophers divide up the types of parts, there is all but universal agreement that each different kind of part is specific to a type of whole. Subjective parts are only parts of a universal whole. Integral parts are only parts of an integral whole. Socrates can be an integral part of a crowd in the Agora, and he is a subjective part of the species Human Being. But Socrates cannot be an integral part of Human Being. Moreover, it is generally agreed that these three basic parts are irreducible. Integral parts cannot be reduced to subjective parts. Potential parts are irreducible to either subjective parts or integral parts.

The only philosophers who take exception to the thesis that types of parts are irreducible are the *collectio* theorists, who explicitly argue that a universal is a kind of integral whole and that subjective parts are reducible to integral parts (Pseudo-Joscelin *De generibus et speciebus* §§ 85–143). But very few medieval philosophers are *collectio* theorists, especially after Abelard famously critiques the theory (Freddoso 1978; Henry 1984, §4.5).

We find the threefold distinction between integral wholes, universal wholes, and potential wholes throughout the medieval period and in both logical and metaphysical treatments of parts and wholes. In addition to these three basic types of parts and wholes, later medieval logicians offered a different taxonomy of parts and wholes (Peter of Spain *Tractatus* V.11–18: 63–67; Radulphus Brito *Commentary on De differentiis topicis* II, q. 9; Lambert of Auxerre *Logica*:126–127; Buridan *Summulae* 6.4.2):

- (a) The universal whole
- (b) The integral whole
- (c) The whole in quantity
- (d) The whole in a respect (*in modo*)
- (e) The whole in place (*in loco*)
- (f) The whole in time

One of the notable features of the logician's taxonomy is the absence of the potential whole. This may be because a potential whole is of little interest to the logician. Or it may be that the logical behavior of a potential whole is reducible to one of the other types of whole (cf. Lambert of Auxerre *Logica*:130).

The wholes that correspond to items (c) through (f) reflect the medieval realization that the adjective “whole” (*totus/- a/- um*) can have a distributive function. Hence, the whole in quantity is the sense of “whole” that acts as a quantifier ranging over individuals, as for example when I say that “humans as a whole are rational.” Likewise, the whole in a respect is the sense of “whole” found in such propositions as “the whole surface of the ball is white,” which means that every part of the ball's surface is white. The whole with respect to place is the sense of “whole” that is found in such propositions as “Lucy is occupying the whole seat,” which means that every part of the seat is occupied by Lucy. And the whole with respect to time is the sense of “whole” that is found in such propositions as “God is present for the whole of time,” which means that God is present at every moment of time.

It was recognized that the adjective “whole” has a distributive sense at least as early as the middle of the twelfth century (Henry 1985:66–68; Zupko 2003:152). In the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, medieval logicians refined this understanding by distinguishing between two senses in which the adjective “whole” can be distributive. Consider two examples: “the whole human is rational” (*totus homo est rationalis*) should be interpreted as “the whole of human is rational.” That is, each human is rational. But when I say “Socrates as a whole” (*Socrates totus*), I am referring to Socrates in so far as he is composed of parts. These two senses of “whole” are labeled, respectively, the syncategorematic sense of “whole” and the categorematic sense of “whole” (Kretzmann 1982). It is crucial to distinguish between these senses when considering a claim such as “the whole Socrates is less than Socrates” (Walter

Burley *De puritate artis logicae tractatus brevior* 256.9–13; Albert of Saxony *Sophismata* 45, 24vb–25va).

## Differences Between the Different Types of Parts and Wholes

According to medieval philosophers, at least some classes of parts and wholes are not reducible to other classes of parts and wholes. Medieval philosophers offer several ways of distinguishing between the various types of part.

One method that medieval philosophers use is the predicative criterion (Boethius *In Cic. top.* 289.11–16; Abelard *Dialectica* 546.24–547.5; Buridan *Summulae* 8.1.4). According to this criterion, the mark of a subjective part is that its whole is entirely attributable to it. An integral whole, on the other hand, is not predicable in its entirety of its part. The integral whole can only be predicated of the parts when they are taken together all at once. For example, Socrates is a subjective part of the species Human Being. Hence, Socrates is a human being. Socrates' hand is an integral part of Socrates. A hand is not Socrates. Socrates is only predicable of the hand, when the hand is taken together with all the other parts, so that this collection of parts (including the hand) is Socrates.

Some medieval philosophers seem to suggest that the predicative relationship that obtains between a part and its whole is itself merely a sign that some deeper relation obtains between the two items. Aquinas, for example, suggests some deeper relations that explain what it is to be an integral part of something, what it is to be a potential part of something, and what it is to be a subjective part of something (*Summa theologiae* I, q. 77, art. 1; and III, q. 90, art. 3, *responsio*):

1.  $x$  is a subjective part of  $y$  because the total essence and power of  $y$  is present to  $x$ .
2.  $x$  is a potential part of  $y$  because the total essence of  $y$  applies to  $x$ , but the total power of  $y$  does not.

3.  $x$  is an integral part of  $y$  because neither the total essence, nor the total power of  $y$  is present in  $x$  taken singularly.

Aquinas implies that the relations spelled out in (1)–(3) ground the various predicative relations that obtain between parts and wholes. Aquinas' characterization of the differences between the types of wholes and parts also attempts to account for the peculiar behavior of potential wholes. Potential wholes are predicable of their potential parts – that is, the rational soul and the vegetative soul are both soul – but the potential parts do not belong to the same species. The rational power of the soul has a different definition than the vegetative power. Other philosophers who appeal to the predicative criterion omit mention of the potential whole.

A second criterion that medieval philosophers sometimes offer is this: an integral whole always “draws together,” or “embraces” (*comprehendere*), some quantity, whereas a universal whole does not embrace a quantity (Abelard *Dialectica* 546.21–27). Notice that this criterion does not require that the parts themselves possess any quantity. For example, an angel is immaterial and hence, does not possess a quantity. Nonetheless, one can make an integral whole out of two angels, since that whole has a quantity, namely, a number.

A third way to distinguish between the universal whole and the integral whole is by determining whether the parts actually compose the whole (see William of Ockham *Expositio in librum Porphyrii* 2.16 [*Opera philosophica* II, 54]; John Buridan *Summulae* 6.4.4). On this view, the parts of a universal do not strictly speaking compose the whole, whereas the parts of an integral whole do literally compose the whole. That is, in order to construct an integral whole, one needs to first find some parts. A universal is not a construction out of particulars. One does not need to first gather together some particular humans in order to make the universal Human Being.

Given that the parts compose the integral whole, it may seem that an integral whole depends upon its parts, whereas a universal whole does not



require the existence of its subjective parts in order to exist. In his *De divisione*, Boethius uses differences of priority to distinguish between the genus and the whole (879b–c). The genus is prior to its species, whereas a whole is posterior to – that is, depends upon – its parts. In later treatments of parts and wholes, the universal whole – which Boethius lumps together with integral and potential wholes – is distinguished from the integral wholes by appealing to relations of priority. Often these relations of priority are encapsulated in the maxims associated with the various topics (*loci*). (On the medieval understanding of the topics see Green-Pedersen 1984 and Stump 1982.) For example, the maximal proposition that corresponds to the topic from the integral part is the following

If the integral part is removed, the integral whole is also removed.

In the next section, the reader will see that there is significant disagreement over how to interpret this maximal proposition.

When discussing these criteria for distinguishing between types of wholes and parts, many philosophers make no mention of potential wholes. Again, this may be because potential wholes are thought to be reducible to either integral wholes or universal wholes. Or it may be that the philosophers who propose these criteria for distinguishing between integral wholes and universal wholes do not think that potential wholes are true wholes. For example, such a philosopher might think that the soul is mereologically simple (i.e., has no parts), and that mereological language, when applied to the soul, is figurative. The nature of the potential whole is not well understood. Much more research is needed in this area (although, see Perler 2010, 2015).

## Dependence and Persistence

One of the proposed hallmarks of an integral whole is that it is actually composed out of its parts. This thought naturally implies that the whole depends upon its parts for its existence. In *On the Trinity* II Boethius tells us that the

composite “gets its being from those things which compose it.” In one sense, this claim is not controversial, for in the case of a composite being, some parts are required to bring the composite into existence. Many medieval philosophers would also concede that in order for a composite to exist at some time, the right sort of parts must exist at that time. For example, in order for a human to exist at time *t*, there must be a substantial human form and the right sort of matter at *t*. But some medieval philosophers consider an even stronger reading, namely, that in order for this whole to exist at *t*, these parts (and no others) must exist at *t*. Boethius suggests this stronger thesis in his treatments of parts and wholes (*De divisione* 879c):

If a part of the whole perishes the whole, whose one part is destroyed, will not exist. But if the whole perishes the parts, although scattered, remain.

Boethius reiterates his claim that the removal of a part removes the whole in his treatments of the topics (*In Ciceronis topica* III, 331.23–29 and I, 289.35–39). Taken at his word, the thesis is remarkable, for it suggests that if Socrates’ fingernail is a part of Socrates, then the removal of the fingernail removes Socrates.

There is an innocent way to interpret Boethius’ maxim that the removal of the part entails the removal of the whole. In his *Metaphysics*, Aristotle notes that one sense of “*x* is whole” is that *x* is complete (V, 26, 1023<sup>b</sup>26–27). Accordingly, if one were to remove *y* from the whole of which it is a part, the whole consisting of *y* and some other parts is removed. For example, if I cut off Socrates’ finger, the whole that consists of Socrates’ finger as well as all of his other parts is compromised. But this just means that Socrates has been “mutilated” (cf. Aristotle *Metaphysics* V, 27). The removal of Socrates’ finger does not entail the destruction of Socrates. Radulphus Brito might have this interpretation of Boethius’ maxim in mind. He claims that in the case of heterogeneous wholes, the maxim holds because “each part is required for the *esse totius*” and thus, when even one part is destroyed “the *forma totius* does not obtain” (*Commentary on De differentiis topicis* II q. 9:45). It is not quite clear what

Radulphus means by “*esse totius*” and “*forma totius*,” but one possible interpretation is that each part is required in order that the composite be “all there” and have the form characteristic of something that is whole, or complete. If that is right, then for Radulphus the loss of a part merely implies that the thing that lost the part ceases to be complete, not that the thing ceases to be altogether.

Other philosophers insist that Boethius’ rule must be restricted in some manner. Most commonly, the rule is restricted in this way: the whole is removed only if one removes a “principal” part. If one were to amputate Socrates’ right hand, Socrates would not cease to exist. He would merely lack a hand. Hence, a hand is a “secondary part.” Yet, if someone were to remove Socrates’ heart or brain, Socrates will be destroyed. Thus, hearts and brains are “principal parts.” The distinction between principal and secondary parts is in place by the middle of the twelfth century (Pseudo-Joscelin *De generibus* §§ 6–10; anonymous *Introductiones maiores Montane* 71va–72rb; cf. Arlig 2013). The restriction of the Boethian maxim to principal parts is common throughout later Scholastic treatments of mereology (cf. Buridan *Summulae* 6.4.4; Joachim Jungius *Logica Hambergensis* XI, §§ 16–18).

What often underwrites this distinction between principal and secondary parts is a metaphysical commitment to forms that are not dependent upon their matter. If a form is independent of its matter, it can be the metaphysical glue that holds an object together as it changes material components. For example, Walter Burley draws a distinction between the whole *secundum formam* and the material whole. The formal whole persists so long as the form persists (*De toto et parte*, 301). Most commonsense objects are identified with a whole *secundum formam*, not a material whole. Hence, Socrates is not substantially compromised by material changes.

However, there are a few medieval philosophers who argue that the removal of any part entails the removal of the whole. Peter Abelard insists that every integral whole is composed by a unique set of integral parts. This house must be

composed out of these nails, these boards, and this cement (*Dialectica* 551.4–9). If I use other nails or other boards, I could make a house, but not this very house. Given that each whole is composed by a unique set of parts, if any part is removed, that whole is destroyed. Another whole similar to the original might exist after the mereological change takes place, but strictly speaking the two wholes are not identical (cf. Henry 1972:118–129, 1991:92–151; Arlig 2007).

Ockham and a number of other fourteenth-century nominalists also flirt with the notion that any mereological change brings about the destruction of the whole. (See, especially, Buridan *Quaestiones in physicam* I, q. 10 (with English paraphrase in Pluta 2001), and *Quaestiones super De generatione et corruptione* I, q. 13; Albert of Saxony *Quaestiones in Aristotelis physicam* I, q. 8. On Ockham, see Normore 2006; Pasnau 2011:692 f.) Ockham is somewhat circumspect, but Buridan and Albert say some unambiguous and remarkable things about the persistence of objects through mereological changes. According to them, there are three senses of numerical sameness: there is a proper sense, a less proper sense, and an improper sense. Something is properly the same in number if all its parts remain the same and it neither acquires nor loses any parts. In this strictest of senses, no corruptible thing persists through mereological change. Something is less properly the same in number if its “most principal part” remains numerically the same. This is the sense that allows us to claim that Socrates is numerically the same man now as that man 10 years ago, since Socrates’ intellectual soul persists through the change. Finally, something is improperly the same in number if there is a continuous succession of beings that maintain a similar shape, disposition, and form. This improper mode of numerical sameness allows us to claim that the Nile River here today is numerically the same river as the Nile back in Caesar’s time. The reason why these philosophers flirt with an extreme notion of persistence is that both Buridan (at least in his physical works, for compare *Summulae* 6.4.4) and Albert claim that plants and animals can only be numerically the same in the third, improper sense, for these creatures do

not have the sort of soul that can act as a guarantor of less proper identity (Buridan *Quaes. super De gen.* I, q. 13:114–15; Albert *Quaes. in phys.* I, q. 8:131).

The extreme view of persistence held by Abelard, Buridan, and Albert of Saxony threatens the Aristotelian distinction between substantial and accidental change. Strictly speaking, we do not have one substance, but rather a succession of substances loosely unified by three facts: these successive beings have some of the same parts, this line of succession is continuous, and each member in the line of succession belongs to the same species of substance. It is perhaps for this reason that these philosophers resort to some interesting antirealist strategies to maintain at the least the appearance of Aristotelian orthodoxy. First, all three philosophers make an exception for human beings. Personal identity is guaranteed by the persistence of the intellectual soul. When it comes to other substances, such as houses and horses, Abelard regrettably is silent (Arlig 2013:91–96). However, one option that is open to him, if he in fact wished to take a hard line, is to treat not only persisting inanimate substances and artifacts but also plants and animals as convenient fictions, that is, conceptual items constructed from ephemeral things. On this proposal, they would be analogous to days and utterances, which strictly speaking do not exist since their putative parts do not exist all at once (see Arlig 2007:217–223). Buridan and Albert, by contrast, explicitly acknowledge the challenge and they meet it head on by denying that their analysis entails that every mereological change entails substantial change. But they do so by reinterpreting substantial change. Substantial change occurs only in those cases where the specific substantial name is changed. So long as one can apply the name and definition of “horse” to the whole in question, no substantial change has occurred.

Given that most medieval philosophers do not endorse an unrestricted reading of the claim that the whole is posterior to its parts, it is interesting to note that many appeal to this very principle in order to demonstrate the absolute simplicity of God (Anselm *Monologion* 17; Anselm

*Proslogion* 18; Aquinas *Summa theologiae* I, q. 3, a. 7; Maimonides *Guide of the Perplexed* II, prop. 21 and II, 1). These philosophers argue that if something is complex, then that thing has parts. But if something has parts, then that thing is posterior to and depends upon its parts. Hence, if God is complex, then God has parts and God depends upon these parts. If God depends upon any  $x$ , then  $x$  is a higher form of being than God is. So, if God is complex, then God is not the highest form of being. But God is the supreme being. Therefore, God cannot possess any parts whatsoever. God is absolutely simple. Medieval philosophers typically take this to mean that God is not divisible in any respect. God is not a composite of hylomorphic parts, He is not a composite of subject and accident, He is not a composite of genus and differentia, and He is not a composite of being and essence. He is utterly noncomposite (*Summa theologiae* I q. 3, art. 7).

The thesis that God is absolutely simple has interesting metaphysical and theological implications. For example, if God is absolutely simple then God cannot occupy space or time, since occupying space and time divides the occupant into parts (Anselm *Monologion* 21).

God’s simplicity also entails that anything that is identical to God’s essence is identical to the whole of God’s essence (Anselm *Monologion* 17; cf. Boethius *De trin.* IV). In particular, God is traditionally identified with the Good itself, Justice itself, and Being itself. But since God has no parts, the Good, Justice, and Being cannot be parts of God’s essence. Since identity is transitive, the Good is identical to Justice, Justice is identical to Being, and Being is identical to the Good. Many medieval philosophers are willing to accept and defend this odd result rather than deny that God is absolutely simple. Those who deny that God’s Goodness and Justice are identical do not in turn think that God has parts. Rather, they insist that names such as “Good” and “Just” do not name the essence of God. The best way to describe God’s essence is to say what God is not (Maimonides *Guide* I 58). In other words, the so-called negative way is motivated by an unwavering commitment to the absolute

simplicity of God, which is in turn founded on the principle that a whole depends upon its parts.

## Identity and the Problem of the Many

It is sometimes assumed that the extreme view of persistence espoused by philosophers such as Abelard and Albert of Saxony is founded on the principle that a whole is identical to the sum of its parts. If that were so, an easy way to avoid the conclusion that a change in parts entails a change in the whole would be to deny that the whole is ever identical to the sum of its parts (Brown 2005: esp. 150–155).

An orthodox Aristotelian will readily assert that an integral whole is not always identical to its parts. Some integral wholes are weakly bound together. For example, a crowd is a very loose and weak unity: it is a combination of substances and an accidental form (Aquinas *In Metaphys. expositio* V, lectio 21, sections 1102–1104; *Summa theologiae* III, q. 90, art. 3, ad 3; Buridan *Summulae* 8.1.4–5). For this reason, its parts might be identical to the whole, and a removal of one part might compromise the existence of that whole. But a combination of a substantial form and matter yields the truest sort of unity one finds in the sublunar world (Aquinas *Summa theologiae* I, q. 76, art. 8). In the case of substances, the whole is clearly not the sum of its integral parts. First, a substance is not identical to the elements that make it up, since when the substance exists, its parts exist only in potentiality. As for the functional parts, which exist in act only when the whole exists, the sum of these is not identical to the whole, since the whole consists of all the parts plus something that is not a part, but rather a principle, namely, the soul (Aquinas *In Metaphys. expositio* VII, lectio 17, sections 1674–1680).

Yet, it would also be wrong to suppose that Abelard or Albert of Saxony think that an integral whole is *identical* to its parts. Abelard presents the clearest illustration of this point. Abelard admits that it is not always sufficient to gather together the parts in order to create a whole. Some wholes

require the imposition of structure in order to bring about the existence of the whole (*Logica ingredientibus* II, 171.14–17; *Dialectica* 550.36–551.4). A house, for example, is a collection of boards, nails, and bricks that have the right arrangement. While this arrangement is not a part, it is a difference maker. Abelard claims that a house and the parts that compose it are the “same in being (*essentia*) and in number,” but they are “distinct in property” (*Theologia Christiana* III, § § 139–154: 247–253; cf. Brower 2004; King 2004:85–92; Arlig 2012). Certain characteristics are true of or can be predicated of the thing, which are not true or predicable of its matter, and vice versa. But this fact does not entail that the matter and the thing are numerically distinct entities, for  $x$  is the same in being as  $y$  if and only if every part of  $x$  is a part of  $y$  and every part of  $y$  is a part of  $x$ . If  $x$  is the same in being as  $y$ , then  $x$  is numerically the same as  $y$ . Therefore, the house is numerically the same as its parts, even though the house is not identical to its parts. The claim that the whole is something over and above its parts is, in Abelard’s view, too unrefined to capture the relations that obtain between a thing and its parts.

Several medieval authors consider a specific puzzle that is generated by the identification of a whole with its parts, namely, the Problem of the Many (Abelard *Theologia Christiana* III, § 153: 252; Pseudo-Joscelin *De generibus* § § 22–25; Albert of Saxony *Quaes. in Arist. physicam* I qq. 7–8, and *Sophismata* 46, 25va–vb; cf. Fitzgerald 2009; Normore 2006). Contemporary philosophers perhaps best know this puzzle as Peter Geach’s puzzle concerning Tibs and Tibbles (Geach 1980:215). Assume that Socrates’ body is perfectly intact: he has all his limbs, and their parts. Now consider every part of Socrates’ body except one finger. Call this whole  $W$ .  $W$  is not numerically the same as Socrates, so it appears that  $W$  and Socrates must be numerically distinct. Socrates’ whole body is imbued with the soul of a man. But it also happens that  $W$  is imbued with the soul of a man. So, there are now two numerically distinct men where it initially appeared there was one. But it gets worse. Considering the body apart

from one finger was only one of an indefinite number of such considerations. And by the same reasoning, these other bracketed wholes composed from Socrates' body are also men. Hence, it is easy to generate an indefinite number of numerically distinct men where commonsense tells us that there is only one.

Most medieval philosophers who consider the Problem of the Many reject the premise that while  $W$  is a part,  $W$  is a human. If  $W$  is a part of a per se being (i.e., an Aristotelian primary substance), then  $W$  itself cannot be a per se being. There cannot be many per se beings occupying the same location at the same time. Therefore, there are not innumerably many men. There is only one man consisting of innumerably many parts (see, e.g., Albert of Saxony *Sophismata* 46, 25vb).

While Abelard's theory of sameness and difference is subtler than most, it appears that ultimately even he would resolve the Problem of the Many in more or less the same manner. If  $x$  and  $y$  are the same in being, then  $x$  and  $y$  are numerically the same. But, according to Abelard, it does not follow that if  $x$  and  $y$  are different in being,  $x$  and  $y$  are numerically distinct. This is because if even one part is not shared by  $x$  and  $y$ ,  $x$  and  $y$  are different in being, but in order to be numerically distinct,  $x$  and  $y$  cannot share any parts. This characterization of numerical sameness and difference leaves logical space for overlapping objects, which are neither numerically the same nor numerically distinct. Thus, according to Abelard it is true that  $W$  is not numerically the same as Socrates. But it does not follow from this fact that  $W$  is numerically distinct from Socrates. Hence, there is not an indefinite number of numerically different men. So far, so good. But if one asks Abelard to pinpoint *which*, if any, of these overlapping men is Socrates, Abelard's theory of identity cannot provide the answer. It might be that Abelard would be content with this lacuna. But it is not unreasonable to think that Abelard instead might have offered this answer: Socrates is the maximal sum of parts that is vivified by Socrates' soul (*Theologia Christiana* III, § 153; cf. Arlig 2012:132 n. 38).

## Conclusion

Medieval philosophers have a sophisticated understanding of parts and wholes, and they make use of these mereological principles when reflecting on metaphysical questions concerning persistence, dependence, and identity. Some of these reflections, as the reader has seen, are of the first rank. Students of logic and metaphysics should be richly rewarded if they continue to explore this important body of work.

## Cross-References

- ▶ [Albert of Saxony](#)
- ▶ [Boethius](#)
- ▶ [Boethius' \*De topicis differentiis\*, Commentaries on](#)
- ▶ [Form and Matter](#)
- ▶ [John Buridan](#)
- ▶ [Metaphysics](#)
- ▶ [Peter Abelard](#)
- ▶ [Peter of Spain](#)
- ▶ [Sophisms](#)
- ▶ [Substance, Accident, and Modes](#)
- ▶ [Syncategoremata](#)
- ▶ [Thomas Aquinas](#)
- ▶ [Trinitarian Logic](#)
- ▶ [Universals](#)
- ▶ [Walter Burley](#)
- ▶ [William of Ockham](#)

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## Metaphysics

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### Abstract

This entry surveys some of the major issues in medieval metaphysics. It examines at length medieval positions on the nature and scope of metaphysics, especially in relation to theology. This entry then briefly surveys some of the major topics that exercised the minds of medieval thinkers, including the transcendentals, the categories, existence, universals, ontological reduction, individuation, material constitution, identity, persistence, and modality.

In the collection of books known as the *Metaphysics*, Aristotle provided several characterizations of this science. In book I (A), Aristotle claimed that the fruit of the highest philosophical investigation is a “wisdom” concerning the first causes and principles of things. In book IV (Γ), Aristotle claimed that metaphysics is the study of being in so far as it is being (chapter 1), but given that all beings ultimately depend upon substance for their existence, metaphysics is primarily a study of substance (chapter 2). Finally, in book VI (E), Aristotle itemized the subject matters of the three theoretical sciences, which are marked off from the practical and productive sciences in virtue of the fact that the former are pursued for their own sake. The theoretical sciences are divided into natural science (“physics”), mathematics, and the “divine” science, or theology. Physics considered things insofar as they are changeable and inseparable from matter. Mathematics considered things, which are actually inseparable from matter, in abstraction from their matter and from change. Theology, however, considered things that exist separately from matter and are not subject to change. Aristotle noted that if there were only natural things, physics would be the first

philosophical science. But given that there are eternal, immaterial substances, there must be a higher science that studies these. Hence, metaphysics comes after the study of physics. For the Aristotelian, one does not have complete knowledge of a science until one knows the causes and principles of the subjects of that science. In this sense, metaphysics is prior to physics. For these reasons, metaphysics is the first philosophical science.

While medieval philosophers were more than happy to parrot these Aristotelian formulae, there was considerable debate over the proper “subject” of metaphysics. For it is one thing to consider the  $x$ 's in a science, it is another matter for the science to have the  $x$ 's as its primary object of study. For example, one may have to consider substance in physics, but substance as such is not the subject matter of physics.

### The Subject Matter of Metaphysics

The tradition that medieval thinkers received presented them with three plausible candidates for the subject matter of metaphysics: being as such (which included the study of the first principles and causes of beings), substance, and God. In practice, it seems that the main struggle was between the conception of metaphysics as the study of being qua being, which was associated with Avicenna, and the conception of metaphysics as the study of eternal substances, which was often attributed to Averroes.

Duns Scotus, like many of his contemporaries, sided with Avicenna. Avicenna's understanding of the subject matter of metaphysics was not without precedent (compare al-Fārābī, *The Aims of Aristotle's Metaphysics*, in McGinnis and Reisman 2007: 78–81, but see Fakhry 1984). But it was Avicenna's particular formulation of the claim that metaphysics is the study of being inasmuch as it is being which was to be extremely influential in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries.

Avicenna observed that metaphysics could not be solely about God or about substance. The

subject of metaphysics cannot be God, because the subject of any science is something whose existence has been postulated at the outset of the investigation; a science only studies the states and properties of its subject. But the existence of God cannot be postulated at the outset of metaphysical study (for no other science has established His existence); rather, the existence of God is something that is sought in metaphysics (Avicenna, *The Metaphysics of al-Shifā' (The Healing)*, I, 1). Likewise, the subject of metaphysics cannot be the first principles and causes of substances. They too are the things that the science seeks after, not what it has already postulated. Finally, if metaphysics were solely about substance, then metaphysics would fail to be fully general. It would only study being under one of its aspects, namely, substance, and not being in general. Metaphysics would not be the highest science; it would be a science that is subordinate to some yet unspecified science that studies being in general.

Avicenna concluded that the subject of metaphysics is being inasmuch as it is being: some of the science will study the causes of being, some of it will study the accidents, some of it the First Cause, and some of it the starting points of the other sciences, all of which also study being but under one aspect or another (*Metaphysics*, I, 2).

Avicenna's conception of metaphysics was very influential, but it did not go unchallenged. Averroes, for example, attacked Avicenna's reason for rejecting the notion that God is the subject matter of metaphysics (*In I Phys.*, com. 83 [*Aristotelis Opera cum Averrois commentariis*, IV, 47v]). Avicenna is mistaken, for the demonstration of the existence of the separate substance, which Averroes identified with the first form and the final cause of everything else, has already occurred by the end of the study of physics (cf. Aristotle, *Physics* VIII). Accordingly, Averroes seems to have endorsed the opposing claim that the proper and primary subject of metaphysics is the separate substance, or God.

Even those who leaned toward Avicenna's view, as opposed to Averroes', often added refinements and qualifications. For example, Aquinas agreed with Avicenna that the subject matter of

metaphysics was being qua being, or “being in general” (*ens commune*) (*In Metaphys.*, Proem.). But Aquinas refused to admit that God is included in the subject matter of metaphysics. God and angels are examined in metaphysics, but only indirectly as the principles and causes of being qua being (*In De trinitate*, q. 5, a. 4; cf. Wippel 2000: 15–22). Divine things may be studied in and of themselves, and not merely as principles of other things, but this can only happen insofar as their existence has been revealed to humans in a nonphilosophical way. Hence, Aquinas draws a distinction between philosophical theology (metaphysics) and revealed theology (“sacred doctrine”) (*In De trinitate* q. 5, a. 4; cf. Wippel 2000: 17–18). Aquinas thought that philosophical theology was a part of, and indeed, the culmination of philosophy. Revealed theology studied God and divine things as its proper subject, but its basis must be handed down in Holy Scripture. Since sacred doctrine is known by something that is superior to the natural light of reason, it is superior to metaphysics (cf. *Summa theologiae* I, q., a. 1).

### Being and Its Necessary Concomitants

Start with the notion that metaphysics is the study of being qua being. There are at least two components to the study of beings, namely, determining the manner in which a being exists and determining what that being is. We will return to the former after a few sections touching upon the latter.

In the broadest terms, we determine what something is by locating it among the types of beings. This avenue leads to the discussion of the categories (see next section). But it was also felt that there were some properties of a being, which are predicable of that being merely because it is a being. The most common among these “transcendentals” – so named because these predicates applied across the categories and, in some sense, were prior to the differentiation of being into one of the general kinds of being – were “good” (*bonum*), “one” (*unum*), and “true” (*verum*). But there were several other candidates for transcendentals mentioned in the literature. Saint Bonaventure, for example, added “beauty” (*pulchrum*),

and Aquinas added “thing” (*res*) and “something” (*aliquid*).

The medieval discussion of the transcendentals is by and large confined to the Latin Scholastic period, but there were some notable predecessors among the Arabs and in the writings of Boethius (see, especially, his *Quomodo substantiae*). (For an overview of the study of transcendentals, see Gracia 1992, and the other articles in *Topoi*, vol 11, pt. 2.) No Scholastic philosopher assumed *prima facie* that the discussion of the transcendentals was merely a discussion about the status of words or concepts, and many assumed that the transcendentals had some sort of ontological status.

The transcendentals were widely believed to be “convertible” – that is,  $x$  is one only insofar as  $x$  is true, and only insofar as  $x$  is good, and only insofar as  $x$  is a being. It was a matter of debate whether the transcendentals were merely co-extensional, or whether they were in reality one and the same thing (*idem secundum rem*). (Rationality and being capable of laughter are co-extensional, but different *secundum rem*.) But while there was disagreement over whether the transcendentals were the same *secundum rem*, there was near unanimous assent that the intensions of the transcendentals were not equivalent.

The transcendentals had a special appeal to Scholastics. It did not escape their notice, for example, that the transcendentals corresponded to some of the fundamental names of God. The transcendentals and their status also had clear implications for other theological and philosophical topics. For example, there was the problem of the metaphysical status of evil. For if  $x$  is a being only to the extent that  $x$  is good, then it seems that evil (or at least pure evil) is unreal.

It was often felt that there was an ordering among the transcendentals and that “being” (*ens*) was first in the hierarchy. In general, however, medieval thinkers were careful not to treat *ens* as the highest kind, for they were mindful of the Aristotelian doctrine that being is not a genus. According to the orthodox Aristotelian line, the range of ways that something could be a being was too diverse for all beings to share some real element in common. Moreover, there was one being who, for both philosophical and theological

reasons, could not have anything in common with all other beings. This transcendent being was God. This consensus and the weight of the authorities behind it should be noted in order to fully appreciate John Duns Scotus' idiosyncratic and controversial doctrine of the univocity of *ens*.

Scotus took the unusual step of asserting that metaphysics was the study of a univocal conception of being (*Ordinatio* I, d. 3, q. 3; translation in Duns Scotus 1987: 5–8). In particular, Scotus asserted that there is one notion of being underlying both the notion of infinite being (i.e., God) and finite being (i.e., creation). Most of Scotus' contemporaries asserted the absolute transcendence of God. There was not one notion of being, but rather two: one proper to God and one proper to creatures. But Scotus thought that this doctrine entailed intractable epistemological difficulties. God could not be naturally known by us unless being were univocal with respect to both the uncreated and the created. Scotus' predecessors tried to avoid the conclusion that being is an equivocal concept and, hence, the epistemological difficulties that Scotus identified, by asserting some form of the doctrine of analogy. The notion of being proper to creatures is secondary to and derived from the notion of being proper to God. Scotus thought that the analogical account of being was incoherent; it either resolved into a commitment to equivocity or into a commitment to a univocal, common conception of being.

To many of his contemporaries, Scotus seemed to be asserting that being was a genus and, even worse, denying the transcendence of God. It seems that Scotus did not fully convince even his own followers, for they tended to divide into those who accepted that there was some sort of real community between God and creatures and those who thought that the unity of the concept of being that was applicable to both God and creatures was merely logical and not real (Dumont 1992: 140–146).

## The Categories

A being insofar as it is a being has a number of necessary concomitant properties. But this being will also belong to one of the kinds of being. First

of all, it will either be a substance or an accident – that is, a dependent property of a substance. If it is an accident, it will fall under one of the nine classes of accidents that Aristotle laid out in his *Categories*.

The *Categories* traditionally stands at the beginning of Aristotle's *Organon*, or logical corpus. Considered as a logical work, the *Categories* appears to be about the nature and classification of simple terms. Yet almost from the beginning, interpreters wondered whether the *Categories* was about more than the study of simple terms. Scattered remarks in the *Categories* as well as other parts of Aristotle's corpus implied that beings were divided into the ten basic categories. It is natural, then, that medieval philosophers would be tempted to read the *Categories* as a treatise about the classification of beings.

As soon as one takes the *Categories* to be about the classification of beings, a number of issues quickly arise. First, it appears that Aristotle is committed to the existence of universal things, and not merely universal terms (see below). Second, one might wonder whether each category term picks out a discrete, nonoverlapping collection of entities. (e.g., do “Substance” and “Quantity” pick out distinct sets of things?) Third, there is the question whether the ten categories exhaust the basic kinds of beings.

Medieval philosophers answered the second and third of these questions in a variety of ways. Many medieval philosophers thought that there were exactly ten categories and that these categories uniquely picked out nonoverlapping classes of beings. Some even thought that they could “prove” that there were exactly ten categories (e.g., Albert the Great, Thomas Aquinas, and Walter Burley). John Duns Scotus expressed skepticism about the possibility of proving the sufficiency of the categories, although he believed that there were ten and only ten categories and that each of these categories corresponded to a class of things.

Other philosophers attempted to reduce the categories in one fashion or another. Henry of Ghent observed that there are some accidents where it is not contradictory to conceive of them as existing without their subjects (namely, qualities and quantities), but that for most accidents it would be a contradiction to conceive of them as

separate from their subjects (namely, those accidents belonging to the remaining seven categories). The first three categories (Substance, Quantity, and Quality) had not only their own proper mode of being, but also their own proper reality. The remaining categories had their own proper mode of being, but they were not distinct things from the first three kinds of beings (Pini 2005: 71–73). Peter John Olivi took this reductivist program one step further and determined that the categories do not pick out distinct kinds of things (*res*), but only distinct ways of describing the same things. The categories, hence, were mind-dependent classifications (*idem*, 74–75).

William of Ockham's reduction of the categories was also quite radical. He reduced the real categories to two: substance and quality. In a series of arguments, Ockham attempted to demonstrate that entities belonging to one of the other eight categories were either not needed in order to explain semantic phenomena, or the positing of the existence of entities in some category led to a contradiction (for his arguments against quantity and relations, see Adams 1987, vol I, chapters 6 and 7 respectively). Terms corresponding to the latter eight categories were merely indirect ways of speaking of the two kinds of items that are real, individual substances and individual qualities. It is a curious fact that Ockham did not apply the same reductivist strategy to qualities as well. Adams has suggested some philosophical reasons why quality might be irreducible (1987: 277–285). Spade has argued that Ockham never explicitly employs the strategies suggested by Adams. The real motivation behind Ockham's refusal to reduce away qualities seems to be theological (Spade 1999: 105–106).

Medieval thinkers not only worried about whether there were no fewer than ten categories, they also were aware that the categories do not appear to exhaust all of reality, as they noticed that the ten categories did not have an obvious place for a number of important entities. For example, where do matter and the substantial differentiae fall in the categorial scheme? And what about God? In his commentary on the *Categories*, Boethius espoused a view, which traces back to

at least Porphyry, that the *Categories* is restricted to composites of matter and form. It is not a scheme that can classify matter alone, or form alone, let alone simple, immaterial substances (*in Cat.* 183D–184B). In his treatise on the Trinity, Boethius endorsed Saint Augustine's assertion that God is "beyond substance" (*ultra substantiam*) (*De trin.* IV). The fact that the categories only appear to apply to a select portion of reality had a number of ramifications. For instance, it shaped later interpretations of Aristotle's discussion of "primary substance" in his *Metaphysics*, since it was unclear whether Aristotle thought that substantial forms or hylomorphic composites are the primary substances – and thus, the primary beings – in his overarching ontology (see Galluzzo 2013).

## Grades and Modes of Existence

A being not only has properties and (with some exceptions) belongs to one of the ten greatest kinds, it also has existence (*esse*). Medieval philosophers have a rich understanding of the nature of existence and its interplay with the characteristics that make a being what it is (i.e., the being's essence). We can only mention some of the general features of this rich tradition.

Many medieval thinkers felt the need to distinguish between the mode of existence that a concrete individual has and the modes of existence that this individual's constituents and ingredients have. One motivation seems to be this. If the constituents of an individual possessed the same mode of existence as the individual itself, then these constituents would exist in their own right – that is, they would be *per se* beings. But Aristotle had claimed that no substance is composed of substances, which many medieval philosophers interpreted as the claim that no *per se* being is a composite of actual *per se* beings. A *per se* being is something that is truly one and capable of independent existence. But how could something be independent and truly one if its parts themselves are also independent and truly one? It appeared, then, that if *x* is composed of *per se* beings, then *x* is merely one in a weaker or

accidental sense – it is an aggregate of substances, not itself a substance.

One strategy was to distinguish between actual existence and potential existence. A human body is made out of the four elements, but when the human body actually exists, these ingredients only potentially exist in the body. They exist in potentiality, since upon death the body is resolved back into the four elements. Hence, in one sense, the elements are not parts of the body.

But some of the items that play a role in the creation of an individual must continue to be present in the individual, when the individual exists. In particular, the nature or essence of the individual must exist in the individual when it exists. Otherwise, the individual would not be what it essentially is. One strategy, which is very old, is to distinguish between the mode of existence that the nature has in itself and the mode that it has in the material world. Boethius, for example, claimed that natures in themselves merely “subsist,” whereas concrete instances of the nature “substand.” It is only when something substands that it can be the subject for accidental properties – that is, to be an individual, material substance. The details of Boethius’ theory are a bit obscure, but it appears that he was espousing a Neoplatonic theory of individuals. The nature itself is a separately existing Form. This Form is then copied in matter. The chunks of matter imprinted with the copy of the Form are the things that substand. The matter and the copy of the Form are parts of the concrete individual, and indeed they are essential parts of the individual, but they are not themselves *per se* beings. The matter needs the copy of the Form to be something, and this copy of the Form needs to be enmattered in order to be a copy of the Form.

The dominance of Aristotelian philosophy in the Scholastic period meant that most philosophers rejected the Platonic conception of separately existing essences. Essences were only found in the mind or in individual beings. Given that the essence contributed to the existence of the individual, there was still the need to distinguish between the mode of existence of the essence as such and the individual. The Avicennian answer was to distinguish between the essence in itself

and the essence in an existent. The essence considered in itself did not exist. It only had existence in so far as it was an essence in the mind or an essence in this individual.

Avicenna, nonetheless, allowed for the essence to have some measure of mind-independent reality, for in itself it was indifferent with respect to this individual or that one. Avicenna’s position did not sit well with Scholastic thinkers, for in their view, if the essence itself had some sort of mind-independent reality, then in effect it has a minor form of existence. And if it has a minor form of existence, then the essence should have a minor form of unity. Generally speaking, there were two solutions to this dilemma: either deny that that essence in itself had any existence at all or accept that the essence had a minor form of being, and hence a minor form of real unity. Aquinas chose the former strategy; Duns Scotus chose the latter strategy.

## Universals

The generality of the discussions of being, the transcendentals, and the categories, strongly suggested to medieval thinkers that there are things that are both independent of the mind and really common to many individuals. The majority of medieval philosophers were “realists,” where this means that they thought that there are mind-independent features (but not necessarily things) that are common to many. A small but influential group of philosophers rejected the thesis that there were any things or aspects that existed universally and mind independently. These philosophers are typically labeled as “nominalists,” since they generally argued that universality is a property of names (*nomina*) or concepts only. However, it should be stressed that no medieval believed that there were no properties or abstract objects (a position that is nowadays occasionally associated with the term “nominalism”).

Some realists argued that universals were things that literally were a part of an individual composite thing. The version prevalent in the later eleventh and early part of the twelfth centuries has been called “material essence” realism (Tweedale



1976: 95–111; Erismann 2011). Peter Abelard attributes such a view to his master William of Champaeux and he boasts in his *Historia Calamitatum* that he publicly demolished the view (King 2004; for the arguments he might have used in this disputation, see *Log. Ingr.* I, 10–13 [Spade 1994: 29–33]). Whether Abelard personally brought an end to material essence realism is not absolutely certain. What is clear is that no thirteenth-century philosopher of note embraced material essence realism. However, a more sophisticated version of material essence realism seems to be the considered later position of Walter Burley (ca. 1275–1344) and his followers.

The most popular versions of realism in the Scholastic Period were forms of what scholars describe as “moderate realism.” Moderate realists argued that a nature or essence is only really universal when it is in the mind. In the mind-independent world, the nature is somehow individualized, so that the nature that is in Socrates is not numerically the same as the nature in Plato.

Like Abelard before him, William of Ockham embarked on a systematic attack of all the forms of realism current in his day. He concluded from this exercise that universals had no reality outside of the mind.

Peter Abelard, William of Ockham, and other nominalists tended to point out the metaphysical difficulties that plagued the various forms of realism. They proposed instead that all things are fundamentally particular. Universality is restricted to the realm of concepts or language. But while realists were plagued by metaphysical difficulties – especially difficulties that centered around identity and difference – the nominalists were plagued by epistemological difficulties. Predicating a universal of an individual can only be legitimate if there is some real basis for the predication. Otherwise, as Boethius famously pointed out, predications are “empty” – that is, they convey nothing truthful about reality as such. But by banishing universals to the realm of the mind and language, the nominalists appeared to undermine the foundations of science.

## Nominalism and Ontological Reduction

The nominalists’ denial that universals are things and Ockham’s reduction of the categories to substance and quality were both attempts to reduce the number of types of things. (However, it should be noted that the reduction of the categories and antirealism about universals are, and in the Middle Ages were sometimes taken to be, logically independent.)

Ockham’s reductivist program is often associated with his principle of parsimony (“Ockham’s Razor”). But Ockham did not invent this principle (indeed, one can find versions of the principle in Aristotle), nor was he the only philosopher in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries who made use of the principle. Moreover, the importance of the principle of parsimony is often overestimated. As one commentator observes, no one advocated the postulation of unnecessary entities (Spade 1999: 102). The real dispute was over precisely what entities were necessary.

Much like contemporary forms of antirealism, medieval antirealists tried to determine what words actually pick out things and what words only appear to pick out things (cf. Normore 1985). Sentences that only appeared to commit someone to a certain kind thing were paraphrased into statements that did not commit one to things of this type. So, for example, sentences that seemed to commit one to quantities were transformed into sentences about substances and qualities existing in this or that way.

But some commentators have wondered whether medieval antirealists actually achieved ontological economy. Ockham, for example, seems to have substituted an ontology of modes for one of things. Even if that accusation does not stick (see Adams 1987: 306–310), it still appears that Ockham’s program cannot reduce away objective temporal, spatial, and causal ordering. Yet Ockham insists that these features of reality are not things (Spade 1999: 106–111). Abelard had a similar problem. He insisted that no thing is a universal, and yet universality is grounded in objective “agreements” between individual things (cf. Tweedale

1976: 204–209). Hence, in practice, those with antirealist tendencies often tacitly employed a “two-tiered” ontology (Spade, *op cit.*).

## Individuals and Individuation

The corollary of any theory of universals is an account of particulars, or individuals. A full account of individuals would answer a number of questions about the extension and intension of “individual.” It would also include an account of what makes something an individual. Medieval philosophers were not always aware of the need to account for the extension and intension of “individual,” but many of them embarked upon sophisticated investigations of the cause, or principle, of individuation.

The source of the search for a principle of individuation was often a theological controversy. Boethius, for example, considered the question of individuation as an aside to his discussions of the Trinity and the Incarnation. Other philosophers considered individuation in the context of the problem of individuating angels (e.g., Duns Scotus, *Ord.* II, d. 3, part 1).

In his *On the Trinity*, Boethius attempted to demonstrate that the Persons of the Trinity are not numerically distinct from one another (*De trin.* I). Boethius proposed that numerical distinctness is brought about by the inherence of accidents in a substance. Given that God has no accidents, and given that each of the Persons is God, it cannot be the case that the Persons are numerically distinct from one another.

The idea that accidental forms, either the whole set of them or some subset of them (such as spatiotemporal properties), make some thing an individual became part of what one scholar has called “the Standard Theory of Individuality” (Gracia 1984, 1994: 26–28). According to the Standard Theory, (1) individuality is conceived in terms of difference or distinction, (2) the extension of the term “individual” is restricted to Aristotelian primary substances, and (3) the principle of individuation is either due to one or more

accidents or to the collection of all properties (including nonaccidental ones) belonging to the substance. The Standard Theory dominated much of the thinking of the early Middle Ages, although there were some notable exceptions, such as Peter Abelard and Gilbert of Poitiers.

Other medieval thinkers looked for the principle of individuation in either a substantial or a noncategorical component of individuals. A common candidate for a principle of individuation was the individual’s matter. This theory is commonly associated with Aquinas (although see Father Owen’s addendum in Gracia 1994: 188). In the same vein, some medieval thinkers proposed that the matter together with the substantial form of the individual was the principle of individuation. A notable proponent of this view was Bonaventure (Gracia 1994: 141–172).

Sometimes the substantial form alone was considered to be the principle of individuation. For this solution to work, the form itself would have to already be individual. One intriguing version of the notion that an individualized substantial form is the principle of individuation was hinted at by a remark in Boethius’ greater commentary on *De interpretatione* (*in De int.* 2nd edn., II, 137.3–137.16). There Boethius suggested that Socrates is individuated by a personal form, his “Socrateity.” It is not clear what the status of these personal forms is or whether Boethius really thought that these forms were the metaphysical cause of individuality, but it was interpreted this way by some later medieval thinkers.

Duns Scotus held that an individual differentia, or haecceity, is the cause of a thing being the very thing it is (Gracia 1994: 284–291). Given that this haecceity does not affect or alter the formal content of the things nature, it is a noncategorical principle (King 2000: 177–179).

Finally, philosophers such as Peter Abelard, William of Ockham, and John Buridan argued that there is no principle or cause of individuation (Gracia 1994: 373–376 and 397–430; King 2000: 180–183, and King 2004). Everything that exists is already individual. Hence, there is no need to find a cause for their individuality.

## Composition, Identity, and Emergence

Another cluster of metaphysical problems focused on the relation at a time between a thing and those items that compose the thing. One such problem was whether the whole is identical to the sum of its parts. Medieval answers to this question were often informed by the Aristotelian principle that there are degrees of unity. Material composites were typically divided into three classes: aggregates, accidental unities, and substances. Aggregates were the weakest sort of unity, since they exist when some things are present in one location. A thing with a greater degree of unity exists when there are some things in one location and these things are arranged in the right way. These arrangements are due either to accidental forms or to substantial forms. Composites of some things and an accidental form are accidental unities; composites of some things and a substantial form are substances. Among material composites, substances were thought to have the greatest degree of unity.

Medieval philosophers generally agreed that an aggregate is identical to the sum of its parts, but there was considerable disagreement when they turned to accidental unities and substances.

Most medieval philosophers thought that artifacts – even complicated ones such as houses – were accidental unities. They disagreed about whether an artifact was identical to the sum of its parts, due in some measure to a disagreement over the ontological status of relations. Those who thought that relations were things could answer that the artifact is not identical to the material out of which it is composed, for the composite has an additional part, the relation, which the sum of the material parts lacks. Those who thought that relations were not things could not make this claim, though there was still a feeling among some that it was improper to reduce the artifact to being merely the sum of its parts. Abelard, for example, thought that arrangements were not things, and hence they could not be parts of things. However, this does not imply that an artifact is identical in every respect to the sum of its parts. An artifact and the parts that compose it are the “same in *essentia* and in number,” but they are “distinct in

property,” because there is something true of the latter, which is not true of the former, and vice versa (cf. *Theologia Christiana* III, § 140: 247–248; King 2004: 89–92).

There were also differences of opinion about the relation of a substance to its substantial parts. Some thought that a material substance is not a sum of two actual, ontologically independent objects (Aquinas *In Metaphys.* VII, lec. 13, n. 1588; cf. Normore 2006: 740–741). Yet others believed that the substantial form and the matter were in some sense independent things, and hence, they had to determine whether the composite is identical to the sum of these two things. Those who answered in the affirmative were in effect offering a reductionistic account of material substance; those who answered in the negative were antireductionists. Antireductionists, such as Duns Scotus, asserted that a numerically distinct object comes to be when the substantial form combines with matter (Cross 1995). Otherwise, he argued, material substances would be nothing more than aggregates or accidental unities. Ockham and Buridan thought that the material substance is nothing more than the sum of its substantial parts, but that this reductionistic account of material substance did not imply that substances are aggregates or accidental unities (Normore 2006: 744–747).

In more general terms, medieval philosophers felt that there were some items that were numerically or really the same thing, yet not entirely identical. This led to an explosion of senses of the terms “same” (*idem*) and “different” (*differens*, or *diversum*) (the preferred terms for medieval discussions of identity). Many of these senses of sameness and difference corresponded to distinctions in the order of things. Hence, Duns Scotus’ famous “formal” and “modal” distinctions were both in the broad sense, real distinctions, even though he reserved the term “real” for a case where  $x$  and  $y$  could, at least in principle, exist separately in reality.

The formal and modal distinctions had a number of applications in philosophy and theology. The formal distinction was employed to explain how the essence in itself and the essence in Socrates were related to one another. The modal

distinction had applications in Trinitarian theology. Indeed, the utility of these nonconceptual modes of distinction in theological applications was the primary reason that even ardent critics of the formal and modal distinction, such as Ockham, often conceded that the distinction was useful when trying to come up with a rational account of the Trinity.

## Dependence and Persistence

Most medieval philosophers paid lip service to the maxim that the whole is ontologically posterior to its parts (cf. Boethius, *De div.* 879C). Although most, then, duly, restricted this claim to cover only some parts – the essential or principal parts. Very few medieval philosophers flirted with forms of mereological essentialism.

But the occasional philosopher did seem to endorse the thesis that a whole depends upon each one of its parts. Abelard, for example, insisted that every integral whole is composed of a unique set of integral parts (Henry 1991: 92–151). This house must be composed out of these nails, these boards, and this cement. Given that each whole is composed of a unique set of parts, if any part is removed, that whole is destroyed. Another whole similar to the original might exist after the mereological change takes place, but strictly speaking the two wholes would not be identical. Some later medieval nominalists, such as Ockham and Buridan, also argued that even minute mereological changes bring about the destruction of most integral wholes, including nonrational animals (Normore 2006: 751–753; Pasnau 2011: 692–702). According to these nominalists, there are three senses of numerical sameness: there is a proper sense, a less proper sense, and an improper sense. Something is properly the same in number if all its parts remain the same and it neither acquires nor loses any parts. In this strictest of senses, no corruptible thing persists through a change of a material part. Something is less properly the same in number if its “most principal part” remains numerically the same. This is the sense that allows us to claim that Socrates is numerically the same man now as

that man 10 years ago, since Socrates’ intellectual soul persists through the change. Finally, something is improperly the same in number if there is a continuous succession of beings that maintain a similar shape, disposition, and form. This improper mode of numerical sameness allows us to claim that the Nile River here today is numerically the same river as the Nile back in Caesar’s time. The nominalists claimed that plants and animals can only be numerically the same in the third, improper sense, for these creatures do not have the sort of soul that can act as a guarantor of less proper identity.

## Time and Necessity

Many of the topics that seemed to most excite medieval thinkers, such as the relation of Providence and Divine Omniscience to human freedom or demonstrations of the existence of God, involved modal notions. Often in the preliminaries of such discussions, one can find rich discussions of the nature of possibility and necessity.

One prevalent conception of modality was closely aligned to a qualified commitment to the so-called Principle of Plenitude – that is, that no real possibility remains unactualized. Medieval thinkers qualified their assumption of the Principle because it was felt that an unrestricted version of the Principle would constrain God’s power and will. Nonetheless, in the natural order of things, it was often assumed that the Principle held. If *A* is a real possibility, then there was, is, or will be some time at which *A* is true. On this conception of modality, modal notions were effectively reduced to extensional terms that were merely means of classifying what happens in this world, the one and only one there is, at different moments of time (Knuuttila 1981: 169). *A* is possible if and only if there is some time at which *A* obtains. *A* is impossible if and only if *A* never obtains. *A* is necessary if and only if *A* always obtains.

While prevalent, especially in the thirteenth century, this “statistical” model of possibility and necessity was not the only model countenanced by medieval thinkers. Anselm, for example, developed a conception of possibility based

upon inherent capacity; necessity properly signified external constraint (Serene 1981). There are some passages in Abelard, which suggest that he did not wholeheartedly embrace the statistical model (cf. *Log. ingr.* II, 272–274). Abelard’s followers, the so-called *nominales*, seem to have consciously rejected the statistical model.

Duns Scotus was deeply critical of the statistical model of modality, and in its place, he developed a “synchronic” model of modality. On the statistical model, it was hard to avoid the consequence that every present thing or state-of-affairs was necessary. This followed from the fact that actualizing a potentiality takes time. If *a* is actually *F* at *t*, then in order to make it so that *a* is not *F*, *a*’s potentiality to become not *F* must be actualized. But if a potentiality takes time to actualize, it follows that given that *a* is *F* at *t*, *a* cannot be not *F* at *t*. Scotus, on the other hand, argued that even though *a* is actually *F* at *t*, *a* could be not *F* at *t*.

Scotus’ position was not without precedent. The twelfth-century philosopher Gilbert of Poitiers, for example, also thought that there were synchronic alternative possibilities (Knuuttila 1993: 75–82). Yet Scotus presented a distinctively sophisticated articulation and forceful defense of the doctrine that the present could have been different than it in fact is. His synchronic picture of modality had a tremendous influence on the development of theories of modality in the fourteenth century and onward.

Scotus is sometimes credited with anticipating the notion of a possible world, either in the sense that Leibniz had or in the late-twentieth-century sense of the notion. While Scotus does not use the term “possible world” or any equivalent, he does defend the idea that God considers all compossible combinations of things and contingently wills that one of these maximally consistent composites of things be made true. However, Scotus did not believe, as Leibniz did, that objects mirror their whole universe, nor did he have the contemporary notion of “truth in a world” (Normore 2003: 155).

Scotus’ synchronic conception of modality should perhaps be described as the doctrine of “the contingency of what has not passed into the

past” (Normore 2003: 135), for like many medieval thinkers, Scotus accepted the claim that the past is necessary. This latter proposition, however, was not universally held in the middle ages. In the twelfth century, for instance, Peter Damian famously defended the claim that God’s will is absolutely unconstrained. This meant that God could even change the past. But given that Damian started with a statistical understanding of modality, his position implied that God could violate the laws of logic. A popular solution to this dilemma was that God could not do impossible things; to be able to do the impossible would be a sign of impotency, not power. Peter Abelard, notoriously, argued that God could not do anything more or other than what He in fact does (*Theologia “Scholarium”* III, §§ 27–60: 511–526; Marenbon 2013: chapters 2 and 4).

More generally, medieval thinkers tried to strike the right balance between God’s power, God’s will, and human freedom. God must be the necessary, first cause of all creations, but the manner in which God’s creative activity is necessary cannot be such that it either compromises God’s very own freedom or human freedom.

## Conclusion

Medieval metaphysicians were preoccupied with a variety of issues, many of which are still of interest to contemporary philosophers. This survey can only hint at the richness and sophistication of this tradition.

There are some current focal points of debate that have no direct medieval correlate. In general, medieval thinkers were realists about relations between causes and their effects – although, there were some who were skeptical of the necessary connection between cause and effect (most notably, al-Ġazālī and the Ash‘arite *mutakallimūn* in the Arabic speaking world, and Nicholas of Autrecourt in fourteenth-century Europe). And no medieval philosopher was a thoroughgoing materialist or opponent of abstract objects.

This article did not dwell upon medieval discussions of time, space, and to some degree

change, because these topics lied outside the scope of metaphysics as it was traditionally conceived. Nevertheless, this should not suggest that medieval philosophers had nothing to contribute to the study of these topics. It should also be emphasized that many medieval treatments of what we now consider to be metaphysical subjects can be found in not only the physical treatises but also in logic and doctrinal discussions (such as treatments of the Eucharist and the Trinity).

## Cross-References

- ▶ [Boethius](#)
- ▶ [Bonaventure](#)
- ▶ [Categories](#)
- ▶ [Form and Matter](#)
- ▶ [Future Contingents](#)
- ▶ [Henry of Ghent](#)
- ▶ [Ibn Rushd, Muḥammad ibn Aḥmad al-Ḥafīd \(Averroes\)](#)
- ▶ [Ibn Sīnā, Abū ‘Alī \(Avicenna\)](#)
- ▶ [John Duns Scotus](#)
- ▶ [Mereology](#)
- ▶ [Natural Philosophy](#)
- ▶ [Peter Abelard](#)
- ▶ [Peter John Olivi](#)
- ▶ [Platonism](#)
- ▶ [Proofs of the Existence of God](#)
- ▶ [Realism](#)
- ▶ [Substance, Accident, and Modes](#)
- ▶ [Thomas Aquinas](#)
- ▶ [Time](#)
- ▶ [Trinity](#)
- ▶ [Universals](#)

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## Metaphysics, Byzantine

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### Abstract

There is no agreement on whether metaphysics proper did exist in Byzantium or, if so, in what it consists. Religion and theology covered officially the realm previously occupied by

philosophy. Still, some room was available for discussing some special questions, the principal among them being the ontological status of “universals,” the structure of the divine being, and the way the sensible beings derive their existence and qualities from the first principle. Many Byzantines from the eleventh to fifteenth centuries, posing themselves in the Platonic tradition, seem to elaborate Ammonius’ doctrine of “universals,” whereas few subscribed to a less “realist” theory. An extra-realist theory was propounded in the first half of the fourteenth century by Gregory Palamas, who projected the multiplicity of the types of the created beings to an inferior divine level, that is, to God’s “energies” construed as naturally emanating from God’s transcendental “essence.” Palamites in the latter half of the fourteenth century polished the harshness of this distinction by qualifying that it is “conceptual,” that is, points just to different aspects of a single being, whereas anti-Palamites argued against any sort of real distinction between God’s essence and acts. In the first half of the fifteenth century, a metaphysical quarrel between Scholarios’ Thomism and Plethon’s anti-Christian Platonism focused on whether things derive hierarchically from each other (Plethon) or each is created directly from God and used by Him as a “causa proxima” of this or that fact. To get a better picture of metaphysics in Byzantium, a lot of work has still to be done.

### Byzantine Metaphysics: *Ens Reale* or *Fictum*?

If by “metaphysics” we mean the systematic “investigation into the nature of reality” or the rational attempt to “uncover what is ultimately real,” it may be argued that metaphysics did not exist in Byzantium. Indeed, since almost all Byzantine thinkers were officially Christians and produced more theological than philosophical writings, their quest for the ultimate source of reality came full circle from its very beginning. For, in their minds, the ancient Greek (and

Roman) “reasoned knowledge” (*epistémê*) and “wisdom” (*sophia*), accessible through “reason” (*logos*) or, at least, not without it, were substituted by “religious faith” (*pistis*) in Revelation (*apokalypsis*), and, as a result, metaphysics and philosophy in general were substituted by theology, that is, the theoretical elaboration of Christian religion. (This reservation is often kept for the philosophical character of Christian thought in its entirety.)

Further, it has been argued that Byzantine thought failed to do even what its western counterpart is, by some (e.g., É. Gilson) optimistically, supposed to have achieved, that is, to produce some philosophical ideas (such as those by Thomas Aquinas, Bonaventure, and Duns Scotus) stimulated by the philosophically unqualified yet potentially fruitful content of Christian Revelation. This seems to a large extent true. Indeed, in the context of these two roughly contemporary Christian civilizations, speculative thought has emerged and developed in different ways. In Europe, Medieval intellectual life succeeded a state of decline bordering on collapse (fifth to seventh centuries) and went on by constantly being stirred up by waves (ninth to thirteenth centuries) of acquaintance with several previously unknown individual pieces or bulks of philosophical, scientific, and theological literature through Latin translations (Greek Patristic authors, parts of the *corpus Aristotelicum* accompanied by some ancient Greek and Latin as well as Byzantine commentaries on them, Arabic treatises and commentaries on Aristotle, works by Jewish authors, Neoplatonic texts), which provoked Christians to deal with them as well as with the way other Christians were dealing with them. Byzantium, on the contrary, exhibits strong marks of continuity with the intellectual life of Late Antiquity (even though, admittedly, not with its highest figures), and the development of its own intellectual life enjoyed a relative stability, which was nominally and positively called “tradition” and usually resulted in repetition.

Further, most of the Greek Fathers of the Church, whose thought was normative for most of the Byzantine intellectuals, though well acquainted with most aspects of Middle Platonism

and some strands of Neoplatonism, had a predilection for the “apophatic” aspect of these trends. And, in contrast with them, where this aspect acquired metaphysical sense in terms of its being the result of a philosophical investigation where “reason” normally played a central role (though tending to show a way of superseding itself), Greek Patristic thought integrated apophaticism into the context of the Christian belief in the Biblical God whose personal way of act cut off any possibility of constructing a metaphysical concept of Him.

Notwithstanding this discouraging context, however, some texts of Byzantine philosophy do testify to the raise of some specific metaphysical questions, whose fundamental character (philosophy or theology?) still remains to be patiently detected and soberly assessed.

## Special Topics of Byzantine Metaphysics

### The Ontological Status of “Universals”

Byzantines inherited from the opening paragraph of a famous text of Late Antiquity, Porphyry’s *Isagoge* (late third century), and from the ancient Greek Neoplatonic commentaries on it (by Ammonius, Elias, and David; fifth to sixth centuries) as well as on Aristotle’s *Categories* (by John Philoponus; sixth century) and from the *Prolegomena* (by Olympiodorus; sixth century) a question that later on proved of paramount importance for many philosophers in the twelfth, thirteenth, and fourteenth centuries in Europe, that is, the question of the ontological status of the “universals.” Do “universals” exist in extramental reality or are they just concepts (*epinoiai*) in our minds? And, if the former, are they corporeal or incorporeal? And, if the latter, do they exist independently from the sensible beings or just inhere in them? In the ninth century, when Byzantine philosophy proper begins, Photios, Patriarch of Constantinople, subscribes to a conceptualist stand, which is very close to (if not identical with) the Stoic doctrine, by explicitly stating that the universals are “bodies” or “corporeal” (*Amphilochia*, 77). Photios argues against the Platonic “ideas” by using Aristotle’s famous “third man” argument

as well as the argument that an intelligible reality, such as a Platonic “Idea,” is by nature unable to account for the identity of two or more sensible realities. True, Photios describes the Platonic “Ideas” as a threat to God’s omnipotence, conceived as His freedom to create the world according to His own will only, without any constraint by this or that “exemplary form” potentially existent independently from His will. Further, his arguments are not original. Still, it is Photios himself who distinguishes the philosophical arguments against the Platonic “Ideas” from the theological ones; and he seems to have investigated the question at stake in depth, insofar as he not only understood Aristotle’s disagreement with Plato but also detected from some indirect sources what the Stoics held on the question and voted for it.

In the second half of the eleventh century, John Italos and Eustratios of Nicaea, in the context of the revival of the Platonic tradition by Michael Psellos, seem to have been interested in the problem of the ontological status of universals and elaborated some version of Ammonius’ and Proclus’ relevant doctrines. It is not, however, quite clear whether they did adhere to some metaphysical tenets or, following Psellos’ policy, they just discussed the problem in the context of their teaching activity for learning purposes. Further, it is not quite clear if their application of some ancient doctrines of the “universals” on some strictly theological (Christological and Trinitarian) matters allows for extracting from this context some lines of argument, taking them at their face value, and drawing the conclusion that Italos and Eustratios held this or that metaphysical doctrine.

In the late thirteenth century, a fierce attack on the “universals” was launched by Nikephoros Choumnos, who rejected not only Plato’s “Ideas” but also Aristotle’s immanent “forms” (*On Matter and Forms*, 242–316). True, Choumnos’ purpose was to exalt God’s power as the absolutely sufficient cause of the world’s existence and form; still, his description of the way God’s power acts is very close to that offered by Plotinus in *Ennead* II, 2, 1–2. Likewise, in the second half of the fourteenth century, Nicholas

Kabasilas, being a strict Aristotelian with no Neoplatonic affinities, claimed that no being whatsoever can be regarded as a model of any other than itself; in so stating, he cut off any metaphysical tie between God and the created beings.

Yet, cases like that of Photios, Choumnos, and Kabasilas were exceptions; during the second Byzantine revival of Platonism (second half of thirteenth century to middle fifteenth century), Ammonius' doctrine of "universals" as existing "before the many," "in the many," and "after the many" was typical, even though thinkers like Nikephoros Blemmydes, George Pachymeres (fourteenth century), Theodore Metochites (thirteenth to fourteenth centuries), Nikephoros Gregoras, Barlaam of Calabria, and Gregory Palamas (fourteenth century) added each of their own epistemological nuances.

### The Structure of the Divine Being

A question closely connected with that of the "universals" was how to explain the production of a multiplicity by the highest level of unity, which is God. Most of the abovementioned thinkers placed the "universals before the many" in God's mind (an idea traced back to Middle Platonism, if not, *mutatis mutandis*, to ancient Stoicism). This solution, however, explains the multiplicity of the created beings away just by transposing multiplicity to the realm of God. In the first half of the fourteenth century (either in connection with the history of the Byzantine treatments of the question of the "universals" or not), Gregory Palamas, a monastic figure well trained in ancient Greek philosophy, formulated (probably inspired by Proclus) a peculiar doctrine of God as consisting of two levels, that is, essence (*ousia*), which is absolutely simple and totally unknown, and His eternal "energy" (*energeia*), which is participated by the created beings, the difference between these levels being not only more real than the merely conceptual rank of a logical relation but also no less than "infinite" (*Triads* III, 2, 8). Arguing that these levels are discernible not only in God but in every being, as well as that for all the real difference between these levels, God's being is nevertheless "one," Palamas believed that his doctrine did not clash

with God's simplicity. He also distinguished between the various "acts" themselves and identified God's "eternal and without beginning acts" with the "reasons of beings," which preexist eternally in God's mind and according to which the world was created (*Triads* III, 2, 24). Palamas' opponents, such as Gregoras, who was inspired by Christian and pagan Neoplatonism, as well as John Kyparissiotis, Demetrios Kydones, Prochoros Kydones, and Manuel Kalekas, who were inspired by Thomas Aquinas and Boethius, too, rejected any sort of *distinctio realis* in God. Palamas' adherents, such as Neilos Kabasilas, Philotheos Kokkinos, Theophanes of Nicaea (second half of fourteenth century), and Markos Eugenikos (first half of fifteenth century), restated Palamas' doctrine by describing his distinctions as drawn by the human mind (*kat' epinoian*), that is, as not implying any sort of separation between God's "essence" and "energy." And John VI Kantakouzenos (middle fourteenth century), influenced by Thomas Aquinas, regarded them as true only *ex parte subjecti*, that is, in the sense that our mind, since it is composite in this life, cannot help grasping the absolutely simple God in terms of multiplicity. Yet, all Palamites insisted, like Palamas himself (e.g., *Triads* III, 1, 24), that all beings, whether created or uncreated, consist not only of essence but also of act.

In the first half of the fifteenth century, George Scholarios – Gennadios II subscribed to John Duns Scotus' *distinctio formalis* (archetypal distinction between God's various properties, notwithstanding their absolute unity), which he found to be very close to that of Palamas.

Palamas' thought is also characterized by a peculiar doctrine of "light," which may be deemed metaphysical. According to him, the stuff of the "rational beings," that is, of God, angels, and the human mind, is "light" or, at least, beings of this sort manifest themselves and are perceived as light (*Triads* I, 3, 8).

In Late Byzantium, Augustine's doctrine (*De trinitate* V-VII) of the inapplicability of Aristotle's ten Categories on God found a place in the thought of authors such as Barlaam of Calabria and Gregory Palamas. It is not clear, however, if this testifies to an interest in

metaphysical matters proper or forms part of a principally theological discussion.

### Mediated Versus Direct Derivation of Beings from the First Principle (Plethon Versus Scholarios)

In the middle of fifteenth century, a strong quarrel between George Gemistos (or, as he called himself, “Plethon”), the only pagan Byzantine thinker, who adhered to Platonism and rejected the idea that Aristotle can be reconciled with Plato, and George Scholarios – Gennadios II – who defended Christianity in terms of his professed Thomism, took place. Plethon accused Aristotle of having an “atheistic” conception of nature. He rejected Aristotle’s doctrine of “entelechy” as the metaphysical principle immanently present in everything, causing the transition from “potentiality” to “actuality” and bringing about the perfect “form” of any particular being. In his own metaphysics, he postulates a hierarchy of beings, each of them responsible for the existence and the qualities of its inferior. Instead, therefore, of Aristotle’s supposed self-actualization (*energeia* in the sense of “entelechy,” that is, being *energês*) of a being, Plethon spoke of *energia* as the productive action of every being, that is, as its being “efficacious” (*energon*) and bringing about its proximate being. Scholarios, for his own part, replied by setting forth Aquinas’ doctrine of *causa remota* and *causae proximae*, each of the latter ones being directly dependent on the former and producing not beings, as in Plethon’s system, but just effects in virtue of their nature as created and “predestinated” by God. To Scholarios, Aristotle’s metaphysics of “forms” fitted better with Christianity, because of Aristotle’s idea that each “form” is an autonomous cause (even though they all depend on the “first mover” or “first cause,” God). A peculiar feature of Plethon’s metaphysics, which contrasts both with Christianity and ancient Platonism, is that it is absolutely “cataphatic.”

### A Metaphysics of Icons?

Byzantine metaphysics has sometimes been sought for in a field principally theological, that is, the quarrel between adorers and enemies of the

holy icons (eighth to ninth centuries). It has been argued that the idea of the defenders of the icons, such as John of Damascus and Theodore the Studite, that a material being such as an icon can reflect the high qualities of a divine being, that is, Jesus Christ, implies a close and positive relation between God as the archetypal being and the sensible world as the realm of derivative beings, in contrast with what is the case in the Platonic bipolar ontology, where the sensible world is just a dull reflection of the real one, that is, the intelligible, whence it derives. This interpretation, apart from the fact that it does not take into account the monistic aspect of Neoplatonism, which, in virtue of its ramification of things, brings images close to realities, argues for the similarity of the sensible with the intelligible realm not from the qualities of the former itself but from a specific sort of sensible beings, that is, the artificial objects, and, more specifically, the religious ones. Thus, it fails to show that a metaphysical doctrine really lies there, since the similarity spoken of by the adorers of the icons does not regard the material aspect of icons but their content, which is incarnation and its effects, and hence has no natural relation or necessary links with the intelligible realm.

Another topic of Byzantine metaphysics, which remains unexplored, has to do with the question of the priority of “one” over “being” or vice versa in the divine realm. This question was posed, for example, by Michael Psellos (*Philosophica minora*, 7), in the context of his predilection for Platonism and by Demetrios Kydones in the context of his subscription to Thomas Aquinas’ doctrine of the four “transcendentals.”

Further discussion on Byzantine metaphysics would probably endanger going far away from what research has as yet established.

### Cross-References

- ▶ [Eustratios of Nicaea](#)
- ▶ [George Scholarios \(Gennadios II\)](#)
- ▶ [Gregory Palamas](#)
- ▶ [John Italos](#)
- ▶ [Michael Psellos](#)

- ▶ Nikephoros Choumnos
- ▶ Photios of Constantinople
- ▶ Plethon, George Gemistos

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## Michael of Ephesus

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### Abstract

Michael of Ephesus most probably belonged to the twelfth-century intellectual circle around Anna Komnene and took part in her project to produce commentaries on Aristotle's writings. His work on Aristotle's ethics, logic, metaphysics, and biology was instrumental in the revival of Aristotelian studies in Byzantium but also in the transmission and rediscovery of Aristotelian thought in the Latin West.

## Biography

We know next to nothing about Michael of Ephesus' life. His dates have been disputed, but at least we can now say with confidence, thanks to Browning's and Ebbesen's research, that he lived not in the eleventh century, as Praechter had argued, but in the twelfth century, and moreover that he most probably, together with Eustratios of Nicaea, belonged to Anna Komnene's circle of intellectuals, which had the task to produce commentaries on Aristotle's works. According to a twelfth-century source, he is said to have complained that his eyesight was spoiled because he had to work through the night to comply with Anna Komnene's wishes. It still remains unsettled, however, whether he wrote his commentaries only while he was working under Anna or whether he commented on Aristotle's treatises also before and after this period.

## Thought

Michael's breadth as an Aristotelian commentator is remarkable. He could justifiably be compared to



Alexander of Aphrodisias both in respect of his mode of exposition and in respect of his method of interpretation; besides, some of his comments were initially edited under Alexander's name. He wrote commentaries on the fifth, ninth, and tenth book of the *Nicomachean Ethics*; in fact, it has been plausibly suggested that it was he who compiled this commentary, bringing together the comments of Aspasius, Eustratios, and two anonymous commentators. He also commented on *Metaphysics* 7–14 and on the *Sophistical Refutations* (both wrongly attributed to Alexander), on the *Parva naturalia*, on the *Generation of Animals* (wrongly attributed to Philoponus), on the *Parts of Animals*, on the *Movement of Animals*, and on the *Progression of Animals*. Finally, he wrote comments on the pseudo-Aristotelian treatise *De coloribus*, which are still unedited, and on the *Politics*, which have only partly survived. His commentaries seem to have been widely read, since his very words often appear in Byzantine commentaries and paraphrases from the thirteenth to the fifteenth century. Moreover, his comments on the *Nicomachean Ethics* were translated in 1246/1247 by Robert Grosseteste and became very influential in the West through the agency of Albert the Great.

Michael's commentaries are of historical interest, because they contain remarks about the contemporary political situation; for instance, there are sometimes critical remarks about the emperor as well as discussions of the contemporary educational system. Most importantly, though, his comments, especially those on Aristotelian treatises for which no other commentary has survived, are treasures of information for the history of philosophy, even if the interpretations suggested were not his own. Zervos has pointed out the Platonic influences on Michael; Praechter has contrasted Michael of Ephesus, the Aristotelian, with Michael Psellos, the Platonist; Preus has claimed that Michael tries to stay as close as possible to the spirit of Aristotle; Mercken has suggested that Michael's Aristotelianism is never a militant one. It seems, therefore, that modern scholars have moved from regarding Michael as a Platonist to

regarding him as an Aristotelian, even if not a militant one. But perhaps it is rather difficult to put a specific label to Michael. He is a commentator of Aristotle and thinks that Aristotle's work is significant, so when he ventures to explain it, he stays close to Aristotle's spirit. This does not mean, however, that he agrees with Aristotle in everything; he often follows Plato, Plotinus, and the Neoplatonists or other ancient thinkers, like Galen.

Besides, as a Christian commentator, it seems important to him at places not to adhere uncritically to an Aristotelian, Platonic, or other ancient viewpoint. For example, the way he discusses the notion of *eudaimonia* indicates that his reading of Aristotle's text is not close to Aristotle's spirit but is rather an interpretation influenced by different traditions; Neoplatonism is certainly one, but Christianity is also present. According to Michael, there are two kinds of *eudaimonia*, namely, the theoretical *eudaimonia* and the political or practical *eudaimonia*; the person who has the ethical or practical or political virtues achieves political *eudaimonia*, whereas the person who has both the political and the theoretical virtues achieves theoretical *eudaimonia*. In other words, political *eudaimonia* is an imperfect kind of *eudaimonia*, whereas theoretical *eudaimonia* is the only perfect *eudaimonia* the virtuous person can have. But to this Platonist account of *eudaimonia*, and in particular to the notion of theoretical *eudaimonia*, Michael adds a further feature; he claims that, apart from being perfect, the most pleasant, continuous, chosen for itself, and self-sufficient feature of theoretical *eudaimonia* is that there is no need for regret and repentance (*metameleia/metanoia*) in this state. Aristotle does not characterize the life of contemplation in these terms nor do the Platonists stress such a characteristic of *eudaimonia*; on the other hand, both the notion of regret and that of repentance are very much part of the Christian outlook.

## Cross-References

- ▶ [Eustratios of Nicaea](#)

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## Michael of Massa

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### Abstract

Michael of Massa (d. 1337) was an Augustinian Hermit active in Paris (and elsewhere) in the 1320s and 1330s. His voluminous philosophical writings are nearly totally unpublished, but the studies of his thought to date show a keen mind and a characteristic approach to philosophical and theological challenges. In the domain of divine foreknowledge and future contingents, Michael passed on to Gregory of Rimini the criticism leveled by Francis of Marchia at Peter Auriol. If this example is representative, then Michael had an important role in the development of Parisian thought in the second quarter of the fourteenth century.

Michael of Massa is something of an enigma and in several ways. He is certainly an enigma when it comes to his biography. We know that he was born in the region near Siena in Italy. He joined the Augustinian Hermits and was *definitior* at the Augustinian General Chapter held in Venice in 1332; he died, probably in Paris, in 1337. He never obtained the master's degree in theology, but recent research supports the position that he held lectures on the *Sentences* at Paris in the early 1330s (although they could have taken place anywhere from 1326 to 1337) while arguing that Michael's extant commentary on book I of the *Sentences* may date from c. 1324 (Courtenay 1995, p. 204; Schabel 1998, pp. 168–171; Schabel and Courtenay 2007, p. 567) and at least the parts of the extant commentary on book II of the *Sentences* that contain explicit criticism of William Ockham's ontological and physical ideas date from the mid- to late 1330s, on the cusp of a heated discussion at Paris of aspects of Ockham's thought (Courtenay 1995). This is basically all we know or can surmise about Michael's curriculum vitae.

Michael is an enigma in a second way: although he has received high marks for his intelligence and importance from the few scholars who have studied his work – Albert Lang (1930, p. 130) called Michael “an extremely gifted and prolific theologian” (ein äußerst begabter und fruchtreicher Theologe), and William J. Courtenay (1995, p. 191) has written that Michael's “*Quaestiones in Sententias* remains one of the richest unedited and, for the most part, unstudied texts of the fourteenth century” – nevertheless we continue to know very little about his ideas. This is in part because his most important philosophical and theological work, his commentaries on the first and the second books of Peter Lombard's *Sentences*, is enormous (some 900 folio pages) and nearly totally unedited. Parts of Michael's commentary on book I of the *Sentences* survive in three manuscripts (Bologna, Biblioteca Universitaria 2214 = ProI.-d.38,q.2; Bologna, Collegio di Spagna 40 = ProI.-d.1,q.9 and d.27, q.3-d. 38,q.2; Napoli, Biblioteca Nazionale VII. C.1 = ProI.-d.8); the work was abbreviated twice in the fifteenth century, these two abbreviations

each existing in two manuscripts (Andrea de Mediolano's in Firenze, Biblioteca Nazionale C. 8. 794 and Oxford, Bodleian, Canonici Misc. 276; Johannes de Marliano's in Bergamo, Γ 3. 21 and Pavia, Università 226). Michael's book II of the *Sentences* is found in a single manuscript (Vatican, Vat. lat. 1087), where it is anonymous; the text is clearly a composite made up of several large treatments of predominately philosophical issues (e.g., creation, the instant, duration, time, eternity, the continuum, cognitive species) added to a truncated but more traditional commentary on dd. 1–2 of book II of the *Sentences*, which Damasus Trapp dubbed the *Opus ordinarium* (for a list of the questions found in Michael's book I and II of the *Sentences*, see Trapp 1965). In a section of his book II of the *Sentences* dealing with motion, Michael makes what is probably the earliest reference at Paris to “Ockhamists” (*Occamistae*) who were teaching that motion is merely a description of the thing that is said to move, having no reality of its own; Michael, approaching the question from the point of view of physics and not of semantics, rejects the Ockhamists' position (Courtenay 2003). In addition, in his book II of the *Sentences* Michael appears to attack William Ockham by name in the process of rejecting several aspects of Ockham's program of ontological parsimony, like the elimination of an independent category of quantity (Hödl 1975, pp. 245–252).

Michael is an enigma in yet a third way, and this stems almost directly from the fact that we know so little about his thought: we have as yet no clear view of where he fits into later medieval intellectual history. The modern pioneer in the study of the thought of the Augustinian Hermits, Damasus Trapp, believed (Trapp 1956, pp. 163–175) that Michael was a representative of a dying intellectual movement in the Augustinian order, that of the “ultra-Aegidianists,” theologians who took the ideas of the order's teaching doctor, Giles of Rome, to extraordinary lengths. Ultra-Aegidians like Michael, according to Trapp, were opposed by more traditional Aegidians among the Augustinian Hermits, men like Gerard of Siena and Thomas of Strasbourg. For Trapp, the victorious traditional Aegidians denied Michael the doctorate and effectively buried his

thought and even his name. More recent research has begun to modify this view in significant ways. First, Schabel's and Courtenay's suggestion that Michael read the *Sentences* in the early 1330s has the effect of removing anything suspicious about the fact that Michael never received the doctorate: it was quite common for Augustinian Hermits to wait many years between finishing their *Sentences* lectures at Paris and being awarded the doctorate, and Michael simply died before that long waiting period was up. Second, in the few recent studies of Michael's thought (Friedman 2012; Schabel 1998, p. 168; 2002, pp. 251–252), no trace is found of ultra-Aegidianism (however that might be defined), and indeed faithfulness to Giles' doctrine does not seem to be a major issue. Michael rejects, for example, Giles' famous position concerning the real distinction between essence and existence, opting instead for a purely psychological distinction based on conceiving the same thing in two different ways, statically (*per modum stantis* = as essence) or "flowingly" (*per modum fluentis* = as existence) (Hödl 1975, pp. 240–245).

A new picture of Michael's place in later medieval thought is emerging from the area upon which he has been studied most intensely: future contingents and divine foreknowledge. Schabel (1998; 2000, pp. esp. 214–220) has shown that Michael expands upon and clarifies not only the criticism that the Franciscan Francis of Marchia had made of the ideas of Peter Auriol but also Francis' own view, even though Michael does not mention that Francis is the source of much of his position. Michael follows Francis in his rejection of Auriol's views that propositions about the future are neither true nor false and that, strictly speaking, God does not know the future as future. Auriol postulated both of these views in order to preserve human free will from any sort of determinism. As part of his response to Auriol's views, Michael accepts Francis' position that the natural world is, strictly speaking, fully determined: the only sources of contingency in the world are God, angels, and human beings. Moreover, Michael accepts from Francis the distinction between two types of "indetermination": an indetermination about the possible (*de possibili*) and an

indetermination about what inheres in reality (*de inesse*). The former is the innate indetermination of the human will by which the will is fully free and contingent; the latter is a lack of determination with respect to bringing some particular thing or action about. For both Francis and Michael, a *determination* toward bringing some particular action about (i.e., a *determinatio de inesse*) is fully compatible with the absolute freedom of the will (i.e., the will's *indeterminatio de possibili*), and in fact that type of determination is required in order for the will to bring about any particular action at all. Thus, in order for our will to bring about a particular action, it must be both fully contingent and qualifiedly determined toward that action. In adopting this position, Michael of Massa was Francis of Marchia's "truest follower on the subject of divine foreknowledge" (Schabel 2000, p. 214). With that said, Michael's treatment is both longer and at times more clear than Francis'. Moreover, parts of Michael's treatment of these issues are significantly different from Francis' treatment, and based on these differences a compelling argument can be made that Michael's treatment influenced Gregory of Rimini's rejection of Auriol as well as Gregory's own positive theory. The picture of Michael of Massa's historical significance that emerges from this example is that he served as a link between Francis of Marchia's innovative response to Peter Auriol's ideas, on the one hand, and Gregory of Rimini's, on the other, and in so doing Michael "may be a key figure in the Augustinian movement away from Dominican-oriented theology and toward the Franciscans" (Schabel 2000, p. 220). It should be noted that also in the area of trinitarian theology, Michael clearly adopted some of Francis of Marchia's ideas, although definitely not slavishly so. Here, as elsewhere, Michael exhibits his own theological and philosophical "style" (Friedman 2013, Chap. 12, Sect. 3).

Another area of Michael's philosophical thought that has received some attention is his views on human intellectual cognition. Michael accepts the important later medieval distinction between intuitive and abstractive cognition, adding to that basic division a further type that

he calls “deductive” cognition (Tachau 1988, pp. 321–322, 332–333; Friedman [forthcoming](#)). Further, Michael holds that the intellect’s first object in terms of generation, i.e., what first moves the intellect to its act, is the extramental singular. In arguing for this view, Michael employs a basic parallelism between the senses and the intellect, claiming that what first moves the senses must also first move the intellect and specifically arguing that singular accidents – e.g., this white patch – are what first move our intellect. The intellectual knowledge we get on this basis is as imperfect as it can be, it is completely unprocessed, and it requires the power of the agent intellect through a process of “abstraction” to refine this initial intellectual knowledge, categorizing it and making it useful in further intellectual activity (Friedman 2012). This view of Michael’s appears to be a part of a conceptualistic tendency to emphasize the singular in both ontology and epistemology, since the singular as singular is the foundation of all our knowledge, although, as mentioned, Michael rejects the parsimonious ontology often associated with “nominalism” that denies motion some reality of its own and eliminates quantity as a separate category. Also of note is that in arriving at his own view on the object of the human intellect, Michael uses without direct attribution the words and ideas of the Dominican theologian Hervaeus Natalis while modifying the Dominican’s conclusions (Friedman 2012, pp. 444–447).

As the above indicates, Michael critically discussed the views of a good number of later medieval university thinkers, principal among them being Gerard of Siena, Peter Auriol, John Duns Scotus, Henry of Ghent, Thomas Aquinas, and Durand of St. Pourçain (on one of Michael’s critiques of Durand, see Friedman and Jeschke 2017). Michael’s use of Francis of Marchia’s ideas without acknowledging his source shows that further research may uncover other influences on Michael. That Michael’s thought had an impact on his contemporaries is shown by the example of Gregory of Rimini (who also cited Michael in other contexts) as well as by that of the Augustinian Hermit Alphonsus Vargas of Toledo who in his own *Sentences* commentary mentioned Michael no fewer than 15 times (Trapp 1956, p. 221). Further, the existence of two separate

fifteenth-century abbreviations of Michael’s book I of the *Sentences* shows that he was being read into the next century. But, again as the example of Gregory of Rimini shows, we will only have a full reckoning of Michael of Massa’s influence when we have made available in print and have studied much more of his work, in the process determining his role in the intellectual development of his religious order and of the fourteenth century as a whole. It seems likely that his role will have been an important one.

## Cross-References

- ▶ [Francis of Marchia](#)
- ▶ [Giles of Rome, Political Thought](#)
- ▶ [Gregory of Rimini](#)
- ▶ [Hervaeus Natalis](#)
- ▶ [Peter Auriol](#)
- ▶ [William of Ockham](#)

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Nearly all of Michael’s works are unedited (see the main text on the manuscripts containing the works). For published editions of parts of Michael’s *Sentences* commentaries, see Courtenay 2003, Friedman 2012, Friedman [forthcoming](#), Friedman and Jeschke 2017, and Schabel 1998. On Michael’s *Vita Christi*, see Baier 1994; for references to further exegetical works and sermons, see Trapp 1956, 163 n. 11, and Trapp 1965, 58 and 131–133.

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## Michael Psellos

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### Abstract

Michael Psellos was one of the most erudite and prolific thinkers of the Byzantine Middle Ages. His works include historical writings; philosophical treatises and commentaries; theological writings; poems; speeches; legal, geographical, military, and medical works; as well as works on music. Psellos taught all branches of philosophy, by closely reading and commenting on the works of ancient philosophers and especially on Aristotle's logical treatises. At the same time, he had a strong preference for Plato and the Neoplatonists, and especially for Proclus, whom he considered as an authority among ancient authors. Psellos may not have been an innovator, but he systematically tried to reconcile the Christian dogma with the ancient philosophical traditions. In his attempts to advance philosophical learning, he was often attacked concerning his theological orthodoxy, so that he often had to be careful to distance himself from heretical doctrines.

### Biography

Psellos' baptismal name was Constantine, but he is better known by his monastic name Michael. He was born in Constantinople in 1018 and died sometime around 1076. He studied under John Mauropous, and among his fellow students were the future patriarchs John Xiphilinos and



Constantine III Leichoudes as well as the later emperor Constantine X Doukas. Psellos worked in civil administration under Constantine IX Monomachos (1042–1055) and was given the honorary title “Consul of the Philosophers” as the head of the school of philosophy in Constantinople. In 1054 he had to resign for political reasons and took the monastic habit at the Olympus monastery at Bithynia. He soon returned to Constantinople, but he never again played an important role in politics, though he remained most of his life as a court intellectual. There is no reliable information about his later years.

Psellos was a polymath and extremely prolific. His works include historical writings, of which the most important is the *Chronographia*, a history of the years 976–1078, which places more emphasis on portraits of characters than on political events. He also wrote another shorter historical text in the form of a world chronicle, *Historia syntomos*, philosophical treatises and commentaries, theological writings, poems, legal, geographical, military, and medical works as well as works on music. His speeches are famous as examples of rhetorical style (his best known panegyrics are on John Xiphilinos and on his own mother). Finally, a collection of about 500 letters is also extant.

## Thought

Psellos taught all branches of philosophy (i.e., logic, natural philosophy, and metaphysics). He was undoubtedly among the most prominent scholars of the eleventh and twelfth centuries and greatly contributed to the revival of philosophical studies in Byzantium. In particular, he provided philosophical instructions by closely reading and commenting on the works of ancient philosophers, and especially on Aristotle’s logical treatises, which he thought should be given a propaedeutic role as a necessary preparation for dealing with more philosophical issues but also as an intellectual exercise which enables one to dispose off heretical views. Thus, Psellos commented on and paraphrased treatises from

the Aristotelian *Organon* (*Categories*, *De interpretatione*, *Prior Analytics*). The commentary on Aristotle’s *Physics* attributed to him in some manuscripts has recently been argued to be the work of George Pachymeres. Moreover, Psellos wrote a large number of short treatises discussing particular philosophical issues raised, in part at least, by his pupils, for instance, the distinction between homonyms and synonyms, the characteristic of substance as self-existent, the Platonic Forms, the unity of the soul and the body, the problem of evil, and dreams. He also compiled a short encyclopedia with the title *De omnifaria doctrina*, a set of brief outlines of various notions in philosophy, science, and theology. Many of the works attributed to him are spurious, for example, the so-called *De daemonibus*.

Although the amount of attention he paid on Aristotle’s treatises was significant, there is no doubt that Psellos had a strong preference for Plato and the Neoplatonists. His works show that he carefully read Plotinus, Porphyry, Iamblichus, and especially Proclus, whom he considered as an authority among ancient authors. He also had a close familiarity with most of the Greek commentators, whom he treated as helpful guides to the works of Plato and Aristotle, and drew extensively from them, for instance, Alexander of Aphrodisias, Ammonius, Philoponus, and Olympiodorus. In general, Psellos was well acquainted with the whole corpus of Greek philosophy, which at the time was somewhat larger than it is now, since he read and used some works which have since disappeared, for example, Proclus’ *Commentary on Plotinus*, his *Commentary on the Chaldaean Oracles*, Iamblichus’ *On Pythagoreanism* V–VII, and most probably other works which have not yet been identified.

In his philosophical views, Psellos may not have been an innovator, but he systematically tried to reconcile the Christian dogma with the ancient philosophical traditions. This at times required some independent thinking on his part, in the form of a slightly different argument from those found in the ancient texts or some interesting additions to already established views. But

there is certainly little evidence to support the view that he was a revolutionary or a cultural extremist in renouncing Christianity in favor of Hellenism. It is true, though, that in his attempts to advance philosophical learning, he was often attacked concerning his theological orthodoxy, so that he often had to be careful to distance himself from heretical doctrines, for example, in his writings on the *Chaldaean Oracles*. Thus, Psellos was instrumental in the revival of the serious study of ancient philosophy, but at the same time, he was able to clear himself of the charge of heresy, in contrast to his student John Italos.

Psellos strongly believed that the philosopher should be a man of comprehensive learning, and he often stressed on the importance of *poly-matheia*, that is to say of a boundless curiosity and wide knowledge, which he invoked in order to defend the study of the pagan texts of antiquity. There are many passages in Psellos' writings in which he underlines the importance of rational philosophical thinking, logical syllogisms, and especially demonstrations, as something which essentially characterizes human beings and helps them in their attempt to understand reality, and in particular nature. Moreover, Psellos explicitly argued that logical reasoning does not bring one into conflict with Christian doctrine; on the contrary, the use of logical syllogisms is said to be an indispensable instrument in our pursuit of truth. At the same time, however, Psellos juxtaposed the kind of knowledge we derive from logical reasoning to another kind, namely, wisdom or dialectic, which can be acquired neither through demonstration nor through inductive reasoning. For there are things, according to Psellos, which cannot be understood by rational thought, ineffable things which are beyond demonstration.

Indeed, Psellos, invoking Plato's authority, claimed that wondering about the ineffable and the supernatural constitutes the ultimate task of philosophy. He, therefore, adhered to the view that the human mind is capable of grasping the truth both through reason and through illumination; that is to say, there are things which can be

known by reason, while others, namely, the ultimate principles of reality, can be known only by illumination. Difficult though it may be to draw the line between the things known by reason and those known by illumination, at least Psellos in many of his writings gives us some idea of how he understands the notion of illumination; he describes it as the state which presupposes the end of all rational thinking and the prevalence of silence after a great deal of turmoil. In this, Psellos clearly followed the Neoplatonists, and in particular Proclus, with the difference that in Proclus the soul's illumination comes from the intellect, whereas in Psellos the Neoplatonic intellect is replaced by the Christian God.

## Cross-References

- ▶ [John Italos](#)
- ▶ [Logic, Byzantine](#)

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## Mirrors for Princes

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### Abstract

“Mirrors for Princes” designates a literary genre in which political ideas are expressed in the form of advice to a ruler. This genre has its roots in Antiquity and especially in Late Antiquity. The first medieval flourishing of works of this kind dates back to the so-called Carolingian Renaissance, when the image of the ideal ruler is strongly influenced by the monastic background of most authors writing on this topic. After a long decline, John of Salisbury gave a renewed impulse to the genre, exerting a long-lasting influence with his *Policraticus*. In the cultural context of the twelfth century, Mirrors for Princes opened not only to the patristic heritage, but also to classical authors. Many mirrors date back to the second half of the twelfth and to the first half of the thirteenth century, when they mostly took the form of compilations. In the following period, great thinkers such as Aquinas and Giles of Rome tried to insert the newly rediscovered Aristotelian ethical and political language into the mirrors tradition. Giles’ *De regimine principum* was the most successful and influential result of such effort. The rise of *De potestate papae* treatises in the first half of the fourteenth century reduced the role of Mirrors for Princes as carriers of political ideas but could not completely supersede them. On the contrary, when the heyday of *De potestate papae* was over, mirrors regained at least in part their function. The present article does not cover the Quattrocento: it is well known, however, that the tradition of the Mirrors continued in the Renaissance and in the following centuries.

The use of the expression “Mirrors for Princes” to designate a literary genre goes back to German scholarship that refers with the term *Fürstenspiegel* to writings dealing with the virtues of the ideal ruler, with his duties and his behavior in general. The counterparts of *Fürstenspiegel* in other European languages, such as *Miroir de princes*, *Specchio dei principi* (and the Latin *specula principum*, although it is attested much later than the first examples of the genre) have also established themselves in present day scholarship. These terms can be used in a rather loose sense, referring to a very wide range of sources, even narrative or iconographic ones, or parts thereof, carrying notions concerning rulership, or in a stricter sense, limited to independent works explicitly aiming at instructing kings and lesser rulers about the virtues they should cultivate, their lifestyle, their duties, the philosophical and theological meaning of their office. Mirrors for Princes can therefore be used as a source for many purposes, from the reception of classical literary texts to the history of mentality. They usually follow standard conventions so that their teachings about royal justice, princely virtues, and the like tend to give the impression of a continuous repetition of commonplaces. This notwithstanding the genre undergoes interesting changes during the Middle Ages. This article will focus on the aspects that can be brought to bear on the history of ethics and political philosophy.

### Roots in Late Antiquity and in the Earliest Medieval Centuries

It is well beyond doubt that the genre is indebted to classical works and to patristic literature as well, although there is still lively discussion among specialists about the extent and relevance of such influence. Seneca and Cicero played a very important role, but also Ambrose (*De divinis officiis*) and Augustine, whose Chap. 24 in Book V of his *City of God* have been regarded as examples of Christian Mirror for Princes, obviously in a very loose sense of the expression. Martin of Braga’s *Formula vitae honestae*, (570–579), mediated a virtue ethics strongly influenced by

Cicero and Seneca, and in the Middle Ages was often referred to as a work of the latter. The discussion about *De duodecim abusivis* (or *abusionibus*) *saeculi*, falsely attributed to Cyprian, but now dated to the seventh century, is still open among scholars. It seems ascertained beyond doubt, however, that this work of Irish origin influenced, especially with its treatment of the sixth *abusio* (*dominus sine virtute*) and of the ninth (*rex iniquus*), later Carolingian Mirrors for Princes.

### Carolingian Mirrors for Princes

Although some writings by Alcuin during the reign of Charles the Great already bear some essential features of the Mirrors for Princes, the first flourishing of the genre is usually dated to the ninth century, in the context of Carolingian courts. Scholars have rightly pointed out that some authors of this century draw on previous works, such as the already mentioned *De duodecim abusivis seculi*. Nevertheless, Smaragd of Saint Mihiel's *Via regia* (813), Jonas of Orléans' *De institutione regia* (831), Sedulius Scottus' *De rectoribus christianis* (855–859), together with some works by Hincmar of Reims' (806–882) build up the first noteworthy body of texts explicitly devoted to the moral instruction of the ruler. A common feature of such treatises is the focus on the personal Christian virtues of the sovereign. They represent therefore an important source for the history of virtue ethics in the early Middle Ages, since authors such as Smaragd are persuaded that the ruler should possess the same virtues as other Christians, obviously at the highest level. A striking feature of Smaragd's mirror, is that it overlaps in part the *Diadema monachorum* (a sort of manual for monks) of the same author. From this point of view, Carolingian Mirrors for Princes can be regarded as a source for the ethical doctrines of the period, which are in turn heavily influenced by the monastic background of their authors.

From the point of view of the history of political thought, such "mirrors" share the implicit assumption that the well-being of the kingdom

depends almost exclusively on the moral righteousness of the ruler. As far as the relationship between the secular rulers and religious authority is concerned, the authors of such "mirrors" consider the king or the emperor as the highest authority of a community that is temporal and spiritual at the same time. *Sacerdotium* and *regnum* are conceived of as integral parts of a whole. Sedulius Scottus (*De rectoribus christianis*) defines the temporal ruler as God's vicar in his church. Notwithstanding this, as Jürgen Miethke has pointed out, authors such as Jonas of Orléans, writing in the troubled period of Louis the Pious' empire, try to draw at least some boundaries dividing the sphere belonging to the spiritual power (mainly understood as the power of bishops) from temporal jurisdiction, without excluding however, the possibility of interference. In case of necessity, for example, the temporal ruler is allowed to have recourse to church goods, but on the other hand, he should submit to the judgment of the bishop when he fails to fulfill his duties.

### Twelfth Century

Between 1148 and 1153, Bernard of Clairvaux wrote a treatise addressed to Pope Eugenius III, the *De consideratione*, enlightening him not only about the duties and perils of the most important office in Christianity, but also about his view of the role of the pope in the church. Many scholars emphasize the similarities of this work to the Mirrors for Princes, describing it as a *speculum paparum* (mirror for popes). Bernard in fact devotes large sections of his treatise to the virtues of a good pope (the four cardinal virtues that are according to him necessarily connected), to the vices he should avoid in himself and correct in the faithful, and to the advisers he should choose, on the governance of the papal household. In addressing his advice to the pope, Bernard also expresses his ecclesiological views: on one hand, he stresses the fullness of power of the supreme pontiff, on the other, he claims that the exercise of this power should result in a service (*ministerium*) to the church and not in a dominion over it. In

particular, the pope is morally bound to respect the rights of the local churches.

Written by a cleric who had attended the French schools at the eve of the age of universities and had personal experience of life at lay and ecclesiastical courts alike, John of Salisbury's *Policraticus*, even though it is not only a *speculum principis* in the strict sense, gave a renewed impulse to the genre, as Wilhelm Berges noted in his ground breaking survey, which accordingly begins its detailed analysis with this work. Deeply indebted to the interest in the classical heritage that is peculiar to the so-called twelfth century Renaissance, John draws not only on biblical texts, such as Deut. 17 (which was to become an almost topical reference for this literary genre) but also on authors from Antiquity. The *Institutio Traiani* that John attributes to Plutarch and inserts in his *Policraticus* is a fake, but it adds a distinct classical flavor to John's political organicism, which conceived of the realm as a body. The hierarchical functionalism that is implicit in the detailed parallelism between limbs of the body and the parts of the regnum was also to exert a long lasting influence on later specula. Historians of political thought have also taken great interest in John's attitude toward unjust rulers, because he does not limit himself to contrasting the ideal ruler with the tyrant but supports the right to resist the tyrant, and even to kill him. According to some interpreters this right is, in John's mind, also a duty. John of Salisbury's impact is particularly noticeable in Helinand of Froidmont's work, completed before 1210. This former troubadour converted to the Cistercian Order devoted a chapter of his huge *Cronica* in 49 books to the issue *De bono regimine principis*, drawing on the *Institutio Traiani* and its organicism, but also on John's conviction that the just king should rule according to the law. In turn, Helinand contributed to the diffusion of John of Salisbury's views, thanks to the fact that his *De bono regimine principis* was excerpted in the following century by Vincent of Beauvais and inserted in his well-known and widely read *Speculum historiale*.

Writing on the ridge between the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, Gerald of Wales combined in his *De principis instructione* a detailed virtue

ethics enriched with exempla from classical writers (first *distinctio*) with reports about the life of contemporary rulers (second and third *distinctiones*) that is an important source for historical events as well.

### Thirteenth Century: From Compilation to the Reception of Aristotle

To Vincent of Beauvais and the team working under his guidance we owe a large number of works based on a compilational method, that is, on the collection of authoritative short texts (called in medieval Latin *auctoritates*) interspersed with remarks by the authors who also shape the overall structure of the work. Wilhelm Berges pointed to the parts of Vincent's works that could be seen as Mirrors of Princes. Berges' hypothetical reconstruction of the original, although not completed, plan of Vincent's work devoted to the prince was not confirmed by subsequent research. The rest of his remarks remain valid even after the recent critical edition of *De morali principis institutione*. In this treatise, together with the usual description of the just ruler contrasted with the tyrant and the stock-in-trade advice concerning life at court, one finds an interesting account of the origins of power among human beings. According to a long-lasting theological tradition, the establishment of one human being's power over others is first and foremost an act of violence, triggered by the perversity of mankind corrupted by sin. Only afterward can power, so to speak, redeem itself by fulfilling the function of compelling and punishing evildoers. The method adopted by Guillaume Peraldi's *De eruditione principum* (later falsely attributed to Aquinas) is very similar to Vincent's: together with the substantial identity of many of their views, this had led Berges to think that they belonged to the same, unfinished encyclopedic work about Christian kingship.

To the same period belongs Guibert of Tournai's *Eruditio regum et principum* (1259): the Franciscan friar explains the function of secular power with the necessity of compelling those who cannot be persuaded by spiritual means.



Strongly influenced by the corpus of treatises attributed to Dionysius the Areopagite, Guibert conceives of the duties of princes according to the pattern of angelic hierarchies, thereby attributing to secular powers a mediating role between God and mankind. According to Jenny Swanson, John of Wales' *Breviloquium de Virtutibus*, written most probably in the mid 1260s, can be numbered among the Mirrors for Princes. In fact, the treatise penned by this prolific Franciscan author shows the features of a mirror centered around a virtue ethics (more indebted to texts such as *Morale dogma philosophorum* than to Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics*) designed especially for the ruler. Inserting in his text many exempla, John of Wales was deemed to exert a durable influence on the literary genre, if for no other reason than as an easily accessible collection of edifying anecdotes, mainly from classical Antiquity.

Comparison of Vincent of Beauvais' views concerning the origins of power with those maintained only a few years later by his confrère Thomas Aquinas offers a telling example of the changes brought about by the reception of Aristotelian practical philosophy. In the only extant part of his *De regno* (shortly after 1270), Aquinas offers an account of the origin of the political community that is strongly influenced by the Aristotelian pattern of the natural, teleological development of the city from the smallest social community, the family. In Aquinas' account of the establishment of power relations among human beings, the Fall does not play the role it played in Vincent. Moreover, Aquinas describes different types of constitution. Monarchy is not the only possibility anymore, so that Aquinas, unlike Vincent, feels a need to argue in favor of the monarchical constitution as reflecting in the best way the order of nature and the universe. It is still controversial whether Aquinas, in defining the duties of the ruler also toward God, suggests that regnum should be subordinated to *sacerdotium*.

Innovative as it might have been, Aquinas' *De regno* remained but a fragment. With his *De regimine principum* (most probably around 1279) Giles of Rome fulfilled the task of writing a Mirror for Princes that exploited the

opportunities offered by the reception of Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics* and *Politics*. The first book of the *De regimine* consists, in fact, in a description of the virtues of the ruler that is much indebted to Aquinas' reception of the *Nicomachean Ethics*. At least for its first part, the third book relies heavily on Aristotle's *Politics*. According to the traditional subdivision of practical philosophy into individual ethics, doctrine of the household (*oeconomica*), and politics, Giles, still lacking a Latin translation of the pseudo-Aristotelian *Oeconomica*, draws on the *Nicomachean Ethics*, the *Rhetoric*, and the last two books of the *Politics*, especially as regards the upbringing of children. The *De regimine principum* presented itself as a mirror that meets the expectations of an audience interested in the newly discovered Aristotelian practical philosophy. At first glance, it could seem that Giles limited himself to summarizing Aristotle's relevant works. On the contrary, he did not only draw on the reception of Aristotle through Aquinas (there are many tacit references to the *Sententia libri ethicorum*, to the fragmentary *Sententia libri politicorum*, to *De regno*, and even to the *Summa theologiae* of the great Dominican master), but also very often succeeded in bending the Aristotelian texts he quoted in his treatise to an apology for hereditary monarchy (presented as the best form of government according to Aristotle), where the king is above positive law and subordinate only to natural law. Giles of Rome also succeeded, however, in setting a standard, so that his Mirror for Princes enjoyed an enormous success, partly because it was used as a handbook of Aristotelian practical philosophy. The *De regimine principum* was also translated into many vernaculars. Some of these versions, however, were not literal, but rather free arrangements that inserted remarks by the translator and also used other sources, such as the Bible, that Giles had neglected in favor of Aristotle, in order to offer an almost purely philosophical Mirror for Princes. Among such modified versions one can count, for different reasons, the so-called *Glossa castellana* to the *Re regimine principum* (first half of the fourteenth century) and John Trevisa's rendering in Middle English. Writing a

philosophical, that is, in his opinion, an Aristotelian Mirror for Princes, was also the intention inspiring, Engelbert of Admont, whose *De regimine principum* (shortly after 1300) had, however, almost no diffusion in the Middle Ages. This work is nevertheless of great interest, since Engelbert develops a virtue ethics that distinguishes between the four cardinal virtues, that are necessary to anybody, and the virtuous habits that are required in kings and emperors. Only the latter, in fact, need what Engelbert calls *virtutes regales*, using an expression that most probably derives from the *Secretum secretorum*, a spurious Aristotelian work whose first part was sometimes referred to as the *De regimine principum* written by the Stagirite. Engelbert also provides the reader with a quite original discussion of the forms of government, in which he takes into consideration not only simple constitutions, but also mixed ones. Surprisingly enough for a supporter of the imperium, Engelbert admits that monarchy in its simple form is extremely rare, because of the rarity of virtues among rulers. Therefore, according to the most recent interpretation by Karl Ubl, he gives his preference to a blend of monarchy, aristocracy, and democracy.

### Examples from the Fourteenth Century

Already at the beginning of the fourteenth century, the literary genre of the Mirrors for Princes begins losing ground as a carrier of political theories, in favor of other genres, such as the *de potestate papae* treatises, especially in the first half of the century, or the *somnia* literature, toward the end of the same century. This does not imply, however, that the production of *specula principum* ceases abruptly. On the contrary, political authors continued to recur to this genre to express their views during the Renaissance and well into modern times, even after Machiavelli and often against him. An overview of such development would exceed the scope of an article devoted to medieval Mirrors. It seems reasonable to conclude with some examples from the fourteenth century, before the influence of Humanism introduces a new shift in the Quattrocento.

For example, at the beginning of the 1330s, William of Pagula uses the literary form of the *speculum*, to protest against the institution of royal purveyance in the English kingdom. He does not limit himself to a moral complaint but argues in defense of a sort of “basic economic rights” that the king himself is not allowed to infringe. Interestingly, William supports his claim by arguing that the English realm is a fief of the pope, so that the sovereign does not possess the same fullness of power that an emperor or a pope can legitimately claim.

Some years later, Guido Vernani of Rimini dedicates to the Malatesta, most probably Malatesta and Galeotto, a *Liber de virtutibus*, that is an abridged version of Aristotelian virtue ethics mediated through Aquinas’ doctrine of happiness attainable in the present life. Guido had criticized Dante’s *Monarchia* and supported a hierocratic theory of power. Here he develops his own ethics for an Italian signore whose territory is inscribed in the boundaries of the “state” claimed by the Roman church.

In 1340–1344, the Portuguese Franciscan friar Alvaro Pais dedicated to Alfonso XI of Castiglia a *Speculum Regum* that not only puts a strong emphasis on princely virtues but also defends the superiority of monarchy over other constitutions and supports the supremacy of the spiritual over the temporal. His account of the origins of power is, as usual in many Franciscan authors, especially after John Duns Scotus, clearly not Aristotelian. He prefers tracing back the origins of subordination among men to pride and other vices. However corrupted the intention of the first rulers could have been, they still played a role in preserving social order. For this reason, God tolerates such a state of affairs, although it does not correspond to his original plan for mankind.

Wilhelm Berges numbered Francesco Eiximenis’ *Regiment de la cosa publica* (1383) among Mirrors for Princes. More recent studies have emphasized that the scope of this work exceeds the traditional limits of a mirror, developing an overall theory of monarchy. His views about monarchy are not only inspired by the principle that Christian faith must be the unifying element of every political community but

are also guided by the peculiar experience of the kingdom of Aragon, where this Catalan Franciscan friar spent most of his life. As a result, Eiximenis supports the idea of a monarchy that is bound by covenants to its subjects and shares its power with parliamentary institutions.

## Cross-References

- ▶ [Bernard of Clairvaux](#)
- ▶ [Carolingian Renaissance](#)
- ▶ [Giles of Rome, Political Thought](#)
- ▶ [John of Salisbury](#)
- ▶ [Thomas Aquinas, Political Thought](#)

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## Miskawayh, Abū 'Alī

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### Abstract

Abū 'Alī Aḥmad ibn Muḥammad ibn Ya'qūb Miskawayh was a prominent figure in the intellectual milieu and at different courts of the Arab-Islamic world throughout the tenth and at the beginning of the eleventh century. Besides having held various positions in the service of a number of rulers, he occupied himself with many sciences, such as philosophy, history, *adab*, alchemy, medicine, and even cooking. Although Miskawayh is said to have composed works in most of these fields, the writings extant today mainly cover the first two mentioned. His universal history *The Experiences of the Nations (Tajārib al-umam)* outlines the time from Noah to his own lifetime, the Buyid reign. His genuine philosophical writings, among which *The Refinement of*

*Character (Tahdhīb al-akhlāq wa-tathīr al-a'rāq)* and the *Minor Book of Triumph (al-Fawz al-aṣḡar)* are the best known today, display a main interest in ethics and on how to reach ultimate happiness. Miskawayh's philosophical doctrines are deeply influenced by Aristotle as well as by Neoplatonism and firmly rooted in the tradition of al-Kindī.

## Biographical Information

Miskawayh is said to have been born around 325/936 in Rayy and died in 412/1030 in Isfahan aged 100 years. Nowadays the allegation that he himself converted from Zoroastrianism to Islam is no longer upheld but transferred to his forefathers.

According to the *Muntakhab Šiwān al-ḥikma* which contains information about the lives and doctrines of philosophers of the Greek and the Arabic-Islamic world, Miskawayh was consecutively in the service of the viziers Abū Muḥammad al-Muhallabī, Abū l-Faḍl ibn al-'Amīd, and the latter's son Abū l-Faḍl Dhū l-Kifāyatayn and the monarchs 'Aḍud al-Dawla and Šamsām al-Dawla and then served at the court in Rayy under several patrons mainly as librarian, secretary, boon companion, and emissary. Furthermore he had contact with a number of well-known philosophers of his time, namely, Abū Sulaymān al-Sijistānī al-Mantiqī, al-Ḥasan ibn Suwār ibn al-Khammār, Abū l-Ḥasan al-'Āmirī, Ibn Sīnā, and Abū Ḥayyān al-Tawḥīdī, with whom he engaged in a philosophical exchange which is preserved in the *Book of Rambling (Questions) and Comprehensive (Answers) (Kitāb al-Hawāmil wa-l-Shawāmil)* and a *Treatise on Justice (Risāla fī l-māhiyyat al-'adl)*.

## Thought/Philosophy

Miskawayh's extant philosophical writings comprise two lengthy books, namely, *The Refinement of Character (Tahdhīb al-akhlāq wa-tathīr al-a'rāq)* and the *Minor Book of Triumph (al-Fawz al-aṣḡar)*, and a number of smaller treatises and fragments. A quite striking feature of

Miskawayh's style of writing is that he is frequently quoting himself, i.e., there often occur literal parallels between two or more of his works. The *Minor Book of Triumph* presents the most remarkable example of this practice as it seems to have existed in at least two versions or recensions, which may both well go back to Miskawayh himself. The standard version is claimed to have been written at the request of an emir who wanted to have three issues dealt with which comprise all knowledge, namely, the existence of God, the soul and its conditions, and prophethood. The alternative version is only preserved in fragments which present about half of the material of the standard version in a completely different arrangement and order apparently focusing on other questions, namely, the hierarchy of being, the man as microcosm, the human soul, the attainment of happiness, and the classification of knowledge. The last two issues do not occur in the standard version of the *Minor Book of Triumph* but are also dealt with in Miskawayh's *Kitāb al-Sa'āda (Book on Happiness)*.

The question of the classification of knowledge is, in fact, quite a prominent topic in Miskawayh's extant writings. The most basic division is the one between theoretical and practical knowledge or philosophy. In the *Minor Book of Triumph*, Miskawayh recommends to start one's search for truth with mathematics and logic and then to turn to natural philosophy and metaphysics before dealing with practical philosophy. In the alternative version of the *Minor Book of Triumph*, mathematics is said to comprise geometry, arithmetic, astrology/astronomy, and music, and the natural sciences are divided according to an eightfold Aristotelian division, which is also applied by al-Fārābī in his *Iḥṣā' al-ʿulūm*. In the *Book on Happiness*, Miskawayh classifies philosophy entirely according to Aristotle's writings.

Miskawayh's worldview is set within the framework of a Neoplatonic hierarchy of being, which is characterized by the sequence of the following levels of existence: God, Intellect, Soul, Sphere which corresponds to Universal Nature, and the bodily beings. Establishing the existence of God, the Creator, is the main intent of the first of the three parts of the *Minor Book of*

*Triumph*, where Miskawayh thus demonstrates Him to be one, single, eternal, incorporeal, the first unmoved mover, and the cause of all other existents, which He has created ex nihilo. Knowledge of God may only be reached and expressed by negation.

The first created existent is the Universal Intellect. Whether Miskawayh indeed pictured the level of intellect as encompassing ten intelligences which cause one another and the celestial spheres must remain doubtful. This Farabian doctrine is expounded in the *Treatise on the Intellect and the Intelligible (Risāla fī l-ʿaql wa-l-maʿqūl)* which has been ascribed to Miskawayh. However, his authorship is questionable, and no tenet expressed in this treatise seems to be genuinely characteristic of his philosophy.

In any case, Miskawayh's main concern is not with universal hypostases but with intellect and soul as present in human beings and, in fact, with granting immortality to them. Three Platonic proofs are cited in the second part of the *Minor Book of Triumph*, the part on the soul and its conditions, in order to establish the soul as life-giving, as containing no badness or evil, and as self-moving and therefore being an immortal, spiritual substance. Consequently, man must not fear death, as Miskawayh explicitly sets out to show in a chapter of *The Refinement of Character* which also circulated as a short self-contained text, namely, as the *Treatise on the Fear of Death (Risāla fī l-khawf min al-mawt)* and in a passage on the same topic preserved in the entry on Miskawayh in the *Muntakhab Ṣiwān al-ḥikma*. On the contrary, one should die willingly, i.e., abandon the sensible world and the bodily pleasures and desires and turn toward the intellect and the intelligibles, before one dies naturally. The rational human soul is potentially intellectual, and by intelligizing the intelligibles, it becomes actualized and is an intellect. Intellect, in turn, is one and the same as its intelligibles and its intellection and furthermore possesses self-knowledge. It does not derive all its knowledge from sense perception; rather, as the senses may err, intellect is able to judge sense data through the first principles which it finds in its own substance.



Miskawayh distinguished three kinds of happiness: happiness of the soul, which is true knowledge and acting accordingly; happiness of the body, which is health, proportionality, and beauty of the body's limbs; and happiness resulting from things outside the body, e.g., wealth, honor, family, and friends. The two latter ones are not ends in themselves but only means by which to reach the happiness of the soul, which is the ultimate happiness, end, and perfection of the human being. As Miskawayh points out explicitly, man cannot attain perfection on his own, but being a social animal, he needs the company of his fellow men. Therefore hermitism has to be renounced. Furthermore, it is important that the four cardinal virtues, i.e., wisdom, temperance, courage, and justice, which are depicted each as a mean between two vices, are extended beyond the virtuous person toward others who should thus benefit from these virtues and become virtuous themselves.

In order to spread wisdom, i.e., theoretical and practical wisdom, among the people, God has sent the prophets who are physicians of the soul.

As to Miskawayh's historical works, *The Experiences of the Nations (Tajārib al-umam)*, which starts with the occurrence of the flood in the days of Noah and ends in 980 when the Buyids are still in power, presents past events to serve as examples to the rulers of the present. Miskawayh describes events happening during the Buyid reign based on personal experience and often takes a subjective point of view. He stresses the value of eyewitnessing over the retelling of hearsay accounts. A different kind of historical interest, namely, an interest in the history of learning, wisdom, and philosophy, becomes apparent in Miskawayh's *Eternal Wisdom (al-Ḥikma al-khālida)* in which he gathers wise sayings of the Persians, Indians, Arabs, and Greeks to show the unity which prevails in human thought throughout time and place.

## Cross-References

- ▶ [al-'Āmirī, Abū l-Ḥasan](#)
- ▶ [Aristotle, Arabic](#)

- ▶ [al-Fārābī, Abū Naṣr](#)
- ▶ [al-Kindī, Abū Yūsuf Ya'qūb ibn Ishāq](#)
- ▶ [Plato, Arabic](#)
- ▶ [Proclus, Arabic](#)
- ▶ [al-Tawḥīdī, Abū Ḥayyān](#)

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## Modal Theories and Modal Logic

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### Abstract

Early medieval thinkers were acquainted with ancient modal theories through Boethius' commentaries on *De interpretatione*, which dealt with Aristotelian and other ancient modal paradigms extensively. Modal syllogistic was brought into the discussion by the recovery of Aristotle's *Prior Analytics* in the twelfth century. Medieval considerations were also influenced by Augustine's ideas, which deviated from philosophical paradigms, particularly his conception of God as acting by choice between simultaneous alternative possibilities. There were analogous discussions of philosophical and theological modalities in Arabic philosophy. Arabic modal theories influenced Latin discussions mainly through the translations of Averroes' works.

Apart from ancient philosophical conceptions, the new idea of associating modal terms with simultaneous alternatives was discussed by Abelard and some other early medieval thinkers. While these innovations were used to some extent in thirteenth-century theology, they were not often discussed in philosophical contexts. The increasing reception of Aristotle's philosophy in the thirteenth century gave support to traditional modal paradigms, as is seen in Robert Kilwardby's influential commentary on Aristotle's *Prior Analytics*, where modal syllogistics is treated as an essentialist theory of the structures of being.

Things became different when John Duns Scotus combined the various elements of the conception of modality as alternativeness into a detailed theory. A logically possible state of affairs is something to which to be is not repugnant, though it may not be compossible with other possibilities. Scotus' modal semantics influenced early fourteenth-century philosophy and theology in many ways. The new modal logic which was developed by William Ockham, John Buridan, and others was based on the new modal semantics. Thirteenth-century essentialist assumptions were largely dropped from modal syllogistics, the Aristotelian version of which was regarded as a fragmentary theory without a sufficient explication of the various fine structures of modal propositions.

There are four originally Aristotelian ways of understanding the meaning of modal terms in ancient philosophy: the "statistical" or "temporal frequency" interpretation of modality, which is found in the discussions of eternal beings, the natures of things, and the types of events and which implies that what is possible is sometimes actual (the so-called principle of plenitude), the conception of possibility as a potency, which was associated with the assumption that no natural potency type remains eternally frustrated, the conception of antecedent necessities and possibilities with respect to a certain moment of time (diachronic modalities), and the idea of possibility as non-contradictoriness. None of these conceptions

includes the view that the meaning of modal terms should be spelled out by considering simultaneous alternative states of affairs. On the contrary, ancient modal thinking is characterized by the assumption of the necessity of the present and the necessity of unchanging states of affairs in general.

An example of the statistical approach in the Boethian tradition is found in Thomas Aquinas' commentary on chapter 9 of Aristotle's *De interpretatione*, where various types of proposition are classified on the basis of their "matter."

In necessary matter, all affirmative propositions are determinately true; this holds for propositions in the future tense as well as in the past and present tenses; and negative ones are false. In impossible matter, the contrary is the case. In contingent matter, however, universal propositions are false and particular propositions are true. This is the case in future tense propositions as well as those in the past and present tenses. In indefinite ones, both are at once true in the future tense propositions as well as those in the past and present tenses (*In Peri herm*, I.13).

The matter of a proposition is associated with the habitude of a predicate to a subject and is explained as follows:

If the predicate is per se in the subject, it will be said to be a proposition in necessary or natural matter, for example 'Man is an animal' and 'Man is risible'. If the predicate is per se repugnant to the subject, as in a way excluding the notion of it, it is said to be a proposition in impossible or remote matter, for example 'Man is an ass'. If the predicate is related to the subject in a way midway between these two, being neither per se repugnant to the subject nor per se in it, the proposition is said to be in possible or contingent matter. (Ibid)

The ancient theory of the matter of propositions was often associated with the rules of contraries, subcontraries, and contradictories in the traditional square of opposition. While these rules defined how the members of various opposed pairs were related to truth and falsity, it was thought that they could be further specified by classifying propositions on the basis of their matter. A typical feature of Aquinas' account of the contingent matter is that universal affirmative and negative propositions are false and particular affirmative and negative propositions are true. Comparing this with what is said about propositions in

other matters, modal differences can be characterized as corresponding to a descending order in the frequency of true cases: the predicate is not truly said of any subject in impossible matter; it is truly said of some subjects in contingent matter and of all subjects in necessary matter.

Boethius' discussion of the necessity of the present shows how this principle was understood in ancient modal thought. In dealing with chapter 9 of Aristotle's *De interpretatione*, Boethius argues that:

1. It is not possible that  $p$  obtains at  $t$  and not- $p$  obtains at  $t$ .

This implies that

2. It is not the case that  $p$  obtains at  $t$ , and it is possible at  $t$  that not- $p$  obtains at  $t$ .

This move is natural only when possibilities refer to one and the same history without simultaneous alternatives. (2) was generally accepted in ancient philosophy, and it is equivalent to the principle of the necessity of the present.

3. If  $p$  obtains at  $t$ , then it is necessary at  $t$  that  $p$  obtains at  $t$ .

Boethius thought that the temporal necessity of  $p$  is qualified by the possibility of being otherwise at another time. One might wonder how the alleged necessity of Socrates' sitting at a certain moment of time is qualified by what he does at other times. According to Boethius, this shows that sitting as such does not inhere in Socrates by necessity. Qualifying the necessity of the present by a "statistical" conception of possibility remained a popular idea in the Boethian tradition.

Boethius was eager to argue that the necessity of an event at a certain time does not imply that it was antecedently necessary. The idea of diachronic modalities was considered important in the later Aristotelian tradition, which stressed against Stoic determinism, that there are genuine future alternatives which remain open until the moment of time to which they refer. Even the Stoics spoke about alternative prospective

possibilities which were not yet fixed at the level of known causes, but they also regarded fate as an active potency which ultimately necessitates everything. Boethius follows the Aristotelian tradition of diachronic possibilities: there are transient individual alternative possibilities, but those which will not be realized disappear. There are no unrealized possibilities which might remain intact even when their diachronic counterparts have vanished.

In dealing with possibilities based on potencies, Boethius writes that some potencies are never unrealized, their nature being such that they are always actual and as such necessarily so. There are no contrary potencies in these cases, Boethius says, because they would remain unrealized forever, and the constitution of nature cannot include elements which are in vain. The potencies of non-necessary features of beings do not exclude contrary potencies. They are not always and universally actualized, but as potency types, even these must be sometimes actualized. This is in agreement with the “statistical” model of modality.

Aristotle’s theory of active and passive potencies was originally meant to explain how and why a singular change takes place. This background made it a cumbersome model for singular possibilities. While it allowed Aristotle and his medieval followers to speak about unrealized possibilities in the sense of partial possibilities, that is, as the correlates of active or passive potencies, full singular possibilities were actualized when they could be actualized. Natural passive potencies could not be actualized without an active power and were necessarily actualized when an active power activated them, and there was no external hindrance (Aristotle, *Met.* IX.5). While the conceptions of power and potentiality were widely regarded as important elements in understanding modality, Anselm of Canterbury attempted to base the whole of modal semantics on these notions. The problems in his theory show that the notion of potency is too narrow a basis for this purpose.

In *De caelo* I.12, Aristotle supposes, per impossibile, that a thing has contrary potencies, one of which is always actualized. He argues that

the unactualized potency cannot be real, because one cannot assume it to be realized at any time without contradiction. Aristotle applies the model of possibility as non-contradictoriness which is defined in *Prior Analytics* I.13 as follows: when a possibility is assumed to be realized, it results in nothing impossible. In speaking about the assumed non-contradictory actualization of a possibility, Aristotle thinks that it is realized in our one and only history. In some places he suggests that for the purposes of argument, one can assume counterfactual states of affairs in thought even though they are not realizable in the world. Assumptions of this kind were not uncommon in late ancient philosophy; they were called impossible hypotheses. Averroes and Aquinas tried to explain these by using the idea of abstract possibilities. The possibilities of a thing can be dealt with at various levels which correspond to Porphyrian predicables. Something which is possible for a thing as a member of a genus may be impossible for it as a member of a species. The same holds of it as a member of a species and an individuated thing. While counterfactual abstract possibilities are counterpossible in the sense that they cannot be actualized, they are understandable metaphysical fictions which can be used in indirect proofs.

Augustine’s doctrine of God’s eternal free choice of the content of creation, which influenced early medieval theological discussions of divine omnipotence and omniscience, involved an intuitive idea of modality as alternativeness. Some authors regarded this as a special theological matter which did not affect the use of traditional ideas in other disciplines, an attitude supported by the general reception of Aristotle’s philosophy in the thirteenth century, but there were some twelfth-century thinkers who realized the philosophical significance of this new modal conception.

Abelard made use of traditional modal conceptions, but he also developed new ideas. Assuming that what is actual is temporally necessary at a certain point of time as no longer avoidable, he adds that unrealized counterfactual alternatives are possible at the same time in the sense that they could have happened at that time. There are

also merely imaginable alternatives, such as Socrates' being a bishop, which never had a real basis in things.

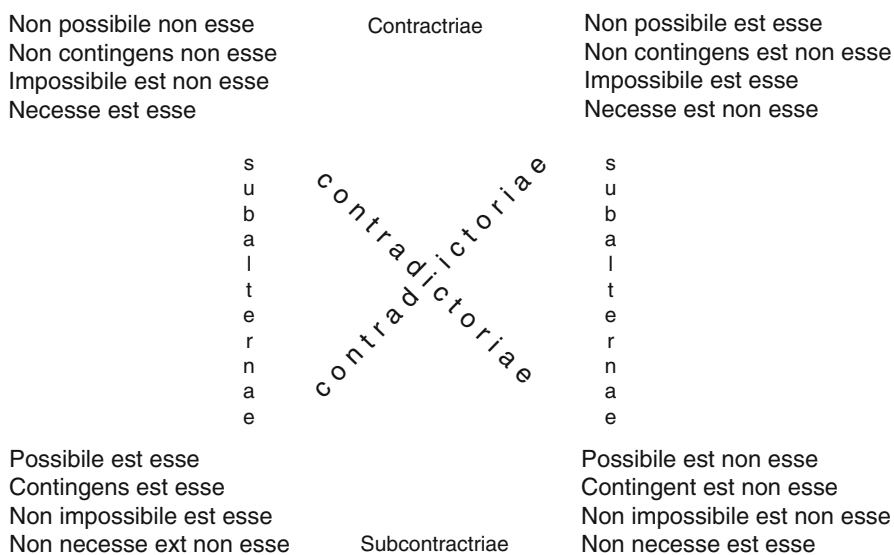
Gilbert of Poitiers stressed the idea that natural regularities which are called natural necessities are not absolute, since they are freely chosen by God and can be overridden by divine power. This basically Augustinian conception had become a widespread theological view in the twelfth century. In explaining Plato's "Platonitas," Gilbert says that this includes all that Plato was, is, and will be, as well as what he could be but never is. The modal element of the individual concept was probably needed in order to speak about Plato in alternative possible histories or, as Abelard did, about Socrates as a bishop. Gilbert seems to have been the first to formulate an individual concept in this way. A significant early thirteenth-century analysis of the modal aspects of the Augustinian theological modalities was put forward by Robert Grosseteste.

A third context of the systematic interest in simultaneous alternatives was the new twelfth-century theory that declarative singular propositions should be primarily treated as temporally definite and as having an unchanging truth-value. This approach was developed by twelfth-century authors, later called *nominales*, one of

whose theses was that "What is once true is always true." It was argued that while tensed statements about temporally definite singular events have a changing truth-value, the corresponding non-tensed propositions are unchangingly true or false, without being necessarily true or false for this reason. This was in agreement with Abelard's view that future contingent propositions are true or false. The actuality of a contingent state of affairs at a specified future time does not exclude the nontemporal possibility of simultaneous alternatives, nor does the truth of a proposition about this state of affairs make it necessary. While medieval commentators usually followed Boethius in assuming that in Aristotle's view future contingent propositions are not true or false, their own position was closer to that of Abelard who in fact ascribed it to Aristotle as well.

Modifying Boethius' systematization of Aristotle's remarks in *De interpretatione* 12 and 13, twelfth- and thirteenth-century logicians often presented the equipollences between modal terms and opposed relations between modal propositions with the help of the following diagram (Fig. 1).

The square could be taken to refer to modals *de dicto* or singular modals *de re* (see below). Abelard tried to define the opposed relations between



**Modal Theories and Modal Logic, Fig. 1** The square of opposition for modal propositions

quantified *de re* modals as well. He thought that these were the same as those between singular modal propositions, which is completely wrong. This question was not much discussed before its satisfactory solution in the new fourteenth-century modal semantics presented in Buridan's famous modal octagon (see below).

The anonymous *Dialectica Monacensis* (c. 1200) involves the analysis of modal propositions which is influenced by Abelard and is found in many medieval logical treatises. In discussing the quantity (universal, particular, and singular) and quality (affirmative and negative) of the modals, the author states that modal terms may be adverbial or nominal. The modal adverb qualifies the copula, and the structure of adverbial modal propositions without negation is:

- 4. Quantity/subject/modalized copula/predicate (e.g., every A is necessarily B).

In this form, the negation may be located in different places, either

- 5. Quantity/subject/copula modalized by a negated mode/predicate (e.g., every A is not necessarily B).

or

- 6. Quantity/subject/modalized negative copula/predicate (e.g., every A is necessarily not B).

If modal propositions with a negation are read in accordance with (5), then the mode is denied; if they are read in accordance with (6), the modal adverb qualifies a negated predication. Modal propositions with the structure of (4)–(6) are also called *de re* or divided modalities. Modal propositions with nominal modes can be taken to mean the same as corresponding adverbial modal propositions or can be taken to mean that what is expressed by a non-modalized proposition is necessary, possible, or impossible. Propositions with non-adverbial nominal modes are singular, their form being:

- 7. Subject/copula/mode (e.g., that every A is B is necessary).

Modal propositions of this structure are called *de dicto* or compound modalities. Modalities *de dicto* are said to be dealt with in Aristotle's *De interpretatione* and modalities *de re* in the *Prior Analytics*.

These distinctions were often mentioned in discussions of the composition-division ambiguity in fallacies – this was their historical background. The compound interpretation of “A standing man can sit” was usually taken to be “It is possible that a man sits and stands at the same time.” Many authors formulated the corresponding divided interpretation as involving a reference to a later or earlier time. The reference to another time was based on the Boethian assumption that the necessity of the present prevents the acceptance of:

- 8. *p* (now) and it is possible that not-*p* (now).

The authors who regarded (8) as false did not operate with counterfactual alternatives, thinking that if an unactualized present possibility is assumed to be actualized, something impossible follows.

As for the logic of unanalyzed modal propositions, Aristotle mentioned its basic inference rules without a further development in *Prior Analytics* I.15. These were dealt with in later ancient discussions and generally accepted in medieval logic as follows: if the antecedent of a good consequence is necessary/possible, the consequent is necessary/possible. However, the main interest was in the modal syllogistics and modalized syllogistic premises, the logic of which was more complicated.

Avicenna wrote a brief summary of Aristotle's modal syllogistics, but his own theory was different, being based on the assumptions that the subject terms and the predicate terms of assertoric and modal propositions stand for all possible applications and the truth-conditions of assertoric propositions and corresponding possibility propositions are the same. It follows that syllogisms with assertoric and necessity premises coincide with syllogisms with possibility and necessity premises and syllogisms with assertoric and possibility premises or with assertoric premises with uniform possibility syllogisms.





While Averroes' commentaries on the *Prior Analytics* followed the main lines of Aristotle's text, his separate treatise on modality involved new systematic ideas, mainly the theory of accidental and per se necessary terms and the interpretation of syllogistic necessity premises as per se necessary predications with per se necessary terms. Both ideas were inspired by Aristotle's remarks in the *Posterior Analytics* I.4; the syllogistic applications were Averroes' own inventions. Since Averroes takes modal premises to be of the divided type, assertoric premises in Aristotelian mixed necessity-assertoric syllogisms must have a predicate term which in fact is necessary. The same applies to the subject term of the first premise in mixed assertoric-necessity syllogisms. This is a speculative explanation of Aristotle's asymmetric treatment of mixed necessity-assertoric syllogisms and mixed assertoric-necessity syllogisms. Analogous essentialist ideas were developed in thirteenth-century Latin discussions.

The first known Latin commentary on *Prior Analytics* is an anonymous late twelfth-century treatise which involves detailed discussions of modal conversion and modal syllogisms as well as many problems dealt with in ancient commentaries. A concise summary of Aristotle's modal syllogistics is also provided in the *Dialectica Monacensis*, and the elements of modal syllogistics were discussed in logic courses in Paris in the first part of the thirteenth century. Robert Kilwardby's commentary (c. 1240) became an authoritative thirteenth-century work on the *Prior Analytics*, from which the discussions of modal syllogistics in Albert the Great's commentary (c. 1250) were also largely derived. The conversion inference rules played an important role in Aristotle's deduction proofs of syllogisms. While the conversion of assertoric propositions ("Every A is B" implies "Some B is A," "Some A is B" is equivalent to "Some B is A" as well as "No A is B" to "No B is A") was frequently discussed in early medieval logic, the modal conversions were not often dealt with before the *Prior Analytics* began to be used in logic teaching in the thirteenth century. According to Aristotle (*An. pr.* I.3), necessity propositions are converted in the same way as the corresponding assertoric propositions;

negative contingency propositions are converted to affirmative contingency propositions of the same quantity and these by the conversion of terms to particular contingency propositions. While these rules are not problematic with respect to modals in the compound (*de dicto*) sense, Aristotle employed them in proving modal syllogisms, some of which seem to be acceptable only when the premises are necessity propositions in the divided (*de re*) sense. However, reading these conversion rules in the divided sense raises questions, since the actuality of a subject changes into necessity when the subject becomes the predicate and similarly with possibility and actuality.

Many historians think that Aristotle's modal syllogistic included various modal insights which did not form a coherent theory. This was not the view of mid-thirteenth-century logicians, who believed that Aristotle's theory was perfect. In discussing the conversion rules and syllogistic moods, they hardly paid attention to the distinction between compound and divided modalities, although some kind of divided reading was the underlying assumption. Many logicians discussed the same alleged counterexamples to the universal conversability of necessity propositions, such as:

9. Everything healthy (or awake) is necessarily an animal.

Robert Kilwardby's explanation is based on the view that convertible necessity premises in modal syllogistics are necessity propositions per se and not per accidens, like (9), which are not convertible. In affirmative necessity propositions per se, the subject is per se connected to the predicate. In negative necessity propositions per se, the subject is per se incompatible with the predicate. The terms in per se inferences or incompatibilities are essential and necessarily stand for the things they signify. The historical background to Kilwardby's interpretation is not clear, but it does show close similarities to Averroes' discussions and may have been influenced by them.

As for the conversion of contingency propositions (neither necessary nor impossible), Kilwardby notes that while the converted

propositions of indefinite (*utrumlibet*) contingency propositions are of the same type of contingency, the conversion of natural contingency propositions (possible in most cases) results in contingency propositions when contingency means possibility proper (not impossible). There were extensive discussions of the kinds of contingency based on various philosophical ideas of contingency in the commentaries by Kilwardby and Albert the Great and in other treatises by their contemporaries.

Following Aristotle's remark according to which "A contingently belongs to B" may mean either "to that to which B belongs" or "to that to which B contingently belongs," Kilwardby argues that the subject terms in contingency syllogisms are read in the second way, having the amplified form "Everything/something that is contingently B is contingently A," if syllogistic relations do not demand restriction. In explaining the difference in this respect between necessity propositions and contingency propositions, Kilwardby argues that since the terms in per se necessity propositions are necessary, "Every A is necessarily B" and "Whatever is necessarily A is necessarily B" mean the same. Contingency propositions which are amplified do not mean the same as those which are not so amplified, although both are convertible.

According to Kilwardby, the modal character of the predication in the conclusion of perfect first-figure syllogisms follows that of the first premise, which involves the whole syllogism in accordance with the *dici de omni et nullo*. The premises and the conclusion in uniform necessity syllogisms are necessary per se. In mixed first-figure syllogisms with a major necessity premise and a minor assertoric premise, the non-modalized premise should be *simpliciter* assertoric, that is, a necessarily true per se predication. Similarly, in mixed first-figure syllogisms with contingent major and assertoric minor premises, the assertoric premise must be *simpliciter* assertoric, but this time the criteria are that the predicate belongs to the subject per se, invariably or by natural contingency.

Kilwardby explains the various readings of assertoric premises of mixed syllogisms by stating

that a first-figure major necessity premise "appropriates" to itself a minor which is necessary per se. No such appropriation occurs in first-figure mixed assertoric-necessity syllogisms. In the second figure, while the universal negative necessity premise appropriates a necessary premise to itself, a particular necessity premise cannot appropriate a universal necessary premise to itself, nor an affirmative a negative. There are similar appropriation rules for third-figure moods. In a mixed first-figure necessity-contingency mood, the first premise appropriates a natural contingency minor to itself. While the major premise of a mixed first-figure assertoric contingency syllogism does not appropriate a minor premise of any special contingency, the major premise of a mixed first-figure contingency-assertoric syllogism demands a simply assertoric minor premise which is true in most cases, if not necessary.

Kilwardby and his followers considered Aristotle's modal syllogistics as the correct theory of modalities, the explication of which demanded metaphysical considerations. Restricting the modal conversion of necessity propositions into those involving necessary terms and the discussions of the kinds of contingency are examples of this approach as well as the various appropriation rules. Kilwardby assumed that propositions of the same form had different interpretations, depending on how they were related to other propositions in a syllogism. From the logical point of view, the rules pertaining to this variation have an ad hoc character.

Late medieval discussions of necessity and possibility were strongly influenced by the modal theory of John Duns Scotus, who took as an obvious fact that there are contingent states of affairs which could be otherwise at that very moment of time at which they are actual. This idea of simultaneous alternatives played an important role in Scotus' proofs for the existence of a necessary first being which acts as the free first cause of the contingent world. Augustine had already argued that the eternal and immutable creative act of divine will is free only if it is a choice between alternatives and could be other than it is. This conception was developed in much more detail in Scotus' metaphysics. God's

omniscience involves all possibilities, which as objects of God's knowledge receive an intelligible or objective being. Some of these are included in God's providential plan of creation and will receive actual being. The description of a possible state of affairs at a certain moment consists of compossible possibilities. Although possibilities necessarily are what they are, the actualizations of non-necessary possibilities are not necessary but contingent. Since all finite things are contingently actual when they are actual, they are associated with alternative possibilities with respect to the same time, though these are not compossible with what is actual. Impossibilities are impossibilities between possible components, such as Socrates' sitting at a certain time and Socrates' not sitting at that same time.

One of Scotus' new ideas was the domain of possibility as a nonexistent objective precondition of all being and thinking. This was well known in the seventeenth century as well through Suárez's works. In his discussion of eternal truths, Descartes criticized the classical view of the ontological foundation of modality as well as the Scotist theory of modality and conceivability. He thought that necessities and possibilities as such are freely established by God and that they could therefore be different from what they are. This was criticized by Leibniz, whose modal views were influenced by the Scotist conception of alternativeness, although he developed it in a different way. Another influential idea was the systematic distinction between logical and natural necessities and possibilities; this called for new explanations of what was meant by the necessities of natural philosophy, the denials of which were not logically inconsistent.

One important branch of medieval logic developed in treatises called *De obligationibus* dealt, roughly speaking, with how an increasing set of true and false propositions accepted in a disputation might remain coherent. According to thirteenth-century rules, false present-tense statements could be accepted as expressing possible positions only if they were taken to refer to a moment of time different from the actual one. Scotus deleted this rule, which was based on the thesis of the necessity of the present, and later

theories accepted the Scotist revision. Obligations logic could now be regarded as a theory of how to deal with logically possible states of affairs and their mutual relationships. These discussions were related to the interest in counterfactual reasoning. As mentioned above, Averroes and Aquinas developed a theory of abstract possibilities for dealing with counterfactual assumptions without the theoretical idea of simultaneous alternatives. John Buridan heavily criticized this approach from the point of view of the new modal theory. Investigating possibilities is to think about them as actualized in a coherent context of compossibilities. If the abstract possibilities in Averroes and Aquinas cannot be treated in this way, calling them possibilities is based on a conceptual confusion.

William Ockham, John Buridan, and some other fourteenth-century logicians took the new notion of logical possibility as the starting point of their modal logic, which largely dropped the thirteenth-century essentialist assumptions and consequently became much more complete and satisfactory. Questions of modal logic were discussed separately with respect to modal propositions *de dicto* and *de re*; modal propositions *de re* were further divided into two groups depending on whether the subject terms referred to actual or possible beings. It was thought that logicians should also analyze the relationships between these readings and, furthermore, the consequences with various types of modal propositions as their parts. Richard of Campsall played an interesting role in the development of medieval modal syllogistics. He introduced the habit of treating the *de dicto* and *de re* moods separately, but he was also dependent on Kilwardby's interpretation. The new modal logic of William Ockham, John Buridan, and Pseudo-Scotus was among the most remarkable achievements of medieval logic. Aristotle's modal syllogistics was now regarded as a fragmentary theory in which the distinctions between different types of fine structures were not explicated. These authors did not try to reconstruct it as such into a uniform system, believing, like some modern commentators, that such a reconstruction is not possible. Buridan's modal logic, dominant in late medieval

times, was embraced by such influential authors as Marsilius of Inghen, Albert of Saxony, and Jodocus Trutfetter. The rise of the new modal logic was accompanied by theories of epistemic logic and deontic logic which also belong among the remarkable achievements of late medieval philosophy.

## Cross-References

- ▶ [Albert the Great](#)
- ▶ [Anselm of Canterbury](#)
- ▶ [Augustine](#)
- ▶ [Boethius](#)
- ▶ [Gilbert of Poitiers](#)
- ▶ [Ibn Rushd, Muḥammad ibn Aḥmad al-Ḥafīd \(Averroes\)](#)
- ▶ [John Buridan](#)
- ▶ [John Duns Scotus](#)
- ▶ [Logic in the Arabic and Islamic World](#)
- ▶ [Peter Abelard](#)
- ▶ [Posterior Analytics, Commentaries on Aristotle's](#)
- ▶ [Robert Grosseteste](#)
- ▶ [Robert Kilwardby](#)
- ▶ [Syllogism, Theories of](#)
- ▶ [Thomas Aquinas](#)
- ▶ [William of Ockham](#)

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## Modistae

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### Abstract

*Modistae* is the name of a group of Parisian grammarians and philosophers who lived in the period between 1270 and 1300, the most important being Martin of Dacia, Radulphus Brito, and Thomas of Erfurt. Their work on grammar and logic is characterized by the intention to situate these former liberal arts within the medieval system of sciences. In order to achieve this goal, they had to find universal objects for these new sciences. The result was the introduction of the concept of modes of signifying (*modi significandi*) in grammar, denoting the general meanings of words which constitute grammatical categories. In logic, they shared the opinion of other intentionalists of their time that the

proper subject of logic is the second intention. In grammar as well as in logic they assumed a complete interdependence between the structure of reality and the operations of the mind. To warrant the foundation of our mental and linguistic operations in reality, they argued that every extra-mental object has various modes of being (*modi essendi*), which serve as the ontological counterpart of the modes of signifying and the second intentions.

The term *Modistae* is used to denote the, mostly Parisian, masters of the late thirteenth and early fourteenth century who wrote on grammar, logic, and metaphysics. They worked within a tradition that had its origin in ancient Latin grammar but had undergone considerable change under the influence of the work of scholars such as Robert Grosseteste, Peter Helias, Robert Kilwardby, and many anonymous commentators on Priscian ( $\pm$  500), the author of the *Institutiones grammaticae*, the standard textbook for the study of Latin during the Middle Ages. The first representatives of the modist school were the Danish grammarians Boethius and Martin of Dacia ( $\pm$  1270), but the most important author was Radulphus Brito ( $\pm$  1290). The last significant member of the group was Thomas of Erfurt ( $\pm$  1300), whose work *Grammatica speculativa* is considered the most complete modistic treatment of grammatical theory available (Bursill-Hall 1971; Thomas of Erfurt 1972; Pinborg 1982; Rosier 1983).

In the early Middle Ages, grammar was one of the seven liberal arts, the most important of which were the arts belonging to the so-called *trivium*: grammar, logic, and rhetoric. Grammar was the art of speaking well, vocal expressions being its object. After the recovery of Aristotle's *Posterior Analytics*, however, the ideas about grammar changed: grammarians now wanted to make grammar a science. This scientific approach to grammar was called "speculative grammar" (Bursill-Hall 1971). Taking seriously Aristotle's requirements for the construction of a scientific theory, the *Modistae* were looking for universal and immutable objects that could function as the foundation of their science. Since speech

differs from one language to another, vocal expressions could no longer constitute the immutable objects of a universal grammar. Thus, grammarians became philosophers, speculating about the universal features of language, in particular, the construction of linguistic expressions. The *Modistae* were interested in the meanings of words in so far as these meanings constitute grammatical categories, such as nouns, verbs, cases, or tenses, the so-called modes of signifying (*modi significandi*). The modes of signifying were the principles of grammar.

According to modistic analysis, words acquire their meaning by a deliberate act of imposition (*impositio*; Knudsen 1982). In a first imposition, a sound (*vox*) is connected with a referent. The relation between sound and referent is called the *ratio significandi*. The result of this coupling of expression and meaning is a so-called *dictio*, which is not yet a word or term in the logical sense, but rather a lexeme (Pinborg 1972). This lexeme can become a term and part of speech when it has received, as a result of a secondary imposition, a number of modes of signifying. The following example may help to make this clearer. The English word “drink” would be a manifestation of the lexeme “drink,” which includes all occurrences of the word “drink,” “drinker,” “drinking,” etc. For this lexeme to become a particular term or part of speech (*pars orationis*), as in “drinks are served at the bar,” several modes of signifying are necessary, in this case the modes of noun, plural, and nominative case. It is clear, then, that the object referred to by the lexeme is not a particular thing, but a more or less abstract content not yet determined in a category. Now the modes of signifying prepare the lexeme for various syntactical functions. Each lexeme has one essential mode of signifying and various other modes. The essential mode determines to which fundamental grammatical category it will belong, for example, noun or verb, whereas other modes provide it with less basic grammatical features, such as tense, case, or number.

As a result of their philosophical background, the *Modistae* believed that there is a structural parallel between language, thought, and reality,

but unlike philosophers they were not interested in truth conditions of sentences, but in the construction of linguistic expressions (Rosier 1994). Such a construction is a union of two parts of speech (*partes orationis*), for example, a noun and a verb, or a noun and an adjective. Each part has its own modes of signifying. A construction is well formed if the modes of one part of speech are compatible with the modes of the other part, for example, a part of speech with the modes of signifying of noun, plural and accusative case, would in many cases be compatible with another part of speech with the modes of participle, and present tense, as in the expression “selling books.”

Although the aim of speculative grammar was to describe relationships between linguistic elements, the *Modistae* had to take the structure of reality into account. To ensure the scientific status of their doctrine, they needed an ontological foundation (*fundamentum in re*) of the modes of signifying. Being moderate realists, the *Modistae* assumed that the structure of reality is mirrored in language and thought. As the necessary ontological counterparts of the modes of signifying, they introduced the modes of being (*modi essendi*), which they considered to be accidental properties of the extra-mental objects, as distinct from their substantial form. Furthermore, since modes of being cannot be signified without being understood, a mental counterpart was needed: the modes of understanding (*modi intelligendi*), i.e., our concepts. The modes of signifying correspond with the modes of understanding, and through these they find their ontological foundation in the modes of being. This modistic “triangle of modes” is in accordance with the traditional interpretation of Aristotle’s *De interpretatione* chapter 1, according to which words signify concepts and concepts are natural likenesses of extra-mental objects. Later philosophers criticized the modists for confusing linguistic distinctions with real ones (Pinborg 1982), but this confusion was a consequence of their Aristotelian conception of science.

The grammatical theory of the modes of signifying also determined the modistic outlook on logic (Pinborg 1975a). The *Modistae* were



interested in metalogical questions about the status of logical concepts. In their view, logic should be considered not as an art, as in the tradition of the liberal arts, but as a science, and what holds for grammar also holds for logic: if it is to be a science, its object must be immutable and eternal. In the case of logic, this object appeared to be the second intention. Second intentions are concepts of a certain kind, which are supposed to be universal and objective and to have a foundation in reality (*fundamentum in re*), for example, “genus,” “species,” “proposition,” and “syllogism.”

Thomas Aquinas and other intentionalists in the Middle Ages considered second intentions as second order concepts (concepts of concepts) and first intentions as concepts of extra-mental things. The *Modistae*, however, were of the opinion that second intentions are only secondary in the sense that they presuppose first intentions. Both first and second intentions are first order concepts, in their view. Moreover, an intention is a concept as well as the foundation of its content; it can be every extra-mental object as far as it is known, for example, a man as conceived (De Rijk 2005). This reflects the epistemological view that the human intellect grasps extra-mental objects through concepts that designate these things, including the ways in which they are conceived.

First and second intentions result from the operations of the intellect in the following way. The act of apprehension produces first intentions like “man” and “animal” and second intentions like “genus” and “species”; the act of judgment generates first intentions like “man is an animal” and second intentions like “conclusion” and “proposition”; and the act of reasoning brings about first intentions like “every man runs, Socrates is a man, therefore Socrates runs,” and second intentions like “syllogism” (Pinborg 1975b). The second intentions are the proper objects of logic, according to the *Modistae*, but the most interesting question is: how do they see the extra-mental foundation of these concepts? Here, the modes of being appear to be useful again.

Both first and second intentions are drawn from the modes of being (*modi essendi*) of extra-mental objects: first intentions from the proper

modes of being and second intentions from the common modes of being. Second intentions conceive and signify extra-mental objects under a common mode of being. In this process, the intellect and the object cooperate, for example, the extra-mental object man has a proper mode of being from which the first intention “man” can be drawn and a common mode of being which is the foundation of the second intention “universal.” The accidental properties (of being) of the extramental object man are the foundation of the concepts “man” and “universal.” Logicians consider things according to their common modes of being. Therefore, second intentions are their primary object of study (De Rijk 2005).

The theory of second intentions sketched above is the version of this theory that can be found in the work of Radulphus Brito. In his view, all second intentions have a relation to the real world, although it is less clear how this works in the case of conclusions and syllogisms, which seem to be examples of mental constructions. Anyhow, the Modists’ views on grammar and logic are formed by the same intention: to make sciences out of these liberal arts. In both cases, their inspiration was Aristotle’s conception of science and its focus on the immutability of scientific objects. Their opinions were severely criticized by later philosophers (De Rijk 2005), but their foundation of logic and grammar in reality was an expression of the intellectual climate of the end of the thirteenth century.

## Cross-References

- ▶ [Boethius of Dacia](#)
- ▶ [Intention, Primary and Secondary](#)
- ▶ [Radulphus Brito](#)
- ▶ [Robert Kilwardby](#)

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conceptualized a moral dilemma to consist of a pair of contradictories, where an agent must select between an act and its omission, both of which are morally prohibited or sinful. The high level of theorizing about moral dilemmas in the medieval period occasioned the gradual development and clarification of a variety of moral principles that are still discussed in present-day philosophical literature. These principles include “ought implies can,” “always choose the lesser evil,” and the principle of double effect. Discussing moral dilemmas became standardized with the practice of producing commentaries on Peter Lombard's *Sententiae*. Distinction 39 of Book II of that magisterial theological textbook became the *locus classicus* for discussions of *perplexitas*, and the issue also surfaced as a popular topic in quodlibetal disputations. The medieval debate over the existence of moral dilemmas was largely interdisciplinary, as earlier canon law theorizing greatly influenced later discussions among theologians and philosophers. The legal tradition provided thinkers not only with a distinctive terminology but also supplied many stock examples for discussion that at times featured agents in unusual situations.

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## Moral Dilemma Theory

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### Abstract

Many philosophers, theologians, and canonists in the Latin West during the twelfth through fifteenth centuries regularly considered whether an agent could ever face a necessary choice between sinful options. This medieval theorizing about the possibility of inescapable moral wrongdoing was usually framed in terms of whether an agent ever experiences genuine perplexity (*perplexitas*) or is genuinely perplexed (*perplexus*). Medieval theorists often

## Development of the Concept of *Perplexitas*

The beginning of serious theorizing about the problem of moral dilemmas in the medieval period arose in the canon law tradition with the appearance of Gratian's masterwork, the *Decretum*, in the mid-twelfth century. In distinction XIII of that famous legal textbook, Gratian advised that no exemption from the natural law is allowable except perhaps for agents who find themselves obliged to select from a pair of evils. Appealing to authorities (including Gregory the Great), Gratian argued that agents in such situations should always choose the lesser evil. Opposition to Gratian's position appears to have been swift, as the influential multi-authored commentary on the *Decretum*, the *Glossa ordinaria*,

severely criticized the master of canon law for this position, on the grounds that all wrongdoing must be voluntary and all ordinances must in principle be capable of being fulfilled by agents. The opposed positions of Gratian and the Glossators were reflected in the two accepted senses of the Latin term *perplexitas*. Gratian emphasized the metaphysical sense of the term as “entanglement” or “ensnarement,” and the Glossators emphasized the epistemic sense of the term as “confusion” or “doubt.” Against Gratian, the Glossators contended that agents who believe themselves to be in moral dilemmas are really only confused, and such agents should overcome their ignorance or foolishness to see that there is always a morally blameless or morally permissible course of action for every situation.

Gratian and his Glossators became the two most significant authorities for all subsequent medieval theorizing about moral dilemmas. Their opposed positions were frequently invoked by later discussants of moral dilemmas in the centuries that followed. In the 1200s, canon law theorizing and its general supply of stock cases of *perplexitas* slowly and gradually migrated to theology. By the early thirteenth century, the wholesale appropriation of this portion of the canon law tradition by Latin theologians was complete. The first major systematic and substantive exposition is found in the *Summa aurea* of William of Auxerre, which was followed then by a similar treatment in the Franciscan compendium attributed to Alexander of Hales, the *Summa Halesiana*. Both works analyze alleged cases of moral dilemmas involving agents who are seemingly entangled between sinful options. Later medieval discussions appearing in works of various genres, such as Antoninus of Florence’s *Summa*, Johannes Capreolus’s *Defensiones*, or John of Freiburg’s *Summa confessorum*, still framed the issue in light of the opposed authoritative positions of Gratian and the Glossators.

Thomas Aquinas is strangely silent about Gratian and the Glossators in his account of moral dilemmas. He argues that an innocent agent will never be unqualifiedly perplexed (*perplexus simpliciter*). Nevertheless, a prior fault (e.g., an infelicitous vow, or a badly formed

conscience, or an unrepented sin) can make the fulfillment of future obligations impossible, and such an agent can be said to be qualifiedly perplexed (*perplexus secundum quid*). In his discussion of a stock example heavily discussed in the canon law tradition, Aquinas notes that an unrepentant priest who persists in fornicating cannot fulfill his obligation to say mass worthily while remaining in a state of sin. Such situations constitute self-imposed, prior-fault dilemmas, and agents in them should rectify the bad effects of their previous wrongs to fulfill their future impending obligations. In this particular case, Aquinas notes, the priest should simply repent to solve the situation of *perplexitas*.

### Moral Dilemma Strategies

Gratian’s famous advice for agents who find themselves in situations of unavoidable wrongdoing was to choose the lesser evil. Gratian had indicated that determining which of two evils is greater, and which is lesser, is an exercise of reason, and later commentators understood Gratian to be distinguishing between the traditional categories of moral failure known as mortal sin and venial sin. Even within the more serious category of mortal sin, the longstanding tradition of the seven capital vices – the so-called deadly sins – implied a hierarchical ordering where even greater and lesser mortal sins could be determined. Following the Glossators, the great majority of medieval theorists considered moral dilemmas to be simply epistemic, that is, to be simply the result of the ignorance and confusion on the part of agents. Their recommendation to perplexed agents was that they should increase their knowledge by asking for advice from the wise, consulting the scriptures, and the like. In contrast, Ramon Llull provides a striking autobiographical defense of the existence of genuine moral dilemmas and offers a distinctively theological resolution. In his *Vita coetanea*, Llull discusses his own situations of *perplexitas*, and he depicts them as being resolved through divine interventions that follow from petitionary prayer.

## Moral Principles

Medieval theorizing about the possibility of moral dilemmas prompted detailed consideration of various moral principles, such as the above-mentioned principle of the lesser evil. Another principle, expressed today as “ought implies can” can be found in a variety of notable medieval formulations, such as “no one is obliged to do the impossible” or “it is always possible to avoid sin.” Theorizing about moral dilemmas also occasioned discussions of related philosophical topics such as free will, culpability, the conditions of voluntariness, the possibility of virtue, as well as fundamental theological issues including judgment, salvation, and damnation.

One frequently-discussed stock example of *perplexitas* occasioned the development of the principle of double effect. The example involves an agent who is questioned by an unjust aggressor regarding the whereabouts of an innocent party. In various formulations, the agent is described by many medieval theorists as *perplexus* between the sinful prongs of (1) committing the venial sin of lying to the unjust aggressor in order to shield the innocent party, or (2) committing the mortal sin of revealing the whereabouts of the innocent party by answering truthfully. A common response by some theorists, likely inspired by St. Augustine’s influential writings on the topic of lying, holds that an agent can maintain silence in such a scenario without sin, on the justification that any foreseen but unintended evils that may befall the innocent party because of the silence will fall entirely outside the agent’s ambit of moral culpability and will be credited to the unjust aggressor alone. Solutions of this type provided an early formulation of the principle of double effect, as they explicitly required a determination what is outside the intention (*praeter intentionem*) of the agent.

## Later Theorizing

Much of the medieval theorizing on moral dilemmas, including the collection of standard cases of *perplexitas* treated by medieval

philosophers and theologians, resurfaced among ethicists of the early modern period, when great attention was placed on the problem of moral uncertainty. Defenders of the moral theory of probabilism incorporated many of the examples and distinctions of the earlier period, and in this later reincarnation of the medieval debate the canon law origins of the medieval discussion largely fell from view.

## Cross-References

- ▶ [Canon Law](#)
- ▶ [Ethics](#)
- ▶ [Peter Lombard](#)
- ▶ [Ramon Llull](#)
- ▶ [Thomas Aquinas](#)
- ▶ [William of Auxerre](#)

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## Moses Maimonides

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### Abstract

The article deals with the leading Jewish philosopher of the Middle Ages, Moses Maimonides. It provides an overview of the topics he deals with in his treatise, *The Guide of the Perplexed*. These topics include the nature of God, the creation of the world, miracles and prophecy, the problem of evil, providence, and human perfection.

### Biographical Information

Moses Maimonides (b. 1138, Cordoba; d. 1204, Cairo) was not only the most important Jewish philosopher of the Middle Ages, but one of the greatest scholars of Jewish Law of all ages, and a leading physician in his period. He also served as head of the Jewish community in Egypt. Maimonides' philosophy finds expression not only in his treatise, *The Guide of the Perplexed*, but also in his legal writings, most notably the opening chapters of the *Mishneh Torah* and in some sections of his *Commentary on the Mishnah*, in some of his medical writings, such as *Medical Aphorisms*, and in some of his epistles, such as *Treatise on Resurrection*. In this article I will confine myself to Maimonides' thought as it emerges from the *Guide*.

## Philosophy

### *The Guide of the Perplexed: An Overview*

Maimonides' *The Guide of the Perplexed* is not a philosophical work in the strict sense of the term. His primary intent in writing this treatise is not in order to expand the borders of philosophical knowledge or to explore topics on the basis of reason alone. It is closer in spirit to theology, defining and rationally defending basic religious tenets. Yet it is far different from the classic works belonging to this genre, such as Thomas Aquinas' *Summa theologica* which is far more systematic in its presentation. The *Guide* devotes as much attention to the interpretation of Scriptural verses and passages from rabbinic texts as to rational argumentation and the rationale behind the order in which it presents its topics and the manner in which they are presented is not always evident.

In the introduction to his treatise Maimonides indicates that he wrote it for the individual who was steeped in Jewish tradition and went on to study philosophy, becoming in the process perplexed by the seeming contradictions between these two areas. Such an individual often feels that he is faced with an either/or choice – either to remain loyal to religious tradition at the expense of human reason or to abandon tradition in deference to reason. Maimonides sets out to show that there is another alternative – the reinterpretation of traditional texts in light of reason. Tradition hides certain profound truths from the masses by presenting them in a figurative manner in accordance with their limited capacities. Maimonides is very much influenced in this matter by the Platonic political tradition, particularly as developed by the Islamic philosopher al-Fārābī. Most people are not prepared to appreciate the bright light of the truth and are blinded by it instead. Only with the attainment of wisdom does one begin to appreciate the truths underlying the Bible and rabbinic writings and understands that not all their words should be interpreted literally. Certain terms have figurative meanings and the prophets often speak in allegories. The corporeal descriptions of God, for example, are meant to uphold the masses' belief in God, since they can only accept the existence of corporeal entities.

In truth, however, all these descriptions should be interpreted in a figurative manner. Maimonides feels that the time was ripe to reveal the truth of God's incorporeality to all the adherents of Judaism and insist that they uphold this belief. Many other topics, however, must continue to be presented in a veiled manner – for example, the Account of Creation at the beginning of the book of Genesis and the Account of the Chariot at the beginning of the book of Ezekiel – in order not to disturb the faith of the masses.

Maimonides explicitly indicates that while he will attempt to further enlighten his readers on the true meaning of traditional texts dealing with the most profound topics pertaining to Jewish thought, he will at the same time uphold the spirit of the prohibition not to present these truths explicitly but only hint at them. One of the techniques he employs is that of purposeful contradictions in his treatise in order to hide what he regards as the true view. Another is the diffusion of remarks hinting to his true view on a given topic in the context of his discussion of a different topic. Thus, to reconstruct Maimonides' position on a given topic, it is important not only to pay close attention to the manner he presents his positions and the premises underlying them, but also to study the treatise in its entirety and not only the chapters pertaining to the topic in question. Maimonides assumes that the average reader is an inattentive reader who will not pick up on his hints. His writing technique, however, has resulted through the centuries in far different interpretations of the views he presents in his treatise.

From Maimonides' introduction it is tempting to conclude that he sees the esoteric level of the traditional texts of Jewish tradition as being in essential agreement with the Aristotelian philosophical conception of the world, while on their exoteric level they appear to contradict the worldview of the philosophers. Otherwise why would he go to such extremes to hide his true views? This indeed has been the thrust of one important school of interpretation of the treatise throughout the ages, whose most famous modern exponent has been Leo Strauss. Yet in the *Guide* itself much of the most significant *philosophical* argumentation goes to proving that the philosophers accepted

doctrines not demonstrably proven by reason and the traditional doctrines are in fact more in harmony with the dictates of reason. This is particularly true of Maimonides' discussion of the creation of the world, which will be discussed in more detail below.

Maimonides divides his treatise in three sections. Many of the chapters of the first section form a philosophical lexicon, for the most part devoted to showing how terms connoting God's corporeality or the corporeality of the angels should be interpreted figuratively. He also deals with the problems involved in attaining philosophical knowledge and the limits of human reason. Beginning with Chap. 50 of the first part he enters into a detailed discussion of divine attributes and the names of God. He also presents his view of God's relation to the world. All the positions he presents are in harmony with the Neoplatonized version of Aristotelian philosophy prevalent in his period. Maimonides concludes the first part by expounding in detail the proofs for the existence, unity, and incorporeality of God as presented in Moslem theology, the *kalām*, after depicting its fundamental premises. While he displays an exceptionally critical approach to this theology, particularly the premises upon which it is based, for the most part regarding them as false, he nevertheless ascribes to it an important role in proving God's existence. The theologians prove God by first proving that the world is created. Maimonides argues that their proofs for creation are not demonstrative, resulting in their proofs for the existence of God being non-demonstrative. The Aristotelian philosophic proofs for the existence of God, on the other hand, are based on the premise that the world is without beginning. This too in Maimonides' view has not been adequately demonstrated. We have then two sets of proofs for God based on contradictory propositions – that is, the world is created and the world is without beginning. Neither set provides us with a demonstrative proof for God's existence. Yet if we combine both sets we have a demonstrative proof, since the world must be either created or without beginning, there is no third alternative. If we assume that the proofs for the creation of the world are correct, then the *kalām* has provided



us with a demonstrative proof for the existence of God. If we assume that the proofs for eternity *a parte ante* of the world are correct, then the Aristotelian philosophers have provided us with a demonstrative proof.

Interestingly, Maimonides analyzes the philosophic proofs and the 26 premises upon which they are based at the beginning of the second part of the treatise, rather than at the end of the first. As opposed to his approach to the *kalām* he expresses full agreement with all the philosophic premises with the crucial exception of one – that time and movement are eternal and always existed in *actu*. In the following chapters of this part (Chaps. 2–12) Maimonides proceeds to express his agreement also with the Aristotelian view how God governs the world through the order of nature and shows how Scripture should be interpreted accordingly. All physical changes in the world result from the fixed motion of the living spheres, each standing in relation to a Separate Intellect, with God serving as the First Cause and the Unmoved Mover on the pinnacle of the hierarchy of existence. The one point on which Maimonides breaks with the view of the philosophers is on the question of creation. The philosophers claim that the world with its fixed order always existed, God serving as the eternal First Cause of an eternal world eternally emanating from Him. Maimonides claims that God created the world and its order *ex nihilo*. Chapters 13–31 are devoted to negating the philosophic arguments for the eternity of the world and providing philosophic and religious arguments for its creation. Maimonides also discusses the question whether the world is eternal *a parte post* and presents his philosophic exegesis of the Account of Creation. In the context of this discussion he deals with the problem of miracles (Chap. 29). He concludes the second part of the *Guide* with an analysis of the phenomenon of prophecy (Chaps. 32–48), drawing a sharp distinction between this phenomenon, for the most part treated by him as a natural one, and two other phenomena which he treats as supernatural – the prophecy of Moses and the Revelation at Sinai. One can see that the acceptance of the doctrine of creation allows Maimonides to break with the

Aristotelian philosophers, at least according to his explicit views, on the issue of purposeful exceptions to the natural order. Only the God of creation can also be the God of history, though Maimonides attempts to limit the occurrence of miracles and God's immediate involvement in human affairs.

The third part of the *Guide* opens with a philosophical exegesis of the Account of the Chariot (Chaps. 1–7), treating Ezekiel's vision of the heavenly world as essentially presenting the order of the spheres and their Movers and their influence on the four sublunar elements – that is to say the scientific picture of the world – in an allegorical manner. The next topics that Maimonides discusses are the problems of evil, personal providence, and God's knowledge of particulars. He also presents a philosophical analysis of the Book of Job (Chaps. 8–24). He continues with a lengthy excursus of the reasons for the divine commandments presented in the Pentateuch (Chaps. 25–50), and concludes the *Guide* with a discussion of human perfection (Chaps. 51–54).

### God

In his discussion of God's essence Maimonides combines Neoplatonic and Aristotelian ideas. Maimonides' God is the absolute One from whom all positive attributes must be negated. These not only include attributes belonging to the Aristotelian categories pertaining to material beings, such as quantity, quality, place, time, relation etc., but even such attributes as living and powerful. Anything that entails change or multiplicity in God cannot be ascribed to Him. For Maimonides all corporeal descriptions of God in Scripture should be interpreted figuratively and all positive attributes attributed to God should be understood as either negative attributes or attributes of action. When Scripture says, for example, that God is alive and powerful, the intent is not to attribute the attributes of life and power to God but to indicate that God is not dead or powerless. Descriptions of God as merciful or vengeful are not meant to ascribe to Him these human emotions but to describe the divine actions which when translated into the human sphere are most often

seen as stemming from such emotion. Hence, war and famine are ascribed to divine wrath, while plentiful crops are traced to divine mercy. Numerous and even contradictory actions, Maimonides argues, can stem from a single essence without entailing multiplicity, just as fire by virtue of a single quality blackens, bleaches, cooks, burns, melts, and hardens.

Together with the doctrine of negative attributes Maimonides appears to maintain the view that God lives, knows, and is powerful in some positive sense. His solution to the problems raised by this position is to argue that God lives, but not through life; knows, but not through knowledge, etc. That is to say, in reference to God these are not attributes superadded to the divine essence but all are one with the essence. God's knowledge, thus, is totally different from our knowledge, having nothing in common with it, and hence completely incomprehensible to us.

Maimonides' God is also Avicenna's Necessary Existent. Like Avicenna, Maimonides treats existence as an attribute superadded to essence. God is the one existent whose essence necessitates existence. All other existents attain their existence from an external cause; hence, their existence is only possible by nature. If their cause did not bring them into existence they would not exist.

In addition to viewing God as the absolute One who possesses no positive attributes and whose essence is unfathomable, as well as the Necessary Existent, Maimonides continues to uphold the Aristotelian view of God as Self-intellecting intellect, thereby treating God's essence as intellect. According to Maimonides, God's self-intellection encompasses all existence in a single thought, since God is the cause of all existence. The transcendent deity is at the same time the ultimate efficient, final, and formal cause of the world, the world being regarded by him as a single organism. Maimonides insists that while the world's existence is completely dependent upon God – the world could not exist even for a fleeting second without God existing – God's existence is in no manner dependent upon the world. All apparent contradictions entailed by these diverse

views of God are reconciled by God's absolute, unfathomable "otherness."

### Creation

At the outset of the discussion Maimonides presents three fundamentally different views on this issue: the traditional view treating the world in its entirety as created *ex nihilo*; the Platonic view that the world is created from eternal matter since creation *ex nihilo* is regarded as absolutely impossible; the Aristotelian view that the world existed without beginning with God as its source. Since the Platonists, like the Aristotelians, posit some form of eternal state to the world, Maimonides feels that it is sufficient to tackle the more rigorous arguments of the Aristotelians on this question and ignore the Platonic approach. Maimonides maintains that while the Aristotelians have presented many arguments in support of their view, none of them is demonstrative. He summarizes and critiques the known philosophic arguments for eternity showing that each suffers from a major flaw. The philosophic proofs are either predicated on the laws of physics, such as every motion must be preceded by a motion, hence motion is without beginning, or on theological premises, such as creation entails a change in God, while it has been demonstrated that God is not subject to any form of change. Against the former set of proofs Maimonides argues that physical laws came into being with the creation of the world and do not reflect the state of affairs prior to creation. In other words, they are natural laws, and not logical ones, which God introduced when creating the world. The theological proofs for eternity are regarded by Maimonides as more compelling since they are based on the nature of the Deity. He argues that the act of creation does not entail the movement from potentiality to actuality, nor does the act of willing after not willing entail a change of essence since this is the essence of will – that is to say, to will or not will. Only if we posit external factors influencing the divine will would this entail a change in God. The argument that just as God's wisdom, which mandated the creation of the world is eternal so must the world be eternal is dismissed by Maimonides on

the grounds that we do not fathom the divine wisdom which may have mandated the creation of a non-eternal world.

Maimonides concedes that his critique of the philosophic arguments does not in itself constitute a proof for creation, it only shows that creation is possible from a philosophic perspective. Maimonides presents one dialectical argument for creation which he finds rationally compelling, one based on the notion of “particularization” – that is to say, the peculiarities exhibited by the heavenly order which indicate that they are a product of design. While the Aristotelians, according to Maimonides, can provide a true explanation for the lack of uniformity in the entities of the earth, they have no convincing explanation for the lack of uniformity in the size of the planets or the differences in their motion. Since these particulars cannot result from natural necessity – the matter of which the heavenly bodies are composed is completely uniform – they must be the product of one who particularized them in this manner. This in turn entails their creation. Maimonides is aware that one can still argue that God may have particularized them in this manner from eternity. His rejoinder is that the eternity of the world entails necessity, eternal creation being an oxymoron, and only by positing the world’s creation from a state of absolute nonexistence, can one explain those particularities of the heavenly order that reflect divine purpose and will.

A version of this argument was already brought by al-Ġazālī in his *Incoherence of the Philosophers* with a critical difference. Al-Ġazālī tries to show that there are aspects of the heavens that reflect the workings of absolute will that can choose between alternatives that are completely alike from the perspective of reason. This proves the existence of a divine will which has in its power the creation of a world when it wills, though there is no rational reason why it chose to create it when it did as opposed to any other possible moment. Maimonides treats the creation of the world with all its peculiarities not only the result of will but also purpose and wisdom. There is for him a rational reason for all the particularities of the heavenly order and they are not the product of will alone. According to

Maimonides, the eternity, hence the necessity, of the world does not leave room for the designing of a heavenly world in which all its non-standardized particulars are the product of wisdom.

To the philosophic arguments in favor of creation Maimonides also brings a list of theological arguments. Creation is in harmony with the literal meaning of the Torah, which should be maintained when there is no demonstrative argument against the literal reading. Moreover, only by positing creation can we explain why God granted certain individuals prophecy and why He gave a certain nation the divine law and why He legislated certain prohibitions. A world governed by natural necessity provides no answers to these questions – in short, it leaves no room for revelatory religion.

#### **The God of Nature Versus the God of History: Miracles and Prophecy**

While the doctrine of creation leaves open the possibility of miracles, Maimonides takes pains to argue their limited occurrence. God created a perfect natural order; hence, there can be no permanent changes in nature. Nature, and not miracles, is regarded by Maimonides as the true expression of divine wisdom. Miracles are rare, temporary disruptions in nature. Moreover, Maimonides suggests that miracles are in some manner implanted in nature at creation, God experiencing no change of will after the creation of the world. This view entails that nature is created also to meet certain historical exigencies.

Prophecy is treated by Maimonides as a completely natural phenomenon. Only the person who possesses a perfect intellect and imagination can receive prophecy. Maimonides does introduce an element of divine will in dealing with this phenomenon by maintaining that God can intervene and withhold prophecy from one who is worthy, just as the case with miracles in general, which disrupt the natural functioning of the order. Yet God, Maimonides, argues, never bestows prophecy to one who does not possess all the necessary qualifications. Whether Maimonides, in fact, believed that God ever intervened in the process, or whether he added this point to mask

his complete agreement with the Aristotelian position, is a subject of debate among his interpreters.

Prophecy itself is not defined as a message from God but rather an emanation from God to the Active Intellect and from there to the rational faculty of the individual and to the imagination, resulting in seeing theoretical truths in figurative form, or learning principles of governance, or viewing the future. Maimonides' account appears to allude to the view that God does not bestow a particular vision on the individual but the emanation strengthens the individual's own rational and imaginative faculties, thereby providing the person with a vision regarding matters that he was thinking about. This interpretation is strengthened by the fact that Maimonides in his discussion of prophecy speaks also of an emanation from the Active Intellect to the rational faculty alone due to the weakness of the imagination which results in the person becoming a philosopher, and the emanation to the imagination alone, characterizing politicians and diviners. Prophecy thus appears to be a completely natural phenomenon, just as the other phenomena are. Even the prophetic mission is explained by Maimonides in terms of an emanation that is so strong that the prophet feels compelled to extend his perfection to others. Maimonides notes that a similar phenomenon occurs by philosophers, leading them to write books and teach others. The prophetic mission for Maimonides essentially is the result of internal compulsion as a result of the prophetic experience rather than an explicit command from the Deity.

The two phenomena most closely associated with the revelation of the Divine Law, however, are removed from the category of normative prophecy. Maimonides treats both the Revelation at Sinai and the prophecy to Moses as *sui generis*. His discussion suggests that Moses received his prophecy directly from God. Whether Maimonides' God is a deity who, in fact, acts directly in history, even if only on exceptionally rare occasions, has been a subject of debate among his interpreters through the ages. It is clear at any rate that Maimonides felt it crucial to preserve this conception of God in order to preserve the nation's faith in the notion of God as the immediate author of the Divine Law.

### The Problem of Evil, Providence, and Human Perfection

In its classic formulation the problem raised regarding the existence of evil is: Why does a good, all-powerful and all-knowing deity create evil or even allow evil to occur – whether the evil consists of natural disasters, disease, or the evils humans perpetrate against each other. In other words, why are the innocent allowed by God to suffer while we often see the evil flourish. Maimonides addresses this problem but he is much more interested in reformulating it. Rather than a problem that questions God's goodness or power, it is a problem Maimonides transforms into a call for action on the part of human beings to recognize the true nature of the evils that affect them and adopt a course of action to limit these evils as much as possible.

The problem of why God creates evil is solved by Maimonides by considering all evils as privations of the good, that is to say, privations in that which exists rather than something existent in its own right. They indicate a lack of a quality, such as blindness is a lack of sight or death is a lack of life, and are not something positive. What does not exist cannot be said to be created; hence, God does not create evil but creates entities lacking certain qualities. This argument appears to be begging the question, for then the problem arises why God does not create a world without privation, a world without floods and earthquakes, diseases and deformities, etc. Maimonides indicates that the essence of earthly matter is characterized by privations and change which allows for the world's continuity. His answer suggests that anyone who asks why God does not create a world without natural evils or even human evils is asking why God created the world at all, for such evils inevitably characterize earthly matter. Underlying this answer appears to be a view of divine plenitude. A world which is characterized by all possible levels of existence – form without matter (Separate Intellects), form with changeless matter except for motion (the spheres), and form with matter in a state of constant generation and corruption (the existents on the earth) – is more complete or perfect than a world lacking one of these levels. A perfect world then

inevitably contains evils consequent upon earthly matter.

The real problem thus becomes what humans can do given this state of affairs. The answer is that they can recognize the nature of the hierarchy of existence and their place in it. More important they can recognize the nature of true human perfection and strive to attain it, in the process avoiding many of the evils that normally affect them. Maimonides points out that there are three types of evils affecting human beings. The first and least prevalent from Maimonides' standpoint are natural evils, such as natural disasters or the death of infants. Maimonides' earlier discussion of the phenomenon of prophecy suggests that even many of these evils may be avoided by advanced knowledge of the future. For example, knowing in advance when a flood will occur allows for saving oneself from the flood. Far more prevalent than this type of evil are the evils humans perpetrate against each other. Given the fact that these evils result from human choice, it is clear that it is in our hands to avoid practicing them.

The most prevalent type of evil, however, is neither of these two, but the evils the individual perpetrates against himself. For Maimonides, any action that brings the individual a step away from perfection is an evil; every action bringing one closer to perfection is good. Human perfection lies in putting an end to our greatest privation, the privation of knowledge, specifically knowledge of God and the manner of divine governance of the world. It lies in adopting a life of moral virtue in order to free oneself from the slavery of one's passions and live a life of intellect. In short, we practice evils against ourselves and others because of a lack of knowledge, which in turn leads to our maintaining a false value system by which we allow ourselves to be ruled by a craving for physical pleasures, jealousy, feelings of honor, etc. without realizing that all these goals are essentially meaningless and distance us from true perfection. A world united in the desire to attain knowledge of the one God, according to Maimonides, is one in which people will no longer practice so much evil against others and against

themselves. The problem of evil, thus, is one that demands of us to stop asking why God does not do more to create a better world for human beings, but what we should be doing in order to create such a world and achieve true human perfection.

On the issue of divine providence Maimonides at first glance adopts a radical interventionist view of God's activity in the world. Nothing, either good or bad, happens to human beings that does not constitute their just deserts in consequence of their freely willed actions. He rejects the view of the Epicurians who maintain that everything in the world happens by chance as well as the view of the Moslem theologians belonging to the Ash'ariyya who maintain that everything that happens in the world, including all human actions, result from divine decree. The view of the Mu'tazilite theologians that God exercises providence over all beings, not only humans, but human beings enjoy some limited form of free will is also rejected. The same is the case with the Aristotelian view that God exercises providence only over the species – by the instruments he gives to each to preserve one's life and to propagate the species – and not over individuals of the species, whose circumstances are governed by chance. Maimonides' own position is closest to the Aristotelian view with the critical proviso that in the case of human beings, as opposed to all other species, God exercises providence over all individuals and nothing happening to them should be attributed to chance. His view that the "otherness" of God's knowledge allows the Deity to know all particulars through all time without this knowledge necessitating change or plurality in God on one hand, nor human determinism on the other, serves to bolster this view of providence.

Maimonides' approach to divine providence, however, undergoes a subtle and radical change as his discussion unfolds, essentially moving him even closer to the Aristotelian position. He maintains that the degree of providence that humans enjoy is in direct proportion to the perfection of the intellect. One who does not develop one's intellect is in fact subject to the vicissitudes of

chance, just as the case of the individuals of all other species, and enjoys no special protection. His view suggests that the intellect itself is the basic instrument of divine providence. A person who perfects the intellect adopts a lifestyle which minimizes the evils that befall human beings since this person does not indulge the appetites leading to physical and psychological maladies, is satisfied with little and maintains a moral equilibrium. The individual attaining perfection may also acquire prophecy allowing him or her to foresee impending evils that others wish to perpetrate, or impending natural disasters, allowing the individual to take the proper precautions for avoiding them. Most important, one of perfect intellect realizes that all evils connected to corporeal being – whether they affect his possessions, family, or body – have no real significance, hence the individual should not feel psychologically affected by them. Thus, the evils that befall the imperfect individual by chance may be said to be this person's "just deserts" for not striving to attain perfection. This interpretation of Maimonides' position is reinforced by his discussion of the book of Job which he treats as a philosophical parable. Satan represents the evils associated with matter that cannot affect the immortal soul of the individual. Job finally attains enlightenment on the nature of the world order, realizing that all the evils affecting him are inevitable aspects of God's wondrous created order. It is left to the individual to view these evils in the proper perspective and pursue what truly has lasting value – the true understanding of God and the world.

Maimonides concludes his treatise reiterating his philosophic approach to human perfection. He also alludes to the philosophic view that only those who attain the perfection of the intellect attain immortality, their intellect existing in its state of contemplation of the eternal truths through eternity. The ending of the *Guide* introduces an additional aspect of human perfection. Those attaining intellectual human perfection should also engage in extending their perfection to improving the surrounding society, just as God's perfection emanates to all existents by ordering their circumstances in an ideal manner,

thereby extending the divine goodness to all that exists. *Imitatio Dei* lies in living simultaneously a life of active contemplation and one of governing others in accordance with the perfection one has attained.

## Cross-References

- ▶ Aristotle, Arabic
- ▶ Divine Law
- ▶ al-Fārābī, Abū Naṣr
- ▶ al-Ġazālī, Abū Ḥāmid Muḥammad
- ▶ Ibn Sīnā, Abū 'Alī (Avicenna)
- ▶ Natural Philosophy, Jewish
- ▶ Philosophical Theology, Jewish
- ▶ Philosophy, Jewish
- ▶ Political Philosophy, Arabic
- ▶ Proofs of the Existence of God
- ▶ Theology Versus Philosophy in the Arab World
- ▶ Thomas Aquinas

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### Secondary Sources

The list of secondary sources dealing with aspects of Maimonides' thought is exceptionally large. The last few years in particular have witnessed the appearance of numerous fine articles and collections of articles in wake of the 800th anniversary of his death.

The most comprehensive bibliographical list of articles published in recent years is available in the Rambi web catalogue: <http://jnul.huji.ac.il/rambi/> (subject: Maimonides).

For the most serious recent studies of Maimonides' biography and literary corpus see:

Davidson, H. (2005). *Moses Maimonides: The man and his works*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Kraemer, J. (2008). *Maimonides: The life and world of one of civilization's greatest minds*. New York: Doubleday.

For an excellent collection of essays providing an in-depth treatment of many aspects of Maimonides' philosophy see:

Seeskin, K. (Ed.). (2005). *The Cambridge Companion to Maimonides*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.



## Mu'ammār ibn 'Abbād

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### Abstract

Mu'ammār ibn 'Abbād (d. 830) was a prominent figure in the classical period of Mu'tazilism, a rationalist movement in Islamic theology. None of his works have survived, but he was frequently cited in later works of systematic theology; his philosophical positions may be assessed from extensive fragmentary testimony. His notoriety derives mainly from his original positions on causality and the inherent nature of things, positions which, even in the heterodox environment of the early Mu'tazilites, were considered frightfully deviant.

### Biographical Information

Mu'ammār was a client, that is, a non-Arab associated with a tribal group – in this case, the Sulaym tribe in Basra. With other early Mu'tazilites, he flourished in Baghdad at the Abbasid court, celebrated in particular for his skills in the practical sciences; he had been an apothecary by trade. Indeed, few writings are ascribed to him on theological or philosophical topics (see van Ess 1993 [vol. 5]: 254). Although no subsequent thinkers adhered to his system in full, two of his students became well-known Mu'tazilites: Hishām al-Fuwaḥī and Bishr ibn al-Mu'tamir.

### Philosophy

Mu'ammār's physical system was unique among the Mu'tazilites. Although he upheld the standard cosmological model of atoms (*jawāhir*; sing., *jawhar*) and accidents, their ontological status was not quite equal with respect to God. Once

atomic particles are combined into bodies (a minimum of eight particles), each otherwise indiscernible particle, according to and necessitated by its specific nature, produces (literally: enacts) the accidents particular to it (*Maqālāt* 303). Elsewhere, he is reported to claim that all accidents are acts of the (composed) body, proper to it. Unlike all of his contemporaries, Mu'ammār insisted that God does not enact accidents nor is He attributed with power over them (*Maqālāt* 405). The language of "action" challenged conventional views insofar as it suggested some sort of agency beyond the direct action of God (or humans). On the other hand, accidents are merely products of the nature of that in which they inhere; Mu'ammār's defenders (such as al-Khayyāt: see *Intiṣār* 46–47) could extricate him from accusations of impiety by reminding his detractors that God had, after all, created the atoms which had engendered the accidents.

As an interesting corollary to this way of thinking, Mu'ammār inadvertently anticipated the dispute about the "createdness" of the Qur'ān which wracked the intellectual community of the ninth century: for by his reckoning, the Qur'ān, insofar as it is a perceptible content, is the accidental product of a *jawhar* in which it inheres, be that "an angel, a stone, or a tree" (*Maqālāt* 405; see also 584). This position didn't sit well with anybody. Another result of this theory was that dream images could be analyzed as the production of nature particular to dreaming subjects, i.e., not implanted directly by God (*Maqālāt* 433).

Besides nature, Mu'ammār is most famous for a theory of *ma'ānī* (sing. *ma'nā*), a term that has proven difficult to translate from Arabic. Generally it is used to denote meaning in some way: either definitional meaning (the *ma'nā* of X is...) or the cognisable content inherent in things or in agents perceiving those things (as in Avicenna, later). For Mu'ammār, however, the term was used to indicate a differentiating factor provoking motion or rest in an underlying *jawhar* (*Maqālāt* 372–3). As such, *ma'ānī* were "causal determinants" (Frank 1967, although Frank's reading evolved thereafter) or reasons for a thing being one way or another. Moreover, each *ma'nā* is in turn determined by another *ma'nā* and so on

infinitely. These *maʿānī* determine primarily motion and rest, but were evidently applied to all accidents by Muʿammar.

Besides these views on the physical world, the sources indicate that Muʿammar attempted to apply some of this reasoning to the operation of divine knowledge, instances of which were also determined by *maʿānī* (*Maqālāt* 488). Acts of creation, too, involved infinite chains simultaneously manifested (*Maqālāt* 511). He was not, however, involved in most of the contemporary debates about God's attributes.

Muʿammar presented a philosophical anthropology that requires further study. The human person itself seems to be a special case in his system: he describes it using the standard Muʿtazilite expression for an atom, that is, as an indivisible particle (*Maqālāt* 331) but also as a "substance" (*ʿayn*), as a "soul" or "self" (*nafs*), and, confusingly, as a *maʿnā* unto itself (*Maqālāt* 405; for the previous terms, see van Ess 1993 [vol. 5] 272–4). The human person can act upon itself, but perception and extra-personal effects are determined by nature.

Muʿammar's philosophical positions are encapsulated in many modern surveys of Islamic thought, but the most significant study remains Daiber's 1975 monograph; a more recent survey may be found in van Ess 1992 (English translation forthcoming), with a selection of fragmentary evidence translated into German and helpfully collected in van Ess 1993.

## Cross-References

- ▶ [Atomism](#)
- ▶ [Kalām](#)

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## al-Mubashshir ibn Fātik

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### Abstract

Al-Mubashshir ibn Fātik was a scholar and patron of the Fatimid court in Cairo in the middle of the eleventh century. He studied medicine, astronomy, and history, and composed a lost *History* of the Fatimid Caliph al-Mustaṣfir (r. 1036–1094). His only book to have survived, *The Choicest Maxims and Best Sayings* (*Kitāb mukhtār al-ḥikam wa-maḥasin al-kalim* or *al-kilam*), gives 20 biographies of some of the main Semitic, Greek, and Egyptian figures of wisdom and prophecy (including the monotheized Alexander the Great). An important part of the biographical and gnomological materials may be compared with similar fragments attested in Greek literature. *The Choicest Maxims* was a medieval success, translated in

at least four European languages from the thirteenth to the fifteenth centuries.

‘Abū l-Wafā’ Mubashshir ibn Fātik (d. 480/1087?) is said to have been originally from Damascus and of Syrian descent. He was close to the Fatimid court during the reigns of the Fatimid Caliphs al-Zāhir (r. 411–427/1021–1036) and al-Mustanşir (r. 427–487/1036–1094) and would have married there a woman issued of the nobility (he himself belonged to the *arbāb* of the court, according to Ibn Abī Uşaybi‘). According to Ibn al-Qifṭī and to Gerard of Cremona (who used the chapter on Ptolemy to compose an introduction to his translation of the *Almagest*), he had the title of prince (Arabic: *al-amīr*) and received further the honorific title of Praised by the State (*Maḥmūd al-Dawla*). He was probably an Ismā‘īlī, as the Fatimid court was then at the peak of its proselyte activity. Mubashshir may have been related to ‘Azīz al-Dawla Fātik al-Qā‘id, the first Syrian governor on behalf of the Fatimids appointed by al-Ḥākim on Aleppo in 1017. Ibn Taymiyya, writing in the second part of the thirteenth century, mentions that Mubashshir ibn Fātik was close to Ibn al-Haytham and was a member of the court of the Caliph al-Ḥākim (r. 386–411/996–1021). Although we have no knowledge of the date of Mubashshir’s birth, it seems unlikely that he ever encountered al-Ḥākim except as a child. His association with the Fatimid court was probably a sufficient reason in the eyes of Ibn Taymiyya for condemning him as a *baṭīnī* (Ismā‘īlī Shī‘ite) (see Ibn Taymiyya, *al-Fatāwā al-kubrā*, Vol. 3, p. 496).

In Cairo, Mubashshir ibn Fātik studied mathematics and astronomy with Ibn al-Haytham (d. c. 430/1039) whose *Kitāb al-Manāzīr* (*Book of Optics*) was a major revolution in optics after Ptolemy’s *Almagest*. Mubashshir also studied with the astronomer, physician, and philosopher Ibn Riḍwān (d. 461/1068), one of the main scientists of the Fatimid court. Ibn Riḍwān authored commentaries on Hippocrates, Aristotle, and Galen, and had access to some of al-Fārābī’s books (see the lengthy bibliography given by Ibn Abī Uşaybi‘ in his *Ṭabaqāt al-aṭibbā’*).

The edition of *The Choicest Maxims* was completed by ‘bd al-Raḥmān Badawī in Madrid in 1958. He gave the book the Spanish title “*Bocados de Oro*,” which he took from the medieval translation realized in 1257 for Alfonso the Wise (Alfonso X of Castile, r. 1252–1284). Rosenthal felt offended that Badawī had double-crossed him in achieving the edition and wrote a bitter review (see Rosenthal 1960–1961). In the Arab world, the book was rarely available in libraries, as it had been published in Franco’s Spain and not diffused properly. These are among the reasons that have left *The Choicest Maxims* little-studied to this day.

To the references given by Rosenthal (1960–1961) in what remains a fundamental article for the study of Mubashshir’s works, Ibn al-Qifṭī, *Akhbār al-ḥukamā’* [269 f. Müller-Lippert]; Yāqūt, *Irshād* 6.241 Margoliouth [= Vol. 5, p. 227, n° 934, ‘bbās]; Ibn Abī Uşaybi‘ *Ṭabaqāt al-aṭibbā’* [2.98–99 Müller, Wiedemann 1906, p. 176], one should add Ismā‘īl Bashā al-Bābānī (or Ismā‘īl al-Baghdādī), the seventeenth-century author of the *Hadiyat al-‘ārīfīn*, a *Continuation (Dhayl)* to Ḥajji Khalīfa’s *Kashf al-zunūn*, who lists twice as many titles as Ibn Abī Uşaybi‘ and gives 480/1087 as the date of Mubashshir’s death. Ibn Abī Uşaybi‘ quotes the following titles: *Kitāb al-waşāyā wa-l-amthāl wa-l-mu‘jaz min muḥkamal-aqwāl*; *Kitāb mukhtār al-ḥikam wa-maḥasin al-kilam*; *Kitāb al-bidāya fī l-mantiq*, and *Kitāb fī l-ṭibb*. Al-Bābānī, in the *Hadiyat al-‘ārīfīn*, mentions the same titles (with a variant for the last one, which he quotes as the *Asrār al-ṭibb*) and adds the following works: *al-Iştilāḥāt al-ṭibbiyya*; *al-Tanbīh wa-l-tabyīn li-maşāliḥ al-dunyā wa-l-dīn*; *Sharḥ al-Unwān*; *Sharḥ kitāb al-adwiyya al-murakabba li-Jālinūs*; *Sharḥ muḥḥadāt Diyusqūrīdis*; *Kitāb al-nihāya fī l-ḥikma*; *Muḥḥadāt al-adwiyya*; and other epistles. To these, Yāqūt adds the *Sīrat al-Mustanşir*, in three volumes.

The looting of the Fatimids’ library by the Turks during a revolt in 1068–1069, and later on its dismantlement and destruction at the express will of the (Sunni) Ayyubid ruler Saladin (r. 1171–1193), may have led to the nearly

complete disappearance of Mubashshir's works. Nevertheless, Yāqūt notes that Mubashshir collected an innumerable number of books, which, Ibn Abī Uṣaybi' adds, he was later able to peruse while working at the Ayyubid court in Cairo. He complains that many of these had been damaged after Mubashshir's widow and some neighbors had thrown them into a basin to take revenge for her husband's passion for books and scholarship. Ibn Abī Uṣaybi' says he saw many of Mubashshir's books "on the Ancients" (i.e., philosophy, medicine, the sciences of the quadrivium, and probably some history) in autograph copies.

Only one of Ibn Fātik's works has survived, and it is therefore impossible to give a comprehensive evaluation of his thinking. The composition of *The Choicest Maxims*, in 440/1048–1049, may have been part of a proselytizing attempt, following a general tendency in Fatimid policy. In the aftermath of the Druze schism, *The Choicest Maxims* explores some of the ways to conciliate the theory of the *theios aner* with a monotheistic religion: asceticism, encratism, and Hermetism. In conciliating apophatic theology with the necessity of a spiritual master or guide, Ibn Fātik does not depart from the doctrine officially taught in his time at the Fatimid court.

The Sages advocate as examples by Ibn Fātik, whose lives and sayings ought to be reflected upon, Seth, the three Hermeses, Tat, Asclepius, Solon, Zeno, Pythagoras, Hippocrates, Socrates, Plato, Diogenes, Aristotle, Alexander the Great, Galen, Ptolemy, Saint Basil, Saint Gregory (of Nyssa and Nazianzus seem to have been confused into one figure), and finally the Coranic Luqmān and the little-known Mahadarjis (seemingly an Indo-Persian figure who has recently been identified with a Zoroastrian sixth-century priest). The biographies are integrated within a general frame imitated from the classical genres of the "literature of inventions" and "successions." Melting Neoplatonic and Ismā'īlī traditions, Mubashshir uses these models of wisdom as exempla of conduct, which the believer should follow to ascend the ladder leading to prophetic perfection.

The chapters of *The Choicest Maxims* are organized by Mubashshir according to a unique pattern, unless he could not find such information in his sources: biography, doxography, sayings, and more rarely some elements of bibliography. If the sapiential genre had been in use for millenniums in the ancient literacy of Near East, and the apophthegms in particular were still favored in Egyptian Christian literature, the scheme, here, is reminiscent of Diogenes Laertius' *Lives of the Philosophers*, which 'bd al-Raḥmān Badawī considered was one of the sources used by Ibn Fātik. Recent research on the Diogenes chapter led Oliver Overwien (2005) to suggest that Mubashshir rather draws on sources that were also used by Diogenes Laertius. A trace of the use of late-antique Greek literature is the frequent use of epistolary novels (as in the Solon, Hippocrates, Aristotle, Alexander, and Galen chapters) (see Cottrell 2004–2005).

Moritz Steinschneider (1893, pp. 28–29), noted that Ibn Fātik has used directly or indirectly a lost work by Ḥunayn ibn Ishāq, the *Ādāb al-falāsifa*, also known as *Nawādir al-falāsifa* (*Wise Sayings of the Philosophers*), of which a Hebrew and a Spanish translation were known in his time, as well as two Arabic manuscripts then unpublished. Steinschneider also remarked that the thirteenth-century physician Ibn Abī Uṣaybi' used Mubashshir (whom he explicitly quotes from) for his chapters on Hippocrates, Pythagoras, Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle. Rosenthal (1960–1961, pp. 145–147) gave a complete concordance table of these parallels in his article on *The Choicest Maxims*. Rosenthal also minimized the use of Ḥunayn ibn Ishāq by Ibn Fātik, rather unconvincingly (see Rosenthal 1960–1961, p. 135). Badawī did follow Steinschneider on that point in his introduction to his edition of *The Choicest Maxims*, where he also emphasized the importance of the *Alexander Novel* for the success of the medieval translations.

The *Alexander Novel* is among the most extensive pieces of the books, spread out in the chapters related to Alexander the Great, Aristotle and Diogenes chapters. It offers quite striking parallels with the Pseudo-Callisthenes' hellenistic novel, but does not preserve the Egyptian features of

Pseudo-Callisthenes' work. On the contrary, it gives to the Persian king Darius the role of a romantic hero betrayed by his own people, a man who put all his trust in Alexander, to whom he gives his daughter Roxane as a bride. Mubashshir's *Alexander Novel* does not share the features of the known Syriac versions, but a Syriac intermediary is not to be excluded. The translation method is that of the calque, including for some of the names (Ruqīyya – the Semitic root \*RQY designates the idea of ascension and elevation – is given as the name of Alexander's mother, instead of Olympias). The precise relation of *The Choicest Maxims'* extracts of both the *Alexander Novel* and the *Alexander Letters* with Ḥunayn's *Ādāb al-falāsīfā's* use of similar extracts remains to be investigated.

A manuscript of Mubashshir ibn Fātik's *The Choicest Maxims* reached the court of Alfonso the Wise (r. 1252–1284), where it was translated into Spanish in 1257. Through his mother, the king belonged to the Hohenstaufen family and shared with his famous cousin Frederick II a wide intellectual curiosity. On the Spanish version, a Latin translation was realized, of which two recensions have been discovered by Franceschini (see further Anawati 1959–1961 and Rosenthal 1960–1961). Franceschini accepted Knust's thesis according to which the Spanish *Bocados de Oro* had been translated from Arabic and not from Latin, as had been supposed earlier. Only one of the manuscripts of the Latin *Liber philosophorum* attributes the translation to John de Procida (ital. Giovanni da Procida, d. 1298, another member of the Hohenstaufen court), and as a consequence this attribution has been questioned since the end of the nineteenth century (see Rosenthal 1960–1961, p. 133).

If *The Choicest Maxims* had lost the name of its author in the medieval translations, the prince Abū l-Wafā' (Mubashshir ibn Fātik) is known to Gerard of Cremona (d. 1187) who transcribes it as Albuguefe (for \*Abu al-Guefe=al-Wafā'?) and correctly translates the Arabic title into Latin as *Scienciarum electionem et verborum pulcritudinem*, nearly a century before the Spanish translation. Gerard was able to use the chapter on Ptolemy's life and sayings for the introduction

to his translation of the *Almagest* (see Kunitzsch 1974, p. 98s). Rosenthal first demonstrated that Gerard had at his disposal the Arabic text, and did not depend on a translation (see Rosenthal 1960–1961, p. 150).

Before 1402, the Latin version was translated into French by Guillaume of Tignonville (d. 1414). It quickly became a success, and numerous manuscripts are known (see Anawati 1959–1961 and Rosenthal 1960–1961, who both mention a number of early modern printed editions as well). The first critical edition of the text was given by Roder Eder in 1915. A Provençal translation is also known and has been partly published, but its date has not been established (see Brunel 1939).

Because of this success, the French translation was rapidly translated into English. The first translation, made in 1450 by Stephen Scrope, was later on corrected by William of Worcester, who added some extra materials to the Socrates and Ptolemy chapters (see Schofield 1936, p. 31). A second and better translation was realized by the Earl Ryvers, between 1474 and 1477. The book was printed in England on November 18, 1477, by William Caxton, among the first books ever printed on English soil with a print which he had brought back with him from Brugges.

Mubashshir ibn Fātik was honored with an early and thorough diffusion, comparable in his time only to the *Bible* and the *Alexander Novel*. The very fact that an *Alexander Novel* constitutes the core of *The Choicest Maxims* gives one of the reasons of its success. In the East too, important authors such as Ibn Abī Uṣaybi' and al-Shahrazūrī made a thorough use of the text, assuring Ibn Fātik a popularity which led the book to be known as far as Iran and India (through al-Shahrazūrī's anonymous lengthy quotations in his *Kitāb nuzhat al-arwāḥ*, which was further on translated into Persian). In the eastern Christian realm as well the book enjoyed some fame, as can be witnessed from the incomplete Berlin Manuscript (MS Or. quart. 785) showing two bilingual seals (Syriac/Arabic), possibly originating from the Mar Mattai monastery in Mossul. This universal diffusion was the very object of the book, showing the ultimate journeys of wisdom through time and ages.



## Cross-References

- ▶ [Doxographies, Graeco-Arabic](#)
- ▶ [Galen, Arabic](#)
- ▶ [Hermes Trismegistus](#)
- ▶ [Ismā'īlī Philosophical Tradition](#)
- ▶ [Mirrors for Princes](#)
- ▶ [al-Shahrazūrī, Muḥammad ibn Maḥmūd Shams al-Dīn](#)

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## Mullā Shams al-Dīn al-Fanārī

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### Abstract

Mullā Shams al-Dīn al-Fanārī (d. 1431) was an Ottoman theologian, jurist, and Sufi, who became a prominent figure after the “Fetret Devri” (Ottoman Interregnum), a historic period in which the Ottoman Empire faced severe civil wars among the sons of Yıldırım Beyazıt (r. 1389–1403). He is widely accepted by historians as the first “sheikh al-Islam” (head of the juristic affairs) in the Ottoman Empire. Al-Fanārī is the author of several works in various Islamic disciplines, each of

which became very influential in their fields. These influential works include *Misbāh al-Uns*, a work in theoretical Sufism which was written as a commentary on *Miftāh al-Ġayb* by Ṣadr al-Dīn al-Qūnawī (d. 1274) and *Fuṣūl al-Badāyi*, a work in the field of jurisprudence (*usūl al-fiqh*). Al-Fanārī’s engagement with the mystical school of Ibn Arabī, along with the traditional methodological disciplines, gave him the epithet of “the combiner of the two main domains” in Islamic sciences, i.e., the domains of classical religious sciences and mysticism. This authority of him continued in the scientific atmosphere of the Ottoman State with his successors who were his family descendants and were known as “Fanārīzāde”s, i.e., the sons of al-Fanārī.

### Life

Al-Fanārī was born in 1350 in Ottoman Anatolia and received his early education in Ottoman cities, such as Bursa, Iznik (ancient Nicaea), and Amasya. His father is known to be a follower of Ṣadr al-Dīn al-Qūnawī, the main theoretician of the Akbariyya school in Anatolia. Al-Fanārī received his early education from his father; then he was sent to several madrasas (the official learning institutions in Ottoman State) to continue his scholarly training in canonical Islamic sciences, Islamic theology (kalām), and Islamic jurisprudence (*fiqh* and *usūl al-fiqh*). Al-Fanārī’s teacher in Orhaniye Madrasa, which was situated in Iznik, was Alāuddīn al-Aswad (d. 1393). Afterward, due to some disagreements between him and his teacher, al-Fanārī decided to leave Iznik for Amasya, where he took the chance to become a disciple of Jamāluddīn al-Aqṣarāyī (d. 1388). Al-Aqṣarāyī was an important figure due to his active role in disseminating the philosophical tradition in Anatolia, which was mainly based on the Avicennan corpus. After receiving his *ijāza* (educational license) from his teacher, al-Fanārī’s academic career entered in a new dimension when he embarked on a scientific voyage to Egypt. At that time, Egypt was a center of attraction for Ottoman students and scholars, who aimed to

specialize in classical religious sciences. In Egypt, al-Fanārī became a disciple of the Hanafite scholar Akmal al-Dīn al-Bābartī (d. 1384) and met his contemporary colleagues al-Sayyid al-Sharīf al-Jurjānī (d. 1413), (for al-Jurjānī's contact with al-Fanārī, see Van Ess, *Die Träume*, 20f.), Ḥājī Pāshā (d. 1424?), Aḥmadī (d. 1412), and Sheikh Badruddīn al-Simāwī (d. 1420), all of whom exerted crucial influence over the scientific atmosphere in the fourteenth- and early fifteenth-century Anatolia. It is reported by Abdurrahmān Bistāmī (d. 1454), a prominent occult scientist of the century, that al-Fanārī studied Bistāmī's work *Qabs al-Anwār* along with the author, a statement that evinces his early interest in occult sciences such as alchemy and the science of letters, i.e., the occult science which seeks secret relations among ontological and numerical entities (Kaya, "Abdurrahman Bistami," 195). After completing his education in Egypt, al-Fanārī began to ascend the ladder of his official career, a process which would lead him to the top position of the religious affairs in the Ottoman State, i.e., the "sheikh al-Islām." Before the civil war (Ottoman Interregnum), he was appointed by the sultan in madrasas and courts as teacher and judge. When political rivalries intensified at the expense of the security of the scholarly elite in Anatolia, al-Fanārī felt obliged to visit Hejaz (today's Saudi Arabia) and once again Egypt and waited for the political situation to stabilize. These visits gave him the opportunity to meet eminent Sufi figures of the age, such as Muhammad Pārsā (d. 1420) of the Naqshbandiyya order and Zayn al-Dīn al-Ḥāfī (d. 1435) of the Suhrawardiyya order. After al-Fanārī returned to Anatolia, he maintained and strengthened his prestigious position among the Ottoman sultans, Mehmed I (r. 1413–1421) and Murad II (r. 1421–1444), respectively, a situation which continued till his death in 1431.

## Works and Philosophical Teachings

The chief historian of the sciences in Ottoman times, Tashkoprižāda, in his *Miftāh al-Sa'āda* regards al-Fanārī "the achiever of the leadership in two methods in theology (*al-ilm al-ilāhī*),"

that is, the method of rational argumentation (*naẓar*) and the method of spiritual purification (*taṣfiya* and *dhawq*) (Tashkoprižāda, *Miftāh*, p. 251). This statement of Tashkoprižāda posits that al-Fanārī was an authority not only in classical Islamic sciences but in mysticism and theosophy too. Tashkoprižāda specifically states that al-Fanārī's predecessor in this achievement was Ṣadr al-Dīn al-Qūnawī, the highly acclaimed commentator of the works of Ibn Arabī. In fact, al-Fanārī wrote his magnum opus, *Misbāh al-Uns*, as a commentary on al-Qūnawī's *Miftāh al-Ġayb*, which was a fundamental text that shaped the subsequent literature of theoretical mysticism in Anatolia, Iran, and North Africa. In *Misbāh al-Uns*, al-Fanārī closely follows the overall stances of al-Qūnawī in the Sufi discourse. First and foremost, the work preliminary posits a distinction between the exoteric (*ẓāhir*) and esoteric (*bāḥin*) aspects of the religious truth. The scholars who belong to the exoteric side are to be regarded as the scholars of customary rules (*ulamā al-rusūm*), that is, the experts of the Muslim law regulations; thus, they are busy with appearances and far from understanding the true realities of God's governance in the universe. On the other hand, the scholars who possess the esoteric and essential meaning of the religious doctrines are to be regarded as the pioneers for those who search for spiritual salvation. The followers of the righteous path, "the people of verification" (*ahl al-taḥqīq*) as is called by al-Fanārī, are required to interpret the literal meanings in the Quran and the Hadith (sayings of the Prophet) according to the inner reality, keeping themselves away from the figurative meanings. Al-Fanārī's ontology is based on the principle that there is a mutual relationship between God and his creation: the universe is related to God, and God is related to the universe, in spite of the fact that God's ultimate essence transcends the universe (al-Fanārī, *Misbāh*, 9–11). To understand the nature of this relationship, the true realities (*ḥaqāʾiq*) of things are to be known. However, it is not enough for the achievement of the true science to grasp only the knowledge of the true realities of things, one must know these realities as they are found and individualized (*taʿayyun*) in the divine knowledge of God: God's

knowledge of things as an attribute of God is the real place where one must seek to grasp the essences of all realities, and this requires a special unification with the divine realm. This is what is done by the possessors of the highest level of knowledge, and this knowledge is certainly not achieved by the people of rational argumentation and disputation, because this way limits itself to search for pure rational inquiries. Al-Fanārī contends that both the *mutakallimūn* (Muslim dialecticians) and philosophers have fallen short of the achievement of the true divine realities, which are definitely to be sought beyond logical argumentations. Dedicating a special chapter in his *Miṣbāh* to the subject, he relates the failure of the abovementioned schools to their unawareness of the deficiencies of the sensual and rational perceptions, the relativist nature of the pure rational subjects (changing from one authority to another), and last but not least human beings' incapability of comprehending the divine realm in the first place. Al-Fanārī asks, "how would someone allege to know anything at all, given that they even do not know the closest thing to them, that is, their own souls?" (for this sentence and other criticisms, see al-Fanārī, *Miṣbāh*, 32f). All in all, along with his master al-Qūnawī, al-Fanārī apparently tries to establish an ultimate and independent science of metaphysics in fully mystical tones, a paradigm which entails a combination of the philosophies of Avicenna, al-Suhrawardī, and Ibn Arabī. Al-Fanārī's acceptance of the theory of emanation shows his allegiance to Avicenna's philosophy, inasmuch as the theory is compatible with the former's understanding of the absolute/all-pervasive being (*al-wujūd al-muṭlaq*) (Janssens, "Elements of Avicennian Influence", 326).

Al-Fanārī's holistic perspective continues in his *Fuṣūl al-Badāyī*, a work which was written in the field of the methodology of Islamic law and is said to be compiled in a period of 30 years (Kātip Chelebī, *Kashf al-Zunūn*, II, 1267). Accordingly, it addresses the classical subject matters of Islamic law, beginning with the chapters on legal argumentation, literal and figurative meanings of the religious texts, legal judgments (*ḥukm*), the problem of the morality of human

actions (*ḥusn* and *qubh*), the four basic proofs (the Quran, the Hadīth, scholarly consensus, and deductive analogy), and ending with the chapters on legal opinion (*fatwā*). Although al-Fanārī mainly follows the Hanafite tradition in such legal matters and sees himself as a member of the Hanafite school, he is much more a philosopher when he goes into the explanations of the fundamental terms. The introductory chapter comes with in-depth philosophical explanations of the epistemological and ontological terms, such as existence, essence, logical argumentation, theory of intuition (*ḥads*), the science of metaphysics, the five logical arts, the middle term in logic, mental existence, and so on. This spectacular array of the philosophical issues is addressed in reference to many figures of Islamic theology and philosophy, such as al-Fārābī, Avicenna, Ḡazālī, Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī, Sayf al-Dīn al-Āmidī, and Abu l-Ḥasan al-Ash'arī, along with many others. Hence, the methodological sections in al-Fanārī's *Fuṣūl* appear to come out from the pen of a scholar who is well versed in the classification of sciences, both in religious and nonreligious, so much so that it even brings to the front such specific matters as Ibn Haytham's theory of lunar eclipse (al-Fanārī, *Fuṣūl*, 51; al-Fanārī here rejects the theory), the difference between the science of chemistry, and the occultist science of alchemy (*Fuṣūl*, 14). All in all, al-Fanārī, as is also seen in his other works, aims to establish a system which exhibits an encyclopedic approach to all divine and human sciences and disciplines, a system which is not dedicated to the religious data solely derived from the religious scriptures.

One of the most influential works of al-Fanārī, especially in Ottoman education curriculum, is his middle-sized commentary on al-Abharī's (d. 1264) *Īsāgūjī* (Introduction to Logic). Al-Abharī's work, titled *al-Risāla al-Athīriyya*, was written in the footsteps of the *Īsāgūjī* literature in Islamic philosophy with Muslim philosophers such as al-Fārābī, Ikhwān al-Safā, and Ibn Sīnā, all stemming from Porphyry's *Eisagoge*. Al-Fanārī contends that *Īsāgūjī* is basically about the five universals in logic, that is, species, genus, differentia, proprium, and accidents. What al-Fanārī does in this commentary is to

provide linguistic and logical explanations, which would enhance and update al-Abharī's work in accordance with contemporary scholarly literature in al-Fanārī's time. Thus, along the pages of work, al-Fanārī gives subtle references to the masters of logic in Islamic sciences, such as Ibn Sīnā, Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī, and al-Taftāzānī, in spite of the fact that the main figure on whose works he depends is distinctly Ibn Sīnā. While doing that, he does not miss the opportunity to bring about his holistic approach and integrate some mystic elements to the text. In one intriguing example, when he defines the art of rhetoric (*khatāba*), he states that rhetorical syllogisms are derived from the premises which are accepted and received from an authority, and this authority could either be a prophet or a friend of God (*walī*) (al-Fanārī, *Sharḥ Isāgūjī*, 62). Such deliberate integrations, as are seen in all works of al-Fanārī, provided a dynamic ground for the development of Islamic disciplines in Ottoman scientific and philosophical spheres.

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## Music, Medieval

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### Abstract

The philosophical background to music in the Middle Ages was ultimately derived from Classical ideas about music, its rudiments, and its place in society. The fact that early medieval thinkers in the West looked in the first place to ancient learning to codify their newly emerging ecclesiastical song (which would ultimately become known as by them as “Gregorian chant”) led to a conflict between the theory of ancient music and the reality of music in the Middle Ages. The uneasy cohabitation of ancient philosophical and cosmological thought with the new and different practical music of the medieval West is an ever-present feature of medieval theoretical literature on music. The extent and importance of this conflict varies from century to century and according to the aims of the theoretical literature in question.

### Classical Sources

The complex epistemology of music in the Middle Ages is due initially to the diverse Classical sources that influenced its history. Perhaps the most influential of the Classical authors was

Boethius (c. 480–c. 525), whose *De institutione arithmetica* and *De institutione musica* (ed. Friedlein 1867) offered to medieval thinkers the most detailed account of ancient thought on the closely related disciplines of arithmetic and music. Both of these treatises circulated widely from the ninth century onward, while an extensive corpus of Carolingian glosses and commentaries points to active engagement with these texts (ed. Bernhard and Bower 1993/1994/1996). Music, for Boethius, was a liberal discipline pertaining to ethics as well as to reason: it was a body of immutable knowledge requiring study for mastery. Consequently, *De institutione musica* aimed to quantify music through the study of ratios, proportions, intervals, and sound. Boethius' definition of the true musician – the scholar who can criticize poetic compositions or instrumental performance – is a function of the centrality of intellect to his approach: the practice of music, with pejorative connotations of manual activity characteristic of the ignoble, was perceived negatively because it lacked any sort of rationality.

Boethius' *De institutione musica* enjoyed a far wider dissemination than did the six books of St Augustine's *De musica* (completed between 387 and 391; ed. Jacobsson 2002), which were concerned mainly with rhythm and metrics. Far more influential were St Augustine's many remarks on music scattered throughout his other works: they show both his endorsement of music for its ability to uplift the spirit and his condemnation of it for its ability to distract. Although medieval thinkers generally took St Augustine's positive comments to heart and ignored his criticisms, many, such as St Thomas Aquinas, vacillated in true Augustinian fashion.

More immediately important for the formation of opinions on music were the encyclopedists Cassiodorus (c. 487–c. 580) and Isidore of Seville (c. 560–c. 636). Their works became standard reference works, transmitting much information, as well as speculation, on ancient music and its rudiments. A subtle shift from the Boethian definition of music and its dismissal of practice is apparent in Cassiodorus and Isidore. From Cassiodorus' *Institutiones* 2.3.21 (ed. Mynors 1937)

came the influential definition that whereas “mathematical science is that science which considers abstract quantity,” music is the division of it “that treats of numbers in relation to those things that are found in sounds.” Although the introduction to Isidore's *Etymologies* (ed. Lindsay 1911) classifies music as a liberal discipline, other sections describe it in terms of the varieties of chant, with the result that five of the nine sections concerned with music are practical in their approach. This surely hints that, by the time Isidore was writing, scholars were already struggling to apply the Classical view of music to the new liturgical music of the post-Roman West.

The Greek philosophers Plato and Aristotle influenced music in different very ways. Prior to the rediscovery of Plato's works in the twelfth century, only part of *Timaeus* (17a–53b) was known. It was available in the translation by Calcidius (c. 256–c. 357), whose accompanying commentary incorporated various middle- and Neoplatonic influences from the earlier commentaries of Iamblichus and Porphyry (ed. Waszink 1975). Calcidius' translation and commentary was extremely popular in the Middle Ages, but since Calcidius had omitted those sections dealing with man, it was understood primarily as a cosmological exposition of the origins and order of the universe. Calcidius was not, however, the only intermediary through which Platonic thought reached the Middle Ages. Boethius had sought to harmonize the philosophy of Plato and Aristotle, and while he was practically the sole means of transmission for a selection of Aristotle's works until the late twelfth century, he simultaneously perpetuated much of Plato's teaching. The influence of Plato is to be seen most vividly in Boethius' *Consolation of Philosophy* (ed. Moreschini 2005), which became one of the medieval period's best-known works of literature. Plato was also behind much of *De institutione arithmetica* and *De institutione musica*. To Calcidius and Boethius should be added the late-Roman authors Macrobius and Martianus Capella, who also contributed much to the medieval reception of Plato. Macrobius' *Commentarius in Somnium Scipionis* (ed. Willis 1970) was very popular in the early and central Middle Ages, while of the nine books

of Martianus Capella's *De nuptiis Philologiae et Mercurii* (ed. Willis 1983), books 7 and 9 were most relevant for music. As with Boethius, the survival of numerous ninth- and tenth-century gloss collections on Macrobius and Martianus Capella points to Carolingian scholars' engagement with these authors (White 1981; Teeuwen 2002).

Although a number of Aristotle's logical works were available to the early medieval West through the translations and commentaries of Boethius, it was not until the end of the twelfth century that his remaining logical works – as well as those on ethics, metaphysics, and the natural sciences – became available in Latin translations. The study of Aristotle thrived in the medieval universities, with Aristotelian methodology and terminology appearing in music treatises from the thirteenth century onward. Nevertheless, Aristotle did not offer to medieval thinkers a useful philosophy of music and thus his influence is visible primarily in the introduction of new procedures of argumentation or his citation as a new authority in support of one or other position.

### The Early and Central Middle Ages

The music theory sources of the early and central Middle Ages show that the main preoccupation of western thinkers was with practical music, specifically music as the vehicle for the liturgy of the Church. They were thus at odds with Boethius' approach to music. The shift in emphasis evident in Isidore's *Etymologies* has already been mentioned; it is even more apparent in his *De ecclesiasticis officiis* (ed. Lawson 1989), which deals with music from a liturgical point of view. Nevertheless, even though there was a fundamental dichotomy between Boethian theory and the requirements of the post-Roman West, Boethius was to some extent assimilated by western Europe's earliest post-Classical theorists in the Carolingian period, who applied him to western plainchant: he provided the vocabulary for music theory, while they provided the model for its use. The music that Boethius described, however, had nothing to do with church music. Until about the

ninth century there was no real modal organization in western chant. It was the Carolingian thinker Aurelian of Réôme who, in his *Musica disciplina* of c. 840–c. 850, first described a modal organization of western plainchant in writing (ed. Gushee 1975). Aurelian assumed that Boethius was relevant to plainchant and adopted the names of the ancient Greek *tonoi* for the new western modes. Others followed his example, including the tenth-century author of *Alia musica* (ed. Chailley 1968), who appropriated Boethius' table of octave-species for each *tonos* to furnish names for his own modal octaves, in the process inverting Boethius' layout.

Carolingian music treatises focus above all on the rudiments and classification of ecclesiastical music ("Gregorian chant") and thus have limited scope for philosophical material. Where this does occur, it is largely peripheral and draws mainly on sources such as Cassiodorus and Isidore. At the same time as scholars were writing such treatises, others were commenting upon Boethius, Macrobius, and Martianus Capella. Many of these commentaries and glosses – which are now beginning to be studied – deal with the cosmological aspects of the source texts.

Perhaps the most sophisticated integration of philosophical thought with practical music during the central Middle Ages is to be found in the music treatises written by a group of monks and clerks working in Salian Germany (1024–1125): the "south-German circle" of music theorists (McCarthy 2008). These scholars were among the foremost intellectuals of their age, making valuable contributions in disciplines such as theology, liturgy, history, chronology, astronomy, and geometry, as well as frequently playing leading roles in contemporary ecclesiastical politics. Abbot Bern of Reichenau (d. 1048) was the founding father of this circle: his teaching was modified by his pupil Herman of Reichenau (1013–1054) and absorbed by figures such as William of Hirsau (d. 1091), Aribo (fl. 1070–1078), Frutolf of Michelsberg (d. 1103), and Theoger of Metz (c. 1050–c. 1120).

For the south-German circle music was a reflexion of natural order. Its theory was practical, growing out of the emphasis placed upon proper



regulation of the liturgy by the Gorze monastic reform movement. Frutolf of Michelsberg summed it up thus in his treatise entitled *Breviarium de musica*: “music is the science of singing well through long reflexion and constant practice” (ed. Vivell 1919). It is the science of commanding correctly all the elements affecting the performance, analysis, and composition of Gregorian chant, the primary vehicle of the *opus Dei* and the liturgy of the Latin West. This definition of music represents a subtle and important reworking of Boethius, for whom only the criticism of music was a worthwhile pursuit: the ideal musician was now he who practised flawlessly because he understood completely. Thus Theoger of Metz was described as “excellently skilled in all disciplines of the liberal arts, consummate in music and outstanding in its performance” (Trithemius, *Annales Hirsauenses*, 1511–1514). The central importance of music to intellectual life required that it be a true reflexion of God’s divinely ordained universe. Thus, for the south-German circle, music’s cosmological and philosophical aspects merged with its more practical aspects.

Bern of Reichenau incorporated Neoplatonic thought into music theory in his treatise *Prologus in tonarium* (written between 1021 and 1036; ed. Rausch 1999). Bern emphasized the significance of the number four, which was vital to the cosmological exposition of *Timaeus*, and which validated the theory of the four modes having their final notes (D E F G) in the tetrachord of the  *finales* (D E F G). He wrote that “from its [the tetrachord of the  *finales*] four notes, the origin of all modes or tones can be seen to proceed,” just as the fabric of the Platonic universe proceeds from the four elements. This statement also hints at the important Platonic concept of unity. Bern used Macrobius (who had glossed Plato with the influential comment that unity was the fount and origin of all numbers) to argue that the tetrachord of the  *finales* was also the fount and origin of the modes. His arguments, retaining their Neoplatonic terminology, were developed by later members of the south-German circle, notably William of Hirsau and Theoger of Metz. They took care to situate the Neoplatonic imagery in a Christian

context, as they were doubtless aware of the potential dangers of “pagan literature” (a contemporary topos of some influence).

The response of the south-German circle to the Platonic inheritance also involved the conscious use of Platonic metaphors. The idea of “generation” was particularly important, with the theorists using verbs like *generare* and *procreare* to describe the natural origins of musical phenomena: for example, Herman of Reichenau declared that the two octaves of the monochord “are not said to be born twice, but that those already born, in the manner of the seven days of the week, are repeated or renewed” (*Musica* 1; ed. Ellinwood 1936). Elsewhere, Aribo criticized a faulty technical description of the monochord as “perverse” because it confused the natural order of the monochord “which never departs from her own nature” (drawn from *Timaeus* 50bc), while praising his own alternative description in avowedly Platonic terms (ed. Smits van Waesberghe 1951). The use of such natural imagery by these thinkers mirrors a wider contemporary trend toward metaphors of generation and growth. It also points to a growing expression of Platonic thought in a Christian context and the personification of *natura*. A number of contemporary authors employ the idea of an artificer behind creation: Bern of Reichenau describes an *artifex natura* (*Prologus in tonarium* 4) and Theoger of Metz a *creatrix natura* (*Musica* 8, ed. Lochner 1995), while the widely read German author Honorius Augustodunensis (c. 1080/1090–c. 1156) speaks of a similar artisan who made the universe “like a great zither upon which he placed strings to yield a variety of sounds” (*Liber XII questionibus* 2). The south-German theorists, therefore, sought to combine the practical and philosophical aspects of music because they believed practice to be a reflexion of nature. This characteristic distinguished them from other European thinkers. The important Italian music theorist Guido of Arezzo, for example, chose to ignore the philosophical aspects of music in his treatises (*Micrologus*, *Regule rithmice*, *Prologus in antiphonarium*, and *Epistola ad Michaelem*; ed. Smits van Waesberghe 1955; Pesce 1999), commenting that Boethius was useful to philosophers but not musicians. Conversely,

eleventh- and early twelfth-century French scholars such as Bernard and Thierry of Chartres, William of Conches, and Bernard Silvestris were more exclusively cosmological in their discussions of the Neoplatonic aspects of music: this is true of William of Conches, for example, in his glosses on *Timaeus* (ed. Jeuneau 2006). The distinguished teacher Hugh of St Victor (c. 1096–c. 1141), in his *Didascalion* of c. 1130 (ed. Buttner 1939) described music as a liberal art encompassing both practical and intellectual aspects. In doing this he was following the example of the German theorists who articulated most coherently an understanding of music that must have been widespread among the educated in the central Middle Ages. Yet Hugh's pupil, Richard of St Victor, reverted to the exclusively impractical Boethian classification of music as a liberal art a few years later in his *Liber exceptionum* (ed. Châtillon 1958).

### The High and Late Middle Ages

The tension between the practical and cosmological aspects of music revealed itself in different ways with the development and expansion of the European universities. Some historians have looked to university statutes to assess the place of music in the curriculum (Carpenter 1958). In Paris, the statutes offer little information on the subjects taught, but other universities modeled on Paris – notably German universities – specified musical studies in their curricula. Anecdotal evidence from former university students sometimes suggests that music was taught: Johann von Jenzenstein, who studied at Paris from 1375 to 1376, attests to hearing lectures on music as a cosmological science. In Oxford, Boethius was a prescribed element of the arts curriculum from at least 1431 until the sixteenth century. Yet despite the persistence of music as a formal curricular requirement, one cannot but form the impression that it was not generally considered an important discipline. Later evidence from Oxford and Cambridge, both of which instituted degrees in music during the fifteenth century for which there were no residence requirements, suggests that these

degrees were seen as the poor relation of degrees in “proper” academic subjects.

Nevertheless, the introduction and assimilation of Aristotelian texts directed renewed attention to the nature of music as a discipline. The second book of Aristotle's *Physics*, which deals with the classification of astrology, music, and optics was formative in inspiring opinions as to the nature of music. Avicenna (Abū ‘Alī al-Husain ibn ‘Abdallāh ibn Sīnā; 973/980–1037) and Averroes (Abū l-Walīd Muhammad ibn Rushd; 1126–1192) were among the first scholars to comment on this matter; they later were joined by Robert Grosseteste (*Commentarios in VIII libros physicorum Aristotelis*), Albert the Great (*Physicorum libri VIII*), Thomas Aquinas (*In II physicorum*), and Duns Scotus (*Quaestiones in octo libros physicorum Aristotelis*). Aquinas referred to the problem of disciplines such as music, which seemed to confound traditional categories, as the problem of the *scientiae mediae*. A number of surviving university texts address the specific problem of music – including Radulphus Brito's *Questiones communes mathematicae*, the *Questiones mathematicales* by Ralph the Breton, and questions 16 and 17 of Peter of Auvergne's sixth *Quodlibet* (which relies on Aristotle's theories of the soul and judgment as outlined in *De anima* and the *Nichomachean Ethics*).

Scholasticism undoubtedly influenced the literature of music theory. An early example is the early twelfth-century German treatise *Quaestiones in musica* (ed. Steglich 1911), which anticipates the *quaestiones* genre that would become so familiar in the later French schools and universities (on the *quaestiones* genre in the university context see Duhamel 2007). The *summa* genre, which was such a feature of thirteenth- and fourteenth-century scholasticism, was also applied to music. The *Speculum doctrinale* by the Dominican scholar Vincent of Beauvais (c. 1190–c. 1264) brings together authors with very different views of music such as Boethius, Isidore, Richard of St Victor, and the Arab theorist al-Fārābī (whose works were by then available in Latin translations). In one sense, *summae* responded to the concerns underlying such early twelfth-century manuals as

Honorius Augustodunensis' *De animae exsilio et patria* or Hugh of St Victor's *Didascalicon*, which grappled with the fracture of the accepted curriculum of the seven liberal arts on account of new studies, such as theology or canon law.

Late medieval discussions about the philosophical and cosmological natures of music occurred in tandem with the production of more practical music treatises. New technical preoccupations, such as the expansion of polyphony and rhythm, required codification and explanation through theoretical literature. Although many of these treatises were written outside the scholastic milieu, a number of university-based scholars contributed valuable practical treatises. The challenge to determine the time values of notes arising out of the development of polyphony can be seen behind the treatise of Johannes de Grocheo (fl. c. 1300), who dismissed the arithmetical speculations of Boethius in favour of an Aristotelian empiricism. Yet de Grocheo was still concerned with the nature of music, substituting a different division for Boethius' division and following Aristotle in discussing the social uses of secular music. Jehan de Muris (c. 1290–c. 1351), who taught at Paris, reaffirmed on the authority of Aristotle and Boethius the primacy of theoretical knowledge over practical experience and gave mathematical theorems for the measurement of rhythm in contemporary mensural notation in his influential *Notitia artis musicae* of c. 1321. De Muris was primarily a philosopher and mathematician for whom music was a secondary interest. This is reflected in his use of the language of scholasticism, more familiar to university-trained scholars than to practical musicians. Nevertheless, the overtly scholastic technique of his writing did not diminish its importance for contemporaries. Along with Philippe de Vitry (1291–1361), de Muris sought to justify the novelties behind the new musical art of the fourteenth century – in this case from a scholastic point of view. In a sense, de Muris was engaged in the same project as the south-German circle two centuries earlier: the use of ancient philosophical wisdom to demonstrate the validity of a particular musical practice.

By contrast, the conservative commentator James of Liège was appalled by the musical practices of the *ars nova*: his vast *Speculum musicae* (c. 1330) cites the relevant Greek and Roman authorities to refute de Muris and de Vitry.

The disagreements over musical practice in the fourteenth century highlight how, as the Middle Ages progressed, music theory became more practical. Technical issues dominate to the exclusion of philosophical and cosmological issues. All-round scholars comment upon music more rarely. Where they do – such as Thomas Aquinas, for example – their contribution offers little beyond the rudimentary. Thus, although the members of the south-German circle were able to make important contributions to music theory because music was an important part of their lives, later thinkers and philosophers were not because music had become a specialization in which certain practitioners were the experts. Scholars such as Jehan de Muris, who could bridge this gap, must be seen, therefore, as isolated examples. Although some philosophers would continue to speculate on music as a cosmological science, the greatest utility of “philosophy” would be in support of this or that technical practice.

## Cross-References

- ▶ [Aristotelianism in the Greek, Latin, Syriac, Arabic, and Hebrew Traditions](#)
- ▶ [Augustine](#)
- ▶ [Boethius](#)
- ▶ [Carolingian Renaissance](#)
- ▶ [al-Fārābī, Abū Naṣr](#)
- ▶ [Hugh of St. Victor](#)
- ▶ [Ibn Sīnā, Abū ‘Alī \(Avicenna\)](#)
- ▶ [Isidore of Seville](#)
- ▶ [John Duns Scotus](#)
- ▶ [Peter of Auvergne](#)
- ▶ [Platonism](#)
- ▶ [Radulphus Brito](#)
- ▶ [Robert Grosseteste](#)
- ▶ [Thomas Aquinas](#)
- ▶ [Universities and Philosophy](#)

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## Natural Law

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### Abstract

Natural law was a key concept in medieval moral and political theories. Originating in ancient Greece, it came to medieval thought mainly through the canon and civil law texts. Commentators on these texts tried to solve various difficulties, especially regarding the justification of property. Thomas Aquinas, Duns Scotus, William of Ockham, and many other theologians discussed natural law, especially in relation to God's commandments.

In medieval texts the term *ius naturale* can mean either natural law or natural right; for the latter sense see the entry ► “Natural Rights”. *Ius naturale* in the former sense, and also *lex naturalis*, mean the universal and immutable law to which the laws of human legislators, the customs of particular communities and the actions of individuals ought to conform. It is equivalent to morality thought of as a system of law. It is called “natural” either (a) because it is taught by natural instinct, that is, some capacity innate in human beings, or (b) because it is accessible to “natural

reason,” that is, to personal reflection independent of any special revelation from God (such as the Christian faith claims to be) and independent of the moral authority of other human beings; or for both reasons.

Medieval writers referred to human law as “positive law,” “custom,” or “convention.” The positive law of a particular community was called “civil law” (there is no contrast here with criminal law); often the term referred especially to the civil law of the Romans. The term “law of nations” (*ius gentium*) seems equivalent in some Roman law texts to natural law, or perhaps to part of natural law; in medieval texts it usually means the laws common to the positive law of all, or most, human communities. (The boundary between natural law and the law of nations was never very clear.) Natural law was also distinguished from “divine positive law,” which is not knowable by natural reason but is notified to some human beings, and not to others, through special messengers (Moses, the Prophets, the Apostles, etc.).

### Justinian and Gratian

In Justinian's corpus there is a disagreement about natural law, or at least some confusion of terminology. Sometimes “natural law” and “law of nations” are distinguished and contrasted: thus slavery was introduced by the law of nations, whereas “according to natural law all persons were born free” (Dig. 1.1.4). But in other texts



the terms seem interchangeable. “By *natural law* we obtain the ownership of some things which, as we have already stated, is called *the law of nations*. . . Therefore. . . all creatures that exist on the earth, in the sea, or in the air, as soon as they are taken by anyone, immediately become his property by *the law of nations*, since whatever formerly belonged to no one is conceded by *natural reason* [which establishes natural law] to the first person obtaining possession of the same” (Inst., 2.1.11–12). If the law of nations is distinguished from natural law, what is the distinction? Ulpian says that natural law is what nature teaches all animals, whereas the law of nations is used by human beings (Dig. 1.1.1.3 and 4). This seemed unsatisfactory, since it suggested that animals follow law, which most medieval readers thought only rational beings could do, and it might seem to suggest that human beings are bound by the same laws (e.g., in matters of sex) as animals follow.

Whether the law of nations and the natural law are identical or different affects the status of two important institutions, slavery and property. According to Dig. 1.1.4 (quoted above), the two laws are not identical, and slavery belongs to the law of nations and not to natural law. Might this be true also of property? The civil law texts say that property belongs to the law of nations, but in these contexts the law of nations and the natural law are not contrasted. According to one text, property, *dominia distincta*, that is, appropriation of a thing to some individual or group to the exclusion of others, was established by the law of nations (Dig., 1.1.5, 41.1.1 and 3). According to another text, property was established by the natural law “which is called the law of nations” (Inst., 2.1.11–12). Generally civil lawyers held that property exists by natural law, but Gratian quotes a text in which Augustine says that property exists by human law (dist. 8 c.1, cols. 12–13): since medieval civil lawyers could not ignore the opinion of Augustine, and canon lawyers and theologians could not ignore the civil law, the status of property became a problem.

Gratian’s *Decretum* makes no mention of a natural law common to mankind and other animals, and the law of nations is treated as distinct

from, and subordinate to, the law of nature. According to Gratian, the law of nature is a divine law found in the Law (i.e., the law of Moses) and the Gospels (I, dist. 1, d.a.c.1; Friedberg, Vol. 1, col. 1). Gratian’s account of law is given mainly through quotations from the sixth century ecclesiastical writer, Isidore of Seville. According to Isidore, human “civil” law consists in customs or human enactments (c.8, col. 2), which differ from one community to another (c.1). Natural law, on the other hand, is common to all peoples and is everywhere held by the instinct of nature, not by any enactment (c.7, col. 2). The law of nations is the law that is used by nearly all peoples (c.9, col. 3); it seems to belong within the category of human law, as a nearly universal body of customs or enactments. According to Gratian, natural law is supreme: “In dignity the natural law prevails absolutely over custom and statute. For anything accepted by custom or contained in writing should be held null and void if it is opposed to natural law” (dist.8, d.a.c.2, col. 13). Custom must give way to truth and reason (c.4 and 5, col. 14).

### Problems Arising from the Law Texts

The relationship between the law of nations and natural law clearly needed to be sorted out, and there were also problems about property and slavery. Isidore’s text as quoted by Gratian says that natural law establishes “the common possession of all things,” but also that it allows “the acquisition of what is taken from air, land and sea” and requires “the restitution of an article given in trust or money loaned.” The common possession of all things seems inconsistent with the acquisition and restitution of property. There was also conflict between natural law and human law. Gratian and Isidore say that by natural law all things are common, and according to Augustine property exists by human law: if natural law invalidates any contrary human law, as Gratian says it does, how can human law establish property?

One solution was offered by Rufinus, one of the early commentators on Gratian. According to Rufinus (pp. 6–7), natural law includes commands, prohibitions, and *demonstrationes*. By *demonstratio* (which can perhaps be translated “indication”) natural law points out what is fitting

or shows what is good (*demonstrat quod convenit, bona esse ostendit*). According to Alexander of Hales (Vol. 4, p. 348), by “demonstration” Rufinus means “advice” (*consilium*). Demonstrations include the “one liberty of all” and “common possession of all things.” Unlike commands and prohibitions, demonstrations can be set aside for a good reason – to do so in some circumstances may serve purposes recommended by natural law (e.g., the enslavement of criminals may serve peace and justice). Demonstrations are not merely “licit” or “permitted.” Natural law not only permits but recommends certain things, such as freedom and community, without commanding them.

Others offered a solution based on the idea of permission or concession. They suggested that property and slavery exist by the permission of the natural law. (Tierney has discussed permissive law in many places: see Tierney 1997, index “Natural Law, permissive”; Tierney 2001, 2002, p. 399ff). But the idea of “permissive” natural law needs clarification. In civil law, a positive or explicit permission may be needed to correct other laws. Corrective provisions will not be needed in natural law, which is not the imperfect work of human legislators. Implicit permission may be given, however, by the silence of the law – that is, when the law includes no command or prohibition on some matter – under the general understanding that what is not prohibited is permitted. Thomas Aquinas (ST 1–2 q.94 a.5 ad 3) and many who followed him held that the question whether goods should be common or private is left open by natural law to be decided by human beings – natural law does not command or prohibit either. Property would have been legitimate also in the state of innocence. Community belongs to the natural law “negatively” as some later writers put it, meaning that it belongs to natural law in that natural law permits it. However, as Suárez realized, it is not enough to say that natural law merely permits either community or property, freedom or slavery; rather, community and freedom are the preferred state for mankind, to be set aside only for good reasons, pertaining to natural law “positively” (see Suárez, II.xiv.16–19, Vol. 4, p. 33ff). Suárez in effect returns to Rufinus’ notion of “demonstrations,” things that are recommended though not commanded.

The *Summa fratris Alexandri* put forward another possible solution. This *Summa* reported Rufinus’ distinction between precept and “demonstration” (Alexander of Hales, Vol. 4, p. 348), and the distinction between precept and permission as stated by Hugh of St Victor (pp. 351–352), but also suggested that natural law may give different precepts for different circumstances. (This is based on Augustine’s explanation of how the same God can be the author of the Old Law and of the New.) Adam’s sin introduced a great change of circumstances, and in view of this difference natural law prescribes the one liberty and community of goods for the state of innocence but for the fallen state prescribes slavery (for some) and property (p. 348). The leading Franciscan theologian of the next generation, Bonaventure, adopted a similar position (Bonaventure, 2 *Sent.*, dist. 44, a. 2, q. 2, ad 4, Vol. 2, p. 1051). Similarly, Scotus held that community of goods is highly consonant with natural law for the state of innocence, property for the fallen state (see below). Ockham followed Alexander and Bonaventure (see below).

Some civil lawyers in the later middle ages (e.g., Bartolus, Paulus de Castro) tried to answer the questions whether, and how, property exists by the law of nature by suggesting that property in moveables (e.g., consumables) is basic and natural, whereas property in immovables (e.g., land) developed in the secondary law of nations in imitation of property in movables: thus one kind of property is natural, the other conventional. All of this was later taken over by Grotius in *De iure praedae* (see Kilcullen 2001b, p. 905ff; on Bartolus see editor’s note in Suárez, Vol. 4, p. 130, n. 274). Whether property exists by natural law, the law of nations, civil law or divine positive law continued to be debated into the eighteenth century.

## Thomas Aquinas

Albert the Great, Alexander of Hales, Bonaventure, and others wrote about natural law (see Cunningham, Quinn). However, the most influential theological treatment was given by Thomas Aquinas in the *Summa theologiae*.

According to Thomas, reason directs human acts in view of some end. Action is commanded by the will, which wills the end, but for a command to count as law it must be in accord with some rule of reason (ST 1–2 q.90 a.1); thus law is from both the reason and the will of the lawgiver. Natural law is from the reasonable will of God (q.97 a.3); God’s reason, will, and law are identical with God himself (q.93 a.4 ad 1). The ultimate end to which reason directs action is the well-being of the whole community, the common good; every law, therefore, is ordered to the common good (q.90 a.2), and every law is ordered to friendship among those who share this common good (q.99 a.1 ad 2; a.2); the natural law fosters the friendship of all mankind with God. Laws are made and promulgated by someone who has charge of the community. The natural law is promulgated by God’s inserting into the minds of human beings a natural capacity to come to know the natural law (q.90 a.4 ad 1). Laws include commands and prohibitions, and perhaps counsels and permissions. Whether Thomas thinks that law includes counsels is not certain: in one place (q.92 a.2; ad 2) he seems to say it does not, in another (q.100 a.2) that it may. Law can give permission by leaving some matters undetermined; according to Thomas, the Gospel law is a law of freedom because it leaves many things to the decision of the individual (q. 108 a.1). Natural law leaves some matters to be determined by human positive law (q.94 a.5 ad 3; 2–2 q.66 a.2 ad 1).

Thomas postulates an eternal law. In God there are “ideas” or “types” of created things (1 q.15), in creatures there are “participations” of these ideas. The eternal law is the type of God’s government of the universe (1–2 q.93 a.1), the participation in human beings of the eternal law is the natural law. Whereas irrational nature is governed without knowing it by the eternal law, human beings can govern themselves consciously in accordance with this participation of the eternal law written into human reason (q.91 a.2). Natural law binds human beings in conscience (q.96 a.4). Natural law is morality (q.100 a.1, q.104 a.1).

The primary principles of natural law are the most basic general principles of practical reason.

There is a plurality of indemonstrable principles of practical reasoning, but one is fundamental and the others are founded on it (*fundantur, referuntur, reducuntur*), though not by being demonstrated from it. Thomas draws an analogy between practical and scientific reasoning (q.90 a.1 ad 2, q.91 a.3, q.94 a.2): the fundamental principles of natural law are the counterpart in practical reasoning of the fundamental indemonstrable principles of scientific reasoning (cf. Aristotle, *Anal. post.* I.3, 72b 18–25, *Metaph.* IV.4 1006a 5–12). A fundamental principle is known per se, that is, its predicate is part of the ratio (intelligibility) of its subject. (Ratio here means not just a stipulative or verbal definition but an understanding of what something is.) Just as the first notion that speculative reason forms of something is that it is something, a being, so practical reason first apprehends what is to be done or brought about as a good. The first principle in practical reasoning, based on the ratio of good (“that which all things seek”), is that good is to be sought and done and evil avoided. Other indemonstrable principles are based on this first principle, in that various kinds of ends are naturally apprehended as good, namely those to which man has a natural inclination. (Inclinations belong to the appetitive faculty, the will; q.58 a.1.) Going from general to specific, natural inclinations can be classified as belonging to man as a substance, as an animal, and as a rational animal. Regarding man as a substance, there are precepts of natural law relating to the preservation of human life, regarding man as animal there are precepts relating to sex and the education of children, regarding man as rational there are precepts relating to the seeking of knowledge of God and participation in social life – forming a list reminiscent of, though not identical with, the content of natural law according to Cicero and the writers quoted by Justinian and Gratian. (For all this see q.94 a.2 and Grisez 1965.) Though the ordering of principles is from general to specific, it seems unlikely that preservation of human life is supposed always to override the others; Thomas does not discuss the possibility that in particular cases natural laws may conflict.

Secondary principles of natural law are derived as “quasi-conclusions” from the primary

principles (q.91 a.3), again in an order from general to particular (q.94 a.4, a.6). The term “quasi-conclusions” (q.94 a.6, q.97 a.4 ad 3, q.99 a.2 ad 2), suggests that the derivation may not be strict logical inference. Thomas says that the most basic principles are exceptionless and are known to all, but practical reason is concerned with contingents, and the closer we come to contingent particulars the more often we encounter defects – one of the principles of Aristotle’s natural philosophy is that corruptible natures are defective in some cases. Derivative rules may therefore not apply in some circumstances. For example, in typical cases natural law requires “restitution of an article given in trust,” but that does not hold if the thing will be used to attack one’s country (q.94 a.4), or if it is a sword belonging to a madman (2–2 q.120 a.1). Adding conditions to the rule will not preclude exceptions, since the more conditions are added the greater the possibility that the rule will fail (1–2 q.94 a.4). Although the fundamental principles (including, as we will see, the Ten Commandments) are exceptionless and do not admit of dispensation, dispensation is possible from the more particular rules in unusual cases (q.94 a.5; q.97 a.4 ad 3; q.100 a.8).

The process of derivation continues into positive law. The two branches of human positive law, the law of nations and the civil law, are derived from natural law in different ways. The law of nations is derived, like the secondary principles of natural law, by inference (*per modum conclusionis*), the civil law is derived “by determination” (q.95 a.2). (It is natural law that we must not kill other people; if traffic is dense and fast moving, the duty not to kill may suggest that motorists should all drive on the same side of the road, but whether this should be the right side or the left is determined by the civil law.) Human law may bind in conscience (q.96 a.4), but human laws inconsistent with natural law are a corruption of law and do not bind morally (q.93 a.3 ad 2; q.95 a.2). Among the matters natural law leaves to be determined by human law is possession of external goods. The natural law permits human beings to use natural things (2–2 q.66 a.1), but (for reasons given by Aristotle, q. 66 a.2) in some circumstances it is best if some individuals

control access to some things, and human law may provide for this by instituting property (q.66 a.2 ad 1).

The Decalogue (the Ten Commandments, Exodus 20:2–17) is a republication of some precepts of natural law. The natural law is a participation of the eternal law, which is divine, but there is also a “revealed” divine law, not promulgated by inscription in the minds of all mankind but promulgated to some human beings through messengers – Moses, the Prophets, the Apostles, etc. (q. 91 a.4); some of its precepts are positive laws (q. 99 a.4), but the Decalogue, promulgated through Moses, re-promulgates some precepts of natural law. The Decalogue does not include the most basic principles of natural law, which are immediately obvious to all mankind and do not need republication, and on the other hand it does not include the more recondite implications of natural law (q.100 a.3, a.5 ad 1). The Ten Commandments are more particular than the most general principles, but they are (at a lower level, so to speak) general principles and can easily be seen by anyone; yet, because in a few cases human judgment regarding them can be perverted, they needed to be republished by divine revelation (q.100 a.11). The “first table” (the first three commandments) consists of precepts ordering mankind to the ultimate end, God; the second table consists of precepts regarding the order of justice among mankind (q.100 a. 8). (Commandments of the first table are self-evident to human reason informed by faith; q.100 a. 3 ad 1, q. 104 a.1 ad 3.) Just as the general principles of natural law are immutable, exceptionless, and indispensable, so are the Ten Commandments, which contain the very intention of the lawgiver (q.100 a.8). There have been cases when God directed or permitted action apparently contrary to one or other of the commandments, but these were not really contrary and were not really changes of natural law or dispensations from it (q.94 a.5 ad 2; q.100 a.8 ad 3). Some apparent dispensations were interpretations (q.100 a.8 ad 4). The explanation of other apparent dispensations is that because God is supreme lord and supreme judge, He can deprive some people of their life as punishment, or transfer their goods to others, or allot some woman to

be some person's wife, without violating the relevant precepts of the Decalogue.

Thomas' account of natural law gives rise to many questions. How "good is to be sought and evil avoided" known per se – is it because "to be sought" is included in the ratio of good? If so, then "that which all things seek" cannot be an accurate statement of the ratio of good, since it implies no such prescription. What are the other self-evident basic principles? Thomas does not state them, but merely indicates their subject matter – for example, "whatever is a means of preserving human life and of warding off its obstacles *belongs to* the natural law." How are the other basic principles "founded on" or "reduced to" the first principle, if not by being demonstrated from it? What are the derivative natural laws, and how are they derived? How do natural inclinations generate laws (q.94 a.2)? How is the list of natural inclinations drawn up – is man's having these inclinations supposed to be known per se in the specified sense (i.e., that the predicate is included in the ratio of the subject), or in some other sense? Is the list "self-evident" merely in the loose sense that it will strike most people as obviously correct, "intuitively"? Some common inclinations (e.g., selfishness, revenge) are not good: if they are ascribed to "sin" and not to nature, we must be able to distinguish between what is common and what is natural. Are all truly natural inclinations good, or do we regard as truly natural only those we recognize (on what grounds?) as good?

### Duns Scotus

According to Scotus, the term "law of nature" has a strict sense and a broad sense. In the strict sense, the laws of nature include practical principles known from their terms (*nota ex terminis*) and conclusions that can be inferred evidently from those principles. In a broad sense, the laws of nature include practical truths that are consonant (*consonans*) with the law of nature in the strict sense (Wolter 1986, pp. 262–263; on what Scotus may mean by "consonant" see Ragland). Laws of nature in the strict sense hold always, for whatever state or condition human beings may live in

(pp. 264–265). They are prior to any act of will, even God's – the divine intellect must recognize their truth and the divine will must will in accordance with the intellect's recognition of their truth. They admit of no exceptions; not even God can dispense from them. What they command is good in itself apart from the command, what they prohibit is wrong in itself apart from the prohibition.

Scotus distinguishes between commandments of the first table of the Decalogue, which formulate duties we have toward God Himself, and commandments of the second table, which regulate our conduct toward other human beings. The command to keep holy the Sabbath day is not part of natural law in the strict sense, and the other two commandments of the first table belong to strict natural law only if given a negative formulation, as precepts not to hate God and not to love as supreme any but the true God. (Scotus holds that only negative commands belong to natural law in the strict sense.) The commandments of the second table are natural law only in the broad sense, and God has power to set them aside. God's power is limited only by the impossibility of his doing anything self-contradictory (p. 256). To set aside a practical truth *nota ex terminis*, or one evidently inferred from such a truth, that is, a natural law in the strict sense, would involve self-contradiction. But God can without any contradiction revoke any of the commandments relating to the good of our neighbors.

Against this it might be argued that love of God implies love of our neighbors, since if we love God we must wish others to love him, and wishing for that is to love them; the commandments of the second table therefore follow evidently from natural law in the strict sense and are therefore natural laws in the strict sense. Scotus rejects this argument for several reasons (pp. 282–284): first, because the duty to love God is affirmative and therefore not part of strict natural law – the strict duty is not to hate God, and we can fulfill this duty without wishing anyone else to love God. Second, because God may not wish to be loved by everyone, for example, not by those whom he has not predestined to salvation. Third, because even if we do want our neighbor to love God, that does

not imply any of the commandments of the second table for example, we can want our neighbor to love God without having any duty not to kill our neighbor. God has revealed that he wills us to love our neighbor in ways that go beyond anything that can be strictly inferred from the natural law obliging us to love God; the second table expresses that will, it does not spell out strict implications of natural law.

These are arguments for rejecting Thomas' doctrine that not even God can dispense with the commandments of the Decalogue. Whether God has in fact done so is another question. Thomas referred to a number of occasions on which God apparently dispensed with one or another of the commandments (ST 1–2 q.94 a.5 obj. 2). Scotus repeats these examples, and argues that they show that God has in fact dispensed. To the objection that the command “thou shalt not kill” does not fully express the intention of the legislator, that is, that it is only an approximate statement of the obligation, Scotus answers that precision is not the issue. Granted that the commandment does not intend to forbid every killing, the question remains: Can God's permission in a particular case makes licit an act that, apart from this permission, would be really forbidden, by the commandment precisely formulated? If so, then God can dispense from the Decalogue, just as he replaced the Old Law with the New, just as a legislator can replace one positive law with another; if not, then He cannot dispense. If Abraham had killed his son that would really have been a violation of a commandment in its true intention, which proves that God has dispensed from the commandment “thou shalt not kill.”

God also revoked the law that prohibited appropriation in the state of innocence (pp. 280–281, 312–315). (The law against appropriation does not belong to the Decalogue, but according to Isidore (above) natural law includes “the common possession of all things.”) After the fall God revoked the prohibition against appropriation; some time after that, human law established the institution of property, and God's law then prohibited theft. Scotus explains (pp. 312–313) that the original prohibition and later permission of appropriation served the same

ends, namely peace and sustenance, under different circumstances. In the state of innocence community of goods served those ends best, in the fallen state appropriation does; if goods had remained common in the fallen state, the physically weak would have suffered from the greed of the powerful. That the physically weak should be protected, that people should live together peacefully, and that there are many morally weak persons who care mostly about themselves and not much about others, all seem obvious. The institution of property in the fallen state is very consonant with those suppositions, though not implied with strict necessity. Scotus comments that perhaps it is thus with all positive laws: they do not follow with strict necessity from the underlying principles, but only as very consonant with them (p. 281).

Unlike Thomas, Scotus in his account of natural law makes no reference to natural human inclinations. An appeal to natural inclinations would have been inconsistent with Scotus' view of freedom of the will and the contingency of creation. According to Scotus, the will is free in the sense that it has an instantaneous “power of opposites,” that is, when the will chooses something, it simultaneously has full power to choose the opposite (*Ordinatio* 1, dist. 38–39; Scotus, *Opera omnia*, Vol. 6, pp. 417–419). According to Scotus, human decisions, and God's, are not determined by thoughts, dispositions, or other causes. This implies that God is not bound by any rules or laws in His decisions about creation. God is free to create human beings with certain natural inclinations, without being bound to issue them with any commandments, and without being bound to command them in ways that further their natural inclinations. Human will, according to Scotus, has two “affections”, an *affectio commodi*, which is a tendency to seek objects of natural inclination, and an *affectio iustitiae*, a tendency to choose to do what is right and good because it is so (Wolter 1986, pp. 178–179). It is the *affectio iustitiae* that constitutes human freedom. It sets us free to disregard our natural inclinations and to choose to follow God's commandments instead, whatever they may be, even if they do not suit our inclinations.



## William of Ockham

According to Ockham (Quodl. II q.14, OTh, Vol. 9, p. 177), positive morality consists of laws that oblige a person to seek or avoid things only because they have been ordered or prohibited by a superior, but there is a “non-positive” morality consisting of laws that direct human acts apart from any command of a superior. Non-positive morality consists of directives that are either fundamental principles *per se nota* or laws deduced from such fundamental principles together with experience. (The reference to factual experience differentiates Ockham’s position from that of his predecessors.) Non-positive morality is the natural law (3.2 Dial., 1.5, 1.10).

There are three kinds of natural law (3.2 Dial., 3.6). The first (elsewhere called “absolute” natural law, 3.2 Dial., 1.11) consists of natural laws that hold always, everywhere, in all conditions of mankind; no necessity excuses disobedience (3.1 Dial., 2.20), they are immutable and no dispensation from them can be given (except by God, as we will find): for example, “Do not commit adultery,” “Do not lie.” The second kind are the laws to be observed by those who make no use of custom and human legislation, laws that would have been observed in the state of innocence and would still be observed if everyone lived according to natural reason or divine law: for example, common possession. The third kind are laws gathered by evident reasoning from the law of nations or another law or from some act, divine or human, unless the contrary is decided on with the consent of those concerned. The third kind are natural laws “on supposition.” On the supposition of the fall from innocence, and on the supposition that human law has established the institution of property as a way of reducing conflict and other evils of the fallen state, natural reason will infer that one must not use something belonging to another without the owner’s consent. The law of nations consists in, or includes, natural law of the third kind (3.2 Dial., 3.7 near the end). Ockham’s doctrine of three modes seems to be a development of ideas of Alexander of Hales, Bonaventure, and Scotus (see above), and likewise resolves the conflicts found in Gratian’s extracts from Isidore.

Ockham does not follow Scotus in giving a lower status to the second table of the Decalogue, but unlike both Thomas and Scotus, he says that God may make dispensations from any of the Ten Commandments (even commandments of the first table). Ockham seems to hold that one of the principles of non-positive morality is that God is to be obeyed, and that this principle overrides the others when there is conflict. From this it seems that God can make exceptions or give dispensations from any natural law, either by allowing an occasional exception or by replacing the current moral law: “I say that. . . hate, theft, adultery and the like. . . could be done by the wayfarer even meritoriously if they were to fall under a divine precept, just as now in fact their opposites fall under divine precept. . . But if they were thus done meritoriously by the wayfarer, then they would not be called or named theft, adultery, hate, etc., because those names signify such acts not absolutely but by connoting or giving to understand that one doing such acts is obliged to their opposites by divine precept” (OTh, Vol. 5, p. 352). To love God, or at least the negative, not to hate God, is a principle of natural law; love of God is necessarily a good act and the most basic of good acts. Nevertheless, the natural law that God is to be obeyed overrides even the law that God is to be loved – if God commanded an act of hatred of God, the commandment would bind. “Everything that can be a right act on the way [i.e., on earth], also [can be right] in the fatherland [i.e., in heaven]. But to hate God can be a right act on the way, for example if it is commanded by God, therefore in the fatherland” (Vol. 7, p. 352).

The overriding force Ockham gives to divine commandments has led some historians to classify him as a “voluntarist,” implying that he holds that morality is whatever God wills it to be (cf. Copleston, Vol. 3.1, p. 115ff). In Ockham’s view, the obligation to obey God’s commands is an obligation of natural law that overrides other precepts of natural law, but that it overrides them does not imply that they hold, when they do, only because they are commanded by God. Perhaps his view is that an act contrary to natural law, such as adultery, is wrong in itself but the wrong of disobedience to God would be greater, so that a

person might be obliged by divine command to commit adultery, which would then, under the circumstances, be right (see Kilcullen 2001a). Ockham states explicitly (see above) that there is a non-positive morality independent of the will of a superior, and there are places where he distinguishes between things wrong in themselves and things wrong because prohibited (3.1 Dial., 2.20). However, it must be said that Ockham did not make his position clear. (For an account of the role of reason in Ockham's moral theory see McGrade 2006, pp. 66–70; on divine command and rational ethics in Ockham's moral theory, see McGrade 1999.)

### Gregory of Rimini

Though modern historians classify them as voluntarists, Scotus and Ockham say that natural law in the strict sense, or “non-positive morality,” is independent of God's will. According to Scotus, propositions which “are true by reason of their terms. . . would be true even if, to assume the impossible, no act of willing existed” (Wolter 1986, p. 275). Gregory of Rimini went further and said that the necessary truths of morality are independent also of God's intellect – if human beings existed but God did not, adultery would still be wrong. To the question why he says that sin is against right reason, rather than against divine reason, Gregory answers that he says this

lest it be thought that sin is precisely against divine reason and not against *any* right reason. . . , and lest it be thought that something is sin not because it is against divine reason as being right, but because it is against it as being divine. For if, to assume the impossible, the divine reason or God himself did not exist, or his reason was in error, still, if someone acted against angelic or human right reason or any other (if there be any), he would sin. And if there existed no right reason at all, still, if someone acted against what some right reason, if it existed, *would* say should be done, he would sin. (Gregory 1980, p. 235)

Many things are sins of themselves and not just because they have been prohibited; even if no divine command were ever given, a person could know and judge that such things are not to be

done. “If anyone acts solely against the natural law or against the right judgment of reason, certainly he would sin, though, *if he were to have with this a superadded precept, he would sin further*” (Gregory 1980, p. 238, emphasis added). Since God forbids what is already wrong, there is a double sin.

In the seventeenth century, Gabriel Vasquez held a similar position (see St. Leger 1962, pp. 131–134). According to Suárez, the term natural law implies the command of a superior, namely God, but it commands or forbids what is right or wrong intrinsically, apart from any divine command: God's command imposes a moral obligation additional to the “(so to speak) natural” evil the act has in itself (Suárez, vi.12, Vol. 3, p. 94ff). There are echoes of Gregory, Vasquez and/or Suárez in Grotius (*De iure*, Prol. 11, and lib. I.1.10), and Samuel Clarke (Raphael, Vol. 1, pp. 212–214). According to all these authors, rightness and wrongness are intrinsic to actions of certain kinds, and God commands right action and forbids wrongdoing.

Medieval natural law theories belong to the genus of theories that suppose that morality is “objective,” that is, that moral standards are independent of the opinions of any human individual or social group. Specifically, natural law theories (1) undertake to derive the standards from basic principles *per se nota*, and (2) claim that the standards are laws sanctioned by God. However, medieval writers failed to present the self-evident basic principles clearly enough to make it possible to judge whether they really are *per se nota*, and they failed to show in detail how other precepts of the natural law can be demonstrated from the basic principles. The rational derivation of morality remained merely a project lightly sketched out.

### Cross-References

- ▶ [Albert the Great](#)
- ▶ [Alexander of Hales](#)
- ▶ [Augustine](#)
- ▶ [Bonaventure](#)
- ▶ [Canon Law](#)
- ▶ [Civil \(Roman\) Law](#)

- ▶ [Ethics](#)
- ▶ [Gregory of Rimini](#)
- ▶ [Jesuit Political Thought](#)
- ▶ [John Duns Scotus](#)
- ▶ [Natural Rights](#)
- ▶ [Political Philosophy](#)
- ▶ [Posterior Analytics, Commentaries on Aristotle's](#)
- ▶ [Thomas Aquinas, Political Thought](#)
- ▶ [William of Ockham](#)

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## Natural Philosophy

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### Abstract

Before the publication of Newton's *Principia mathematica philosophiae naturalis* (1689), Aristotle's *Physics* was the most widely read and influential book of natural philosophy. After 1250, it constituted the core text of the discipline of natural philosophy and was, together with Aristotle's other "natural books," routinely studied at all European universities. Change and motion were the central topics in Aristotle's "natural books," and, as a

consequence, came to be pivotal in medieval natural philosophy. For Aristotle, and the medievals in his wake, motion was not merely a starting point from everyday experience, but a phenomenon whose nature needed closer investigation. This article will pay attention to medieval studies of the nature of motion, but also to medieval dynamics and kinematics (gravity, accelerated free fall, projectile motion, and qualitative changes, such as heating). The medieval discussions raised interesting ontological, semantic, and mathematical issues. The focus will be on developments at the universities of Oxford and Paris.

## Introduction

Nowadays, philosophy and science are two distinct domains, separated by dividing lines that were nonexistent in the past. We often associate philosophy with the examination of unanswerable questions, whereas the core activity of science seems to be the collecting of empirical data and the creation of explanatory mathematical models. In antiquity and in the Middle Ages, however, philosophy and science were one discipline with one shared history.

Medieval natural philosophy did not originate out of nothing; it did not stand on its own shoulders but on those of ancient philosophy. The famous British philosopher Bernard Williams once remarked that "the legacy of Greece to western philosophy is western philosophy." Before the publication of Newton's *Principia mathematica philosophiae naturalis* (1689), Aristotle's *Physics* was the most widely read and influential book of natural philosophy. How could Aristotle become such an important authority? The answer to this question is linked to the site of philosophy during the Middle Ages. After 1200, philosophical and scientific culture primarily flourished at the universities, instead of, for instance, in laboratories or learned societies, cathedral schools, monasteries, or courts. At all universities in medieval Europe, Aristotle's works came to be compulsory reading for all students. The works of Plato or of other Greek thinkers were hardly known. This historical

circumstance shaped medieval (natural) philosophy in a unique way (see the entries on ► [“Aristotelianism in the Greek, Latin, Syriac, Arabic, and Hebrew Traditions”](#) and ► [“Universities and Philosophy”](#) in this volume).

In medieval universities, the curriculum of the Faculty of Arts included the seven liberal arts (grammar, rhetoric, logic, arithmetic, geometry, music, and astronomy) and what were called the three philosophies: natural philosophy, moral philosophy (or ethics), and first philosophy (or metaphysics). Aside from astronomy, then, most of the disciplines that were later called “science” fell under the heading of “natural philosophy” (*philosophia naturalis*). Other terms that designate the domain of natural philosophy are natural science (*scientia naturalis*), physics (*physica*), and, in the post-medieval period, physiology (*physiologia*).

In addition, medieval scholars were familiar with the term “science” (*scientia*). It was applied, however, in different ways than we are used to today. In the Middle Ages, the term “science” referred to the mental condition of possessing certain knowledge of something. It was a type of knowledge that was produced by a logical demonstration. In this respect, “science” distinguishes itself from “opinion” or “view” in that the latter are not based on any particular method and are not universally valid and certain. In a derivative sense, “science” can also refer to a discipline in the Middle Ages, a discipline with its own domain of inquiry, principles, and methodology. In this sense, “science” is a collection of propositions about a particular topic, organized in a coherent set of arguments and proofs. Thus, “physics” is a science, but so are metaphysics, medicine, and theology. Overall, *scientia*, the medieval term for science, was not exclusively reserved for physics, but was applied to any field that contained certain and valid statements (see the entry on ► [“Posterior Analytics, Commentaries on Aristotle’s”](#) in this volume).

The basic content of philosophy was constituted in medieval universities by the works of Aristotle, known as “the Philosopher,” often accompanied by the commentaries of Averroes, known as “the Commentator.” To fulfill their

requirements in natural philosophy, selections were made of Aristotle’s works in natural philosophy. Natural philosophers of the Middle Ages and the Renaissance believed that Aristotle had raised and discussed crucial questions about the natural world and had explained important definitions, general principles, and concepts of physical science. In addition to the *Physics*, Aristotle had provided this explanation in other “natural books” (*libri naturales*), such as *On the Heavens (De caelo)*, *On the Soul (De anima)*, *On Generation and Corruption (De generatione et corruptione)*, “Meteorology” (*Meteorologica*), and *The Short Natural Treatises (Parva naturalia)*. These books were arranged around the *Physics* as treatises that discussed particular aspects of natural objects. In sum, the medieval and Renaissance scholars found their natural philosophy in the books of Aristotle rather than in the Book of Nature, written in the language of mathematics, as Galileo expressed two centuries later in a very powerful metaphor (see the entries on ► [“De caelo, Commentaries on Aristotle’s,”](#) ► [“De generatione et corruptione, Commentaries on Aristotle’s,”](#) and ► [“Parva Naturalia, Commentaries on Aristotle’s”](#) in this volume).

Aristotle as well as the medieval and Renaissance scholars who followed in his footsteps, were utterly convinced of the intelligibility of nature. Nature possesses an order that is accessible to the human mind, an order that initially discloses itself in the way we speak of nature. Investigation of the natural world begins with phenomena (*phainomena*) and it moves from “that what is better known to us” to “that what is more knowable by nature,” that is, the “objective” principles and causes that are concealed and intrinsic to the phenomena (Aristotle, *Physica*, 184a17–22 and *Metaphysica*, 1029b3–12). Aristotle speaks about “phenomena” in a much broader sense than we are used to. For Aristotle, “empirical data” not only refer to the observable facts themselves, but also apply to common opinion or to scholarly opinion about these facts. It is Aristotle’s traditional method to investigate how, for instance, one speaks of a specific topic. He reflects on commonly held views, signals all kinds of problems, and subsequently offers us a more profound analysis of a “phenomenon.”



One of the essential research themes in Aristotle's "natural books" is the phenomenon of change. What is most remarkable about the natural world is that it is susceptible to all kinds of change. Natural objects originate and perish; they are altered; they move (they change location); and they grow. From this perspective, natural philosophy includes the study of celestial bodies, of meteorological phenomena, and of important concepts that are fundamentally intertwined with change, such as "place," "space," and "time" and related notions such as "continuity" and "infinity" (see the entry on ► ["Atomism"](#) in this volume). But it also includes the study of material objects, which have the characteristics of living beings, such as human beings and animals (see the entry on ► ["Philosophical Psychology, Jewish Tradition"](#) in this volume). For the first time in the history of western thought, a systematic attempt was made to give a conceptual analysis of change and motion, including their temporal and spatial aspects.

### From Athens to Western Europe

How did medieval natural philosophers become aware of the theories of a Greek thinker from the fourth century BCE? Did they read the papyrus scrolls, which Aristotle had scribbled down in Greek 600 years earlier? The ideas and views of Greek philosophers, strolling and chatting in the local marketplace or at a gymnasium, traveled a long way before they had their impact at the universities of Oxford, Paris, or elsewhere in Europe.

Roger Bacon (1214/1220–1292) once claimed that proficiency in languages "offers the first door to wisdom, which certainly applies to the Latins, who only possess philosophical and theological texts written in a foreign language" (Roger Bacon, *Opus tertium*, Cap. XXVIII). Bacon had a point: Latin wisdom had mainly been imported from Greece. If one wonders how western philosophy had become the legacy of Greece to western philosophy, then the answer is clear: through translation. From the end of the twelfth century onward, a basically alien philosophical and scientific

culture was reintroduced into the Latin West that meanwhile had become Christian. In the time span before the twelfth century, Latin natural philosophy was based on a very small number of sources (see the entries on ► ["Adelard of Bath"](#) and ► ["Roger Bacon"](#) in this volume). Due to political developments within the Roman Empire, the intellectual ties between the Latin West and the Greek East were gradually severed. The days when members of the intellectual elite in Rome were able to speak and write in Greek had definitely passed.

Western scholars read Aristotle in Latin, even long after 1470, when the first Greek editions of Aristotle's works had appeared in the West. The Latin translations continued to be published for reasons of user convenience. From the Middle Ages until far into the seventeenth century, Latin simply was the language in which scholars conversed and wrote, no matter their geographical origin. Galileo, Descartes, Spinoza, and Newton, for instance, consulted Latin translations of Aristotle. The position of Latin as the universal language for scholars explains why Aristotle and other Greek thinkers were translated into Latin, rather than into Europe's different vernacular languages.

In certain respects, the transmission of Greek science and philosophy into Latin is comparable to an infectious disease. Both pass from one community to another through contact. Whenever an "outbreak" is diagnosed, we ask ourselves "Where did it first originate?" Can all outbreaks be traced back to one primary source, or have there been several independent starting points? How did the first Latin translations of Aristotle's works originate? The question might seem obvious, but the answer is rather complex, at least when one wants to delve deeper than the mere enumeration of data, names, places, and titles of works. The translators came from all parts of Europe. Some worked individually, while others were part of a systematic translation movement. The activities of the Latin translators were part of a process that can best be characterized as the appropriation and assimilation of Greek knowledge in the Latin West. The choice of phrasing implies that much more was at stake than the mere



continuation and reception of Aristotle's works. The Greek thinkers had not come to the West as uninvited guests; they were not thrust upon western culture. On the contrary, translators went to seek out Greek erudition. Extraordinary historical circumstances offered western scholars the unique opportunity to revert to the Greek originals, as well as to their Arabic translations.

Texts written in Arabic played an important role in western philosophy and science. They were an Islamic legacy to the West. The authors came from an area stretching from North-East Africa and the South of Spain to eastern Asia, and wrote in Arabic. The Arabic translations of Aristotle's works were only a small segment of this Islamic legacy. It further consisted of Arabic translations of other Greek authors, such as Hippocrates, Galen, Euclid, and Ptolemy and, obviously, of independent works of Islamic scientists and philosophers (see the entries on ► [“Arabic Texts: Natural Philosophy, Latin Translations of”](#); ► [“Aristotle, Arabic”](#) in this volume).

Which role did Islamic science play as an intermediary in the transmission of Aristotle's natural philosophy to the West? The picture often given is that the West came to know Aristotle's works through translations from Arabic. These translations supposedly had given the impulse toward the western revival of philosophy and science: the light came from the East. However, around the same time when the Latin translations from Arabic were made, Aristotle was also translated from Greek into Latin. The manuscript evidence demonstrates that, in the West, Aristotle's works were mainly read in Latin translations that were made from the Greek original, certainly since the first half of the thirteenth century. An exception is *De animalibus*, one of Aristotle's treatises on biology, which was read throughout the Middle Ages in a Latin translation made from Arabic.

More important Arabic sources, however, from a western point of view, are the Latin translations of paraphrases and commentaries by al-Fārābī (d. 950–951), Ibn Sīnā/Avicenna (980–1037), and Ibn Rushd/Averroes (1126–1198). They belonged to the philosophical movement known by the Arabic loanword *falsafa* (*philosophia* in

Greek). Their works would come to play an important role in the Latin reflection on the writings of Aristotle (see the entries on ► [“Ibn Rushd \(Averroes\), Latin Translations of”](#); ► [“Ibn Sīnā \(Avicenna\), Latin Translations of”](#); ► [al-Fārābī, Latin Translations of](#) in this volume).

The origins of the translations and the details about scholars who traveled wide distances in search for texts and who spent most of their lives translating them, are told elsewhere in this Encyclopedia. Important translators of Aristotle's “natural books” from Greek are James of Venice, Burgund of Pisa, and William of Moerbeke. They helped Aristotle to become the companion of any late-medieval (natural) philosopher in the West.

## The Universities of Paris and Oxford

After 1250, every teacher in the arts-faculty at any university in Europe was required to teach using Aristotle's natural books. The teaching resulted in commentaries on Aristotle's works, which contained contemporary discussions about natural philosophy provoked by Aristotle's text. For this reason, the commentary literature on Aristotle is a rich source of information about medieval theories. In addition, issues in natural philosophy were discussed in the context of theological works, notably commentaries on the *Sentences*, and in separate treatises. The favorite format, however, was the commentary on Aristotle's natural books.

Literally hundreds of commentaries were written on Aristotle's natural books during the Middle Ages and the Renaissance. For reasons of convenience and historiographical tradition, this survey will devote special attention to the universities of Oxford and Paris. They were the sites of the two most prominent schools in natural philosophy, that is, the network of scholars linked to John Buridan (d. 1361) at Paris and the group linked to Thomas Bradwardine (d. 1349) at Oxford. In recent research, it has been argued that there was no such thing as a Buridan school. More accurately, John Buridan and his alleged pupils Albert of Saxony (d. 1390) and Nicholas Oresme (fl. 1345–1360) were contemporary scholars at

Paris, engaged in the discussions of their time. Even so, they remain the key figures in Parisian natural philosophy and its aftermath. Oxford's main protagonists were Richard Kilvington (d. 1361), Richard Swineshead (fl. 1340–1355), William Heytesbury (d. 1372/1373), and John Dumbleton (fl. 1338–1348). Richard Swineshead (not to be confounded with his contemporaneous namesakes John and Roger) came to be designated by later authors as “the Calculator” (*Calculator*), whereas the Oxford group in its entirety has been called “Calculators” (*calculatores*) (see the entries on ► “Albert of Saxony”; ► “John Buridan”; ► “John Dumbleton”; ► “Nicholas Oresme”; ► “Oxford Calculators”; ► “Richard Swineshead”; ► “Thomas Bradwardine,” and ► “William Heytesbury” in this volume).

## Change and Motion

As has been mentioned above, change and motion were the central topics in Aristotle's “natural books,” and, as a consequence, came to be central in medieval natural philosophy. The *Physics* was only one of Aristotle's works on natural philosophy, but from the medieval perspective, it was the most important one. It was understood to provide a characterization of the most general principles and properties of the “things that are by nature” (Aristotle, *Physics*, 192b9–193a30). It covered the most general truths of natural philosophy, true for all bodies. Examples of natural things are animals and their parts, plants, and the four basic elements: earth, air, fire, and water. They are natural in a way that other objects are not, such as artifacts and things that are due to chance. But why are plants natural objects, and beds not? According to Aristotle, “things that are by nature” are distinguished from nonnatural things in virtue of having an inner source of moving and being at rest. In the case of natural objects, as in contrast to those artificially made by man, their specific nature disposes them to certain kinds of behavior, notably to all kinds of natural change. Fire, for instance, naturally heats other bodies. Acorns naturally develop into oak trees. Artifacts lack such

an inner source of motion (although they too contain such an inner principle insofar as they are made out of natural things). A coat, for instance, considered as a coat, does not have an inner impulse to change. As a consequence, “we must therefore see what motion is; for if it were unknown, nature too would be unknown” (Aristotle, *Physics*, 200 b 10–15). Precisely this endeavor was undertaken in the *Physics*.

Aristotle's account of nature and natural objects is couched in the terminology that was primarily reserved for local motion (*kinēsis*, *motus*). But how does it relate to change in general? In an influential passage in Book 3 of the *Physics*, Aristotle had maintained that motion does not constitute a separate category of its own over and above the things that are moving, but is placed in several categories of entities that are capable of change: substance, quantity, quality, and place (*Physics*, 200b32–201a10). Thus, “motion,” in this broad Aristotelian sense, includes (1) change of quantity (growth and decline); (2) change of quality (alteration, such as white into nonwhite); (3) locomotion; and (4) substantial change or generation and corruption. In the first three types of change, the substance remains the same and its properties change, whereas in the latter, the substance itself changes. For this reason, medieval thinkers sometimes classified generation and corruption not as a type of motion (*motus*), but as a *mutatio*, that is, an instantaneous change. Motion, by contrast, was gradual and successive.

## What Is Motion?

For Aristotle, and the medievals in his wake, motion was not merely a starting point from everyday experience, but a phenomenon whose nature needed closer investigation. The question about the nature of motion not only concerned the adequacy of Aristotle's definition of motion, the *quid nominis* so to speak, but also, more interestingly, the question of what motion really is, that is, the *quid rei* or ontological status of motion. In response to certain conceptual puzzles that the Eleatic philosophers Parmenides (fl. 480 BCE)

and Zeno (fl. 450 BCE) had raised, Aristotle had introduced his form–matter theory of motion. If we may believe Aristotle’s account, Parmenides and Zeno had claimed that none of the things that exist come into being or pass away, or, in other words, that change is only apparent. They had argued that what comes to be must either do so from what already is, in which case it is no veritable coming-to-be, or from nothing at all (*ex nihilo*). The latter option, however, was considered absurd. On these logical grounds, they denied that change was possible.

Aristotle starts from the common sense assumption that perceived change is real. By his doctrine of form and matter, Aristotle tries to solve the logical impasse created by Parmenides and Zeno. He considers the objects in the world as composites of underlying matter and imposed form. From the perspective of matter, change involves continuation. The underlying substrate does not change. From the perspective of form, however, change involves real change, because it consists of the successive replacement of one form by another. For example, if a black object turns white, the matter or substrate remains, whereas the form of blackness is replaced by that of whiteness. In similar fashion, if an acorn becomes an oak tree, the change can be described in terms of the continuation of a substrate on which a new form is imposed.

In Aristotle’s view, the replacement of one form by another is not a transition from nonbeing to being. He supposed that any change was a transition from potentiality to actuality. The black, or rather, the not-white, is potentially white. By becoming white, it becomes actually what it was already potentially. Similarly, an acorn is potentially an oak. In sum, Aristotle’s invocation of matter and form, and of potentiality and actuality solved the logical puzzles raised by the Eleatic philosophers. Change does not involve a passage from nonbeing to being, which both Aristotle and Parmenides considered impossible, but rather a passage from potential being to actual being. As a consequence, matter and form, and potentiality and actuality became the most fundamental explanatory principles of medieval physics. Form is the principle that bears the essential

properties of a substance, that is, of any object in reality. It determines what the thing is, that is, what its specific nature is. Matter is the passive recipient of the form (see the entry on ► [“Form and Matter”](#) in this volume). Medieval attempts to define motion and discuss its ontological status were later ridiculed by Descartes. In the *Rules for the Direction of the Mind* (*Regulae ad directionem ingenii*, Rule 12 AT X, 427–27), Descartes pokes fun at the Aristotelian definition of motion. “Who doesn’t know what motion is?,” he asks rhetorically. In *The World* (*Le Monde*, AT XI 39), started around the same time, Descartes even claims that he finds the scholastic definition of motion so obscure that he is forced to leave it in “their language,” that is, “motion is the actuality of a thing in potentiality insofar as it is in potentiality” (*motus est actus entis in potentia prout in potentia est*).

In his works, Aristotle had made contradictory statements concerning the ontological status of motion. In *Physics*, book 3 (200b32–201a10) he maintained that motion is not something over and above the things in motion. In other words, motion does not constitute a separate category, but belongs to the same category that is gained by motion, that is, the category of Place in the case of local motion. In the *Categories* (11b1–8), however, Aristotle had claimed that motion fell into the category of Affection (*passio*).

Averroes tried to reconcile these incompatible statements by pointing out that in the *Physics*, Aristotle had set forth the more correct view, whereas in the *Categories*, he had maintained the more common view. Averroes’ explanation of Aristotle’s view hinges on an analysis of motion from two different perspectives. Motion, if considered from the terminus toward which it tends, only differs from it in its degree of “more or less,” that is, in its degree of perfection. If, however, motion is considered as a process (*via*) toward perfection or actuality, and, as a consequence, is different from the perfection it attains, it belongs to a category of its own. When seen as a road toward actuality, motion cannot coincide with that actuality. The same twofold analysis of motion recurs in Averroes’ commentary on *Physics* V. There it is couched in the terminology of

change “according to matter” and “according to form.” According to matter, change and its terminus belong to the same category; according to its form, one must view change as a transmutation that takes place in time and constitutes a category of its own, namely that of Affection (*passio*).

In the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, these alternative analyses of motion came to be captured under the formulas *forma fluens* and *fluxus formae*, a distinction that medieval authors usually attributed to Albert the Great. According to the *forma fluens* theory, change is nothing but the forms successively gained by the changeable body. In the case of local motion, the *forma fluens* is the place successively attained by the mobile body. In other words, motion is the same as the perfection or form it acquires, but it represents that form in a state of flux. It is important to note that the flowing character of the form is not posited in the form itself, but results from the degree of actualization of the form in the subject. Thus, the view of motion as *forma fluens* did not contradict the common medieval view that forms are unchangeable. The *fluxus formae* theory, on the other hand, maintained that change is not the form acquired but is “the flux” of that form – the flow, the process, or the road toward an actuality or perfection. These distinctions were, at least implicitly, in the background of fourteenth-century discussions of Aristotle’s statement that there is no change over and above real things.

In the fourteenth century, the two main positions in the debate over the nature of motion were clear: some claimed that motion is a flux, which is distinct from the mobile object and the place, whereas others advocated that motion requires nothing more than mobile body and place. However, the debate was complicated by other elements that were woven into the discussion, such as the correct interpretation of Aristotle’s and Averroes’ views and a discussion of whether local motion should be treated in the same way as alteration, that is, change of quality. On the basis of arguments that invoke God’s omnipotence in rotating the whole cosmos, John Buridan had argued that local motion cannot be treated in the same way as alteration. Albert of Saxony found Buridan’s arguments concerning God’s

omnipotence compelling and gave up the *forma fluens* theory for local motion, which in his view represented the theory genuinely advocated by Aristotle and Averroes.

John Buridan, Nicholas Oresme, and Albert of Saxony describe local motion as fluxus and as “being continuously in another way than before” (*aliter et aliter se habere quam prius*). But what is fluxus? Buridan and Albert of Saxony agree that the fluxus character of motion should be interpreted as an inherent quality or disposition (*dispositio*) of the mobile object, as a property of a mobile being, but of such a nature that it is purely successive.

Oresme, on the other hand, rejects the idea that the fluxus is an inherent quality, such as a form. He disqualifies this interpretation of fluxus as “the worst possible view.” How then should the fluxus be understood? Oresme introduces a new ontological entity, the *modus rei* or way of being, to explain the phenomenon of motion. Motion is nothing but the mode or condition of the mobile object, its condition of traversing spaces in succession. The successiveness of the mobile body, however, should not be taken in the sense of a successive thing (*res successiva*) that is distinct from it. Thus, Oresme’s interpretation of fluxus almost turns it into a *forma fluens* theory.

## The Causes of Motion

Other significant problem areas to which medieval thinkers addressed themselves are the dynamic and kinematic aspects of motion, that is, motion’s relations to its causes and to distance and time, respectively. In medieval terminology, these aspects concerned the study of motion “with respect to cause” (*penes causam*) and “with respect to effect” (*penes effectum*). In the former case, some consideration was given also to the forces acting on bodies to produce motions. Phenomena which fourteenth-century thinkers at Paris and Oxford discussed under these headings, and to which they often took a semantic and quantitative approach, were gravity, accelerated free fall, projectile motion, and also qualitative changes in a given subject, such as heating.

This section discusses the approach of motion with respect to its causes, which roughly corresponds to the dynamic study of motion (as in contrast to kinematics). Aristotle distinguished two kinds of local motion: natural and nonnatural or violent. Natural motion is the motion toward the natural place of the mobile body, which is determined by the proportion of the four elements – water, earth, air, and fire – in it. Bodies in which the elements earth or water predominate are heavy and consequently move downward, whereas bodies in which the elements air and fire predominate are light and move upward. Violent motions are motions in any direction deviating from the moving body's natural place, for instance upward for bodies mainly consisting of the element earth. Aristotle explained the local motion of inanimate bodies, that is of bodies that do not move themselves, by invoking the principle that motion is never spontaneous but that everything that is in motion "is moved by something" (*Physics*, 241 b 34; 259 a 29–31). In medieval terminology, this proposition was rendered as "everything that is moved is moved by another" (*omne quod movetur ab alio movetur*). Moreover, Aristotle had argued that there is no action at a spatial distance: the cause of motion and the thing moved need to be in contact (*Physics*, 243 a 3–4). Both propositions seemed to require that mover and moved were separate entities. When medieval commentators turned to these two basic Aristotelian principles of the explanation of motion, they concentrated their discussions on two problem areas that seemed to present counterexamples to Aristotle's axioms: one in the field of natural motion, and one in the field of violent motion.

### Natural Motion: The Explanation of Gravity and Accelerated Free Fall

In violent motion, it was not difficult to see that an external motive force was involved; but how were mover and moved body to be distinguished in natural motion? Some medieval scholars followed Thomas Aquinas' lead and concluded that the generator (*generans*) gave the mobile body its form and everything that followed from that

form, including its motive powers and its disposition to move, that is, its heaviness (*gravitas*) or lightness (*levitas*). In this way, the generator acted as a kind of remote motive cause in natural motion. A body's natural motion was conceived of as the consequent of its original generation. In case a body was impeded to move after it was generated, the cause of its natural motion was identified with whatever removed the impediment to its motion (*removens impedimentum*). The natural motion, for example, of a stone hanging on a rope was caused by the agent that cuts the rope. However, the generator and the remover of the impediment could not explain the continuation of a body's natural motion, since they were not in continuous simultaneous contact with the moving body. How did fourteenth-century authors solve this problem?

A decisive viewpoint was taken by John Duns Scotus (c. 1265–1308). He concluded that heavy and light bodies are moved by their heaviness and lightness, and in this sense, they move themselves. This was an important deviation from Aristotle, Averroes, and earlier commentators. They had emphasized that the generator was the real cause of the fall of a body, and that the substantial form, heaviness, and lightness were, at best, lower-order instrumental causes. After Duns Scotus, however, authors such as John of Jandun, William Ockham, Walter Burley, John Buridan, Marsilius of Inghen, and Albert of Saxony embraced the position that heaviness and lightness were the proximate causes of a body's unobstructed natural motion. In this way, they gave up Aristotle's principle that mover and moved are separate entities. The mover was therefore no longer an extrinsic cause (such as the generator had been), but was now conceived of as an intrinsic principle, inhering in the moving body. As a consequence, the important Aristotelian distinction between the motion of animate and inanimate bodies became blurred. None of these fourteenth-century authors, however, stressed the new turn they had taken, but, on the contrary, tried to justify Aristotle's views by "glossing" them.

Another question raised in the context of falling bodies was acceleration: a body in natural fall

moves with accelerated velocity, not with uniform speed. Discussions about “heaviness” and “lightness” ignored the phenomenon of acceleration. The causal explanation of acceleration took its point of departure from the rules concerning motion, which Aristotle had provided in Book 7 of the *Physics* (249 b 27–250 a 9) and book 1 of *De caelo* (273 b 30–275 a 20). In these books, he had discussed the notions of “quicker,” “slower,” and “of equal speed” and formulated the relations that obtain between velocities and the forces and resistances that determine them. Aristotle’s passages are often presented as his “mechanics” and certainly helped to develop late-medieval mechanics.

With respect to natural motion, in which weight acts as the motion’s internal force, and the density of the medium as the resistance, Aristotle states a number of rules. In sum, they provide two options to account for the acceleration of a falling body: it was caused by either an increase in force or a decrease in resistance. Most late-medieval thinkers, however, eliminated the second option. The most influential theory was proposed by John Buridan. He maintained that the body’s weight not only caused its downward fall, but also generated an impressed force in the falling body, which he called impetus. Since the body’s weight does not expire, but continues to act as a cause, it continues to produce new increments of impetus, which successively increase the falling body’s velocity. This explanation was basically followed by other thinkers in Paris, such as Nicholas Oresme, Albert of Saxony, and Marsilius of Inghen.

### **Violent Motion: The Explanation of Projectile Motion**

Buridan also uses his impetus theory to solve another problem in Aristotelian physics, namely that of the explanation of projectile motion. Projectile motion seemed to contradict Aristotle’s principles about movers and mobile bodies: how could the mobile body continue its motion after it had lost contact with the moving force, say, the hand throwing a stone? Aristotle had claimed that

it was the surrounding medium, which accounted for the continuation of the projectile’s motion. Simultaneously with the projectile, the medium too received a motive force from the projector, which it continued to transmit by means of the activation of the medium, thus pushing the projectile along. In this way, Aristotle could uphold his principle that the external force is in continuous contact with the mobile body: the projector’s role had been taken over by the medium.

This account came to be rejected in the fourteenth century. The medium’s role in continuing the projectile’s motion was considered problematic. Francis of Marchia (fl. 1320) pointed out that if the original projector could produce some motive force in the medium, there was no reason why it could not do so also in the projectile itself. Indeed, this “left-behind force” (*virtus derelicta*) or impressed force (*vis impressa*) given to the projectile was the real proximate cause of the projectile’s continued motion. This solution had been anticipated by the Greek commentator John Philoponus (d. after 575), who had also found it implausible that the medium should serve as a motive force rather than as resistance to the projectile’s motion. His work, however, was not available in translation, and neither were the several writings of Islamic thinkers who had developed theories of impressed force (*mail*) in projectile motion.

John Buridan introduced the technical term “impetus” for this impressed force and developed an advanced theory about it. In Buridan’s view, impetus was a motive force transmitted from the initial mover that could act in any direction to which it had been. Buridan took a first step toward the quantification of impetus by declaring that its strength was determined by the velocity with which the initial mover had moved the projectile. Furthermore, he considered its strength proportionate to the projectile’s weight, which in turn depended on its quantity of matter (*quantitas materiae*). Buridan substantiated this rule by reference to the phenomenon that a leaden projectile can be thrown further than a wooden one of the same volume and shape, because it has a greater capacity to receive impetus.

Buridan applied his impetus theory not only to the explanation of the acceleration of falling



bodies, but also to that of celestial motions. He declared that at the moment of creation, God might have imprinted an impetus on the heavens. Since in the case of the heavenly motions, the impetus is not producing a violent motion away from their natural place, and therefore encounters no resistance, it will continue forever. In the sub-lunar region, however, the impetus is corrupted by the mobile body's tendency to move to its natural place, and by resistances (from the medium, for instance) acting on the body. In sum, Buridan conceived of impetus as a quasi-permanent quality inherent in the mobile body, which, under terrestrial conditions, interacted with the body's natural tendencies, and dissipated as a consequence. Albert of Saxony adhered to the same position, even though he avoided the terminology of impetus and spoke instead of "moving force" (*virtus motiva*) or "moving quality" (*qualitas motiva*). Still other slight variations were introduced by Nicholas Oresme and Marsilius of Inghen. New medieval concepts such as impetus and weight (*gravitas*) helped abolish Aristotle's principle that mover and moved are separate entities that must be in contact. Instead, they represent an internalization of Aristotle's external motive force. The medieval impetus theory was to remain the dominant explanation of projectile motion until the seventeenth century, although it had little impact in Oxford.

### The Quantification of the Causes of Motion

At Oxford, scholars took a more quantitative approach toward the causal explanation of motion. The quantitative rules for force and resistance by which Aristotle had tried to capture the interaction between mover and moved (*Physics*, book 7), came to be criticized at the beginning of the fourteenth century. In his *Treatise on Proportions* (*Tractatus de proportionibus*), written in 1328, Thomas Bradwardine gave a general treatment of how one can relate a change of speed of a mobile to a variation in its causes, or as he put it, "of the proportion between the speeds with which

motions take place with respect to both moving and resisting powers."

Bradwardine's mathematical approach had a tremendous influence. At Oxford, Richard Swineshead further developed Bradwardine's insights by applying them to two new problems. In his *Book of Calculations* (*Liber calculationum*), written about 1350, Swineshead specifies, among other things, Bradwardine's theorem for different kinds of changes in velocity, such as uniform, difform, uniformly difform, and so on. Moreover, he applies Bradwardine's function to the fall of a heavy body near the center of the universe.

Bradwardine's theorem of motion was incorporated into the Parisian commentaries on the *Physics*. Starting with John Buridan, other fourteenth-century scholars at the University of Paris began to show familiarity with Bradwardine's views. Moreover, Albert of Saxony and Nicholas Oresme elaborated Bradwardine's function in their *Treatise on Proportions* (*Tractatus proportionum*) and *Treatise on Ratio of Ratios* (*Tractatus de proportionibus proportionum*), respectively. They abstracted from the physical problems that Bradwardine had discussed and, instead, concentrated on a calculus of proportions as such (see the entries on ► ["Oxford Calculators"](#) and ► ["Richard Swineshead"](#) in this volume).

### Logic and Geometry in Natural Philosophy

The quantification of motion not only occurred in medieval dynamics, but also in kinematics, which relates motion to time and space traversed. This type of approach should be seen in the light of the introduction of logic and geometry in natural philosophy.

Scholars at Paris had a predilection for providing semantic analyses of the terms in which their physical problems were formulated. Terms such as "motion," "nature," "change," "alteration," "point," "space," "time," and "instant," for example, were submitted to an analysis that employed all the logical techniques available. Especially the

theory of supposition was fundamental. It was a tool that analyzed a term's reference within the context of a proposition and in this way determined the meaning and truth of that proposition. The supposition theory provided, for instance, different semantic analyses of the propositions "man is a species" and "man is a three-letter word." Another much-used semantic tool was the analysis of a term's position within a proposition, the "word-order," so to speak. This aspect was expressed in the technical vocabulary of distinguishing between the categorematic and the syncategorematic use of a term. Since these semantic aspects significantly affected the truth-value of the propositions in which the physical problems were stated, they had a bearing on the solution of these problems (see the entries on ► ["Supposition Theory"](#); ► ["Terms, Properties of"](#) in this volume).

At Oxford, the application of logic in kinematics was blended with mathematical techniques. As a matter of fact, one of the distinctive features of most of the Calculators' treatises is that they originated out of a logical, disputational context. This is especially true for the *Sophismata*, collections of counterintuitive statements called "sophisms" that served as examples to illustrate semantic theories. Often, *sophismata* have a purely logical character, but especially at Oxford a new genre originated, that of the mathematical-physical sophisms. This emphasis on logico-mathematical techniques, rather than directly on physical theory, is present in the treatises of Heytesbury and Swineshead and also in the *Sophismata* of Richard Kilvington. A typical example of the type of problems discussed there is the truth of sophism 34, "Plato can move uniformly during some time and as fast as Socrates now moves" (see the entries on ► ["Sophisms"](#) and ► ["Richard Kilvington"](#) in this volume).

The quantification of kinematic aspects of motion was introduced in the context of the so-called doctrine of the latitude of forms (*latitudo formarum*), a theory that was developed to deal with the different degrees that may be assigned to one and the same quality. For instance, one banana can be more yellow than another one, or one object hotter than another one. The idea that qualities in a subject can exist in varying

degrees was first expressed in Aristotle's *Categories* (10 b 26 and following). It gave rise to two problem areas that were only very loosely connected. The first one, called the problem of the intension and remission of forms in medieval terminology, developed further the idea that qualities can become more or less, that is, that they can undergo intensification and remission (*intensio et remissio*). It focused on ontological issues such as the search for the subject of the strengthening or weakening: was it the quality itself, or the subject's participation in the quality? And how was a quality intensified or weakened? The two most prominent alternatives that had emerged by the fourteenth century were the succession theory and the addition theory.

Discussions of the intension and remission of forms tacitly assumed that a quality was uniformly distributed in a subject and uniformly changed over time. However, precisely this assumption was further investigated in the second problem area, namely that of the latitude of forms (*latitudo formarum*). This problem area studied the phenomenon of qualitative changes in a subject from the perspective of space and time. The point of departure was the idea that qualities can be non-uniformly, or difformly (*difformiter*) according to medieval terminology, distributed over a given subject and that they can change difformly. The scholars at Oxford focused on the problem of measuring these qualities, especially the uniformly difform qualities, that is, that class of qualities that strengthened or weakened at a constant rate from one end of the subject to the other. By analogy, they addressed questions of measures of other types of change, especially of local motion. It was in this context of measuring qualities and motions that the concept of latitude came to play a pivotal role. It is important to note that these discussions often were hypothetical (see the entry on ► ["Intension and Remission of Forms"](#) in this volume).

The philosophical analysis of the degrees of qualities helped to develop the idea of velocity as a magnitude to which can be attributed a numerical value and by which motions can be measured. The idea had been quite alien to Aristotle, who had conceived of velocity as an unquantifiable

concept. One theorem that developed out of the latitude of forms context has been characterized by at least one historian of science as “probably the most outstanding single medieval contribution to the history of mathematical physics”: the mean speed theorem (Grant 1996, p. 101). This theorem measures uniformly accelerated motions with respect to the spaces traversed by comparing them with uniform motions. The mean speed theorem states that a mobile moving with a uniformly accelerated motion covers the same space in a given time as it would if it moved for the same time with a uniform speed equal to the speed at the middle instant of the duration of its acceleration. The mean speed theorem has attracted much scholarly attention, because it was mentioned by Galilei in his *Discourses on Two New Sciences* (Day 3, theorem 1) and applied to the free fall of bodies, which is an example in nature of a uniformly accelerated (i.e., uniformly difform) motion.

The Calculators provided many proofs of the theorem, but none was as easy to visualize as Oresme’s geometrical proof, which was also employed by Galilei. Oresme noted that a right triangle is equal in area to a rectangle whose height is the mean height of the triangle. In this way he graphically compared the quantity of a uniformly difform quality to that of a uniform quality of mean intensity. Other Parisians besides Oresme were also well acquainted with the Oxford’s Calculators’ discussions of the measure of the effects of motion, as is clear from their discussions in commentaries on the *Physics*. As Edith Sylla has convincingly argued, the aim of the logical and geometrical discussion of kinematics was to instruct students to think and argue clearly and exactly. Newton’s *Principia mathematica philosophiae naturalis* still carries the echos of medieval natural philosophy in its title, although the emphasis had now definitely shifted toward the mathematical approach.

## Cross-References

- ▶ [Adelard of Bath](#)
- ▶ [Albert of Saxony](#)
- ▶ [Arabic Texts: Natural Philosophy, Latin Translations of](#)

- ▶ [Aristotelianism in the Greek, Latin, Syriac, Arabic, and Hebrew Traditions](#)
- ▶ [Aristotle, Arabic](#)
- ▶ [Atomism](#)
- ▶ [De caelo, Commentaries on Aristotle’s](#)
- ▶ [De generatione et corruptione, Commentaries on Aristotle’s](#)
- ▶ [al-Fārābī, Abū Naṣr](#)
- ▶ [al-Fārābī, Latin Translations of](#)
- ▶ [Form and Matter](#)
- ▶ [Francis of Marchia](#)
- ▶ [Ibn Rushd \(Averroes\), Latin Translations of](#)
- ▶ [Ibn Rushd, Muḥammad ibn Aḥmad al-Ḥafīd \(Averroes\)](#)
- ▶ [Ibn Sīnā, Abū ‘Alī \(Avicenna\)](#)
- ▶ [Ibn Sīnā \(Avicenna\), Latin Translations of](#)
- ▶ [Intension and Remission of Forms](#)
- ▶ [John Buridan](#)
- ▶ [John Dumbleton](#)
- ▶ [John Duns Scotus](#)
- ▶ [Marsilius of Inghen](#)
- ▶ [Nicholas Oresme](#)
- ▶ [Oxford Calculators](#)
- ▶ [Parva Naturalia, Commentaries on Aristotle’s](#)
- ▶ [Philosophical Psychology, Jewish Tradition](#)
- ▶ [Posterior Analytics, Commentaries on Aristotle’s](#)
- ▶ [Richard Kilvington](#)
- ▶ [Richard Swineshead](#)
- ▶ [Roger Bacon](#)
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- ▶ [Terms, Properties of](#)
- ▶ [Thomas Bradwardine](#)
- ▶ [Translations from Greek into Arabic](#)
- ▶ [Universities and Philosophy](#)
- ▶ [William Heytesbury](#)

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## Natural Philosophy, Arabic

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### Abstract

Natural philosophy written in Arabic from the time of the Koranic message through the VII AH/XIII CE century is the subject matter of the entry. It consists of an introduction and two chapters: the first examines the thinkers of the *kalām* tradition, i.e., rational defenders of Islamic dogmas, and the second, the *falāsifa*, whose ideas are grounded on the Greek philosophy and science. Within each entry, the order is chronological.

### Introduction

Islamic philosophy does not have a unique doctrine about nature and physical issues but has common features. Two main streams flow in a related direction: the *kalām* tradition mostly assumes that substances are bodies made of atoms; the *falsafa* distinguishes between sensible and immaterial substances and assumes substances are bodies that can be infinitely divided. Under the influence of Greek philosophy, *falsafa* develops a deeper and more comprehensive explanation of nature. It conflicts with *kalām* on the issue of the pre-eternity of the universe, because the *mutakallimūn* understand that eternity in the past excludes the causal action of a free agent. Although this is an important issue, it is not the only one. The condemnation of Averroes in Almohad times and occasional burnings of philosophy books, including Avicenna's, should not

make us believe that *falsafa* was ousted from Islamic learning. Many Islamic thinkers, such as al-Baydawī (d. 1316?), did not see any conflict in studying *kalām* and *falsafa* at the same time (Calverley and Pollock 2001). They were abiding by the Qur'ānic teaching to contemplate and reflect on nature.

The Merciful taught the Qur'ān  
Created man,  
Taught him the explanation:  
The sun and the moon are in a reckoning  
The star and the tree do obeisance (Qur'ān  
55:1–5).

The Qur'ān's cosmological model consists of the seven heavens and seven earths that we also find recorded in the Bible and in ancient Mesopotamian texts; the heavens are built up on a flat earth [Qur'ān 65:12]. However the Qur'ān is obviously not a treatise on nature, and its doctrine aims at man and at his behavior. God instructs man how to do good and avoid evil, and He shall punish or reward him in the afterlife for his bad or good actions. This is possible not only because of His omnipotence but also because of His goodness toward man. Man has to show Him gratitude for the goodness; one way to show Him gratitude is by contemplating creation, which reveals to us His omnipotence as well as His intelligence.

Therefore, Muslims who were interested in knowing the secrets of nature have to abide by some principles. There is one God who is almighty. He not only created the world but He also intervenes in its daily activity. Moreover, He may be the real agent of events, which appear to be the work of human agents.

Islam expanded as Muslims conquered many lands in a short time period; Muslims thus entered into contacts with other religions and civilizations. Present Iraq was under Sasanian rule, but its population consisted of Arameans, Persians, and Arabs (Morony 1984). The official religion of the Sasanian Empire was Zoroastrianism, which was practiced by many Persians, although some were Christians. Jews and Christians were strong in Mesopotamia, and most of them spoke Aramaic dialects. Arabs immigrated to Iraq since the Parthian period when Arabs organized border

states. They were sedentary as well as nomads; the former converted mainly to Nestorianism.

The Muslim conquest brought new Arab populations into Iraq, and new cities were founded where they settled. Kufa (founded in 638) and Basra (founded in 635) are the most representative cities, and together with an enlarged Baghdad, they became centers where arts and sciences flourished over the years. In the first-century Hijra/seventh CE, Basra was a center of Qur'ānic studies. There were early Basrians who knew the various readings of the Book and the traditions of the Prophet (Pellat 1953). In the first century, discussion on religious issues began, including whether or not a capital sinner is any longer a Muslim. In addition, the Basrian population was acquainted with foreign cultures and their scientific creations.

### Philosophy of Nature in the *Kalām* Tradition

The science of *kalām*, that is, rational explanation of the Islamic dogmas, developed later in the second-century Hijra. However, the *kalām* was not the only discipline aiming at rational explanations. The theologian and heresiograph al-Ash'arī (d. 935) occasionally mentions those “who sustain the natures,” *aṣḥāb al-ṭabā'i* (Ash'arī 1929–1933, 382, 517). “Natures” were the four principles (hot–cold–humid–dry) of the four elements following the Aristotelian tradition (fire–air–water–earth). These people should be considered as the first philosophers of nature who were active in Iraq, mainly in Basra, already in the second-century Hijra/eighth century CE. Van Ess identified several of them, the most important being Mu'ammār Abū l-Ash'ath (Van Ess, Band II 1992a, 2, pp. 37–39).

The third/ninth century is the time when the Mu'tazila shaped *kalām* developing it into a philosophical system and comprehending the study of the Divine essence, His creation of the world and natural reality, and man and his moral responsibility. Mu'tazila is the plural of Mu'tazilite and means the “Separatists,” those who separated themselves from something. Nallino produced evidence that the word meant separation from



those religious parties that fought each other with the sword (Nallino 1916–1918). However, the meaning remains a matter of discussion (Van Ess, Band II 1992a, 2, pp. 335–342).

Two men are named as the founders, Wāṣil ibn ‘Aṭā’ (d. 131/749–9) and ‘Amr ibn ‘Ubayd (d. 143/760 or 144/761) who lived in Basra. The textual evidence shows that both were interested in theological and political matters, not in philosophical ones. We find the first references to ontological issues in Abū Bakr ‘Abd al-Raḥmān al-Aṣamm (d. 200/816 or 201/817) (Van Ess, Band II 1992a, 2, pp. 396–418). Al-Ash‘arite quotes al-Aṣamm: “I only affirm the three-dimensional body” so that he denied movement, rest, and other accidents of the bodies (Ash‘arī 1929–1933, 343).

We have more information about Abū ‘Amr Ḍirār ibn ‘Amr (d. 180/796) (Van Ess, Band III 1992b, 3, pp. 32–67) and his doctrines on physical reality. He affirmed that accidents, *a‘rād*, first build a body, and then the body becomes the bearer of accidents. Accidents mean physical properties:

Body is accidents which are put together and joined so that they stand and are permanent. Then they become a body which bears the accidents; once it settles down, it bears the accidents and changes from one state into another. Bodies cannot exist without accidents or their contraries. For instance, in life and death, not a single body can exist without one of them, and none of its kind can be separated from colors and tastes nor from weight, as heaviness and lightness, nor from coarseness and softness, nor from warmth and coldness, nor from humidity and dryness, nor from resistance. (Ash‘arī 1929–1933, 305) (Ash‘arī, ed. ‘Abd al-Ḥamīd 1985, 2, p. 6)

Ḍirār seems to have supported two theses: bodies are made out of accidents, and bodies bear accidents of which bodies cannot be deprived of (unless they are destroyed). The doctrine looks rather contradictory, but we should not forget that the information is supplied by al-Ash‘arī, who lived almost two centuries later and who reports only fragments or phrases ascribed to the authors he mentions. The main point is that bodies are defined by the accidents they bear.

Abū ‘Amr Mu‘ammar ibn ‘Abbād al-Sulamī (d. 215/830) built a system which we can better reconstruct (Daiber 1975). He lived in Basra and was in touch with Ma‘mar Abū l-Ash‘ath. Mu‘ammar was a pharmacist, which may explain

his interest in the physical constitution of bodies. He appears to have been the first person to expound atomism. Atomism became the most original contribution of the Basrian rationalists (Dhanani 1994). Mu‘ammar admits that the body is something three-dimensional, but he adds the reason: its atomic composition. The best known definition reads

[The body] is that which is long, wide, and deep. Bodies consist of at least eight parts. When the parts are reunited, accidents are generated, and they are caused by the force of nature. Each part produces accidents that inhere to it. He affirmed that length is produced when one part is joined to another one; width is produced when both are joined to other two parts; and depth is produced when the four are applied to other four parts. Therefore, eight parts comprise a three-dimensional body. (Ash‘arī 1929–1933, 303; cf. Pines 1997, 6)

We may, therefore, see the atom as some kind of substance, but the real, effective substance is the body, which is composed of eight atoms. From the body, accidents will result. The substance “body” cannot be perceived; only accidents are perceived. Colors and tastes, odors and sounds, warmth and coldness, and humidity and dryness are accidents; Mu‘ammar adds movement and rest. God does not intervene directly in the events and activities of creatures; instead, He uses an instrument – bodies (Ash‘arī 1929–1933, 405). Giving life and bringing death are caused by God but also natural color.

Mu‘ammar looked for a scientific explanation of nature. This search led him to recognize capacities in the bodies, which moved thanks to them; also, these capacities caused effects in a regular way. He introduced the concept of *ma‘nā*, to explain movement in particular. *Ma‘nā* is commonly translated as “meaning”; but, when Mu‘ammar says that movement and rest in a body differ because of a *ma‘nā*, a notion of cause is implied. Mu‘ammar establishes an endless chain of *ma‘ānī* residing in bodies (Khayyāṭ 1925, 55). Wolfson saw in the doctrine of endless *ma‘ānī* a way to integrate Aristotle’s doctrine of nature with its eternal motion (Wolfson 1976, 164).

Abū l-Hudhayl Muḥammad ibn al-Hudhayl al-‘Allāf (d. 227/841) was originally from Basra, but he succeeded in entering the court of the Caliph al-Ma’mūn (Van Ess, Band III 1992b, 209–291). He



is the major representative of Muʿtazilite atomism (Frank 1966). Atoms do not have dimensions; if six of them touch each other, a body results. The body has three dimensions and six directions: right and left, back and front, and top and bottom. We should not imagine any geometrical figure because the smallest “touchable” body needs 36 atoms, that is, six sets of minimal bodies (Juwaynī 1969, 407). Atoms can move or rest, join others, or separate from others, but they cannot have colors and tastes, or life, or knowledge. As for the possibilities of movement, there was a discussion whether an atom can have two movements, and Abū l-Hudhayl al-ʿAllāf did not accept this notion. Although one stone is moved by two different movers, the movement is one for it:

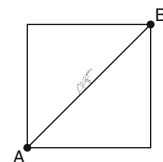
Abū l-Hudhayl taught: like there is one movement divided into two agents, there is also one movement of many atoms, and two different actions. He claimed that accidents divide in time and place, according to the two agents. He also claimed that the movement of the body divides according to the number of its atoms, as does its color. The part of movement which affects this atom is different from the part of movement which affects that atom. (Ashʿarī 1929–1933, 319)

Time is an accident, but it does not reside in a body; Abū l-Hudhayl does not explain what place is. When an atom moves on a surface, it reduces the distance covering or touching each atom of the surface. No doubt, movement and rest are major issues of the atomistic doctrine. Bodies move at different speeds, and Abū l-Hudhayl explained that not all atoms get movement at the same time. Some get rest, so that speed is the ratio between atoms endowed with movement and those with stops. A body is at complete rest when all of its atoms have the accident of rest.

The difficulties of the atomic idea of reality were obvious to his relative and disciple Abū Ishāq Ibrāhīm al-Nazzām (d. c. 230/845). Al-Nazzām objected that if atoms have sides, then they must be divisible. Bodies are not made of atoms:

Body is length, width and depth. Its parts do not have a number by which you can stop; not a half, from which a half can be given, not a part from which another part can be given. The philosophers define the body as width and depth. (Ashʿarī 1929–1933, 304)

**Natural Philosophy, Arabic, Fig. 1** The square and the two ants



Accidents are the elements of substance, except for movement. Al-Nazzām raised many objections to the atomistic theory of motion. He believed that movement happens in a discontinuous space, through leaps. If movement were continuous over infinite atoms, even if it were possible, one object could not run faster than another. His best-known argument is that of the square and two ants (Juwaynī 1969, 439; Fig. 1).

The ant going on the diagonal shall arrive at its goal before the ant going on the legs of the triangle. Al-Nazzām argues as if he accepts the atomic structure: the ant going on the diagonal or hypotenuse “jumps” over a smaller number of atoms than the ant “jumping” over the atoms of the legs. The atomists, represented by Abū l-Hudhayl, reacted against his criticism, and the discussion was continued by Ibn Ḥazm, Shahrastānī, and Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī, theologians who opposed atomism (Baffioni 1982).

Another important notion of Nazzām’s physical doctrine is latency, *kumūn*, which he shares with other Muʿtazilites: “Abū l-Hudhayl, Ibrāhīm [al-Nazzām], Muʿammar, Hishām ibn al-Ḥakam, and Bishr ibn al-Muʿtamir taught: oil was in the olive, ointment was in the seed of sesame, and fire was in the stone” (Ashʿarī 1929–1933, 329). Al-Nazzām stressed the importance of fire for life. If we take into consideration what his contemporary al-Jāhīz (d. 255/869) wrote about him, fire was for him more important than other elements, like water and earth.

Latency points to the nature of bodies and physical entities. They contain a mixture of elements; while one shows up, the rest is hiding in the substance. The doctrine is opposite to the continuous creation of events by God, but we do not know the necessary details. We expect that al-Nazzām establishes the order about how effects appear. In a general sense, his doctrine reminds the Aristotelian doctrine of potency and actuality.

About a century later, Abū Hāshim ibn al-Jubbā'ī (d. 321/933), the son of a Mu'tazilite master, Abū 'Alī al-Jubbā'ī (d. 305/915–916), introduced the doctrine of states or modes, *aḥwāl*, in the course of the discussion on divine attributes. Abū Hāshim distinguished between caused and uncaused states. Caused states include “living” in a creature, which has the *ma'nā* of life in itself, and uncaused states include the property of occupying a place or genera and species of the substance (Shahrastānī 1931, 132).

Abū Hāshim ibn al-Jubbā'ī was a contemporary of Abū l-Ḥasan 'Alī al-Ash'arī (d. 324/935). Al-Ash'arī was born in Basra but he spent most of his life in Baghdad. He remodeled *kalām* into a form acceptable to the orthodoxy in theological aspects. Concerning cosmology, al-Ash'arite followed his master al-Jubbā'ī who was a follower of Abū l-Hudhayl al-'Allāf (Gimaret 1990, 43): the universe consists of substances and accidents. Natural substances are atoms, and their aggregates build bodies. Accidents explain the variety of substances because the latter are homogeneous.

Al-Ash'arī classified accidents into various categories and formulated rules applying to them. The accident *kawn*, “being,” belongs to the local category; by virtue of the accident “being,” any substance is situated in a place, and no substance can be devoid of the accident “being” in this sense. Place means a body or atom on which something relies, against which something leans, and one place suffices to be at rest; movement requires at least two places (Ibn Fūrak 1987).

Two disciples of al-Ash'arī, Abū Bakr al-Baqillānī (d. 403/1013) and Abū l-Ma'ālī al-Juwaynī Imām al-Ḥaramayn (d. 478/1085), shaped the physical doctrine of Ash'arite *kalām*. Al-Juwaynī argued that since an infinite number of accidents are impossible, there must be a beginning of all bodies (Juwaynī 1969, 215). They both helped atomism triumph over al-Nazzām's theory of the infinite divisibility of the body. Prevailing did not mean the end of the adversary school: we have instances of the latter doctrine in *kalām* authors such as Ibn Ḥazm (d. 456/1064). Ibn Ḥazm was influential during a short period of the Almohad dynasty (1121–1269) and to a limited extent.

Atoms, the void, and the possibility of other worlds are doctrines of Abū l-Faḍl Muḥammad Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī (d. 606/1209). He was one of the most important theologians of the Islamic postclassical period and embodied the Ash'arite thought for this late period. The Sufi Ibn Ibn 'Arabī regarded him as the leading philosopher of the time although he wrote him that mystical gnosis was superior to rational discourse (Ibn al-'Arabī 1948). Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī was a prolific author, his works encompassing the great Qur'ān commentary, his theology treatise *The Acquired Thoughts (Muḥaṣṣal 1991)*, or his criticism of Avicenna's *Remarks and Admonitions* and *The Sources of Wisdom*.

*Al-Maṭālib al-Āliya, The Higher Issues* (Rāzī, Maṭālib 1987), deals with theological as well as physical issues, and as 'A. Setia observed, the work represents his final thought and for this reason we are relying on it (Setia 2006, 116). There he defines being (*mawjūd*) either as that which occupies a place (*ḥayyiz*) or as that which is a condition or state (*ḥāl*) of what occupies a place or that which is neither of both and that is God. If that which occupies a place is divisible, is a body, and if not, it is an atom (Rāzī, Maṭālib 1987, 4, p. 9). That which is a condition or state is an accident; besides the qualities related to the five corporeal senses, al-Rāzī counts *kawn* “coming-to-be” as accident. “*Kawn* is the expression of the fact that substance occurs in a place” (Rāzī, Maṭālib 1987, 4, p. 10) and comprehends four categories: movement, rest, gathering, and disassembling. Among living beings we find exclusively the accidents of life and the attributes of knowledge and action.

Section V of *The Higher Issues* contains treatises on time and place: Our knowledge of time is a primary intuitive knowledge (*'ilm badīhī awwālī*). Time is composed of successive instants that are indivisible (Rāzī, Maṭālib 1987, 5, pp. 10–11); it is not a property of motion (Rāzī, Maṭālib 1987, 5, p. 17), but motion cannot be understood before one understands the essence of duration and time because motion implies occupying a place after being in another (Rāzī, Maṭālib 1987, 5, p. 30), and this is the definition of motion: leaving an occupied place and striving for another (Rāzī, Maṭālib 1987, 5, p. 168).

Time is not a continuous quantity, as Aristotle and his followers assert, but a succession of instants and “the actual instant does not admit division” (Rāzī, Maṭālib 1987, 5, p. 72). He distinguishes between incidental time (*zamān*), endless time (*sarmad*), and unlimited time (*dahr*), and he explains as follows:

Plato’s opinion concerning time and duration is closest to ours. Time is a being subsisting by itself, autonomous by itself. If we consider its relation to the permanent beings free from change we call it endless time (*sarmad*), if we consider its relation to that which precedes motions or changes we call it unlimited time (*dahr*), and this is the very unlimited time, and if we consider its relation to the changing beings insofar as they are connected to it and occurring together with it, we call it time (*zaman*). (Rāzī, Maṭālib 1987, 5, p. 91)

Al-Rāzī reports that the philosophers agree on the pre-eternity (*qidam*) of the *sarmad*, the endless time, and duration, while the theologians defend its innovated creation (*ḥudūth*), and he is among them (Rāzī, Maṭālib 1987, 5, p. 99).

On place, al-Rāzī considers two views: one as expression of the matter or form and the other as the void; the second view comprehends the view of the theologians and some philosophers (Rāzī, Maṭālib 1987, 5, pp. 111–113). He aligns with the theologians and maintains that place is “the distance called void” (*faḍā’*), an empty distance. Void is defined also as that which exists between two bodies that are not in touch (Horten 1910, 129). Rāzī refutes at length and with detail the arguments based on the impossibility of motion in the void and explains how the void plays its role in motion, for instance, when the fish moves in the water:

Our view is that plenty of void is produced in the water, and it is the cause why water is rare and waving although water is heavy and flowing by nature. Whenever some parts of water strive to some empty places, the other places become empty, and the parts of water strive again from their places to them, and so on indefinitely. For this reason, the body of the water is always waving and moving. (Rāzī, Maṭālib 1987, 5, p. 159)

Section VI of *The Higher Issues* deals with first matter, and al-Rāzī knows two definitions, one says that it is the atoms and the other “a self-subsisting entity in which corporeity dwells”

(Rāzī, Maṭālib 1987, 6, p. 6); he needs to analyze the conditions of the body in order to decide about the definition of the first matter.

Al-Rāzī opposes the definition of body of the Mu‘tazilites to that of the philosophers. The former define a body as “the long, the wide and the deep” and the latter as “the substance in which the three dimensions can be determined, standing on right angles” (Rāzī, Maṭālib 1987, 6, p. 8). He relates the definitions to the issue whether the body is composed of atoms, and he examines the doctrines of the philosophers and the Kalam people in the following pages. This examination leads him to consider motion, and he summarizes:

We prove that motion is an expression of successive occurrences (*ḥuṣūlāt*) in contiguous places so that each one of these occurrences does not admit division at all. We also prove that time is composed of consecutive contiguous instants so that each one does not admit division at all. Then once this discourse on motion or on time is clear, we can prove with certainty that the body is composed of atoms. (Rāzī, Maṭālib 1987, 6, p. 29)

Motion, therefore, is not something continuous admitting infinite divisibility, and he argues against it although he says that its falsity is known by obvious intuition (*badīhīya*). Al-Rāzī mentions Avicenna regarding (Rāzī, Maṭālib 1987, 6, p. 44) the discussion about a stone thrown high into the air and then falling to the earth. Avicenna claimed that it is at rest for some time between the two motions, and al-Rāzī denies the possibility and defends the theory of successive instants. Other examples are considered, and al-Rāzī wants to interrelate motion, time, and atoms. The sphere can only be in touch with a plain surface if there is an atom, an indivisible contact point, and on this basis he starts arguing for the existence of the substance that is one. Al-Rāzī says that he resorts to Euclid’s geometry and explains:

If we roll the sphere on the surface so that it completed its circle, there is no doubt that the contact never ceased, and the contact has occurred in another point, and there is nothing different between the two points because we speak only of the point in which the contact has occurred in the first instant of contact as the first point. According to this appraisal, the line is drawn by the assembling of points and if the line results from the assembling of points, likewise the surface results from the assembling of lines, and the

body from the assembling of surfaces. The contact point in the sphere is not divisible, and the body results from the integration (*inḍimām*) of points, and that is intended by “single substance.” (Rāzī, Maṭālib 1987, 6, pp. 48–49)

Therefore, the point is something that exists, to which the senses can point to, and indivisible: it is the “single substance” (*al-jawhar al-fard*). From the single substance, al-Rāzī proceeds to the body which is composed of them and of a finite number. He refers, for instance, to the polemic between the atomist Abū l-Hudhayl al-‘Allāf and his opponent al-Nazzām and the question of the leap (Rāzī, Maṭālib 1987, 6, p. 69) and is definite in his affirmation of atomism. Arguments of geometrical kind abound in many chapters with references to Euclid or to Ibn al-Haytham.

“Aristotle’s followers” argued that the universe has a spherical shape and that is one alone because if there were two spheres, the void would exist between them and the existence of void is not possible, but al-Rāzī already asserted the opposite, namely, the existence of void. Furthermore he asks them: why the shape of the world must be spherical? The first body has the shape of a cube. He puts more questions on the philosophers showing that there can be more than one world (Rāzī, Maṭālib 1987, 6, pp. 193–195). He rejects the existence of first matter, although he accepts that “the body in itself is something one and continuous but continuity for us is simple unity” (Rāzī, Maṭālib 1987, 6, p. 205). Divisibility of a substance implies two substances; there is no option for an eternal first matter.

The new creation of the world (*ḥudūth*) should be mentioned as one of the fundamentals of al-Rāzī’s philosophy. The Divine Writings inform of the creation of the world, but they do not contain a clear affirmation that the world is newly created after its nonexistence (Rāzī, Maṭālib 1987, 4, pp. 29–32). However if we look at Sect. I of *The Higher Issues*, we already meet “Those who affirm the anew creation of the world, are more than those who affirm its eternity and besides the majority maintains that He be Exalted became agent of the world after He was not agent of it” (Rāzī, Maṭālib 1987, 1, p. 76). He was careful to give all arguments, against and in favor of the

anew creation, but he sided with the Mu‘tazilite doctrine.

An entire chapter of Sect. I of *The Higher Issues* (Rāzī, Maṭālib 1987, 1, pp. 192–199) summarizes his view of the universe. Every celestial sphere has a given quantity and density (*kathāfa*). Every sphere is composed of parts as any other substance. Motion and rest are equally possible in all these bodies, as different velocities also are. The spheres are different from the stars embedded in them, and the stars take a determined point in them. F. al-Rāzī uses the term *jā’izāt*, “thinkable objects,” to refer to this possible character and to oppose absolute necessity concerning the number or details of the spheres. He reminds that the existence of the void was proved and adds that it is endless, existing outside the sphere, and that this occupies just one part of the void. Therefore al-Rāzī’s view of nature is well defined and opposed to the view of Avicenna and the Aristotelian philosophers, as we will see.

Despite their differences, the authors of *kalām* were united in articulating philosophy in accordance with the Qur’ānic teachings. They all agree on the temporal creation of the world and on the best-known proofs in favor of it relying on the connection of substances (atoms) and accidents. They both cannot exist independently.

## Philosophy of Nature in the *Falsafa*

Basra lost its importance in the *kalām* tradition in favor of Baghdad, the capital of the Abbasid empire. The Abbasid Caliphs not only encouraged the science of *kalām*, but they were also eager to acquire the wisdom that had once flourished in the countries that Islam had conquered. There were already translations of Greek sources into Syriac, the main Aramaic dialect spoken across Mesopotamia and Syria, which was the basis for translations into Arabic. However, much more numerous were the translations made from Greek into Arabic under the auspices of the Abbasid Caliphs or of high-ranking personalities of their courts. Although medicine and astronomy initiated the movement, philosophy had its share in the translation movement too (D’Ancona

2005), and translation was the first step toward creating an Arabic philosophy.

Abū Yūsuf Ya‘qūb ibn Ishāq al-Kindī (d. c. 870) is paradigmatic for this synthesis of translation and creation of philosophy (Endress 1997). He arranged the translation of Aristotle’s *Metaphysics*, and the *Theology* falsely ascribed to Aristotle (*Enneads* IV–VI), and on the basis of the translations as well on the contributions of the Mu‘tazilite *kalām*, he worked out his own philosophy. His ideas on nature and the universe were conditioned by his Islamic belief that God created the world, which cannot be eternal. God is the only eternal, and the Eternal is mainly defined in negative terms. For instance, He is not a body; He has neither genus nor species.

On the contrary, the universe is finite: it has a temporal beginning and its body is limited. In his treatise *On First Philosophy* (Kindī, *Rasā’il al-Kindī al-Falsafiyya* 1950, 97–193) al-Kindī produces four proofs for creation. The first proof establishes the finiteness of the body of the universe, and as a result, it establishes the finiteness of time, because time is a predicate of this body (Kindī, *Falsafa al-Ūlā* 1950, 114–110). The second proof insists that any quantitative entity cannot be infinite in actuality and that time must have a beginning; body, motion, and time are never prior to one another; therefore, are all limited. The third proof argues that composition and combination build bodies, which is a Mu‘tazilite doctrine. Composition and combination are motions, and through motion there is time; now, “if time is finite in actuality, then necessarily, the being of a body is finite in actuality” (Kindī, *Falsafa al-Ūlā* 1950, 120) (Ivry 1974, 120). But no doubt, the fourth argument is the most important to al-Kindī. It proves that an infinite cannot be traversed, and if time were infinite, the actual time could never exist. He argues:

Before every temporal segment there is (another) segment, until we reach a temporal segment before which there is no segment, i.e., a segmented duration before which there is no segmented duration. It cannot be otherwise – if it were possible, and after every segment of time there was a segment, infinitely, then we would never reach a given time – for the duration from past infinity to this present time would be equal to

the duration from this given time regressing in times to infinity. (Kindī, *Falsafa al-Ūlā* 1950b, 121, Ivry 1974, 74).

As H.A. Davidson has shown, al-Kindī employed some of Philoponus’ proofs for the temporal beginning of the universe (Davidson 1987, 106–116; see the entry on Philoponus, Arabic in this volume). The temporal beginning implies that time is concomitant with body and motion; all the three come to be with the creation of the heavens.

In sum, the universe is finite in extension and duration. No void or plenum lies outside the universe. Its shape is spherical, and al-Kindī composed an essay entitled *That the Elements and the Outermost Body Are Spherical in Form* (Kindī, *Kurrīyat al-shakl* 1953b) to sustain it. Al-Kindī has another treatise *On the explanation that the Nature of the Celestial Sphere is different from the Natures of the Four Elements*, which begins saying that physics, that is, the science of the natural beings, deals with the movable things because “nature is something that God made a direct cause (‘illa) and a cause (sabab) for a direct cause of all that is capable of motion and of rest after motion” (Kindī, *Ṭabī‘at al-falak* 1953a, 2, p. 40) (Adamson and Portmann 2012, 188).

In these writings we read that there are four elements: earth, water, air, and fire; they are concentrically ordered according to their lightness or heaviness; the fire is the lightest, and the earth the heaviest. The outermost sphere extends from the perigee of the moon to the limits of the universe, and it is made of a fifth element, following Aristotle’s teachings, which is neither heavy nor light.

In spite of their spherical form, the elements and the outermost body are very different. The elements consist of opposite qualities, something that is proved by their movements. Al-Kindī distinguishes two kinds of motion, circular and rectilinear motion. The movements of the elements are rectilinear, and they are not continuous. In contrast, the celestial sphere moves always around the center “for the duration of its existence.” Al-Kindī concludes that this body cannot be made of any of the elements: its substance is simple.

As for the shape of the elements, al-Kindī shows familiarity with Plato’s doctrine of the



polyhedra in the *Timaeus*. Plato assigned the tetrahedron to fire, the hexahedron or cube to the earth, the octahedron to the air, and the icosahedron to the water (54d – 55a); the dodecahedron, whose faces are not triangular, would represent the universe (55c). Al-Kindī follows him, but he combines his reading with neo-Pythagorean numerology (N. Rescher 1968, 15–37). His interest in a geometrical explanation of the simple bodies is shared by the *kalām* in its explanation of the atoms.

Al-Kindī believes in the influence of the heavenly bodies upon the sublunary world and talks about the role of the Sun and the Moon as the efficient causes of generation and corruption (Kindī, *Kitāb al-Kindī fī l-ibāna ‘an al-‘illa al-fā‘ila al-qarība li-l-kawn wa-l-fasād* 1950a); they carry out God’s providence acting upon the realm of generation and corruption. Moreover, the heavenly bodies are intelligent beings who serve God through their regular motions. Al-Kindī praises God for His providential design of the universe:

How perfectly has the Creator, great be His praise, arranged things by putting the sun close to the zenith above our heads, coming is high in the air and draws far away from the surface of the earth, so that it has reached the beginning of the declination (*mayl*); then it draws nearer to us until it arrives at the end of the declination. Then it turns celestial equator descending and breaking the distance in the degrees whose declination in one direction is one. There are two different seasons in each inclination, and the seasons are four, corresponding in quality to the four elements. (Kindī, *al-‘illa al-fā‘ila* 1950a, 230–231) (Adamson and Portmann 2012, 167)

Thus al-Kindī knew the Ptolemaic astronomy but also its astrology that associated spring with the element air, summer with the fire, autumn with the earth, and winter with the water. However the Islamic faith guides him to view God as the remote mind governing the universe.

Al-Kindī offers us a general description of the physical world in which he agrees with the Mu‘tazilite *kalām* on essential issues. Abū Naṣr Muḥammad al-Fārābī (d. 339/950) offers us a more precise description, and he distances himself from *kalām*. In Baghdad, he met scholars, many of them Christians, who were engaged in the transmission of the Aristotelian corpus; and he

mastered logic. Al-Fārābī constructed a system in which he tried to comprehend all the fields of philosophical speculation. Among his works, *On the Perfect State* (Fārābī, Perfect State 1985) and *The Political Regime* (Fārābī, Political Regime 1964) represent the most developed stage of his thought.

Al-Fārābī decided there in favor of a generative model. His system starts with the absolute One: “The First is that from which everything which exists comes into existence” (Fārābī, Perfect State 1985, 88–89). Everything comes into existence in a way like an overflow, *fayḍ*, which is commonly translated as emanation; it follows an exact order. The first emanated, that is, “the Second,” is an incorporeal substance, which is intelligence, a separate intellect. It is thinking itself and also is thinking the First. We may add, just as an aside, that knowledge of the cause and of the self is a crucial concept for Proclus and many Neoplatonists, as Damien Janos rightly reminds (Janos 2012, 170). From the Second thinking the First emanates the Third; from thinking itself, it becomes substance; and substance is here the First Heaven, the Outermost Sphere. The process of “thinking itself and thinking the First” goes on through the spheres of the Fixed Stars, Saturn, Jupiter, Mars, the Sun, Venus, Mercury, and the Moon; they are nine altogether. In each step we have a reciprocal process of being intelligent and being intelligible, i.e., they are Active Intellects, *‘uqūl*, and passive intelligibles, *ma‘qūlāt*.

The matching spheres are not composed of matter, although they are bodies; the spheres and their contents are composed of two principles of soul (*nafs*) and substrate (*mawḍū‘*). Their motion is essentially harmonious and natural; they all move in circles but at different speeds so that they are affected by contraries of accidental import. The celestial bodies emit light, which is in turn responsible for generating heat in the sublunary world.

Al-Fārābī combined the metaphysics of Plotinus (d. 270 CE) and his school with the astronomy of Ptolemy (d. 161 CE), although he simplified it. Walzer thought that al-Fārābī was inspired by a later Greek tradition in his synthesis, but he could not identify any source (Fārābī, Perfect State



1985, 362–367). M. Maróth traces al-Fārābī's equation between the intellects and the celestial sphere bodies to Alexander of Aphrodisias (Maróth 1995). The blending was very successful in spite of its intrinsic weakness, as it remains purely speculative. Al-Fārābī assumes, for instance, an eternal creation of the universe, but he does not buttress the statement with arguments.

According to al-Fārābī, after the Moon thinks the First, an Eleventh intellect comes into existence, but the process stops herewith. The last separate intellect is the Active Intellect, whose intellection is threefold, as it understands the First, the nine emanated intellects, and itself. The Active Intellect is necessary for the existence of the material beings as well as for intellectual knowledge by man. Al-Fārābī emphasizes that the individuals existing under the sphere of the Moon have their most imperfect way of existence in the beginning, in contrast to the celestial bodies, which are always perfect. Matter has the most defective existence, and in ascending order of perfection, he aligns:

The elements such as fire, air, water, earth and things belonging to their genus such as vapor and flame and other things; the minerals such as stones and what belongs to their genus; the plants; the animals which lack speech [and thought], and the animals which have speech [and thought]. (Fārābī, Perfect State 1985, 106–109).

Al-Fārābī does not seem to distinguish between the elements as principles and as real individuals; he even understands prime matter as their effective matter: “the matters of the elements have no matter” (ibid.).

Through mixture, *ikhtilāf*, all material beings arise. The first mixture is that which combines some of the elements, and mixtures go on, but there is a last level of mixture: “Man alone arises as a result of the last mixture” (ibid.). Mixture brings out various potencies or powers, some active and some passive. Al-Fārābī adds the celestial bodies to the causes acting in the processes. He obviously believes in astrology and maintains that stars sometimes help and sometimes oppose the sublunary agents with their works.

Al-Fārābī's exposition is suggestive and rather imprecise. He depicts a dynamic nature in which

opposite entities, *muḍaddāt*, which are either inherent or external to the body and their powers, *qūwāt*, overcome each other destroying substances and creating new ones. Al-Fārābī sketches some rules such as the contrary that destroys an element must come from the outside or, when the mixture is not very complex, like in stone or sand, the contraries that destroy a body of a complex mixture “come simultaneously from outside and inside its body” (Fārābī, Perfect State 1985, 148–151). Living beings are of a very complex mixture, and al-Fārābī adds that they can be destroyed by “things contrary to them from their inside.”

Powers go from more defective to more perfect. In the case of man, the first power to arise is the nutritive faculty, followed by the faculties of the various senses, by the faculty of imagination, with the rational faculty as the highest. Sensation, imagination, and reason are complemented by parallel appetitive faculties. The exposition is neither original nor precise, although al-Fārābī makes further distinctions. He distinguishes between one ruling faculty and auxiliary faculties within the nutritive faculty as well as the faculty of sense. He views the heart as the ruling faculty of nutrition and sensation.

The faculties of imagination and reason have no auxiliaries. Al-Fārābī places the faculty of imagination in the heart: the heart is the ruling organ and is followed by the brain, which “is ruled by the heart and rules over all the organs and limbs” (Fārābī, Perfect State 1985, 174–175). Although he does not know precisely where the rational faculty resides – Aristotle did not either – he states that the rational faculty consists of a material part, which is “a shape, *hay'a*, in matter prepared to receive the imprints of the intelligibles” (Fārābī, Perfect State 1985, 198–199). In order to become intellect in actuality, the material intellect, that is, man, needs something else, which is always in actuality, namely, the Active Intellect. Thus, al-Fārābī links together the world of nature with the celestial architecture, and man is the linking band.

Such an intervention of the Active Intellect that gives sublunary beings their forms is not mentioned by al-Fārābī's in his writings. He gives all celestial bodies the decisive role of creating prime

matter and the contrary forms of the sublunary beings. Nevertheless matter, the elements, and nature have an inherent force to develop into higher forms of existence.

How well organized are al-Fārābī's doctrines? M. Mahdi claimed that his cosmology was political and devoid of scientific value since its purpose was to be a guide for the inhabitants of the virtuous city (Mahdi 2001). On the contrary, D. Janos argues that the doctrines are consistent, "grounded in the most up-to-date physical, metaphysical, and astronomical theories of his time" (Janos 2012, 7). However, he recognizes in other places that al-Fārābī's doctrines are not always homogeneous or that, for instance, he does not devote much space in his extant works to celestial motion, which is a crucial issue in physics. Al-Fārābī's carelessness may hint at the fact that he was much more concerned by a metaphysical foundation of ethics and politics.

In the tenth century CE and matching the lifespan of Al-Fārābī (ca. 870–950), a society of learned men flourished in Basra. They remained anonymous on purpose, and their interest in philosophy and science was stirred by a way of life, where knowledge was "nourishment of the soul." The Brethren of Purity, as they called themselves, have bequeathed us with 54 epistles comprising all the learning available at their time (Ikhwān al-ṣafā' 1957). The epistles often combine Platonic and Aristotelian doctrines, but sometimes they drink from other sources, for instance, Pythagorean. Whether the epistles can be considered as a disseminating work aiming at a general audience or one intending to reach scientific level remains a matter of discussion.

Epistles 16 through 21 deal with the natural sciences; they have been translated into English by Carmela Baffioni (2013). The doctrine of the human being as a microcosmos enjoyed broad dissemination in medieval Islam, and the Brethren of Purity reproduce the doctrine of both man as a microcosmos and the universe as a macroanthropos. In Epistle 16, c. 2, we read:

Know, o my brother, that by saying 'world' the wise men mean the heavens, the earths, and all the creatures of them, and they called it a 'big man' because they think that it is a simple body with all its spheres,

the layers of its heavens and the elements of its basic compounds, and the things generated from them. They believe that it has a soul whose faculties pervade all parts of its body as the soul of an individual man pervades all his parts. (Baffioni 2013, 135)

In the classical issue of the character of the creation of the world, the Brethren of Purity join ranks with those who sustain the world. In several places, for instance, in the Epistle 42, they insist in the doctrine that the world is temporally created: *muḥdath* (Ikhwān al-ṣafā' 1957, 3, pp. 452–453). Generally speaking, the Epistles are close to the *falāsifa* tradition, but they are not concerned by scholarly rigor and even contain matters of magic, astrology, and superstition.

While Al-Fārābī's school was based in Baghdad and the Brethren of Purity were active mainly in Basrah, Avicenna will move through different places of present Iran and Uzbekistan. Abū 'Alī al-Ḥusayn ibn 'Abd Allāh ibn Sīnā (d. 1037 CE/428 AH; for his biography, see al-Juzjānī, (Juzjānī 1974) was indebted to al-Fārābī; however, his philosophy is not only most original but also embraces all aspects of knowledge. The major work that we know is *The Book of Healing*, an encyclopedia which begins with logic, more precisely with the *Introduction*, which is a reformulation of the Porphyrian *Isagoge*. Avicenna describes the purpose of philosophy as "the knowledge of the realities of all the things insofar as man can know them" (Avicenna, *Mantiq* 1952, 12). These things can be dependent on human will or not, and the latter are the subject of theoretical philosophy. They divide into things that mix with movement and things that do not. God and the intellect are the only beings that do not mix with movement.

Movement means something like engagement with matter. Avicenna tells us that the different sciences arise according to the relationship of beings toward movement. Some beings exist in movement in their intellectual apprehension, *taṣawwur*, as well as in their subsistence, *qiwām*; they cannot be separated from matter. Some beings exist in movement only in their intellectual apprehension; they can be separated from matter. Some beings exist in movement and can be separated from matter in their intellectual apprehension and in their subsistence. Natural science deals

with the first kind of beings, mathematics with the second, and metaphysics, the “divine science,” with the third (Avicenna, Maṭīq 1952, 14).

*The Book of Healing* contains a first section on logic considered as a preparatory part of philosophy, followed by a section on mathematics, and then a section on natural beings. The order may vary; in the *Dānesh Nāmeh*, the rank is Logic, Metaphysics, Physics, and Mathematics. Following the rules of scientific knowledge exposed in logic, Avicenna enquires for the subject matter of physics. The subject matter of natural science is “the sensible body insofar as it undergoes change” (Avicenna, Samāʿ al-ṭabīʿī 1983, 7) (Avicenna, Sh. Physics 2009, 3), and he proceeds to describe the natural body:

The natural body is that substance in which you can presuppose an extension, then another extension cutting it vertically, and then a third extension cutting them both vertically. Its being, *kawnu-hu*, is the form by which it became a body. (Avicenna, Samāʿ al-ṭabīʿī 1983, 13) (Avicenna, Physics McGinnis 2009, 13)

The three-dimensionality is reminiscent of the *kalām* tradition, but it is not exclusive of it. Avicenna and the Muʿtazilite scholar ʿAbd al-Jabbār al-Asādabādī (d. 415/1025) might have met in Rayy, in 1013–1015, and textual evidence of a discussion on physical theory exists (Dhanani 2003). For Avicenna, the three dimensions however are properties and not principles of the natural body because they are changing, not stable. He explicitly denies the existence of atoms and the void (Avicenna, Ishārāt 1957, 152–157).

There are two principles that produce corporeity, matter and form, and a third one, privation, that intervenes in change and motion. Avicenna introduces a corporeal form, *ṣūra jismīya*, from which matter is never separable (Avicenna, Ishārāt 1957, 207–213). When wax is squeezed and creased, it takes on many shapes while remaining a body. And matter and motion are the subject of physics.

As for the attribute “natural,” *ṭabīʿī* of the body, Avicenna affirms that “natural” comes from the relationship to “the potency, *qūwa*, called nature, *ṭabīʿa*” (Avicenna, Samāʿ al-ṭabīʿī 1983, 7) (Avicenna, Physics McGinnis 2009, 4), but on the

other side, he defines nature as “the efficient principle common to natural things” (Avicenna, Samāʿ al-ṭabīʿī 1983, 25) (Avicenna, Physics McGinnis 2009, 32).

Nature in its restricted sense is the source of motion and change under two conditions “the action has only one outcome and is without volition” (Avicenna, Samāʿ al-ṭabīʿī 1983, 30) (Avicenna, Physics McGinnis 2009, 39), and the example he gives is that of the stone falling and coming to rest at the center. However Avicenna admits there are three other meanings of nature insofar as it is the source of motion with only one outcome but with volition, that of motion with variable outcome and no volition, and that of motion with variable outcome and volition. The rotation of the Sun belongs to the second category, and its proper source is the celestial soul; the generation, growing, and halting of the plants belong to the third category, and the proper source is the vegetative soul; the motion in place of the animals belongs to the fourth category, and its source is the animal soul. After this explanation, Avicenna considers that he has given enough reasons to call nature an efficient principle, and not an efficient cause, producing motion and to call it an efficient power too (Avicenna, Samāʿ al-ṭabīʿī 1983, 32) (Avicenna, Physics McGinnis 2009, 43).

In *The Book of Science*, Avicenna observes that motion in a proper sense applies only to change in place but that it has acquired a broader sense, “any state and any actuality of something insofar as this something is in potency” (Avicenna, Dānesh Nāmeh 1958, 14). Motion means change in general, which is found also in the categories of substance, quantity, and quality. Avicenna defines movement in the *Book of Healing* in similar terms, but he additionally distinguishes two meanings, internal and external, of movement. Its internal meaning is our perception of it as continuous; its external meaning is its existence as an intermediate state in the instant (Hasnawi 2001, 228–234).

There is another division depending on that change, which takes place gradually, as colors sometimes do or, at once, as substances do. Substantial change occurs at once, motion in quantity as well as in place is always gradual, while qualitative change has both forms (Avicenna, Dānesh

Nāmē 1958, 14–16). In the case of sperm, which becomes an animal, the gradual progression is only apparent. The distinction is not Aristotelian; Avicenna remarks that the Ancients, that is, Aristotle and the Greeks, referred to movement as only that which occurs gradually (Avicenna, Samā' al-ṭabī'ī 1983, 84). McGinnis hints at the possible influence of John Philoponus concerning the affirmation that substantial change occurs at once (McGinnis 2004, 47–48), but here again we should not lose sight of the *kalām* tradition, including their doctrine of states.

“Every body has a nature, form, matter and accidents” (Avicenna, Samā' al-ṭabī'ī 1983, 34) (Avicenna, Physics McGinnis 2009, 45); with this statement, Avicenna summarizes his views that differ from Aristotle; he integrates nature as a dynamical dimension into the composition of matter and form and adds the accidents as a necessary expression of any substance.

Since the realm of physics comprises simple and composite bodies, the simple ones are primarily natural. Simple bodies divide into those having only one potency or power and those having two potencies, for instance, one proceeding from the form and the other from an accident. Composite bodies receive the potencies corresponding to the bodies from which they are mixed, and if they blend, a common potency arises, which is mixed (Avicenna, Samā' wa-l-'ālam 1969, 1–2).

In his book *On the Heavens and the World*, Avicenna looks at the simple bodies and sees that they have simple movements, either circular or rectilinear. Bodies with circular movement are completely different from those moving in a straight line, that is, the elements. They are neither hot nor cold, neither heavy nor light. The simple spherical form has no contrary; it is not generated from anything simple, and it is created, *mubda'*. As for the spherical matter, it does not have any contrary form; it is unalienable, *mawqūf* (Avicenna, Samā' wa-l-'ālam 1969, 28–30). He concludes that such a substance must be a soul endowed with the choice of movement.

The celestial body contains a number of stars, following a hierarchy since “we see that some eclipse others and that some cause a change of appearance, *manẓar*, and others do not.” Further,

we observe that some stars move according to their approved movement, while others disobey and move in the opposite direction (Avicenna, Samā' wa-l-'ālam 1969, 37). Avicenna comes closer to the results of observation; the Moon is dark and receives the light from the Sun, for instance.

Some people claim that the earth is moving in a circle and the sphere is resting and that sunrise and sunset are not true. Avicenna refutes this because he proved that there is a resting body on which all others turn and which cannot be anything but the earth. He adds “if it were as they claim, a clod of earth would not fall vertical, but slanted, and the arrow thrown toward the east would reach a shorter distance than the one thrown toward the west” (Avicenna, Samā' wa-l-'ālam 1969, 55).

Avicenna's universe is finite in extension and infinite in duration. He follows al-Fārābī's design of the universe based on emanation; from the First Principle emanates an intellect one in number, it is the first of the separate intellects. Each sphere possesses a separate intellect “whose relation to it is as the relation of the Active Intellect to us” (Avicenna, Metaphysics Marmura 2005, 325). The intellect cannot move directly but by means of the soul that is “the proximate principle of motion.” Each sphere is moved by the corresponding soul and each sphere has a body. Chapter four of Book IX of the “Divine Matters,” *Ilāhīyāt*, reviews the hierarchical structure (*tartīb*) emanating from the First Principle:

You know that we have here numerous separated intellects and souls. It is thus impossible that their existence should be acquired through the mediation of that which has no separate existence [from matter]. But you [also] know that the aggregate of existents proceeding from the First includes bodies [...] these bodies come into being from Him through an intermediary. (Avicenna, *Ilāhīyāt* 1960, 405, l. 9-12) (Avicenna, Metaphysics Marmura 2005, 329–330)

The intermediary must have duality or plurality in itself so that it can produce the duality inherent to any body because a body is a possible existent by itself and necessary existent because of another. To sum up, the intellects and the souls can proceed directly from the First, but the bodies, and their possible matter, can only proceed

through an intermediary that is contingent. Moreover, it should be reminded that for Avicenna the number of unmoved movers or separate intellects is explained through the art of astronomy and therefore through observation.

Because of the souls and the spheres, there is motion and herewith time comes to being; it depends on motion. More precisely, it is dependent on a single motion, and Avicenna even affirms that the body endowed with this single motion is the efficient cause of time (Avicenna, *Samā' al-ṭabī'ī* 1983, 169) (Avicenna, *Physics* McGinnis 2009, 252). Avicenna clearly means the infinite movement of the universe and adheres to Aristotle: "The head of the Peripatetic school has proved that the mover of the universal sphere moves it with an infinite motion, that his power is infinite and that this mover is not in any corporeal power" (Avicenna, *Ishārāt* 1957, 179–180).

Composite bodies are investigated in the rest of the natural books including the treatises on animals. Living beings have the four kinds of motion; qualitative and quantitative motion is found in growth, for instance. The movers in the living body are its faculties or powers. The human faculties divide into natural, animal, and mental, and the heart is the principal organ that spreads the potentialities over all other parts; thus, the brain runs the mental faculty. Avicenna designed a system, which extended from matter and from the simplest elements to biology and medicine (Scrimieri 1973).

Avicenna started a new approach in the philosophy of nature when he used movement as the criterion to classify beings and then proceeded to study them. In addition, he tried to integrate observation within the system, but he eventually yielded to the seductive, all embracing emanation system designed by al-Fārābī. His approach was successful throughout centuries of Islamic thought in the East, that is, Iran, regardless of the different developments of this thought. So we see the Qur'ānic commentator 'Abd Allāh al-Baydawī (d. 1316?) and his disciple Maḥmūd Isfahānī (d. 749/1348) making a comprehensive effort to combine Avicenna's philosophy and *kalām* (Baydawī 2002). Al-Baydawī expounds on both doctrines

about bodies. For instance, the *mutakallimūn* say that a body is composed of atoms, and the philosophers say that a body is continuous in itself.

Abū Bakr Muḥammad Ibn al-Ṣā'ig Ibn Bājja (d. 533/1139), known in the West as Avempace, contributed to the development of the philosophy of nature. Ibn Bājja sketched a theory of dynamics based on a notion of "power" (*qūwa*) different from the Aristotelian notion of *dynamis*: his "powers" are mechanical forces, which can join with another force or counteract it by offering resistance. Shlomo Pines introduced the term "dynamics" to define his views, which were influenced by the tradition linked to John Philoponus (Pines 1986). There is a minimum amount of moving power for each movable. For instance, to move a boat, a minimum of manpower is needed. When two opposing powers are equal, there is no motion, and when one power "overcomes" the other, the body moves until it suffers "exhaustion," *kalāl* (Avempace 1973, 112).

Avempace made a remarkable contribution related to motion in the void; we are dealing here with "natural" movements such as a stone falling through air and water. Aristotle rejected the possibility of motion in the void because the medium was essential to natural movement at a finite speed. John Philoponus had already expressed the view that the medium is not a necessary condition but only provides resistance (Letting 1994). The different velocity with which the stone passes through the air or the water is only caused by the different density of the medium; it is not connatural to the medium. As a proof that motion without any medium, namely, through a void, is possible, Avempace adduces the movement of the spheres:

[In the heavens] there are no elements of violent motion because nothing bends their movement; the place of the sphere remains the same and no new place is taken by it. Therefore circular movement should be instantaneous, but we observe that some spheres move slowly – such as the sphere of fixed stars – and others fast – the daily movement – and that there is neither violence nor resistance among them. The cause for the different velocities is the difference in nobility (*sharf*) between mover and movable. (Avempace, *Samā' al-ṭabī'ī* 1973, 116)



D. Wirmer has written a monograph on the role of potency/power in Avempace's philosophy (Wirmer 2014) in which he extends the outreach of this concept from psychology to metaphysics through natural science and considers "active and passive potencies as universal explanatory principles" in Avempace's thought. No doubt, potency/power is not limited to the mechanical field, and it has a wider function in his natural philosophy. In the processes of a substance as well as in qualitative and quantitative changes, potency is an active and passive factor. Hot and cold are active potencies in the case of the elements, and as far as the passive potencies are concerned, Avempace explains them in the case of the element water:

Since the element insofar as element possesses a receptive potency of one of the composing forms, the water is neither [element] of the air nor of the earth nor of the fire, but it is element of the wine, of the vinegar, of the blood or of the phlegm, or of what belongs to the kind. (Avempace, Kawn 1994, 65)

Avempace adds that the passive, or receptive, potency of each element divides into two. One underlies its transformation into other simple elements; the other allows it to receive the form of composite substances. He puts the oxymel as an example where the active and passive potencies intervene: the form arises by means of the active potency and the subsisting matter by means of the passive one.

Avempace makes a wide use of the concept of potency in natural philosophy, and the comparison with Avicenna and his use of "nature" comes to mind. Avempace shares with Avicenna his cosmological doctrines although he makes some interpretations of his own, when he calls "spiritual forms" the forms of the celestial bodies (Avempace, Régime 2010, 132).

The correction in the sense of separating the account of timeless emanation from philosophical explanation came from Abū l-Walīd ibn Rushd, Averroes (d. 595/1198). He reacted to the criticism of Abū Ḥāmid al-Ġazālī, Algazel (d. 505/1111) against Avicenna and resorted to Aristotle who did not know emanation as his source and guidance:

The habit of our contemporaries to say that such-and-such a mover proceeds from such-and-such a

mover or emanates from it, or follows necessarily, or similar expressions, is something which is not correct in the case of these separate principles [the heavenly bodies]. (Averroes, LC Met. 1984, 174)

Like Aristotle, Averroes admits the existence of these separate principles and adds that their number has to be established by the astronomer. He was not satisfied with Ptolemaic astronomy, but he could not propose another more Aristotelian version in this case.

Since Aristotle's works are not systematic, his disciple had to solve some inconsistencies, at least apparent. When Averroes comments on *Met.* 1069a 30–32, his passage establishing three kinds of substances (i.e., a sensible one "of which there is one eternal and one corruptible" and another immobile) states that the sensible substance without generation and corruption is "the fifth body," that is, the heavenly spheres, and insists that natural philosophy studies the principles of both substances. Physics and metaphysics complement each other. The metaphysician acquires from the philosopher of nature the assessment that the corruptible sensible bodies are composed of matter and form and that the eternal sensible body has an immaterial mover (Averroes, LC Met. 1984, 72–73). In the beginning of his *Epitome of the Metaphysics*, he stresses the continuity of physics and metaphysics:

In sum, the first purpose of Aristotle in this science [metaphysics] is to expound on the part needed for knowledge of the remote causes of the sensible beings, because what he expounded in the natural science was only two remote causes, i.e., the material and the moving cause. (Averroes, SC Met. 1998, 7–8) (Amzen 2010, 23)

For Averroes, the books of Aristotle's *Physics* consistently expound matter, motion, and related subjects as time and place; the treatises on *Coming-to-Be and Passing Away* and on *Meteora* deal with kinds of motion that are not in space, that is, substantial change and quantitative and qualitative change. Aristotle's well-known definition of motion in *Phys.* 201a 10–11 reads: "motion is the perfection of that which is in potentiality under the aspect that it is in potentiality," and Averroes comments on it that the movable has two kinds of perfection, a perfection in actuality and a



perfection in potentiality, under the aspect of which it is called motion (Averroes, LC Phys. Latin 1962, LC 88AB TC6). Averroes could have learned the distinction either from Philoponus (Lettinck 1994, 213) or Themistius (Themistius, On Aristotle's *Physics* 2012, 85). He observes that the definition is valid for both eternal and non-eternal classes of motion, and he considers that the continuity inherent to motion shows in the definition itself (Averroes, LC Phys. Latin 1962, 88C TC6).

Averroes raises the question whether motion is a category in itself or it belongs to the category, i.e., the genus of the perfection toward which it intends, so that motion in substance belongs to the genus of substance and motions in quantity, place, and quality to the respective genera. Averroes accepts both answers: insofar as transition toward a perfection is different from the perfection itself, motion is something different from its goal and considered in this way, "Motion must be a genus per se, for the way toward something is different from it [the end]" (Averroes, LC Phys. Latin 1962, 87D TC4). For this reason, he believes Aristotle classified motion in own category in his book *Categories*.

Averroes sustains that motion does not differ from its final perfection essentially but only in a matter of degree, *nisi secundum magis et minus* (Averroes, LC Phys. Latin 1962, 87C TC4). Therefore, the definition of motion as belonging to the genus of its perfection is more adequate, *verior*, although the definition of motion as a genus in itself is better known, *famosior*; Averroes points out that Aristotle in the *Physics* deals accordingly with the first definition. Medieval Latin philosophy would call this view of motion as genus in itself "a flow of form," *fluxus formae*, and the contrary view, "a flowing form" *forma fluens* (Maier 1958, 62–64) (Glasner 2009, 112–117).

The issue of motion in the void was discussed by Avempace as we saw above; Averroes opposed to his solution, and herewith he made Avempace's position known to the Latin philosophers (Averroes, LC Phys. Latin 1962, 160D TC71). Averroes blames Avempace for misunderstanding the essence of velocity. Velocity is not a motion added to or subtracted from another motion, in

this case, natural motion, "like a line added or subtracted from a line" (Averroes, LC Phys. Latin 1962, 161A). For Averroes, there is a *ratio* between the power of mover and the resistance of the movable, and a ratio between the hindering and the hindered, and velocity depends on both factors. Velocity in the celestial spheres results from the first kind of *ratio*, since there is no medium, and Averroes agrees with Avempace in considering the degree of nobleness (*sharf*) of the various spheres as the factor explaining their different velocities. *Sharf* is the surplus of "energy" between the power of motor and the resistance opposed by the movable.

Matter is another subject of inquiry in the *Physics*, as one of the four causes and as a principle. According to Aristotle (Phys. I.7–9), and Averroes, there are three principles: matter, form, and privation. In his commentary on the Aristotelian passage, Averroes points to the privation of form as the nature of matter. Prime matter is "almost composed of being and not-being" (Averroes, LC Phys. Latin 1962, 45C TC80). Because of the presence of not-being in material beings, coming-to-be and passing-away is possible in them but not in heavenly bodies which do not have matter. Sensible substances are made of matter and form, but both are of different kinds in celestial and corruptible bodies; the difference clearly appears – Averroes thinks – in the case of the corporeal form. Avicenna spoke of the corporeal form as that primary form, which gives a body its three dimensions and which is essentially prior to them. Averroes accepts the principle of corporeal form: matter never separates itself from the three dimensions, but he distinguishes between determinate and indeterminate dimensions. He blames Avicenna for missing this distinction (Averroes, Sub. Orbis 1986, 63–65). Prime matter first receives the indeterminate three dimensions, which are identical with the corporeal form; the composite receives the determinate dimensions. This is not the case with the celestial bodies, whose forms do not exist by means of the three indeterminate dimensions. "They are not powers in bodies" (Averroes, Sub. Orbis 1986, 66).

They cannot be powers in bodies, because celestial bodies have an infinite activity in spite

of being of finite extension. However, they have dimensions, and Averroes resolves the issue stating that celestial bodies receive the dimensions in a different way: “their matter receives the dimensions by means of its forms” (Averroes, *Sub. Orbis* 1986, 68), and the dimensions are obviously determinate.

Following Aristotle, Averroes describes the universe as a unique self-containing body in a spherical shape. It is neither heavy nor light; it is eternal and not corruptible; its only change is moving from place to place. While Aristotle introduces a fifth nature for the heavenly bodies, he cautiously explains that Aristotle meant that such a nature does not accept any changes (Averroes, *LC Caelo* 2003, 36–37).

In his commentaries on the *Physics*, Averroes deals with a discussion about the place of the celestial sphere, an issue raised by Aristotle in the *Phys.* IV.5 and one which concerned his Greek, Arab, and Latin commentators. Averroes first accepted Avempace’s explanation that the sphere is in a place by means of its concavity, so that its place is the convexity of the resting body that the sphere surrounds (Averroes, *SC Phys.* 1983, 55). Later he rejected the distinction “from inside – from outside” and decided in favor of the distinction “essential – accidental” after discussing the views of Alexander of Aphrodisias, Themistius, al-Fārābī, and Avempace. The earth is at rest and has to be in a place per se; the heavenly body is rotating on it and can be in a place per accidens (Averroes, *LC Phys. Latin* 1962, 141C–143D).

He is aware that some commentators regard Book VII of the *Physics* as superfluous because it proves what is better described in Book VIII – *perfectius* “as some commentators thought.” He does not agree that Book VII sets up a key premise for the enquiry: “everything that moves has a mover” (Averroes, *LC Phys. Schmieja* 2007, 2). The issue is neither that the hand moves the stick and the stick moves the stone nor that something moves because of a part of its whole; rather, it only moves accidentally. He gives as an instance of the latter the heart, which is the first movable in animals and is moved by some part that moves itself and the whole. The mover is not external but is

found in the movable itself. According to Averroes, the inquiry excludes the corruptible bodies and leads to the one and simple movable, that is, the celestial body, and he concludes:

The following has now been proved: there is a first movable and a first movement. For this reason [Aristotle] presupposes at the beginning of Book VIII that there is a first movement and a first movable and investigates whether that movement is temporally produced or eternal. (Averroes, *LC Phys. Schmieja* 2007, 20)

Book VIII proves the eternity of the movement of the celestial body and also the immaterial nature of its mover. This is not the correct reading of Aristotle, who employed the definition of movement in general to prove its eternal duration, and, indeed, Averroes had followed the correct reading before changing his view. In his revision of the epitome of the *Physics* (Averroes, *SC Phys.* 1983) in his *Quaestiones* (Averroes, *Qst. Phys.* 1990, 17–20) or even in the same text of the long commentary – although in form of a reconsideration of his previous opinion (Averroes, *LC Phys. Latin* 1962, 339C) – he tells us that Aristotle’s aim at the beginning of Book VIII is to prove that the heavenly movement is eternal. Aristotle’s purpose here is not to demonstrate that motion does not pass away as genus (*bi-l-jins*) because he investigates a specific movement, that of the universe. Since he studies it as a whole, he does not consider its parts, where movements are following one after the other in an accidental succession.

The cause of this eternal movement lies outside the universe and is not material. Physical inquiry leads to the existence of God as the Prime Mover. The argument based on motion is seen as the best way for Averroes, Maimonides, and Aquinas (Davidson 1987, 237–280) to prove the existence of God, and Averroes deserves the credit for setting up this important proof in an explicit way.

While Avicenna wanted to build his own “Oriental” philosophy independently from the Aristotelian tradition to which the Arab philosophers of Baghdad adhered, and he was proud of his achievements, Averroes just wanted to be a faithful interpreter of Aristotle. However the history of ideas has its own dynamics, and *volens nolens*, Averroes essentially contributed to it.

## Cross-References

- ▶ Atomism
- ▶ al-Fārābī, Abū Naṣr
- ▶ al-Ġazālī, Abū Ḥāmid Muḥammad
- ▶ Ibn Bājja, Abū Bakr ibn al-Sā'ig (Avempace)
- ▶ Ibn Rushd, Muḥammad ibn Aḥmad al-Ḥafīd (Averroes)
- ▶ Ibn Sīnā, Abū 'Alī (Avicenna)
- ▶ Impetus
- ▶ John Philoponus
- ▶ Kalām
- ▶ al-Kindī, Abū Yūsuf Ya'qūb ibn Ishāq
- ▶ al-Rāzī, Fakhr al-Dīn
- ▶ al-Ṭūsī, Naṣīr al-Dīn

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## Natural Philosophy, Byzantine

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### Abstract

Byzantine natural philosophy is heavily dependent on that of late antique Neoplatonic Aristotelianism, especially in the idiosyncratic form it took in the works of John Philoponus. In this tradition, nature is considered to be an inner principle of change (kinanti) and stability (stasis), and natural philosophy is the branch of theoretical philosophy that studies such entities as are subject to change in accordance with nature, in contradistinction to mathematics and theology, the objects of which are exempt from change. The views of the late antique philosophers were mostly followed by the Byzantines as long as they were not perceived as contrary to the Christian faith. One view that was shared by most of the former but none of the latter is the view that the world is eternal. The Byzantines followed Philoponus in rejecting this view, rather than trying to harmonize it with creationism, as Proclus and others did. They also generally rejected views which seemed to entail it: thus the Aristotelian doctrine that the heavens are composed of an imperishable kind of body met with little support in Byzantium. Other features of Aristotelian-Ptolemaic cosmology were, however, readily accepted: the world according to most Byzantine writers is a system of nine nested spheres rotating at various speeds and in different directions (the ninth sphere being responsible for the diurnal motion from east to west) around the sublunary realm, where fire,



air, and water form concentric layers with the small spherical earth at rest at the center. These elements are involved in a continuous cycle of transformation into one another, by virtue of each possessing one of the active qualities of hot and cold and one of the passive qualities of dry and moist. Some Byzantine writers, who found fault with Aristotle's theory of place, also lent a willing ear to the Stoic cosmologist Cleomedes' arguments in favor of the existence of extracosmic void. Philoponus' influence is also obvious in the field of psychology, where most writers subscribe to an interpretation of Aristotle which leans strongly toward dualism: according to it, the lower soul faculties are inseparable from the body, but the rational soul, although dependent on the human body for some of its activities, is wholly separable from it in substance, and thus immortal.

## Natural Philosophy in Byzantium

Natural philosophy was always taught and studied in Byzantium, but for the most part only to a limited extent. Its importance in general education is evidenced by a number of elementary works, including, in the eleventh century, Symeon Seth's *Conspectus rerum naturalium* and Michael Psellos' *De omnifaria doctrina*; in the twelfth century, Theodore of Smyrna's *Epitome of Nature and Natural Principles according to the Ancients*; in the mid-thirteenth century, Nikephoros Blemmydes' widely influential *Epitome physica*; and around the year 1300, the relevant parts of George Pachymeres' compendium-paraphrase of Aristotle's philosophical works. The commentary on the *Physics* attributed in some manuscripts to Michael Psellos is now also considered to be the work of Pachymeres (Golitsis 2007). In addition, detailed commentaries on Aristotle's *Parva naturalia* and on his zoological treatises, as well as on the pseudo-Aristotelian *De coloribus*, were composed by Michael of Ephesus in the early twelfth century; and in the early fourteenth century Theodore Metochites published his commentaries on all of Aristotle's writings on natural philosophy.

Essays on various topics in the field were written by Theodore Doukas Laskaris, Nikephoros Choumnos, Theophanes of Nicaea, Nikephoros Gregoras, Gregory Palamas, and others.

The Byzantine conception of natural philosophy is most clearly and directly influenced by that of late antique Neoplatonic Aristotelianism. In this tradition, nature is considered to be an inner principle of change (kin Byz) and stability (stasis), and natural philosophy is the branch of theoretical philosophy that studies such entities as are subject to change in accordance with nature, in contradistinction to mathematics and theology, the objects of which are exempt from change. On the other hand, natural philosophy is also distinguished from natural history, which studies the same entities, although not in a general way. The natural world is the world of sense-experience, extended in space and time; the higher reality constituting the domain of theology is accessible only to the intellect. On this division the Byzantine writers superimposed the Christian dichotomy of Creator and created world. As a consequence, the Aristotelian bipartition of the natural world into one realm (the celestial) in which no other change than locomotion takes place, and another realm (the sublunary) where things are also subject to coming-to-be and passing-away (substantive change) as well as quantitative and qualitative change, was generally rejected: it was assumed, on the authority of Scripture, that heaven and earth had come into being and would pass away (Matt. 24: 35). Nevertheless, the division of natural philosophy embodied in the *corpus aristotelicum*, where a part dealing with the most general principles of the natural world precedes specific parts dealing with cosmology, elemental theory, meteorology, psychology, and biology, is adhered to by most if not all Byzantine writers, and in this article the several parts will be treated separately.

## General Physics

By and large, the doctrines of the late antique Neoplatonic writers on natural philosophy were accepted by their Byzantine successors as long as



they were not felt to be in conflict with the Christian faith. The general theoretical framework was Aristotelian. Thus Michael Psellos began the original redaction of the *De omnifaria doctrina* by defining “nature” as the proximate cause of change and rest (ēby de) in bodies, implanted in them by the ultimate cause, which is God (Chap. 57). Assuming that no bodies are eternal, coming to be and passing away are the most fundamental kinds of change that all bodies undergo. The four “primary bodies” or elements come to be and pass away by losing one of their qualities and taking on the contrary quality: thus, for instance, water becomes air by exchanging its coldness for heat. This they can do, Symeon Seth explained, in virtue of being composed of the two first principles of the natural world: (prime) matter, which seems to have a very peculiar ontological status as a “mere attempt at existence,” and forms, which exist in separation from the matter, not independently but in the mind of God (CRN 56–58).

The cosmogony of the *Timaeus*, according to which the world was created from preexisting forms and matter, sits ill with the Christian doctrine of creation *ex nihilo*, and was repudiated by Psellos and others. It came under a concerted attack in the early fourteenth century, when Nikephoros Choumnos, in an essay purporting to show that matter and form are inseparable and simultaneously created (*Against Plato*), argued by elimination against the separate existence of matter, and objected to the eternal existence of forms that if forms do not allow self-predication, they are not participated in by individuals; but if they do, they are not universal and eternal, but individual and perishable.

Aristotle insisted in *Physics* 4 that the natural philosopher should also study place and time: the first because it seems to be a prerequisite of change (especially of locomotion), the second because it seems to be a constant attribute of change. The Byzantine writers took him at his word. A peculiarity in Byzantine – as compared to late antique and Latin medieval – cosmology is the continuous influence of Stoicism through the agency of Cleomedes’ *Caelestia*. This is manifest, for instance, in the refusal on the part of some

authors to endorse Aristotle’s theory of place as “the limit of the containing body,” with its consequent denial of the existence of extracosmic void. Aristotle’s theory is accepted without reservation by Symeon Seth (CRN 62–64), who also regards it as a demonstrated fact that there is no void outside the cosmos (CRN 34); but Michael Psellos (OD 120, 153) and Nikephoros Blemmydes (EP 31) reproduce Cleomedes’ arguments in favor of extracosmic void with no attempt to refute them. Blemmydes also criticizes Aristotle’s definition of place for being applicable only to place conceived of as immobile and separate, and praises the greater accuracy of the definition provided by Damascius apud Simplicium, who says that place is the measure of the position of things in a position. Two possible reasons why he preferred Damascius’ theory are (1) that it regards the internal well positioning of the parts of the universe as not only the point of reference for all local movements in the universe but also as the final cause of all natural movements, and Blemmydes explained natural movement by the two related concepts of affinity of an element with a place, and the tendency of the part toward its whole; and (2) that it does away with a notorious problem in Aristotle’s theory, namely, how the outermost heavenly sphere is capable of being moved, in spite of not being in a place. A further advantage of Damascius’ theory actually noted by Blemmydes is (3) that it takes the places of incorporeal entities into account.

Nikephoros Gregoras, in his anti-Aristotelian dialogue *Phlorentius* (c. 1333), goes further. He argues that place would be better defined as the boundary of the contained body itself, since this definition, which Gregoras fathers on Anaxagoras, Democritus, and Anaximander, entails that the heaven, too, is in a place. In addition, against the consensus of Plato, Aristotle, and the Stoics (as well as Blemmydes), he subscribes to the view, which he attributes to “Pythagoras and Democritus and the other wise men,” that there is void not only outside but also inside the cosmos, distributed in small portions in the elements, since otherwise bodies would not be able to expand except by extending through other bodies, which is impossible (cf. Aristotle, *Physics* 4.6).

As regards time, Michael Psellos seems content to define it, with Aristotle, as the measure of movement with respect to before and after, and to assign to it the ontological status of a mere concept (*OD* 102). Elsewhere (*Theol.* 88.12–19) he defends a view based on a literal interpretation of Plato's *Timaeus* against Aristotle's contention that time cannot have been generated. It must have been generated with the heavens, Psellos says, for it requires movement, and the Forms do not change. As against Plotinus' account of eternity as having no extension, he champions that of Gregory of Nazianzus, according to which eternity and time are different, because the former is immeasurable, but analogous, because eternity is also "coextensive with the eternal beings, like a kind of temporal movement and extension" (*Or.* 38.8). The notion of an extended eternity, most famously promoted in late antiquity by John Philoponus, was also favored by Blemmydes, although it looks like a concession to Plotinus' account that he qualifies the relevant kind of extension as "concentrated" (*EP* 24.21).

Nikephoros Choumnos (*De natura mundi*, probably 1310s) departs from all his predecessors in that he declares both measured, sensible, time and intelligible eternity to be, in a sense, time. Both have been created: measured time, in order to change and dissolve into eternity; eternity, in order to remain unchanged. The Creator, unique and unlimited in being, nature, and power, transcends even the everlastingness of eternity, and everything, whether changing or unchanging, depends on Him.

## Cosmology

The doctrine that the world was eternal was undoubtedly the single doctrine of Aristotelian natural philosophy that Byzantine writers found hardest to accept. In contrast to some of the late antique and medieval commentators (including Thomas Aquinas), they tended to resolve the tension between this doctrine and (Platonic or Christian) creationism not by recourse to a theory of creation which allowed for the world's being eternal, but by rejection of the Aristotelian doctrine.

The example was set by Philoponus, who attempted to prove through philosophical argument, in his *Contra Proclum* (529), *Contra Aristotelem*, and *De contingentia mundi*, that it is both possible and necessary for the world to have had a beginning, before he proceeded to show by scriptural exegesis that the biblical account of creation does not contradict the findings of natural philosophy (*De opificio mundi*, probably 550s). Thus he maintained, against the literal interpretation of Genesis advanced by Kosmas Indikopleustes and other followers of the Antiochene school of exegesis, that the cosmos is a system of nested spheres, the outermost of which, being responsible for the diurnal movement from east to west, encompasses the fixed-star sphere, seven lower spheres each carrying the epicycle of a planet, and, at the center, the small immovable spherical earth. Against the Aristotelian–Ptolemaic world-view, however, he argued that the celestial realm is not composed of a fifth ungenerable and imperishable kind of body, but of different mixtures of the four elements (mostly water and air in crystalline form); and that the movement of the heavenly spheres is not due to their eternal nature, but to the motive force impressed in them by God. He also repudiated a view which he seems to have still held in his works against Proclus and Aristotle on the eternity of the world, namely, that the heavenly spheres and bodies have souls.

Much the same basic cosmology is defended with similar arguments by numerous later authors. Symeon Seth (*CRN* 30) and Nikephoros Blemmydes (*EP* 24) both assume that the doctrine that the world has had a beginning can be scientifically proved, and they both draw their arguments from Philoponus; Michael Psellos (*OD* 157) more cautiously refers only to Scripture. Aristotelian–Ptolemaic celestial mechanics is more or less universally accepted, but the five-elements-theory is discarded as groundless. Choumnos, for instance, points out that Aristotle's attempt to deduce his theory from the fact that the heavens have a circular movement fails, inasmuch as he has only secured the premise that all simple bodies have simple movements, not that all simple movements belong to simple bodies, which is

what his argument requires. Most authors either agreed with Philoponus in *De opificio mundi* or followed the Platonic view that the heavens consist of an elemental mixture dominated by fire, but Choumnos accepted Plotinus' view that they consist of fire alone.

## Elemental Theory

Turning from the eternal entities in the celestial realm to the world of coming-to-be and passing-away, Aristotelian doctrine assigns to each of the four sublunary elements a natural place in accordance with its absolute or relative lightness or heaviness. These elements, forming concentric layers of fire, air, water, and earth in descending order, are involved in a continuous cycle of transformation into one another, by virtue of possessing one of the active qualities of hot and cold and one of the passive qualities of dry and moist. The distribution of these primary qualities is such that earth is dry and cold, water cold and moist, air moist and hot, and fire hot and dry.

An interesting development in some Late Byzantine texts is the idea that the sharing in each primary quality by neighboring elements is responsible for preserving the unity of the world. This idea appears full-fledged in Blemmydes, *Epitome physica* 11.22, and later reappears in Choumnos, *De natura mundi*. Its proximate source is probably Basil the Great, *Homiliae in Hexaemeron* 4.5, another important source text for Byzantine natural philosophy. In Basil, however, it is only sensible compounds that are assigned two primary qualities; the elements have only one, and their connection is left unexplained. Blemmydes enhances the idea by insisting on the Aristotelian theory assigning two primary qualities to each of the elements, so that earth essentially connects with water, and so on. Possibly the idea of shared primary qualities was linked in Blemmydes' mind with that of natural places, each element having its natural place between those two elements with which it shares each of its primary qualities (cf. Aristotle, *Physics* 4.5 and *De caelo* 4.3 with Simplicius, *In Phys.* 597.16–20).

It is against this background that one must view Gregoras' denial, in the *Phlorentius*, that the absence of shared qualities would pose a threat to the unity of the world, since all bodies share in weight. Some of Gregoras' statements in the dialogue seem to suggest that he understood the problem as that of securing spatial cohesion, which is indeed a classic problem for those who believe, as Gregoras did, in extracosmic void (see "[General Physics](#)" above).

## Psychology

Another potential conflict between Aristotelian natural philosophy and Christianity is created by Aristotle's definition of the soul as "the first actuality of a natural body," which seems to rule out the possibility of its being immortal. To a large extent this conflict was suppressed by the Neoplatonic exegesis of Aristotle. Especially Philoponus' commentary on the *De anima* was studied throughout the Greek Middle Ages, although virtually unknown in the Latin West. Philoponus thought that what Aristotle meant to say was that the vegetative soul is wholly inseparable from the body, whereas the irrational soul is separable from the gross body, though inseparable from the *pneuma*, and thus mortal, and the rational soul or intellect, the substance of which transcends all body, but some of whose activities are bound up with the human body, is wholly separable and thus immortal. This interpretation was adopted by numerous writers, including Theodore Metochites in his commentary on the *De anima* (c. 1320), where he explained that Aristotle's famous query of whether the soul is analogous to a sailor on a ship was meant to suggest that some part of the soul may per se be wholly separable from the body, even though it is inseparable *qua* the actuality of that body, in the same way that the sailor is inseparable *qua* sailor. Metochites also claimed in his *Semeioseis gnomikai* that Aristotle's cosmological argument in *Physics* 7 and 8 for the existence of an unmoved mover entails the existence of a self-moved soul à la Plato, and that the latter must necessarily exist forever. The inferences are astonishing and

apparently fallacious, but can at least be partly defended on the assumption that Aristotle's ban on self-movement is only applicable to physical change.

Metochites was aware that Aristotle had been taken by some interpreters to deny the immortality of the soul, but so entrenched was the Neoplatonic reading that even George Gemistos Plethon, who tried his best in his *De differentiis* (1439) to document the inferiority of Aristotelian to Platonic doctrine, conceded that Aristotle made the human intellect immortal. He did, however, think that the Stagirite was inconsistent in affirming, on the one hand (in *De gen. an.* 2.3), that the intellect exists prior to the body, and denying, on the other hand, that learning can be called "recollection". In his reply, George (Gennadios) Scholarios explained that Aristotle's view should be understood in terms of a transition from potentiality to actuality: the soul is the fulfilment of the body, and the intellect is its only immortal part. It is prior to the body in substance, not in time. Plethon retorted that on Scholarios' and Aristotle's own showing (*De caelo* 1.12) an immortal intellect must be ungenerated. Anyone, he contended, who regards the human soul as immortal must admit that it is uncreated in time as well as subject to reincarnation. Otherwise, something which according to Aristotle's arguments in *Physics* 3.5 is impossible will follow: there will be an infinite number of simultaneously existing souls. This point had been previously raised by Philoponus (*In De anima* 3, 38.90–96).

## Cross-References

- ▶ [Aristotelianism in the Greek, Latin, Syriac, Arabic, and Hebrew Traditions](#)
- ▶ [Aristotle, Arabic: Physics](#)
- ▶ [De caelo, Commentaries on Aristotle's](#)
- ▶ [De generatione et corruptione, Commentaries on Aristotle's](#)
- ▶ [George Pachymeres](#)
- ▶ [Gregory Palamas](#)
- ▶ [John Philoponus](#)
- ▶ [Medicine: Byzantine](#)
- ▶ [Metaphysics, Byzantine](#)

- ▶ [Michael Psellos](#)
- ▶ [Natural Philosophy](#)
- ▶ [Natural Philosophy, Arabic](#)
- ▶ [Natural Philosophy, Byzantine](#)
- ▶ [Natural Philosophy, Jewish](#)
- ▶ [Nikephoros Blemmydes](#)
- ▶ [Nikephoros Choumnos](#)
- ▶ [Nikephoros Gregoras](#)
- ▶ [Parva Naturalia, Commentaries on Aristotle's](#)
- ▶ [Philosophical Psychology, Byzantine](#)
- ▶ [Plethon, George Gemistos](#)
- ▶ [Theodore Metochites](#)
- ▶ [Time](#)

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## Natural Philosophy, Jewish

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### Abstract

After a period of ingestion, when Jewish thinkers came to grips with a large and variegated body of scientific literature, mainly written in the Arabic, comprehensive philosophies of nature were developed. The most systematic and influential thinker in this field as in so many others was Moses Maimonides. A fixed and permanent natural order was an important feature of his philosophy. Though in conception and in most details it was an Aristotelian philosophy of nature, in fact Maimonides

asserts that an unchanging natural order is a key and requisite feature of his religious philosophy that recognizes a Creator God above nature. However, Maimonides' seemingly wholesale acceptance of "Greek" science irked many later thinkers, most especially Moses Nahmanides' who proffered a particularist philosophy. If nature has a role here, it is only as a lower order system; if they behave properly, Jews can insert themselves in a higher order, in which they come under the direct control of God.

In this entry, we will investigate some Jewish conceptions of how the world as a whole operates. The earliest attempt to articulate what can be called a comprehensive, if highly schematic, natural philosophy is found in an extremely concise and highly enigmatic treatise, *Sefer Yesira* (*The Book of Creation*). There is considerable controversy about the book's date, provenance, and purpose (Langermann, *Aleph Hist Stud Sci Jud* 2:169–189, 2002; Wasserstrom). The Hebrew word *teva*, which later came to mean, "nature," does not appear there, nor is there any other word with a similar meaning. Instead, *Sefer Yesira* lists correspondences, mostly based upon numbers (3, 7, 12) and the 22 letters of the Hebrew alphabet, on the one hand, and three dimensions of reality on the other: *'olam*, which refers here to the physical universe, both heavens and earth; *shanah*, literally "year," here meaning time; and *nefesh*, signifying here the human body. These correspondences explain the overall pattern of events in the universe. In the tenth, eleventh, and twelfth centuries, Jewish savants throughout the diaspora expounded and expanded upon this text. Most tried in one way or another to read into it the medicine, astronomy, and physics that they had absorbed from other sources; many attempts to articulate a philosophy of nature can be found in these commentaries (Jospe).

Moses Maimonides (d. 1204) deepened the Jewish engagement with the sciences. He advocated the view, according to which a fixed, permanent,

"nature of reality" (*ṭabī 'at al-wujūd*) is the touchstone of all philosophy, including, of course, theology. Just as Maimonides urged a single truth, he argued for a single, fixed nature governing reality. We may learn how nature operates by observation and the application of logic to our findings; in short, scientifically. Maimonideans, then and now, as a rule, deny any special status for the Jewish people within the natural scheme of things.

In contrast, many Jewish thinkers advanced the concept of two modes of governance (*hanhagah*). This was a highly particularist view, emphasizing the special place accorded to the Jews within the cosmic scheme. This view, which won increasing acceptance during the late medieval period (and has strengthened ever since in "orthodox" circles), recognizes two governances: the one called "natural," identified with the rules and laws of natural science (particularly astrology, which provides a mechanism for the causality of terrestrial events), and the other called by a variety of names, especially "miraculous" or "higher" governance. It is an alternative, higher system, almost a sort of parallel universe, in which cause and effect play themselves out in accordance with obedience to divine command, in place of the natural law (usually identified with astral causality), which manages the affairs of non-Jews, as well as those Jews (individuals or communities) who do not adhere to the Law. The remainder of this entry will address these two alternative philosophies of nature, (even though the second often involves the formal denial that "nature" exists).

### **Maimonides: One Single, Permanent Nature of Reality**

*Ṭabī 'a*, "nature," was a widely used technical term in Arabic. Maimonides knew of several different meanings that were assigned to it, and he recognized the need to be clear in which sense one employs the term in any given discussion. In his *Medical Aphorisms* VI, 94, he employs the formulaic declaration that *ṭabī 'a* is an equivocal term (*ism mushtarak*) possessing several meanings. One of these, the one most relevant to medicine, is "the faculty which governs the body of living



beings. . . This faculty always spares the most eminent activities of the body and always strives to maintain the integrity of all [its] activities” (trans. Bos, 20).

There is no concentrated discussion on the various usages of *ṭabī‘a* in Maimonides’ *Guide of the Perplexed*, but the term is often employed and defined in different ways. The most important of these, indeed one of the bedrocks of Maimonides’ religious philosophy, is this: nature is the fixed mode of operation by which the cosmos functions, a set and unchanging protocol that forces things to move in a certain fashion. We shall shortly elaborate upon and illustrate this concept. Nonetheless, Maimonides takes care on occasion to alert the reader that he is using the term in a different sense. Indeed, in some cases, confusion is almost inevitable. For example, in *Guide* II, 4, Maimonides takes up the knotty and delicate issue of the principle or source of the celestial motions. This cannot be a “nature”; in a kinematic context, that term applies specifically to the upward motion of the light elements and the downward motion of the heavy ones. Both classes of body move only insofar as it is necessary to regain their “place,” where they come to rest. The celestial bodies possess a circular motion, and, therefore, the principle of this motion cannot be “nature.” Is the principle then a soul? Ensouled bodies move only “because of a certain nature or because of a mental representation.” Here “nature” must have a different meaning than the one assigned to it previously. Maimonides duly elaborates, “I mean here by the expression ‘nature,’ the seeking to attain what agrees with one and the flight from what disagrees.”

A fixed and permanent nature, or natural order, is basic to Maimonides’ worldview. This is the half of Aristotle’s worldview that conforms to his own: “We agree with Aristotle with regard to one half of his opinion and we believe that what exists is eternal *a parte post* and will last forever with that nature which He, may He be exalted, has willed” (II, 29; trans. 346). The natural order as such is blind and unthinking; the intentionality or purposefulness that is evident in the natural order must come from some other principle. The purposes of the natural bodies are interconnected; for example, plants exist for the sake of animals.

Aristotle recognized an intellectual or divine principle. For Maimonides, this “principle” standing above nature is surely the God of Jewish tradition. (This, by the way, is a clear indication that Maimonides does not subscribe to the notion of *deus sive natura*.) More precisely, according to Aristotle, the “craftsmanlike governance proceeds from an intellectual principle” but, “according to us,” it is the act of an intelligent being (III, 19; trans. 479).

But there is more: Maimonides insists that the combination of the two ideas – the *teloi*, or “final purposes” for which natural things exist, and the inflexible and permanent nature of the components of the universe that possess these *teloi* – leads inevitably to the belief in creation. Otherwise, how can one explain the existence of a set of bodies, all uncreated, yet well-ordered in a system in which the one exists for the sake of the other? In Maimonides’ words: “Know that the existence of this final end in natural things has of necessity led to a belief in a principle other than nature. . . Know too that to the mind of an equitable man, one of the strongest proofs for the production of the world in time is the fact, demonstrated with reference to natural beings, that every one of these has a certain final end, some of them existing for the sake of others; for this is a proof of purpose on the part of a being possessing purpose. And purpose can only be conceived with reference to the production in time of something so produced.” (III, 13; trans. 449; see also the beginning of II, 19).

By extension, “nature” refers to any fixed and unalterable rule, and it can be applied to entities that, strictly speaking do not belong to the world of nature. In the passage to be cited presently, the “flow” of intellect from one individual to another is compared to the overflow of water from one vessel to another. Maimonides is there developing his theory of prophecy, and he is eager to emphasize that the phenomenon is essentially “natural”; in line with this, he speaks of the “nature of the intellect.” Maimonides writes, “But the nature of that intellect is such that it always overflows and is transmitted from one who receives it after him until reaches an individual beyond whom this overflow cannot go and whom it merely renders perfect. . .” (II, 37; trans., 375). Even the nonexistent (because it is impossible for it to exist) has a

“nature,” meaning here that its status cannot be changed. “The impossible has a stable nature, one whose stability is constant and is not made by a maker; it is impossible to change it in any way” (Guide III, 15; trans. 459). This statement is an important principle for Maimonides.

Human nature, or what we may call the natural inclination of most people to look at things in a certain way, figures as well in Maimonides’ thought. Biological “nature” is fixed too, but in a weaker sense. In line with the general thinking of the period, biological characteristics are true statistically (to use an anachronism) rather than absolutely; in the scientific idiom of the period, they are *akthariyy*, “mostly usually so.” We must distinguish here between societies and individuals. With regard to the former (because they are statistical), Maimonides is more open to stating rules. For example, certain opinions can be revealed only in the form of parables because “it is not within the nature of the common multitude that its capacity should suffice for apprehending that subject matter as it is” (III, 27; trans. 510). Understandings of this sort are part of the *raison d’être* for writing the *Guide*.

Concerning the individual, on the other hand, Maimonides is much more circumspect. Committed as he is to the freedom of the will, he must carefully define just what human functions are determined by “nature.” The lengthy final chapter of his *Eight Chapters* focuses upon the problem of the *fitra*, the inborn human nature. Human nature (*tab’*) cannot predetermine any ethical or intellectual quality or even profession. However, it does mold significantly character traits concerning which the Jewish tradition pronounces a moral judgment. A person endowed with coarse natures (here in the sense of the four humors) will have great difficulty in her studies. These and other traits, however, can be overcome, to some degree, but only with great difficulty.

## Alternatives to the Natural Order

Certainly, the most significant voice in the formation of an alternative natural philosophy was that of Moses Nahmanides (d. 1270). To be sure, Nahmanides insists that he rejects “nature”

altogether. His system (if it may be called that) was in large measure a reaction to Maimonides, who, in Nahmanides’ words, “diminishes miracles and augments nature” (Twersky, 232). Nahmanides will, then, “augment” miracles and diminish nature. Moreover, he draws upon ideas of earlier Jewish thinkers whose views were at variance with those of Maimonides.

In several clear statements, Nahmanides rejects out of hand any notion of “nature,” asserting that Jewish belief maintains that there are only miracles – miracles here meaning, direct products of the divine will. Will is not whim; it is an intervention elicited by Jewish moral and ritual behavior. Nahmanides does not propose an alternative physics (such as atomism, adopted by Muslim *mutakallimūn* and some Karaites). As we shall see, he in effect accepts the explanations of Aristotelian physics and Galenic medicine for mundane affairs; they cannot be allowed only when the observance of the Torah is somehow involved. “The blessings and curses are all miracles, for it is not natural that the rains should fall in season when we worship God. . .” (Commentary to Exodus 6:2). When the Jews as a whole behave as they should, “their affairs will not be realized by nature at all: not with regard to their bodies, their land, their collective, or any of their individuals” (Commentary to Leviticus 26:11).

Indeed, Nahmanides recognizes a permanence in the cosmic setup, which, he insists, includes the spiritual as well as sensible realms, which is hardly distinguishable from Maimonides’ proclamation of a fixed and permanent natural order. He may even discern some sanctity in the scheme of things that God created. These ideas are divulged in his discussion of the biblical prohibition to cross species (*kil’ayim*):

The rationale underlying *kil’ayim* is that God created the worldly species of things possessing a vegetative soul and those with a motive soul [an Aristotelian phraseology for plants and animals!], and he gave them the capacity to reproduce so that the species would maintain themselves forever, so long as He (Blessed is He!) wills the world to exist. As part of this capacity, He commanded that they reproduce within their own species, and that they do not change forever. . . Whosoever crosses two species denies the act of creation, thinking as if God did not perfect the world as required, and so he wishes to aid in the creation. . . [Therefore]

animals will not reproduce [when mated] with another species, and even those that are close in nature and do reproduce, such as mules, will have no issue, since they are infertile (commentary to Leviticus 19:19).

Though formulated largely as a response to Maimonides, Nahmanides' approach has roots in other, earlier Jewish approaches. He was well acquainted with the astrological worldview of Abraham ibn Ezra, for whom he professed "open antagonism and concealed love." According to Ibn Ezra, man is bound within a universe governed by the stars, but he can escape their decrees by linking up to a higher order of reality, one which is above the stars. Nahmanides is much clearer than Ibn Ezra in specifying that this is achieved by observance of the Torah. We are not speaking about a subjective liberation from this-worldly drudgery, that can be achieved by developing the proper spiritual outlook – that would seem to be the view of Ibn Ezra. Instead, at issue here are the rewards and punishments clarified in the Torah: "For man receives no benefit in reward of a commandment nor evil in punishment of a violation unless it be by miraculous action. If he were left to his nature or his [astral] sign, his actions would be of no consequence..." (Commentary to Genesis 17:1). The idea that the natural course of events is astrally governed, or, to put it differently, that someone left to the governance of nature would be subject to the decrees of the stars, was widely held by Nahmanides' followers, and largely identified by them with the lower order governance of the universe.

Nahmanides firmly believes that natural science is severely myopic. Aristotle and his school limited their interest to the sensible phenomena alone. They totally ignored the spiritual dimension of the cosmos and, therefore, had not a clue about the most telling set of operative causal connections: the linkage between human behavior, more precisely, Jewish ritual observance, and sensible phenomena such as rainfall. Revelation and the prophetic tradition teach Jews about this linkage, which is a key element of belief.

This idea fits into an earlier tradition that asserted that Jews have access to a richer body of knowledge than Gentiles. The poet and

philosopher, Judah Halevi, argued it would be wrong to assert that reason (*qiyās*) is the criterion distinguishing Jewish from Greek science. The Greeks came up with "rational" explanations for whatever phenomena they could detect with their senses. Had they been able to visually attest to the miracles performed by the prophets, they would have "explained" them as well; but they cannot be faulted for denying events that they could not possibly witness. This line of thought was pressed by later thinkers. Joshua ibn Shueib, an influential preacher, criticized those who proffer illegitimate, allegorical interpretations of Jewish lore; they err "because they believe only what their eyes see and their senses apprehend. Whatever is beyond intellect or nature, they reject, in the manner of the philosophers. But whoever has belief in his heart... will believe that God creates new things on earth, as the situation or the moment [require]" (Derashot, Beshalah, I, 132). The "Greeks" are not accused of maliciously spreading disbelief; quite to the contrary, they are excused for not including in their theories dimensions or modes of operation of the world that lie beyond their grasp.

Miracles or nature are not the only options for Nahmanides. There exists a third alternative: God may occasionally intervene in a non-miraculous fashion, but rather by manipulating the usual, haphazard course of events (*derekh ha-miqrim*). Such was the case when quail were dispatched in response to the Children of Israel's craving for meat. They arrived in greater than usual quantities, and their descent proved to be a punishment: both of these features are characteristic of miracles. Nonetheless, avers Nahmanides, there was no innovation here in "the nature of the world" (commentary to Numbers 11:19, end). Nahmanides also knows of one nature supervening upon another. At creation, animals were impressed with a vegetarian nature, "and that is the nature that was placed in them permanently." They became carnivorous (and murderous) only with Adam's sin, and this "custom" endures. In the messianic age, animals will revert to their "first nature" (comm. to Leviticus 26:6).

The idea of a higher order gained acceptance among Jewish thinkers who are classified as

philosophers and overall adhere to the Maimonidean path. Here follow applications of the concept in the writings of two such thinkers. According to Jedaiah Penini, the higher mode becomes operational when the Jewish people behave as they ought to. Repentance is one way to activate the higher governance, and, as a rule, the Jews repent only when motivated by a hostile environment. Hence the Jewish people are paradoxically closest to salvation when they are most downtrodden. Repentance places them under divine providence, rather than natural law (*Lashon ha-Zahav*, Venice, p. 15a). Isaac Arama notes that the implementation at times of a higher order, which in effect “robs” the natural order of its governance, does not necessarily mean that there is no fixed natural order. He agrees that there is one indeed, the philosophers are correct in recognizing it and seeing in it a proof for God’s existence; but the Jews are no less well-grounded in finding proof in the miraculous violation of nature. “Just as the customary natural order of reality testifies to the truth of God’s existence, so also the occasional robbing and destruction of its nature proclaims the majesty of His kingship. . .” (Aqedat Yitzhaq, Bo, beginning of ch. 38).

## Cross-References

- ▶ [Abraham ibn Ezra](#)
- ▶ [Aristotelianism in the Greek, Latin, Syriac, Arabic, and Hebrew Traditions](#)
- ▶ [Moses Maimonides](#)
- ▶ [Philosophical Theology, Jewish](#)

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## Natural Rights

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### Abstract

From the twelfth century onwards, medieval canon lawyers and, from the early fourteenth century, theologians and philosophers began to use *ius* to mean a right, and developed a theory of natural rights, the predecessor of modern theories of human rights. The main applications of this theory were in respect of property and government.

In medieval texts the term *ius naturale* can mean either natural law or natural right; for the former sense see the entry on ► “Natural Law” in this volume. Medieval texts sometimes use the term *ius* in a way that seems equivalent to English “a right.” In other modern European languages this sense is indicated by the adjective “subjective” (e.g., *subjectives Recht, droit subjectif*). “Subjective” means that there is a “subject” to whom the right belongs; it does not imply subjectivity in the sense of arbitrariness. Some medieval writers, beginning with the canon lawyers of the twelfth century, refer to certain *iura naturalia*, “natural rights” that belong to human beings apart from any human positive law. They held that some of these natural rights are alienable or able to be overridden by human law, but others (or these same rights) are in certain circumstances operative irrespective of positive law – that is, at least some natural rights are, at least for some circumstances, inalienable. This is the ancestor of the modern idea of human rights, that is, rights belonging permanently to any human being as such, independently of the law or customs of any community.

### Meanings of *Ius, Dominium*

The canonistic rights vocabulary, like our own, is a rich one. *Libertas, potestas, facultas, immunitas, dominium, iustitia, interesse, and actio* can all in the appropriate circumstances be translated as ‘right’. (Charles Reid, quoted Tierney 1997, p. 262)

The key words are *ius* and *dominium*. In medieval Latin *ius* had a number of meanings – according to Tierney (Tierney 1997, p. 115; cf. Tierney 1997, p. 40), the canonist Johannes Monachus listed two dozen. Some were not relevant to ethics and politics (e.g., *ius* in the sense of broth), but those that were include the following: (1) what is just (*id quod iustum est*); (2) a law (also signified by *lex*); (3) a natural innate force or power that leads human beings to act rightly; (4) the innate capacity in *any* creature that leads it to do what the creator appoints; (5) a right.

Sense (3) is seen by the chief authority on this subject, Brian Tierney, as fundamental. He suggests that both natural law and natural right can be

seen as deriving from the innate force of reason (Tierney 1997, p. 65). Huguccio and others who use *ius* in this sense (Tierney 1997, pp. 62–65) seem to echo Cicero (*De inventione* II. liii.160–161, II.xxii.65). According to Cicero, natural law is brought to us by some innate force (*De inventione* II.xxii.65): these canonists referred to this innate force as *ius*. Some identified it as reason, some as free will, and some as *synderesis*; in any case, it is the ability to distinguish between good and evil. Clearly *ius* in this sense is not a law or a right but a rational agent’s power of moral discernment.

Sense (4) seems to be related either to sense (2) or to sense (3). It is either a law or a power that directs nonrational agents to act as God intends. Roland of Cremona says that in a spider is a *ius* that leads it to spin a web (Crowe 1977, p. 117). Gerson says that the sun has a *ius* to shine (Gerson 1960–1973, Vol. 3, p. 142). Summenhart and Vitoria sometimes follow Gerson’s usage (Tierney 1997, p. 248; Brett 1997, p. 126). Gerson did not mean to attribute *rights* to irrational creatures. He goes on to say of *ius* that “it is taken more narrowly by those concerned with politics, so that *ius* is said only of things that belong to rational creatures” (Gerson 1960–1973, p. 142). The idea that God has given *all* creatures an inclination toward their appointed ends is equivalent to Thomas Aquinas’ doctrine that creatures participate in the eternal law, but, as Thomas explains (ST q.91 a.2 ad 3), there is no natural law in irrational creatures except by a similitude. To translate this sense of *ius* as “a right” seems inappropriate, since it has no implication of duty, rights, or other moral qualities, which all agreed belong to rational beings alone.

Sense (5) is uncommon in Thomas Aquinas (though it is not entirely absent; see Hering). This has led some historians to look for a “watershed” after Aquinas in the use of *ius*, a time at which it first began to mean “a right.” According to Michel Villey, Ockham was the first to use *ius* to mean a right, according to Richard Tuck it was Gerson. However, Brian Tierney has shown that *ius* was used in this sense by canonists from as early as the twelfth century, and that the theologian Hervaeus Natalis and the philosopher Marsilius adopted the lawyers’ usage before Ockham

did. Thus Ockham was not the originator of the concept of subjective right, though, as will be seen below, he seems to have been the first to have constructed a political philosophy based on natural rights.

The term *dominium* also had many senses. On the meaning of *dominium*, *dominare*, etc., in the fourteenth century (including in natural science) see Ockham, OND 2.262ff. Four senses are worth noting: *dominium* may mean (1) the mastery a rational being with free will has over his or her own actions, (2) rulership (e.g., a king's rulership), (3) ownership over things (*proprietas*), and (4) the mastery Adam and Eve had in the state of innocence over other creatures. Sense (4) was sometimes called "original" *dominium*, and by analogy with this some wrote of evangelical *dominium*, beatific *dominium* and other kinds enjoyed by particular categories of people.

Only beings with *dominium* in sense (1) can rule themselves by law or possess rights, but this *dominium* is not itself a right. Rulership and ownership are rights or objects of rights: a king has a right to his *dominium*, an owner has a right to his property (*ius domini*). In sense (3) *dominium* meant, originally, possession of and complete control over a thing. Such *dominium* implies the exclusion of others. *Dominium* was distinguished from more limited rights such as usufruct, just as we would distinguish ownership of a house from tenancy. In Justinian a *dominus* who granted usufruct to another retained only "bare" *proprietas* (*Inst.* 2.4.1) and enjoyed *dominium proprietatis*, but in medieval usage, at least among theologians, *proprietas* was synonymous with *dominium* in sense (3).

On the question whether every *ius* is a *dominium*, see Tierney 1997, pp. 243–245, 260), and Brett (1997, pp. 34–40, 128–129, 149–150).

Natural rights were usually referred to as *iura naturalia*, but there were occasional references to *naturale dominium*.

## The Chief Natural Rights

A full-fledged medieval natural rights theory (for example, as presented by Ockham – see below) consisted of two elements: a treatment of property

rights, and a treatment of political rights. Whether property itself was a natural right was disputed; theologians generally said that property was not natural but a creation of human positive law; lawyers generally said that property, or at least some kind of property, existed by natural law. But it was generally agreed that every person has a natural right to self-preservation and hence a natural right to use things – in a situation of necessity even things belonging to another. Medieval writers postulated other natural rights with important implications for politics. They held that everyone has a natural right to self-defence. Like the right to use things to sustain life, the right of self-defence was seen as implied by the natural law duty to preserve human life, one's own first of all. Another natural right with political implications was the right to freedom. The right to use things, the right to freedom and the right of self-defence were included in Isidore's statement of natural law: "the common possession of all things and the one liberty of all. . . and the repelling of force with force" (quoted Gratian, I dist.1 c.7, Friedberg, Vol. 1, col. 2).

## Property and the Right to Use Things

Although Isidore says that natural law includes "the common possession of all things," he also says that it includes "the acquisition of things taken from air, sea, and sky, the restitution of an article given in trust or money loaned"; and one of the Ten Commandments is "Thou shalt not steal," which shows that property is approved by God. Some held that common possession existed only in the state of innocence and had been superseded when property was instituted after the Fall. However, according to the canonist Huguccio and many others the original common possession still holds, in the sense that in time of need the better-off are obliged to share their means of sustenance with the poor, who commit no theft if they help themselves (Tierney 1997, pp. 72, 73, 139).

According to Thomas Aquinas, human beings have a natural lordship (*naturale dominium*) over useful external things, because by reason and will we are able to use them (ST 2-2 q.66 a.1). This *dominium* is not ownership, which is the topic of



the next article, but an extension of *dominium* in sense (1), that is, it is an exercise of free choice, as in 1-2 q.1 a.2; man has natural lordship in the sense that he can use things at his choice (Compare 2-2 q.66 a.1 ad 1). In the next article (2-2 q.66 a.2) Thomas asks whether it is licit to possess something *quasi propriam*, that is, as being one's own, to the exclusion of others – that is, whether property is licit. He answers that it is (for the reasons given by Aristotle), but one must be ready to share one's property with others, especially in time of need. A poor person who takes another's property in time of need is not guilty of theft (2-2 q.66 a.7).

Discussion of property and the right to sustain one's life by using things intensified with Pope John XXII's attack on the Franciscan claim that they had renounced all legal rights and used food and other things only by "simple use of fact," without ownership. According to Bonaventure (*Apologia pauperum* 1269: 312, followed by Pope Nicholas III, *Exiit qui seminat* (1279), Friedberg, Vol. 2, col. 1113), the Franciscans renounce property and other rights, but since life is impossible without use of external goods, and self-preservation is a duty, "no profession may ever be made that renounces entirely the simple use of temporal goods." This answers the objection that complete renunciation of property is suicide (Bonaventure: 323, Nicholas, col. 1113). In his attack on the Franciscan position, Pope John XXII argued that no one can justly consume something without owning it. He was answered by various writers, including Bonagratia of Bergamo and Marsilius, who argued that one can justly use another's property, without acquiring it as one's own property, if the owner gives permission. To this the Franciscans' opponents replied that permission confers a right, indeed (in the case of consumables) a right of ownership: to give permission to use a consumable is to hand over property in it. To consume with the owner's permission is therefore incompatible with the Franciscan's claim to have renounced all rights.

Ockham in the *Opus nonaginta dierum* distinguishes between natural rights and positive legal rights (OND 65.35), and he claims that an owner's permission does not confer a legal right, or any

new right, but merely "unties" the original natural right to use things. Like Alexander of Hales, Bonaventure, and Scotus, Ockham says that in the state of innocence property would have been contrary to natural law but after the Fall became permissible and in most circumstances obligatory. After the Fall, human communities have the right to enact positive law establishing the institution of property. The right to establish property is said in OND to be from natural law, supposing the circumstances of the fallen state (OND 92.16–45: 439), in *Breviloquium* it is said to be from divine positive grant (Brev. iii.7.35–36: 179); but in both works Ockham holds that the original right to use things to sustain life is a natural right. After the Fall, once human positive law has established property, the original natural right is "tied" but not abolished. Anyone can use any unappropriated thing, anyone can use anything necessary to sustain life in a situation of extreme necessity, and, even outside a situation of necessity, anyone can use another's property with the owner's permission. An owner's permission does not necessarily confer any legal right – it does not necessarily confer the "right to use" that is a legal right. (It is important here not to confuse the *usus* and *ius utendi* (OND 2.127ff, 2.155ff) that are legal rights with the "simple use of fact" to which a legal right is not necessarily attached (OND, 6.268–270).) In some cases permission is intended to grant a legal right, and may be accepted in that sense; but an owner may give – using a term Ockham does not himself use – "bare" permission, without conferring any legal right whatever, so that if the permission is withdrawn, for any reason or for none, the beneficiary may not complain and cannot take the owner to court. Bare permission is the only kind Franciscans accept. The Franciscans' use of things, outside the situation of necessity, rests upon the bare permission of owners. This is true even of the use of consumables: though by use a consumable ceases to exist, the friars can with permission consume things, just as slaves, children, guests, and others may consume food and other things that continue to be the householder's property as long as they exist (OND 4.255ff). The permission that does not confer a legally enforceable right

merely unties the original natural right to use things, and this right is enough to make the use just. (On all this see OND Chaps. 64 and 65.)

Later theologians were not much interested in “simple use of fact,” but otherwise their view of property was like Ockham’s: in the state of innocence every person had the natural right to use anything; this right is now restricted by property, which is an institution of positive human law; but one can use another’s property with the owner’s permission, and in a situation of necessity the original natural right revives so that helping oneself without permission is not theft.

## Political Rights

When Ockham’s conflict with Pope John led him to questions about the constitution of the church and the relationship between church and secular government, the notion of natural rights was again central to his thinking. In a number of places (OND 88.308–310, Brev. iv.10.54–58, 3.1 Dial. 2.28, 3.2 Dial. 3.6) Ockham invokes the canon *Ius civile*, a text in which Isidore explains the meaning of the term “civil law”: “Civil law is the law proper to itself that each people or city establishes, in accord with divine and human reason.” Ockham interprets this not merely as the explanation of a term but as an assertion of the right of each people to establish for itself a law and a government and to elect its own ruler. (“People” here does not mean what it meant for nineteenth century nationalists. It means human beings living in some locality or region who have common interests, for example, in peace; see OQ iii.1.66–70.) These natural political rights are said to be given “by God and nature”; they are not given by God through positive divine law, but through the law of nature (which is divine law in a broad sense). “Law of nature” is here understood in the third sense, that is, natural law on supposition (see the entry on ► “Natural Law” in this volume). The natural political rights have application even to the government of the church. For example, the Christians of Rome have a natural right to elect the pope (3.2 Dial. 3.6–7). Although by Christ’s institution monarchy is the normal constitution of the

church, there may be situations in which Christians have the right to vary the ecclesiastical polity at least for a time – for example, there may be situations in which different parts of the church have the right to appoint heads not subordinate to a pope (3.1 Dial. 2.20–28).

Independent rulers hold power “from God alone” in the sense that regularly they are answerable to God alone, but rulers receive their power from the people and on occasion can be corrected or deposed by their subjects, or even by an individual subject (Brev. iv.6). Rulers have a (positive) right to their rulership, so that they cannot be replaced except for misconduct (Brev. iv.13). Hence the right to establish law and government can be exercised only by a people with no superior, i.e. a people not already under government (3.2 Dial. 3.6). Ockham accepted the view of the Roman lawyers that when the Roman people transferred their power to the first emperor, they also gave the emperor and his successors power to provide for the succession (OQ, viii.4.218–236: 193–194; Brev. vi.2.31–8:251). Similarly, the Christians of Rome, who have a natural right to elect the pope, may have transferred the right of election to others, for example, to the cardinals, or in some cases to the emperor (3.2 Dial. 3.6–7). Which rights are given to the ruler and which are retained by the people, and what is the constitution of the government, varies from one community to another (3.2 Dial. 2.29; OQ v.6.56–61:159–160). However, just as in situations of necessity an owner’s positive rights may be overridden by the right to use, so if government breaks down, or if the ruler becomes a tyrant, the people’s natural right to provide themselves with government and law revives and they may depose one ruler or regime and establish another. In view of the possibility of breakdown or tyranny, a ruler should not have so much control that he can evade correction – it is unnecessary, indeed dangerous, for everyone in the state to be subject in every case to one supreme ruler (OQ, iii.3.34–39).

Even in normal situations, the rights or powers of a ruler, even of pope and emperor, are limited by the rights of subjects, not only by the right to replace a tyrannical ruler but also by other “rights and liberties.” Ockham does not specify these in

detail. The ruler's power is obviously limited by the natural rights of subjects. Ockham takes this pretty much for granted, since no one claimed that rulers have power superior to natural law. His main contention, in regard to both popes and secular rulers, is that their power is limited not only by divine and natural law and natural rights, but also by positive rights and by natural and positive liberties. The pope's power is limited by the freedom Christians have under the gospel, which is a "law of liberty" (Brev. ii.3, 16–18); the secular ruler's power is limited by the freedom which (not all but most) subjects have because they are not slaves but free – the freedom of subjects is necessary to the best form of government (OQ iii.4, 6; 3.2 Dial., 2.26–28). The indefiniteness of the array of rights and liberties may well be deliberate; perhaps Ockham did not need, or wish, to set out a purportedly complete list. The conception of the subjects' rights and liberties is given content by two things: first, by tradition – the rights and liberties people have had since Roman times should be respected unless there is some good reason why not (Brev. ii.16.12–13:142–143); and second, by the notion of the common good – rulers must aim not only at their own good, but at the good of all the members of the community (OQ iii.4.7–14:103).

Ockham's accounts of the right to use, the right to property, the rights of rulers and the rights and liberties of subjects make no reference to the difference between Christian believers and unbelievers. Political rights belong to all human beings. The empire of the pagan Romans may have been established at first unjustly, but later the subjected peoples came to consent to government by the Romans and this made it legitimate – Christ himself acknowledged its legitimacy (Brev. iv.9–11, 3.2 Dial. 1.27). The Christian Roman emperors and other Christian rulers succeeded to the political rights of their non-Christian predecessors (Brev. iii.5). Against those who assert that all *dominium* belongs to the church, Ockham argues explicitly that unbelievers have rights under both natural and positive law (Brev. iii.2–6, 8, 12, 13). Some medieval writers, notably Giles of Rome and John Wyclif, denied that unbelievers (or sinners, or the reprobate) had rights,

but, like Ockham, most theologians rejected this view. When the Spaniards invaded South America the property rights, and other rights, of the Indians were asserted by Vitoria and Las Casas and others (see Tierney 1997, p. 255ff).

Theories like Ockham's were put forward by many later medieval writers. The leaders of the Conciliar movement studied Ockham (d'Ailly, for example, produced an *abbreviatio* of Ockham's *Dialogus*) and were also influenced directly by the canonist tradition that had influenced Ockham (Tierney 1955). Gerson's conception of a body whose members had individual rights prior to any enactment by that body, rights that include a right to self-defense and also certain "political" powers (Tierney 1997, pp. 220–225), echoes both Ockham and the canonist tradition. The political theory of Locke's *Second Treatise* has obvious similarities with Ockham's; the Conciliarists are the most likely medium of transmission of fourteenth century ideas into the seventeenth century (see Oakley).

Though the general architecture of natural rights political theory did not change much, if at all, after Ockham, later writers made interesting contributions. Vitoria, de Soto and Suárez extended and strengthened the natural right to freedom. In defending the rights of the Indians, Vitoria followed Scotus (Flüeler, Vol. 1, pp. 75–81) in rejecting, or greatly modifying, Aristotle's doctrine of natural slavery: the less intelligent may need leadership, but it is unjust to subordinate their interests to the interests of the intelligent. Aristotle did not mean "that it is lawful to seize the goods and lands, and enslave and sell the persons, of those who are by nature less intelligent" (Vitoria 1991, p. 251). Even if it were true, as Spaniards allege, that the Indians are less intelligent, they have a right to their property and to their freedom. Vitoria reflected on the duty or right of self-preservation and argued that the duty of self-preservation leaves an individual free in some cases to accept his own death for the sake of others (Tierney 1997, p. 299). De Soto says that an individual is not bound to preserve his own life at the cost of great pain, for example, by undergoing amputation (Brett 1997, p. 161). In attributing to individuals

some choice in respect of their own survival (though not to the extent of approving suicide) these authors are acknowledging a natural right to freedom that is not merely an implication of natural duties. Similarly Suárez (II.xiv.15–16, Vol. 4, pp. 32–34; cf. Tierney 1997, p. 306) tried to strengthen the foundations of freedom and the right to use things to sustain life by postulating that these rights pertain to natural law “positively,” that is, not merely in the sense that natural law leaves these open as possible choices, but in the sense that there is a presumption in their favor, so that they cannot be abolished without good reasons.

### The Definition of Rights

Hervaeus Natalis, Marsilius, Ockham, Gerson, and many others give substantially the same definition of a right, namely, that it is a licit power to do something (or a power licitly to do something). Some writers substituted for “power” some other term – for example, *facultas* (Gerson), *auctoritas* (Summenhart) – but the meaning is the same. (For illustrations see Ockham, OND 2.127–129, 6.170, 6.269–270, 61.46–50, 65.273–275; Tierney 1997, pp. 106–107, 210, 246, 293.) The power to “do” something covers also inaction and claiming (claiming is an action). There is no trace in medieval texts of the idea found in some modern writers that the beneficiary of another’s duty *eo ipso* has a right to that benefit – for medieval writers a right is a licit power of action, implying a choice to exercise the right. Ockham sometimes gives a more elaborate definition of a legal right: “a right of using is [a] a licit power of using an external thing [b] of which one ought not be deprived [c] against one’s will, without one’s own fault and without reasonable cause, and [d] if one has been deprived, one can call the depriver into court” (OND 61.46–50). Point (a) applies the generic definition of a right as a licit power to do something, (b) indicates the duty other people have in relation to rights, (c) indicates circumstances in which the right may be alienated or cancelled, and (d) is the specific difference of a legal right.

What sort of reality can a right be? A right clearly cannot be a passive power (like the potentiality of brass to become a statue). Neither can it be an active power (like intellect or will, or the power of fire to boil water), since one can have a right to do something without having any causative or “agent” power to bring the act about – we may not be physically able to do what we have a right to do. Several theologians, including Peter John Olivi, John Mair (Maior), and Konrad Summenhart, reflected on the metaphysical status of rights (see Tierney 1997, pp. 39–40, 240–241, 245; for Olivi see also Doyle, Boreau). According to Olivi, a right cannot be an accidental essence added to the person whose right it is. This is proved by many arguments, including the following: the person who confers the right may be at a distance, or the concession may be for the future or may be conditional on some future event; no created agent can produce real effects in such ways (Olivi in Boreau: 318–319, 326). The only reality in a right consists in God’s will together with the created things he wills to be related by the right and the intermediaries through which he wills the right to be assigned (Olivi: 323–324). In denying that a right adds anything real to the right-holder, Olivi seems to be right: possessing a right does not help anyone actually to effect what they have a right to do. It would seem better to say that “power” here means what it means in such expressions as “legal power” or “constitutional power” – that is to say, when someone has such a power and he or she “can” exercise it, his or her action will not be (morally, legally, or constitutionally, as the case may be) wrong. In the definition of a “right” *potentia* contributes nothing; the word that conveys the meaning of “a right” is *licite*. To say that someone has a right is to say that a certain kind of action, if they choose to do it, will (ordinarily) be licit, that is, right, not wrong, permissible.

In any case, there is no conflict between the (at least purported) “objectivity” of morality or natural law and the ascription of “subjective” rights. On any view of morality, it will be true that in some cases some persons can licitly do or claim certain things. Morality prohibits some things and commands others, but it also implies

that for some persons in some circumstances some acts (at least acts commanded and the opposites of acts prohibited) are permissible: that is, it implies that some persons have a right (a “subjective right”) to do or omit certain actions. Some have believed that Thomas was right not to use *ius* in the sense of subjective right because the ascription of rights to individuals is a betrayal of the objectivity of morals. This is a mistake: there is no incompatibility between moral objectivism and the ascription of subjective rights.

## The Origin of Rights

Since Michel Villey, historians have focussed on the question: Did medieval thinkers develop a theory of rights comparable with modern theories, and if so when? Historical research has therefore been guided by conceptions of what counts as a right in the modern sense, and therefore by various philosophical suppositions, some of which have been misleading. Some have argued that medieval theories of rights were not equivalent to modern theories because the latter put more emphasis on choice, freedom, and individual sovereignty.

Since a right relates to a “kind” of action or claim, and since acting or claiming involves choice, to say that a right marks out an “area of choice” is a truism. Exercise of a right may be a duty (e.g., the rights that go with a role), but even then exercise is a matter of free choice, since one can always choose not to perform one’s duty. Every list of rights and duties, indeed every moral code of whatever kind, is addressed to persons who have freedom of choice. Freedom in another sense (not freedom of choice, but freedom from obligation) is what is left after duty, and the shorter the list of socially enforced duties the greater the individual’s freedom in this sense. The medieval list was not all-embracing, and therefore there was freedom in this sense during the Middle Ages – though certain kinds of freedom, for example, freedom of religion, were not as well recognized as they have been since. It is not true that medieval rights were for the sake of duty while

modern rights are for the sake of freedom; both kinds of rights have been recognized both in the Middle Ages and in modern times. Both kinds are rights in the same sense of the word – in every case, to say that one has a right to do or claim something is to say that the action or claim is permissible. If it is also a duty, the point of describing it as a right is to remind potential opponents that one must be permitted to do one’s duty. Both kinds of rights impose duties (different duties) on other people, but only if the right-holder or his or her representative chooses to exercise the right. Finally, it is not true that the modern, in contrast with the medieval, conception of a right attributes “sovereignty” to the right-holder. On either the modern or the medieval view, a person’s choice to exercise a right imposes on others certain duties, but these duties are determined by the moral or legal code and merely triggered by the right-holder’s choice to exercise the right; they are not legislated by the right-holder.

## Cross-References

- ▶ [Alexander of Hales](#)
- ▶ [Bonaventure](#)
- ▶ [Canon Law](#)
- ▶ [Conciliarism](#)
- ▶ [Francisco de Vitoria](#)
- ▶ [Gregory of Rimini](#)
- ▶ [John Duns Scotus](#)
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- ▶ [Political Philosophy](#)
- ▶ [Thomas Aquinas](#)
- ▶ [Thomas Aquinas, Political Thought](#)
- ▶ [William of Ockham](#)

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## Nicholas Chamaëtos Kabasilas

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### Abstract

Nicholas Chamaëtos Kabasilas (1319/1323–1397/1398) is considered as one of the greatest theologians of the Middle Ages. His work is based on the tradition of the Eastern Church and on the teaching of Gregory Palamas and, along with that, he tried to achieve a synthesis of the two traditions: the eastern and the western one. Kabasilas owes his place in the Christian theology mainly to his sacramental teaching. The life of men is nothing else but life in Christ, which is mainly achieved by free sacramental participation.



## Biography

Nicholas Chamaëtos, who took his mother's name Kabasilas, was born in Thessaloniki between 1319 and 1323. He started studying by his uncle Neilos Kabasilas – one of the most active Palamites – and received in Thessaloniki and in Constantinople a brilliant education. During the 1340s he came to Constantinople, where about 1345 he drew closer to the emperor Kantakouzenos' court and occupied various offices. Thanks to his classmate and friend Demetrios Kydones, he got acquainted with Thomism. In 1347 he accompanied the newly elected metropolitan Palamas to Thessaloniki and Athos. Presumably in 1353 he was among the candidates for patriarch, in spite of his being a layman. In 1354 he withdrew from public life. At that time appeared his main works: *Explanation of the Divine Liturgy* and *The Life in Christ*. Once more in the 1350s he wrote a polemic text against Gregoras, an anti-Latin text consistent with the tradition (an introduction to his uncle's works), as well as the treatise on the value of reason and against skepticism. There is no further evidence about his life except for the presumable fact that in 1387 and in 1391 he wrote two letters to the emperor Manuel II. Perhaps Kabasilas died in 1397 or 1398. He was acclaimed a saint in 1982.

## The Teaching

In his treatise on the value of reason, one can ascertain the influence of Thomas Aquinas. Here Kabasilas introduces an anti-skeptical debate and undertakes to defend the power of the human ability for knowledge and of the human morality. His optimistic theory of knowledge, which represents a revised Christian version of the Aristotelian one, enters into polemics against Gregoras' epistemology and also – although not explicitly – against the more radical formulations of the Palamite position concerning secular wisdom. Human perfection is defined on the basis of knowledge (in virtue of the *nous*) and of love (in virtue of the disposition of the will – *gnomē*). But

in this state man can be perfect only in love and not in respect of knowledge. Nevertheless, he stresses the high value of secular knowledge. The rational knowledge which grasps being qua being, guides and controls the sphere of the irrational. The same position Kabasilas represents also in his writing *Against Pyrrhon*.

These views are also to be found in his main works. It is noticeable that he opposes the view according to which the life of the monks is the only true life in Christ. For him the mystical attainment is not a sufficient condition for getting near to God. He brings to the foreground the constant presence of Christ in his Grace. Both writings are meditative texts and not theological or philosophical treatises. The argumentation is directed not only against intellectual mysticism, but also against dogmatic formalism. Kabasilas stresses the value of existence in Christ, that is, in the one power and energy of the Trinity, without thus undermining Christ's transcendence. Spiritual life and the life of man in general can be nothing else but the life in Christ. On this basis he constructs his entire doctrine: the Christology, the anthropology (together with his expressive mariology), the ecclesiology, and the sacramentology. Kabasilas maintains an uncompromising Christocentrism, whereby he speaks of no other kind of life, apart from the liturgical and sacramental one. From this perspective it is still very important to him to demonstrate in detail the joint action of the free divine and human activity. While the first five books of the work *The Life in Christ* are devoted to the divine activity, the other two deal predominantly with human action, whereby the emphasis on the spiritual Jesus-prayer is noticeable. Kabasilas is considered as "the great theologian of Christian freedom" who binds the perfection of the latter with the divine "sonship," that is, the participation of the "adopted sons" in the divine nature.

In Kabasilas' work one can notice a reception of *Cur deus homo* of Anselm of Canterbury. In fact, he speaks about a "satisfaction" (*hikanopoiesis*) in the sense of "recreation" (*apokatastasis*). The justice of God generates the divine justification (*dikaiosis*), the justice coinciding with the love,

the wisdom, the peace – through those three God is in relation with mankind. Man was wounded by nature and the suffering of Christ is the healing of this wound. Christ reintegrates the divine image in the human nature. This is his justice and through the paschal mystery he himself restores its original beauty. The new life is the life in Christ, the ecstatic love of God toward men and of man toward God. This justification does not simply happen in the order of morality but on the ontological and personal level. Christ is the center and the goal of the universe, he is the cosmic synthesis of the created and the uncreated. The entire economy, based on the Incarnation, is no historical coincidence called forth by the Fall, it is a realization of the divine plan. History is a function of the Incarnation. Christ is Head not only of the Church but also of the whole mankind. Man is part of Christ and can exist only by virtue of and through this fact.

Kabasilas owes his place in Byzantine theology mainly to his teaching on sacraments. For Kabasilas the sacramental theology summarizes the entire religious experience. The enlightenment through the mysteries of Christ is the central point and the beginning of the life in Christ. The sacraments are bearers of the uncreated divine energies, that is, of the uncreated life of God, which fills up the believer and calls him anew to life. Kabasilas discusses more closely three sacraments: baptism, anointment, and the Eucharist. Baptism relieves man of his serving to Satan and endows him with the ability to be active in the field of the spiritual energies. In baptism is received the being, while during the anointment – the *energeia*. The anointment allows the new “spiritual senses” to grow. The Eucharist stays in the center of the human life. This is the perfection and the synthesis of all sacraments. In the Eucharist Christ grants His energy and renders men gods, although not according to the essence. In the Eucharist Christ bestows himself and men live the same life with Christ. The divine energy is denoted as acting love, which is identical with divine life.

A debatable point today is the attitude of Kabasilas toward Palamism. The views vary between elucidating his spiritual identity with Palamas and defining him as anti-Palamite, by

which his stated engagement in Palamism is claimed to be of merely political nature. Indeed, Kabasilas does not tackle in particular the distinction between divine essence and energy and, in general does not confine himself to the conventional Palamite issues. This fact however gives no reason for the attempts to rank Kabasilas among the cryptoanti-Palamites. Palamas himself in his last period hardly mentions the famous distinction and deals predominantly with the issues of the Incarnation, the Salvation, and the sacramental participation in the grace. Nevertheless, the teaching about God’s energies stays in the background of all his statements. In the main works of Kabasilas the fundamental Palamite theses are available. Kabasilas’ christocentric sacramentalism is close to the teaching of Palamas, but he manages not to enter into the already commonplace problems. He demonstrates a way, which starts from Palamas without completely confining to him.

In these writings Kabasilas is neither scholastic nor yet polemic. His conduct as an author is perfectly autonomous. Kabasilas seeks for a synthesis of the two traditions: the eastern and the western one, and presents the common spiritual heritage of both great traditions. Aside from the new historical and intellectual situation was his position “old-fashioned”; it was simply non-schismatical. His failing to achieve a new systematic synthesis because of accidental circumstances does not change the fact that he remains among the most meaningful theologians of the East, nor does it cancel his remarkable acceptance in the West. It is hardly a coincidence that the Council of Trent adopted his teaching on sacraments as his one original *theologumenon*.

## Cross-References

- ▶ [Aristotelianism in the Greek, Latin, Syriac, Arabic, and Hebrew Traditions](#)
- ▶ [Barlaam of Calabria](#)
- ▶ [Demetrios Kydones](#)
- ▶ [Gregory Akindynos](#)
- ▶ [Gregory Palamas](#)
- ▶ [Metaphysics, Byzantine](#)

- ▶ [Natural Philosophy, Byzantine](#)
- ▶ [Nikephoros Gregoras](#)
- ▶ [Philosophical Theology, Byzantine](#)
- ▶ [Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite](#)
- ▶ [Thomism, Byzantine](#)

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## Nicholas of Autrecourt

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### Abstract

Nicholas of Autrecourt (c. 1300–1369) was one of the most important Parisian Masters of Arts of the fourteenth century. He is best known for his alleged skepticism, which has led many medieval scholars to call him the “Medieval Hume,” and for his radical atomism. Unfortunately, the condemnation of his work in 1347 stopped his thought from having any real influence in the late Middle Ages.

Nicholas was born in the village of Autrecourt, Lorraine, c. 1300, and he was a student at the Faculty of Arts in Paris during the first quarter of the fourteenth century. He graduated around 1317 from the University of Paris, after which he was a bachelor of civil law, probably at Orleans. He came back to Paris around 1326, where he was both a student at the Faculty of Theology and a professor at the Faculty of Arts. In 1331, he became member of the College of Sorbonne, where he was prior in 1333. He lectured on the *Sentences* between 1335 and 1336, and probably obtained his license in theology before 1339. He was then summoned to Avignon in 1340, after some envious colleague had submitted a list of suspect theses that he had held. He was retained there until 1346, which is the date of his conviction. As a consequence his writings were burned, and Nicholas was banned from teaching. After this, he moved to Metz, where he received the benefit of Canon. He died in 1369 as Dean of the Chapter. Because of this conviction, he leaves us

with very few writings. The main source of information is an unfinished treatise called *Tractatus utilis ad videndum an sermones peripateticorum fuerint demonstrativi*, of about 100 pages, named after his incipit: *Exigit ordo*. A few fragments of correspondence with Bernard of Arezzo OFM and a colleague of the College of Sorbonne, Gilles van Faeno, supplement this work. Finally, we have also a disputed question on the beatific vision, which gives us a glimpse of a new epistemological conception of theology that developed in the later Middle Ages and in which Nicholas was involved. The condemned articles also contain extracts from his teaching, but they remain difficult to interpret out of context.

The philosophy of Nicholas of Autrecourt is essentially critical. As he notes in the prologue of the *Exigit ordo*, he condemns his Art Faculty colleagues who merely comment on and repeat Aristotle and Averroes without going to things themselves. Nicholas' philosophy, such as it has reached us, seeks to establish the conditions for an alternative to the Aristotelian school philosophy. From this perspective, Nicholas proposes first a fallibilist epistemology that seeks to accurately assess the degree of certainty that could be claimed by a theory, and second an atomistic and mechanistic natural philosophy that is contrary to Aristotelian hylomorphism.

Nicholas' epistemology aims to assess the strength of the arguments advanced by his opponents, whether Aristotelian or Scotist. Its approach is normative insofar as it aims to determine which theories can claim to be demonstrative, which ones are to be regarded as sufficiently evident to be qualified as knowledge, and which ones are mere fictions and can be shown to be fallacious (see on this topic the two prologues of the *Exigit ordo*). The highest level of epistemic justification is that of evidentness, which is twofold, namely incomplex and complex. Complex evidentness first of all applies to the first principle, that is, the principle of noncontradiction. For Nicholas of Autrecourt, any evident proposition must in the last analysis be clearly reduced to this principle. Thus, more generally, an analytic proposition (*per se nota*) can be said to be evident only if its justification rests on the principle of

noncontradiction, and there are hence no degrees of evidentness, since all evidentness is based on this first principle. Nicholas' perspective is explicitly foundationalist. From the first principle and any analytical propositions, a transfer of evidentness is possible if some rules are respected. If a consequence is evident (which is a superior requirement of simple validity), it is a necessary and sufficient condition that the signification of the consequent is partly or wholly included in the signification of the antecedent, that is to say, that there is a connection of signification or meaning between the antecedent and consequent. Thus, the consequence "a house exists, therefore a wall exists" is evident, while the consequence "an accident exists, therefore a substance exists" is not, unless we assume that the notion of substance is contained in the definition of the accident, but then we make the fallacy of begging the question in assuming what we want to demonstrate. Besides these propositions, a certain number of our perceptions can be claimed to be evident. Nicholas argues for the idea that all complete appearances, also called appearances in full light (*apparentia plena, apparentia in pleno lumine*) are evident. He develops, therefore, a theory of veridical perception that implies a relationship of conformity between a mental act and an external thing. A relationship that requires both that the thing actually exists, *per se*, and that it is perceived by the external senses. Conversely, in the case of incomplete appearances, which include among others sensory illusions, the appearance does not end in the thing itself, but only in an image of the thing. In the first case, such appearances give rise to correct judgments, which will allow for the eventual correction of any incomplete appearances.

Below the level of evidence is the level of clear knowledge, which is characterized as the knowledge that leads to assent, without being evident, that is to say, to absolutely exclude any risk of error. The last degree of justification, finally, is that of the probable. One must not misunderstand the status of probability, it is indeed knowledge. Unlike most medieval thinkers, Nicholas of Autrecourt does not make evidentness a necessary condition for knowledge. Sufficiently argued

propositions, justified by reasonable proofs such as an argument for convergence, or by partial experiences such as induction (based on a number of complete and evident singular experiences, and generalized by our disposition to conjecture, *habitus conjecturativus*) are only probable, but are nevertheless knowledge if they are more probable than the opposite propositions. This is an essential criterion, and hence probable knowledge is always relative to a context (temporally determined), and in this context, it must be non-contradictory and more argued than its opposite.

Armed with these epistemological principles, Nicholas tries to show that the Aristotelian and Scotist philosophies are not evident (fully justified), but only probable. Given this, it is legitimate to seek an alternative to these systems by proposing an alternative theory at least as likely. All of Nicholas of Autrecourt's natural philosophy and metaphysics are motivated by an intuition about the eternity of the world. In this perspective, Nicholas develops a universal and coherent atomistic vision of the world. There is no generation and corruption in the sensible sublunary world. All that we can perceive are the appearance and non-appearance of things, the tangible facts that something presently exists, whereas before it did not exist, and afterward it will cease to exist. However, to realize this fact, the mere local motion of atoms is enough. Generation is nothing else than the aggregation of atoms, while corruption is their separation, and alteration is the removal of some atoms. Nicholas takes this fundamental axiom from Democritus, as Aristotle presents him in several of his treatises on natural philosophy, and the *mutakallimūn* criticized by Maimonides in the *Guide for the Perplexed* (Ch. 72). He, however, strongly modifies these sources in interpreting the atom from a qualitative perspective. This is the price of mixing Democritus' view of the atom with Anaxagoras' *homeomeron*. Hence there are white atoms, atoms of flesh, etc. that determine the discernible structure of the atomic compound. However, alongside these accidental atoms whose removal does not cause the alteration of the compound, there are atoms that are essential parts and whose removal will destroy the

compound. Finally, the soul is an atom that plays a similar role as a magnet attracting and holding the atoms, and Nicholas qualifies this as a formal principle. These atoms are indestructible and eternal. They are sometimes called *vera entia*. From this qualitative understanding of the atom and a mechanistic theory of local motion, he tries to account for all natural phenomena. Thus, the local motion of a body is merely the movement of atoms from one indivisible space to another, and the rest of these atoms explain the difference in speed. Similarly, the increase and decrease, and the phenomena of densification and of rarefaction of gases and liquids can be explained by the presence of an interatomic void, inside the compound, which may increase or decrease, allowing the arrival of new atoms, or excluding certain atoms from the compound. But it is mostly at the level of psychology and anthropology where the atomism of Nicholas of Autrecourt proves to be innovative, highlighting his vision of a totally atomistic nature.

## Cross-References

- ▶ [Atomism](#)
- ▶ [Causality](#)
- ▶ [Certainty](#)
- ▶ [Epistemology](#)
- ▶ [Induction](#)
- ▶ [John Buridan](#)
- ▶ [Skepticism](#)
- ▶ [Walter Burley](#)

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**Nicholas of Cusa**

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**Abstract**

Nicholas of Cusa produced, in *De concordantia catholica*, a synthesis of medieval ideas on hierarchy, representation, consent, and reform. He later gave up support for the Council of Basel (1431–1449) for loyalty to the pope but without abandoning his interest in reform. His unique metaphysical ideas, especially “learned ignorance” and “coincidence of opposites,” were developed after Cusanus left Basel, and they continued being refined until he died in 1464.

**Life and Works**

Nicholas of Cusa or Cusanus was born to a family of comfortable but middling means at Kues (*Cusa* in Latin) on the Moselle River in 1401. A common German version of his name is Nikolaus Krebs. He already was a cleric of the archdiocese of Trier when he studied at the University of Heidelberg in 1416. In 1417, he moved to Italy and studied canon law at the University of Padua, receiving his doctorate in 1423. Cusanus pursued further studies at the University of Cologne, becoming acquainted with Heymeric of Camp and, through him, with the works of Ramon Llull. He also practiced law and searched for previously lost classical and patristic manuscripts. Cusanus attended the Council of Basel (1431–1449) beginning in 1432 as the representative of his patron, Ulrich von Manderscheid, one of the claimants to the vacant archbishopric of Trier. His case for Ulrich's promotion was not successful, but Cusanus attracted attention for his writings on issues of theology and reform. He also became dean of St. Florin in Koblenz, where he preached his first recorded sermons.



While present at the Council of Basel, Cusanus took part in negotiations with the Hussites of Bohemia, arguing in published letters (1433) that they should follow established practice in administering communion, instead of demanding that wine, not just bread, be given to lay communicants. He also wrote a *Libellus de maioritate auctoritatis concilii* (*A Little Book on the Preeminence of the Authority of a Council*), which, with its treatment of the authority of church councils, reads like a draft of his larger and more famous work on church and empire: *De concordantia catholica* (*On Catholic Concord*), completed by 1434, a synthesis of ideas on institutional issues balancing hierarchy with representation and consent, papacy, and councils. This treatise remained useful to critics of the papacy long after Cusanus left Basel and became an agent of Pope Eugenius IV (1431–1447). Cusanus became close to Cardinal Giuliano Cesarini, the papal legate to the council, who tried to reconcile pope and council, especially in a dispute over the seating of presidents of the Basel assembly appointed by Eugenius. In 1434, Cusanus wrote a tract *De auctoritate praesidendi* (*On the Authority of Presiding*), trying to reconcile competing interests.

He also involved himself in a dispute over the site of a council to meet with the Greeks, who, needing aid against the Ottoman Turks, were willing to discuss reunion with the Latins. He and the other members of the conciliar minority supported Pope Eugenius IV in his effort to bring the Greeks to Italy, a region more acceptable to them than Basel's choice of Avignon. The council split over this issue, and the minority issued its own decree favoring a site in Italy. In 1437, Cusanus undertook a mission to Constantinople to persuade the Greeks to attend the council Eugenius decreed would be held at Ferrara. On his voyage back in the winter of 1437–1438, he had a shipboard experience that changed his point of view. Thereafter his writings tended to be on more philosophical topics, especially on the limits of human knowledge in the quest for God. The treatise *De docta ignorantia* (*On Learned Ignorance*), completed c. 1440, set forth his typical themes of “learned ignorance,” enfolding and unfolding, and “conjecture.” This last, possibly better

understood as a learned surmise, was expounded at length in *De coniecturis* (*On Conjectures*), completed in 1443 or 1444, which discusses the mind's ascent from sense to reason to the inspired intellect. Cusanus even tried to apply these concepts to the Basel schism by writing about the “conjectural church” (*ecclesia coniecturalis*).

After returning to Italy, he represented the pope in Germany, becoming known as “the Hercules of the Eugenian cause” on account of his heroic work for Eugenius against the Council of Basel. He presented the case for papal primacy at several imperial diets, arguing that the church was monarchical. His polemics from the period also argued that the Council of Basel lacked the consent of the princes and of the church throughout the world. This bold presentation of Eugenius' case helped persuade the princes to reach agreement with Rome, which in turn conceded control of local patronage. Eventually, they abandoned the Council of Basel, which recognized Pope Nicholas V (1447–1455), who had succeeded Eugenius.

After playing this key role at imperial diets, Cusanus was rewarded by Pope Nicholas V, who made him a cardinal in 1448 or 1449 and bishop of Brixen in the Tyrol in 1450. He also was named papal legate to the Empire. In 1451, he embarked on extensive travels, proclaiming the Jubilee indulgence and holding local councils to enact reforms. Many of these decrees were not enforced, since Pope Nicholas canceled them when pressed by lay authorities. Cusanus' unsuccessful effort to discourage pilgrimage to the supposed bleeding hosts of Wilsnack was typical of the failures of his legation. The greatest successes were achieved where he found allies in local groups of reformed religious.

Cusanus then retired to his diocese. There he tried to impose reforms on the diocesan clergy and the local monasteries. He also tried to reclaim diocesan revenues lost to other powers in the Tyrol. His efforts were backed with ecclesiastical censures, but they aroused fierce local opposition. Most important of the opponents was Duke Sigismund of the Tyrol. In 1460, the duke briefly imprisoned Cusanus, who left for Rome after being released. Pope Pius II (1458–1464) excommunicated Duke Sigismund and imposed

an interdict suspending church services throughout his domains. Cusanus never returned to his bishopric, and Sigismund only capitulated in 1464, a few days after Cusanus' death.

Cusanus became a resident member of the Roman curia. In 1453, after the Fall of Constantinople, he wrote a dialogue, *De pace fidei* (*On the Peace of Faith*), envisioning a celestial conference that reconciled the differences of all religions. Nevertheless, he became a partner in Pope Pius' more worldly efforts to launch a crusade against the Ottomans. He governed Rome while the pope was absent at the Congress of Mantua, trying in vain to persuade Europe's princes to take the cross. Cusanus also wrote a critical but not entirely hostile account of the Qur'an, the *Cribratio Alchorani* (*Sifting of the Qur'an*). In addition, he represented the pope in local negotiations at Orvieto and continued writing works on metaphysical themes. His later works tried out new metaphors for God, particularly the idea that the divine was "not-other" (*non aliud*) than human beings and other creatures.

Cusanus became involved in Pius II's efforts to lead a crusade and died at Todi in Umbria on August 11, 1464, on his way to join the pope in Ancona. (Pius, although mortally ill, had gone to that seaport, hoping to lead the crusade himself.) The cardinal's body was interred in his titular church, San Pietro in Vincoli, in Rome. There is a sculpted image of the cardinal on his monument. In accordance with his last wishes, his heart was taken for burial to the Cusanusstift in Kues, a charitable foundation for the housing of the aged that he established. He bequeathed his books, scientific instruments, and money to it.

## De Concordantia Catholica

Cusanus' *De concordantia catholica* is divided into three books. The first discusses the nature of the church and the role of the clergy, including the Roman pontiff. The second discusses church councils, from local synods to ecumenical councils. The third book opens into the larger context of Christendom, the political community of the peoples within the Latin Church. It discusses the

nature of political communities and especially the role of the emperor. Cusanus included in this book his proposals for reform of the Empire, including possible revisions of the system of imperial elections. The entire work drew upon a rich heritage of pagan and Christian texts, especially the canon law collections he had studied in Padua. At the time of his education, these texts, in particular those in Gratian's *Decretum*, and previous discussions by learned doctors of the church as a corporation, were read by many as supporting the ability of the church, represented by a council, to limit papal power. This was tied directly to a desire for reform of the church "in head and members," especially reform of the Roman curia.

*De concordantia catholica* opens with a preface calling for union in church and empire and saying that councils have been neglected but have the weight of authority behind them. Book I then discusses the nature of the church, the priesthood, and the hierarchic order in ecclesiastical affairs. His emphasis on faith and charity as uniting Christians with Christ was traditional, and he defended the institution against accusations that the church had lost validity through sin. Both good and bad persons belonged to it, although in different ways. Nor did bad priests lose sacramental power because of sin. This was one of the key lines of anti-Hussite argument, a posture shared with writers like John Torquemada. Cusanus linked sacramental validity not just to the church militant but to the church triumphant in heaven.

Book II turns to the question of the location of authority in the church. The focus of the book is on councils, from diocesan synods to a universal council. A presiding person – bishop, metropolitan, or pope – ordinarily had the right to call a council. The universal council represented the church's power to bind and loose. Its decisions were to be considered inspired by the Holy Spirit. All of these councils, local up through universal, represented the church in a virtual manner. Its decisions were made not just by a binding decree of the presiding officer but with the consent of all present. Even after a decree had been issued, it was binding only when it had been accepted at the local level. Cusanus was able to demonstrate the correctness of his arguments by appealing to

the examples of the great councils of the fourth and fifth centuries, which had defined the key dogmas of the church.

He applied the same principle of consent and reception to the papacy. Papal decrees gained force from “usage and reception” (Bk. II c. 11). This was, in Cusanus’ system, a form of consent. Papal power was administrative, requiring submission of subjects. Plenitude of power was not automatic. Its exercise required the consent of the College of Cardinals to be valid. Cusanus also recommended that the cardinals should be chosen from all nations to make their consent more representative. Looking wider, he argued that all coercive power similarly depended on consent under natural law. This, in turn, opened the way for a defense of free elections to office.

The wide representation of the church also guaranteed that a universal council was superior to the pope and more likely to be divinely guided. This being the case, the council was above the pope and able to bind him to accept its decisions. The pope, using the power granted by Christ, could dispense from canons in case of need but not capriciously. Even the papal role in convoking councils did not grant a right to dictate their decisions or disobey them. Abuse of any ecclesiastical power was not tolerable and was subject to reform.

Book III is focused on the Empire. The emperor was head of the temporal hierarchy, and his power derived from consent under natural law. The papacy had not conferred this supreme authority on him. The translation of imperial power from the Greeks to the Latins occurred by the consent of the clergy and people of Rome in the reign of Otto the Great. The electors who chose the next emperor acted by the common consent of their subjects. By their consent, he was Christ’s vicar in temporal affairs, although not the direct ruler of all lands. By consent of the orthodox faithful, the emperor was guardian of the church and the faith, as well as the protector of a sitting general council. A limited role for lay persons in church councils is included in Cusanus’ discussion of the Empire. The Empire was expected to be governed, like the church, with the consent of representatives of its provinces.

Like the pope, the emperor was expected to judge justly and not to abuse his power. The book concludes with a detailed proposal for the reform of the Empire.

The entirety of *De concordantia catholica* emphasizes unity and harmony. The hierarchy of councils, the expanded College of Cardinals, the superiority of a general council to a pope, and the role of the emperor in secular and ecclesiastical affairs were all intended to promote harmony and concord. The Council of Basel, however, could not achieve concord throughout Christendom. Its squabbles over reforms and the site of a council with the Greeks may explain why Cusanus was willing to abandon the Council of Basel for the pope and his council of union in Italy.

### Pro-Papal Writings and Reform Proposals

After Cusanus left Basel, his major writings were concerned with metaphysical issues. Nonetheless, he continued addressing questions of authority and reform. The speeches and memoranda prepared for the meetings of the German princes emphasized papal primacy. A more interesting effort, especially in the *Dialogus concludens errores Amedeistarum* (*Dialogue Refuting the Errors of the Amedeists*) accuses the followers of Felix V, Amadeus VIII of Savoy, and the antipope chosen by the Council of Basel, of erring in their opinions on church government. In the *Dialogue*, Cusanus rewrote the doctrine of consent, arguing that Basel’s deposition of Pope Eugenius was invalid because it lacked the consent of the church throughout the world. Cusanus stressed, for diplomatic purposes, the role of the princes in giving or withholding consent. He also offered a more traditional view of papal power, with the pope holding plenitude of power over the general council and its decrees. Nonetheless, Cusanus expected hierarchical order to be preserved except where dispensations from rulers were required on grounds of equity.

Cusanus tried a different approach in a letter to a Castilian diplomat. The church was only known by surmise (*ecclesia coniecturalis*). It was

unfolded from Peter (*explicatio Petri*). All powers were “contracted” in Peter but unfolded from him in the bishops and curates. All represented Christ, but Peter’s successors did so most perfectly. Nicholas, however, insisted that the pope be like Peter, having the faith of his exemplar, in order to be most fully pope. This sentiment can be found in Cusanus’ sermons. It also appears forcefully in his proposed reform of the Roman curia. Reform was to begin with the pope. He was to accept reform to set an example of what Christ expected of prelates. Then reform was to spread out to the curia and from the curia to the church worldwide. This proposal remained in circulation in the curia for another half century, but it never was adopted.

These pro-papal and reform writings had little circulation outside Rome. Cusanus’ earlier work, *De concordantia*, however, remained in circulation. It was quoted against Eugenius even after its author had changed allegiance. When Cusanus’ works were printed in the sixteenth century, *De concordantia* gained renewed circulation. Its attack on the Donation of Constantine, in particular, was widely read. It was quoted, in Latin or in translation, throughout the sixteenth century. Even Protestant writers quoted Cusanus in their defenses of lay authority, especially lay independence of papal power.

## Cross-References

- ▶ [Canon Law](#)
- ▶ [Conciliarism](#)
- ▶ [John Torquemada](#)

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## Nicholas of Methone

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### Abstract

Nicholas of Methone was a leading thinker of the twelfth century in Byzantium. He published a detailed refutation of Proclus’ *Elements of Theology*. He became concerned by the popularity of Proclus and acted as a defender of Christian Orthodoxy. Nicholas was interested in Proclus’ Neoplatonic categories and their influence on Christian doctrines. He objected to heretical Christian teachings confused by pagan learning and his criticism

of Neoplatonism was a reaction to the Christian Hellenism of the eleventh century. Nicholas commented on Proclus' use of specific philosophical terms (e.g., participation) and systematically criticized Proclus' inconsistencies.

## Biographical Information

Nicholas of Methone (early twelfth century – c. 1160/66) was one of the most important thinkers of the twelfth century in Byzantium. He became bishop of Methone c. 1150, but otherwise his life remains obscure. As a theological adviser and panegyrist of the Emperor Manuel I Komnenos (1143–1180), he dreamt that the Emperor would unite the western and Byzantine Churches. Nicholas developed a concept of unity between the State and the Church, and criticized the Bogomils. He actively took part in the discussion with the Latin theologians about the *filioque* and in the resistance against the Christological doctrine, which was condemned at the Councils of 1157 and 1166 (Angelou 1981). In most of his writings, he dedicated considerable space to different topics besides these theological debates and his works maintained their authority and popularity up to the end of Byzantium. Nicholas is the author of 16 works on a variety of subjects, and his last dated work was written in 1160. His most important philosophical work is *The Refutation of Proclus' Elements of Theology* which survived in 13 manuscripts and in a Latin translation from the sixteenth century.

## Thought

By the middle of the twelfth century, Proclus' philosophy was considered to be a source of heresies. Nicholas' treatise illuminates the nature of the conflict between pagan and Christian Hellenism (Michael Psellos, John Italos). A "refutation" was quite new in the Byzantine intellectual world since John Philoponus' *De aeternitate mundi contra Proclum*. Contrary to other critics of Proclus (Theodore Prodromos,

George Tornikes) who rejected Proclus' theory in general, Nicholas analyzes Proclus' propositions in detail, in the light of Orthodox Christian dogmas. He argues that the contemporary interest in Proclus and Platonic arguments threatens the concept of Trinity.

The refutation represents a philosophical genre that was used against pagan philosophy, and especially against admiration for Proclus' work as the epitome of human wisdom. The aim of the work is to protect the doctrines of the Church from the infiltration of Neoplatonic philosophy (Benakis 1987). The treatise contains important theological issues which were relevant in connection with the influence of Neoplatonism on the thinking of Bogomils. He is probably the author of the anti-Bogomil work *The Dialogue Concerning Demons*, which used to be attributed to Michael Psellos. Similar criticism also appears in Nicholas' other treatises in which he rejects the heresy of Soterichos Panteugenos (*Bibliotheca ecclesiastica*, pp. 321–359). Nicholas objected to heretical doctrines in accordance with the anathemata contained in the *Synodikon Orthodoxiae*, claiming that heretics draw their ideas from Proclus. His treatise is similar to older criticisms of Proclus, especially those dealing with the issue of the eternity of the world (Philoponus); as to his method of argumentation, he often appealed to the authority of the Church Fathers, for instance Pseudo-Dionysios Areopagita and Gregory of Nazianzus (Dräseke 1892). Nicholas' *Refutation* is written as a confrontation between Areopagita and Proclus, in which Proclus is portrayed as an unorthodox pupil of Areopagita.

Nicholas does not refute Proclus' doctrine in general but he deals with the propositions of *The Elements of Theology* chapter by chapter. The treatise can be seen from two angles: in comparison with conceptual consistency and in relation to Christian dogmas (Tatakis 1949). His criticism of Proclus is pointed not only against cosmology and polytheism but also against specific philosophical terms which prove Proclus' discrepancy with Christian teachings. Nicholas discusses the most basic of Proclus' triads: remaining, procession, and reversion (*mone, proodos, epistrophe*) and unparticipated, participated, and participating

(*amethektos, methektos, metechon*). He adopts the first one (*mone, proodos, epistrophe*): all things are pre-contained in God, are unfolded from him into creation, and return to him as their end (Terezis 1995). Nicholas accepts the triple existence but not the multitude of creators, since it is only one creator from which everything derives. He refuses to attribute the creative power to anything apart from God. Nicholas also criticizes Proclus' concept of participation. He understands that God is both participated (*methektos*) and unparticipated (*amethektos*), in the sense that a term that is directly unparticipated (*amethektos*) can be indirectly participating (*metechon*) by means of the participated things (*metechomena*), which it creates. Nicholas adopts the phrase unparticipated participated things (*amethektos metechomena*) from Pseudo-Dionysios Areopagita. The division of the participated intelligence into terrestrial and celestial sphere is according to Nicholas a fallacy, and it is unacceptable because it leads to polytheism (Niarchos 1983–1984).

The only source and cause of the existence of every being is God, the supra-intelligence (*hypernoun*). All beings derive their existence from God, who is the only unparticipated, for everything unparticipated subsists prior to the participated. The perfection of God does not depend on the participation of others in him. Nicholas states that the divine substance (*ousia*) remains ineffable and incognoscible. God by his own act gives substantiality to all other intelligences. Nicholas understands the intelligences as mediators between God and all other beings (*Refutation*, pp. 115–116). He argues that not every intelligence knows everything nor creates everything. This is the attribute of the Intellect (*nous*), which, being itself unparticipated, knows and creates everything. All its acts are directed toward all beings and things in general. The Primal Intellect is identified with God, while all other intelligences are subordinate, close to One, and divine and perfect due to the participation in the Primal Intellect (*Refutation*, pp. 143–144).

According to Nicholas, the first six propositions of the first group of *The Elements of Theology* are against the Christian doctrine of the

Trinity. According to him, Proclus deals unsuccessfully with theological matters, mainly with intelligible concepts, which he drags down to the corporeal sphere. Nicholas attempts to demonstrate the contradictions in Proclus' conclusions and he makes extensive comments on the ambiguities of *The Elements of Theology*. He is persuaded that Proclus blended together metaphysical and logical conclusions, a mistake that led him to a series of contradictions. The first proposition of *The Elements of Theology* (Every manifold in some way participates unity) is set against other propositions (for instance, proposition 5 or proposition 24) to prove that Proclus refuted himself when he stated that the One is simultaneously participated and unparticipated; in doing so, he made the One to be at the same time many. Also, Proclus states that the unparticipated Intelligence is superior and has primal existence (propositions 23 and 24), while at another place he accepts both; namely, that it is an unparticipated and participated intelligence and the latter is participated either by celestial or by terrestrial souls (proposition 166).

Moreover, Nicholas refutes Proclus' statement that the cause of all things (the intelligence) must be motionless, since, if it moved, it would be imperfect (for all motion is an imperfect activity); and it would be subject to time, although it is the cause of time. He also criticized Proclus' statement that emanative creation is timeless, which is in contrast to the Christian doctrine of deliberate creation in time (*Refutation*, pp. 152–153). Nicholas argues that if intellection is creation, then, since each intelligence has intellection of itself and its priors, each intelligence must create itself and its priors, which is absolutely absurd.

Nicholas also finds Proclus' proposition that "all that participates in time, but which has perpetuity of movement, is measured by periods," unacceptable, because according to him, the soul cannot have an eternal and a temporal movement simultaneously. Whatever participates in time can never be eternal, nor can that which is eternal be at the same time temporal, for beings are divided into those that participate in time and those that are eternal (*Refutation*, pp. 174, 3–6).



Nicholas rejects Proclus' proposition that "all things are in all things but in each thing according to its proper nature" by putting the argument that the prior and the great cannot be in the posterior and the small (*Refutation*, pp. 99–101). For Nicholas it is only the Intellect that remains indivisible, being itself incorporeal, without magnitude and possessing all kinds of plurality. Even its activity is single in itself but dispersed to many things (*Refutation*, p. 110).

Nicholas' treatise is an important testimony of the Byzantine interest in Proclus' thought, for it seems that he was inspired by numerous refutations of Proclus. However, the influence of his thought is still not well examined.

## Cross-References

- ▶ [John Philoponus](#)
- ▶ [Proclus, Arabic](#)
- ▶ [Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite](#)

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## Nicholas Oresme

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### Abstract

Nicholas (Nicole) Oresme (c. 1320–1382), was a mathematician and philosopher, a translator of Aristotle, and a prelate. Oresme was one of the most distinguished scholars at the University of Paris in the fourteenth century. As a natural philosopher, Oresme was a younger associate of John Buridan. Oresme was deeply influenced by the Oxford Calculators, a group of natural philosophers who had developed mathematical means to analyze natural phenomena. Their work was Oresme's starting point when he invented the configurations,

geometrical presentations, which describe with two-dimensional figures various hypothetical distributions of the intensity of qualities in a subject or velocities in time. As for the latter, he presented a geometrical proof of the so-called Merton mean speed theorem. Inspired by Thomas Bradwardine's exponential function which describes the relationship between forces, resistances, and velocities in motions, Oresme set out to study the relations of proportions as such. He applied the results to create a sophisticated argument against astrology which he ardently opposed. Around 1359 he became acquainted with the dauphin of France who would later be enthroned as King Charles V. In 1369, Charles commissioned Oresme, who had acted as his secretary, to translate Aristotle's treatises in practical philosophy from Latin to French. These translations were Oresme's last scholarly achievement; in particular the translation of Aristotle's cosmological treatise *De caelo et mundo* was to be a major accomplishment. This translation, *Le Livre du ciel et monde*, contained a lengthy commentary in which Oresme appears to be as innovative and original a thinker as in his youth. The translations made Oresme one of the founders of scholarly French.

## Biography

Nicholas Oresme was born around 1320 in the diocese of Bayeux in Normandy. The village he came from was probably Allemagne (today Fleury-sur-Orne) on the southern edge of the town of Caen. Early stages of Oresme's life remain obscure; the very first time his name appears in an official record was in 1342 when the pope provided him, along with several other Parisian scholars, with ecclesiastical benefices. The papal letter granting the benefices refers to Oresme as clerk of the diocese of Bayeux and a master of arts. Thus, Oresme had completed his first degree at Paris in his early twenties and most probably began his theological studies soon after 1342. His was licensed for the doctorate in theology in 1356 after which he became regent master

in theology. In 1356, he was elected as *grand maître* of the College of Navarre. From the late 1350s onward, Oresme established a close connection to the court of France; royal support probably promoted his ecclesiastical career. In 1361, Oresme was appointed archdeacon of Bayeux, a position he eventually discarded. In 1362, he was appointed canon at Rouen and a few months later he was nominated to a similar post at Sainte-Chapelle in Paris. He became dean of the cathedral of Rouen in 1364, and in 1377 he was elected as bishop of Lisieux. Oresme died on July 11, 1382.

## Oresme and Buridan

When Oresme arrived in Paris in the middle of 1330, the most renowned teacher at the arts faculty was John Buridan, who is often mentioned as Oresme's teacher and mentor. This, however, is most unlikely. According to the university statutes, Oresme could not have officially studied under Buridan's supervision, since students were allowed to enroll only with a master from their own nation. Buridan, who originated from Béthune, had to affiliate to Picardian nation whereas Oresme had to enroll with a master from Norman nation. Though Buridan could scarcely have been Oresme's supervising master, it is possible that Oresme attended his lectures since students in the faculty of arts had the right to attend the lectures held by the masters of other nations. Oresme could have also consulted Buridan's works in the libraries kept by the institutions affiliated to the university. Buridan offers us a small piece of evidence, which shows that the two scholars were in contact, even though it does not reveal the extent of their collaboration. In his treatise *Quaestiones super meteorum*, he noted that "The Reverend Master Nichole Oresme said to me himself to have seen two <parhelions>, one on either side of the sun."

In many respects these two scholars have a unique profile. Buridan remained at the faculty of arts all of his life never taking a theological degree whereas Oresme, after completing his studies in the arts, continued in the theological

faculty and eventually pursued an ecclesiastical career. A major share of Buridan's works is commentaries on Aristotle, whereas, apart from three commentaries, most of Oresme's production consists of treatises on separate scientific topics. When Buridan focuses on logic and leaves mathematics aside, Oresme does the opposite. Although both scholars shared the conviction that ultimate truth is based on faith and that even the most certain human knowledge is merely contingent and probable, their mentality differ considerably from each other. Buridan was a natural philosopher who mostly considered Aristotelian natural philosophy to be a valid and sufficient foundation for scientific knowledge. Oresme, for his part, was ultimately a theologian who had severe doubts about results achieved through reason and experience. These were not capable of identifying the true explanation for physical problems from all the given tentative alternative explanations. Eventually, Oresme's aim was to cast doubt on the theories and power of natural philosophy, to attain certain knowledge in order to protect the truths of faith. Human knowledge was always second to God's, who alone could know the true causes of natural phenomena.

### Mathematics and Its Application in Natural Philosophy

One of Oresme's major achievements in mathematics is his development of the theory of the relations of proportions. Here Oresme based his work on the ideas of the Oxford-scholar Thomas Bradwardine, who had developed the mathematics of the exponential-type function to treat the relation of forces, resistances, and velocities. Bradwardine's function was an attempt to correct the obvious deficiencies in the prevailing interpretation of the fragmented remarks found in Aristotle's *Physics*, book 7. According to the common understanding, the general rule that Aristotle intended but never explicitly formulated was that motion occurs only when force is greater than resistance, that is when  $F > R$ , where  $F$  is force or motive power and  $R$  is resistance of a medium or mobile. In the next,  $V$  is used for velocity or

speed. In modern notation, the common medieval understanding of Aristotle's remarks on dynamics are represented as:

$$\frac{F}{R} \propto V$$

Bradwardine argued against this view by showing that it led to absurd consequences when either  $F$  or  $R$  is varied while the other is held constant, which was a common technique in Aristotelian physics. Thus, when the resistance is continually doubled,

$$\frac{F}{nR} \propto \frac{V}{n}, \text{ Where } n = 2, 4, 8, 16, 32 \dots$$

Even after  $R > F$  there will be a value for  $V$ , which goes against the assumption that whenever motion is produced,  $F$  must be greater than  $R$ . Furthermore, the result implies that any given force can move any resistance whatever, and therefore the force would be of infinite capacity.

Thus, Bradwardine had shown that the prevailing interpretation of Aristotle's *Physics* led to incorrect results. To overcome such absurd outcomes, Bradwardine suggested that the proportion of force to resistance must vary geometrically, where as the velocity changes arithmetically. Thus, when the proportion is squared, the velocity caused by the proportion will be doubled. Using modern conventions Bradwardine's solution can be written as follows:

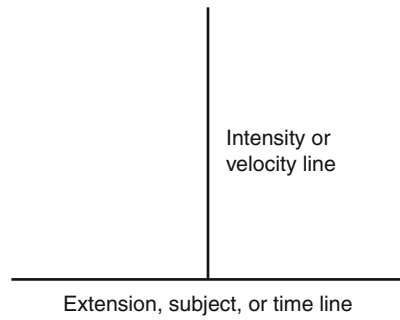
$$\frac{F_2}{R_2} = \left( \frac{F_1}{R_1} \right)^{\frac{V_2}{V_1}}$$

The advantage of Bradwardine's solution, where two ratios of force and resistance are related geometrically or exponentially, is that when given initially that  $F > R$ ,  $R$  can never become equal or greater than  $F$ .

Oresme, who was well acquainted with Bradwardine's work, took the Bradwardine's function as a starting point for his inquiries to the mathematics of "ratios of ratios," which is the expression he applies to the exponent. The aim of his treatise *De proportionibus*

*proportionum* is to explore the various ways where any two ratios can be related exponentially. In this inquiry, the central concepts Oresme deploys are “part,” “commensurable,” and “irrational.” Oresme uses the term “part” here strictly in its proper sense meaning an aliquot or multiplicative part. Thus, for example, in the set of proportions  $2/1$ ,  $4/1$ ,  $8/1$ ,  $16/1$ ,  $32/1$ , we may conclude that  $2/1$  is a third part of  $8/1$ , since it is tantamount to  $(2/1)^3=8/1$ . Likewise,  $2/1$  is the fourth part of  $16/1$  and fifth part of  $32/1$ . Oresme then continues to explore the “parts relation”; he asks what is the relation of  $32/1$  to  $8/1$ . The two ratios share the common base  $2/1$  and there are five  $2/1$ -parts in  $32/1$  and three  $2/1$  parts in  $8/1$ , therefore  $32/1$  is five third parts of  $8/1$ ; in modern notation this is written as  $(8/1)^{5/3}=32/1$ . As both ratios have a common base, they are proper parts and commensurable with each other. However, not all proportions are commensurable, that is one proportion is an aliquot part, or parts of another proportion. Thus, for example  $5/1$  is not a part or parts of  $64/1$ . In fact, most of the ratios are incommensurable with each other and thus irrational. Oresme proves this by taking 100 ratios from  $2/1$  to  $101/1$  and comparing them two at a time. The result is that out of altogether 4,950 ratios of ratios only 25 are rational whereas the rest are irrational, which implies that two arbitrarily chosen rational ratios will most probably produce an irrational ratio of ratios. Oresme applied this result to treat local and celestial motion. In his treatise *Algorismus proportionum*, Oresme developed particular rules for handling ratios.

Another of Oresme’s major achievements pertains to the geometrical description of the theory of the latitude of forms, which medieval natural philosophers used to describe and analyze the distribution of qualities in a subject and to describe qualitative changes and changes of velocity. Latitude was used as a technical term meaning the range within which the intensity of a certain quality like whiteness or, in the case of local motion, velocity could vary. In the *Tractatus de configurationibus qualitatum et motuum*, Oresme introduces two-dimensional figures to describe hypothetical distributions of the intensity of qualities in a subject or hypothetical velocities in time.

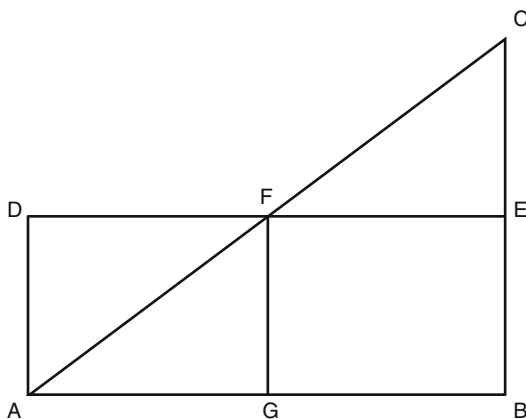


**Nicholas Oresme, Fig. 1** Two-dimensional presentation of qualities or motions

The term *configuratio* describes geometrical figures or graphs in which the baseline represents the subject in the case of qualities or time in the case of velocities, and the perpendiculars raised on the base line describe the intensities of the quality distributed in the subject or, in the case of motion, the velocity at each instant of time (Fig. 1).

The totality of perpendiculars represents the whole distribution intensities of a quality in a subject or in the case of locomotion, the total velocity. The two-dimensional figures, the configurations of qualities or locomotion, have different forms respective to the type of distribution: in a quality of uniform intensity and a motion of uniform velocity, all the perpendiculars raised on the base are of equal length and thus the figure produced is a rectangle. A quality of uniformly difform intensity starting from zero and a uniform acceleration of velocity are represented by a right triangle, and respectively a quality of uniformly difform intensity ending at zero and uniform deceleration of velocity are represented by a left triangle. Difformly difform qualities or velocities would correspondingly produce figures where the line describing maximum intensity at a point or velocity at an instant is curved or, in the case of sudden changes, contains step-like shapes.

Using the configurations of motions, Oresme gave a geometrical proof to the mean speed theorem stemming from the Oxford Calculators. According to the theorem, a uniformly difform motion is equal to its mean degree in so far as the same space is traversed in the same time. Oresme’s proof shows (Fig. 2) that the configuration of the uniform motion (rectangular ABED)



**Nicholas Oresme, Fig. 2** Geometrical proof of the mean speed theorem

and the configuration of the uniformly difform velocity (triangle ABC) have equal areas since the exceeding triangles AFD and FEC are equal; thus the total velocities depicted by these configurations are equal. But where the Oxford Calculators were unable to fully take advantage of the quantification of qualities in measuring the phenomena of nature, Oresme equated e.g., the “quantity of velocity,” that is, the intensity of velocity times extension of velocity in time, with the total distance traversed. The geometrical proof of the mean speed theorem was to be among the most enduring aspects of Oresme’s work; its influence can be traced up to Galileo.

Just as his predecessors at Oxford, Oresme was interested in infinite series, which typically occur when a given magnitude is divided unendingly into proportional parts. In *De configurationibus*, Oresme introduced the result for the following convergent series:

$$1 + \frac{1}{2} \cdot 2 + \frac{1}{4} \cdot 3 \cdots + \frac{1}{2^{n-1}} \cdot n \cdots = 4.$$

In his *Questiones super geometricam Euclidis* (q. 2), Oresme did differentiate some convergent series from divergent series. This result was based on the observation of an infinite summation of proportional parts which follow the pattern:

$$1 + \frac{1}{m} + \frac{1}{m^2} + \frac{1}{m^3} + \cdots + \frac{1}{m^n} + \frac{1}{m^{n+1}} + \cdots$$

When Oresme explored the ratio  $a/b$  determining the proportional parts, he noticed that when  $a > b$ , “the total would be infinite” as it is in the following summation:

$$1 + \frac{1}{3} + \frac{1}{9} + \frac{1}{27} + \cdots + \frac{1}{3^n} + \frac{1}{3^{n+1}} + \cdots = \frac{3}{2}.$$

This series is divergent. When the ratio  $a/b$  is less than one, the series has a finite sum. Oresme’s views on infinity are deeply rooted in the medieval discussion, yet he substantially promotes mathematical understanding of the infinite.

## Opposition to Astrology

Oresme applied the results of his mathematical inquiries to various other fields. He was convinced that the inquiries into the “ratios of ratios” had implications for astronomy which he ardently opposed. Astrologers, whose predictions were based on the precise determination of celestial phenomena, were not able to find the exact astronomical data they needed. Astronomical predictions are inexact since they are based on the ratios that are derived from celestial phenomena. But as Oresme had proved, the more ratios of ratios there are, the greater the number of incommensurable ratios of ratios is, and therefore it is probable that the ratio of any two ratios is irrational. For astrologers there was no escaping this mathematical indeterminacy. The explanation for Oresme’s attack may relate to King Charles’ strong interest in astrology and magic. As a friend and advisor to the King, Oresme the scientist tried to direct the king’s interest away from superstition. In his treatise *De causis mirabilium*, Oresme tried to show that every physical phenomenon has a natural explanation. However, Oresme’s efforts had scarcely any effect.

## Concept of Time

Regarding the particular issues of natural philosophy, Oresme appears to be at the same time a

product of the Aristotelian tradition and a scholar looking for novel and accurate descriptions of natural phenomena. An example of this twofoldness is his theory of time in which his setting is clearly contemporary and yet his conclusions go beyond Aristotle's views. Oresme argues that there are two meanings for the term "time." Its proper sense is a successive duration of things; it is neither a substance nor an accident inherent in a subject. Thus time is, in contrast to permanent things, an ever flowing entity, *res successiva*. The broader meaning of the term "time" is the unit of measure which, in the first place, is used to measure motion in the heavens and the motion of the sun in particular, and which is secondarily applied to local motion. Oresme's definition of the proper as well as the improper sense of time deviated from Aristotle's conception which by definition connected time with motion as it is "the number of movement in respect of the before and after."

Where Oresme's notion of time shows his deviation from traditional views, a great many other examples are prove of his unwillingness to depart from prevailing scientific explanations. An example of this tendency is the question of the diurnal rotation of the earth, which Oresme discussed in *Le Livredu ciel et du monde*. Here Oresme presented several arguments to prove that astronomical phenomena could be explained by the earth's rotation contrary to the commonly accepted theory which postulated that the earth was the center of the universe around which the heavens moved. Rational arguments indicated that the rotation of the earth was a plausible, even a better explanation than the alternative theory. Still, Oresme considered experience as insufficient for demonstrating either of the theories and, as usual, chose the traditional explanation: "However, everyone maintains, and I think myself, that the heavens do move and not the earth: For God hath established the world which shall not be moved, in spite of contrary reasons because they are clearly not conclusive persuasions." The quote expresses the uncertainty of natural knowledge, an attitude which characterizes his last work, *Le Livre du ciel et du monde*. Oresme, being a theologian, gave

preference to articles of faith over natural reason. As a natural philosopher he is also a traditionalist: despite presenting ingenious emendations and radical alternative resolutions, Oresme remained within the broad limits of the Aristotelian framework.

## Translations

During the years 1370–1377, while still a canon at Rouen, Oresme published translations of four treatises by Aristotle. The translation of *Ethics*, *Politics*, and *Economics* was initiated by King Charles V who, "for the common good," desired to cultivate the French political elite with Aristotle's works on practical philosophy. The King, who is known as a bibliophile and a promoter of vernacular literature, had several other translations made. These included the pseudo-Aristotelian *Problemata* translated by court physician Evrart de Conti, Ptolemy's *Quadripartitum* translated by Guillaume Oresme (possibly a brother of Nicholas), and a number of treatises on astrology. Oresme, for one, tried to convince his royal patron of the problems pertaining to astronomy by writing a treatise called *Contra judicarios astronomos*, which he also translated into French as *Le Livre de divinacions*. Oresme's final scholarly work was his translation of Aristotle's *De caelo et mundo*. It is uncertain whether this was included in the King's commission; the translation may well have been undertaken on his own initiative and the choice of the work to be translated may have had something to do with Oresme's attempts to convert the King away from astrology. Whatever the backgrounds for the translation might have been, *Le Livre du ciel et du monde*, Oresme considered Aristotle's treatise to be the finest work in natural philosophy. Oresme supplemented the translation with an extensive commentary which is a synthesis of his mature thinking.

Perhaps the most influential part of Oresme's production is his translations. Oresme, who was one of the first translators of philosophical text into French, laid the foundation for the vernacular scientific language.



## Cross-References

- ▶ [De caelo, Commentaries on Aristotle's](#)
- ▶ [Intension and Remission of Forms](#)
- ▶ [John Buridan](#)
- ▶ [Natural Philosophy](#)
- ▶ [Oxford Calculators](#)
- ▶ [Thomas Bradwardine](#)
- ▶ [Universities and Philosophy](#)

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## Nicomachean Ethics, Commentaries on Aristotle's

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### Abstract

The first Latin translations of Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics*, the *Ethica vetus* and the *Ethica nova*, are the object of six commentaries

from the first half of the thirteenth century, presumably written by Parisian arts masters. Typical for these early commentaries is the interpretation of Aristotle's doctrine in the light of Christian religion. In 1246/1248, Robert Grosseteste achieved a complete translation of the *Nicomachean Ethics*. The first to write commentaries on it were Albert the Great (twice) and Thomas Aquinas. Both attempted to interpret Aristotle philosophically; the extent to which Aquinas nevertheless admitted theological views is disputed in scholarship. The commentary of Aquinas was a major source for many other commentaries of the late thirteenth and early fourteenth centuries, while his *Summa theologiae* influenced the commentaries written by Parisian arts masters around 1300. The most influential commentaries of the fourteenth century were those of Gerald of Odo and John Buridan, where both claimed that only the four cardinal virtues were essential for moral goodness. Buridan's work became the object of intensive study, notably at the newly founded universities of Central Europe where it even replaced the *Nicomachean Ethics* itself. Meanwhile, Aristotle's work attracted the interest of Italian humanists. Leonardo Bruni and John Argyropoulos composed new translations on which Italians and others wrote commentaries, which often betray scholastic influence.

The first Latin translations of Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics*, known as the *Ethica vetus* (the oldest translated part, covering books ii–iii) and the *Ethica nova* (book i), were probably made by Burgundius of Pisa before 1150. Six commentaries on Burgundius's translations, presumably written by Parisian arts masters, have come down to us from the first half of the thirteenth century: two on the *Ethica vetus*, one on the *Ethica nova*, and three on both. One of these last commentaries can be attributed to Robert Kilwardby; the others are anonymous (Wieland 1981). Typical for the early commentators is their interpretation of Aristotle's doctrine in the light of Christian religion. Most notably, they conceive

happiness as the union with God (a conception influenced by Neoplatonic teaching); the moral virtues make human beings fit for this union, while the intellectual virtues produce it. Many commentators even affirm the human need for divine grace.

In 1246/1248, Robert Grosseteste achieved a complete translation of the *Nicomachean Ethics* together with a series of ancient Greek and Byzantine commentaries (by Aspasius, Eustratius of Nicea, Michael of Ephesus, and several anonymi) on all ten books of Aristotle's work. Grosseteste's original translation is known as the *recensio pura*; *recensio recognita* is the name given to a revision dating from about 1260 and previously attributed to William of Moerbeke.

Albert the Great was the first to write a commentary on Grosseteste's complete translation. Actually, Albert produced two commentaries. The first one, *Super ethica*, is a literal (phrase by phrase) commentary with adjunct questions, which much influenced Thomas Aquinas' literal commentary, the *Sententia libri ethicorum*. Albert's second commentary, the *Ethica*, is written in the style of a paraphrase. In contrast to the early commentators, Albert and Aquinas try to avoid confounding theological and philosophical categories. Albert explicitly attempts to expound Aristotle's doctrine philosophically (Müller 2001). As for Aquinas, the point is disputed in scholarship. His wish to interpret Aristotle charitably is generally recognized: his aim seems to illuminate what he takes to be Aristotle's philosophical ideas together with the doctrines that he believes at least implied by Aristotle's text – doctrines which are of special interest to Aquinas himself and occasionally lead him to make digressions beyond Aristotle's apparent intentions (thus, both Albert and Aquinas impose the Platonic and Stoic scheme of the cardinal virtues on Aristotle's work). But while some modern commentators believe that Aquinas in fact "baptizes" Aristotle, others claim that he examines Aristotle's teachings without measuring these by the standards of Christian religion. Arguments on either side can be put forward. Aquinas certainly refrains from Christianizing Aristotle as much as he does in the

*Summa theologiae*. Thus, in the *Sententia*, Aquinas does not mention martyrdom as an example of fortitude, although he does so in his *Summa*. Yet, his Christian convictions sometimes shimmer through even in the *Sententia*. For instance, he defends virginity against the charge of being a vice contrary to temperance, as Aristotle's notion of *insensibilitas* would seem to suggest (but then he avoids religious motivations of virginity; Blažek 2008); he rejects Aristotle's idea that the poor cannot develop the virtue of magnificence; and while Aristotle holds that moral dispositions determine one's actions, Aquinas claims that vicious persons cannot stop being vicious "right away," while virtuous persons "can" (but do not "have to") always act virtuously.

Aquinas' *Sententia* exercised a considerable influence on other commentators active in the late thirteenth and early fourteenth centuries. The work is a major source for the commentaries of John of Tytynsale, Henry of Friemar, and Walter Burley, while Conrad of Ascoli, Peter of Corveheda, Guido Vernani, Paul of Venice, and (as late as 1472) Giovanni Battista Cambio extracted or paraphrased the work. Burley's commentary – which also absorbs many of the notes added by Grosseteste to his translation – served in turn as a base for the commentaries of John Dedecus (c.1350) and Albert of Saxony. By contrast, the six or seven interrelated commentaries composed by Parisian arts masters around 1300, once erroneously labeled "Averroist," betray little influence from Aquinas' *Sententia*, but borrow in varying degrees from his *Summa theologiae*; their possible connection with the commentary of Guido Terreni still has to be established. At the same time, these commentaries enjoy a reputation for being radically Aristotelian, notably because of their tendency to connect the philosophical life with perfect happiness (Wieland 1982). Yet the commentators occasionally propose interpretations which distort Aristotle's views. They present, for instance, heroic virtue as an effort of the will (a concept unknown to Aristotle) which pushes the intellectual virtues to knowledge of the most sublime realities (Costa 2008), and they reduce the Aristotelian ambit of friendship by seeing it as a

private relation among individuals rather than a tie binding the political community (Toste 2008).

The most influential commentaries of the fourteenth century were those of Gerald of Odo (1285–1349) and John Buridan (d. 1358/1360). Although both claim to discuss virtue and happiness from a philosophical perspective, Gerald declares that humans are incapable of acquiring moral virtues without divine assistance, while Buridan – who made ample use of Gerald's work (Walsh 1975) – recognizes that true happiness resides in the contemplation of God in the hereafter, something for which the moral virtues are no absolute requirement. In Buridan's view humans do not even strictly need virtuous habits in order to act virtuously, although virtuous habits do make virtuous choices easier and more pleasant. Buridan's view, which upsets a basic premise of the Aristotelian system, is tributary to the ethical voluntarism of Henry of Ghent and John Duns Scotus. Accordingly, Buridan also claims that Aristotle locates all moral virtues in the will rather than the sensitive appetites, and that virtuous habits are not so much generated through repeated virtuous actions as through repeated instances of willing the good.

Perhaps the most striking novelty of Gerald's and Buridan's commentaries is the claim that only the four cardinal virtues are essential for moral goodness (viewed from a philosophical, not a theological perspective). Aristotle's remaining moral virtues merely add a kind of adornment to a person's moral character. As a consequence, Gerald claims that Aristotle's theory of the necessary connection of prudence with the moral virtues applies to the cardinal virtues only. Prudence, justice, fortitude, and temperance imply each other's presence, but they can exist without any of the remaining moral virtues. Buridan likewise challenges the doctrine of the connection of the virtues. Conceding that all moral virtues are connected through prudence at their highest level of perfection, he nevertheless argues that virtues such as virginity, magnificence, magnanimity, and military courage (conceived as a superlative form of the cardinal virtue of fortitude) are not necessary for everyone. Hence, Gerald and

Buridan simply admit Aristotle's view, unacceptable to most earlier commentators, that the poor cannot acquire the virtue of magnificence: as magnificence is not a cardinal virtue, the lack of it does not detract in any essential way from the moral goodness of the poor. By contrast, the cardinal virtues are accessible to every upright human being, as Buridan in particular insists, whether poor or rich, man or woman. Buridan even maintains that mortal sin consists in violating the cardinal virtues, whereas disrespect of other moral virtues results only in minor vices. The cardinal virtues are therefore essential not only to the philosophical idea of moral goodness, but also to the theological idea of sin and the salvation of Christian believers (Bejczy 2008).

Buridan's commentary, which survives (like the *Sententia* of Aquinas) in just over 100 known manuscripts, enjoyed great authority in the late medieval period and itself became the object of several commentaries, notably at the newly founded Central European universities (Prague, Cracow, Vienna, Leipzig). In fifteenth-century Vienna, university courses on the *Nicomachean Ethics* were in fact devoted to the study of Buridan's commentary rather than Aristotle's work (Flüeler 2008). In Paris, Buridan's influence was more moderate. The most widespread Parisian commentaries of the fifteenth century were those of John Versor (Jean Le Tourneur, d. 1482/1490) and Pierre Tartaret (d. 1522), who are known as a Thomist and a Scotist, respectively. Meanwhile, the *Nicomachean Ethics* attracted the interest of Italian humanists. In 1416/1417, Leonardo Bruni composed a controversial new translation, followed in the late 1450s by John Argyropoulos. Commentaries on Bruni's translation were written by, among others, Marsilio Ficino, Niccolò Tignosi, Pedro Martínez of Osma, and Peter of Castrovol, while the translation of Argyropoulos was used by Donato Acciaiuoli, Jacques Lefèvre d'Étaples, and Giles of Delft. The "humanist" commentators are traditionally reputed to have made relatively sparse use of scholastic distinctions and *dubia* and to have given more attention to matters of literary and historical interest than

their medieval predecessors, but the point is revised in recent scholarship. From a doctrinal point of view, they did not break with scholasticism; notably, Aquinas and Buridan remained important authorities (Lines 2002).

Apart from comprehensive commentaries, compendia of the *Nicomachean Ethics* and questions devoted to specific problems occasioned by the work appeared as well. The questions of Richard Kilvington (d. 1361) gained some renown in their day. *Florilegia* of Aristotelian ethics were relatively rare and usually had a modest diffusion. A prominent specimen is the *Tabula moralium, Milleloquium philosophiae*, or *Manipulus philosophiae* (1346) of Jean Bernier du Fayt.

## Cross-References

- ▶ Albert of Saxony
- ▶ Albert the Great
- ▶ Ethics
- ▶ Guido Terreni
- ▶ Happiness
- ▶ Henry of Ghent
- ▶ John Buridan
- ▶ John Duns Scotus
- ▶ John Mair
- ▶ Radulphus Brito
- ▶ Richard Kilvington
- ▶ Robert Grosseteste
- ▶ Robert Kilwardby
- ▶ Simon of Faversham
- ▶ Thomas Aquinas
- ▶ Virtue and Vice
- ▶ Walter Burley
- ▶ Will, Weakness of

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## Nikephoros Blemmydes

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### Abstract

Nikephoros Blemmydes (1197–1269) was a Byzantine theologian and philosopher, of vast learning (polyhistor) and considerable influence. His major philosophical work is a two-fold manual on logic and physics that reflects the interests and the status of the philosophical discussions in early thirteenth century Byzantium. In these *Epitomes* he exposes systematically, and in a manner suitable for teaching, the Aristotelian logic and physics, clarifying many issues and emphasizing the points (in physics) that are irreconcilable with the Christian views. Apart from his theological and scientific writings, Blemmydes wrote also shorter treatises on anthropology (on the soul, on the body, on the term of man's life), ethics (on virtue) and politics (on the king's offices), advocating traditional Byzantine views under the influence of Greek classical literature and philosophy.

### Biographical Information

Constantinople 1197 – Emathia, near Ephesos 1269. Byzantine theologian and philosopher, teacher and ecclesiastical man, representative of the intellectual movement in the Empire of Nicaea and the best-known figure of the Byzantine letters of the thirteenth century. Blemmydes was born in a family of high social status, which after the Latin conquest of Constantinople (1204 CE) migrated to Asia Minor. In Nicaea and in other smaller cities he received his encyclical education and he studied poetry, rhetoric, philosophy (Porphyry's *Isagoge*, *Categories*, *On Interpretation*, *Prior Analytics*, and *Physics*), mathematics, geometry, astronomy, medicine, and the Scripture.

Back to Nicaea (1224) Blemmydes began his clerical career and his teaching on philosophy and medicine. Nicaea was then the capital of the Byzantine government in exile and was trying also to be the new theological, philosophical, and educational center. Blemmydes contributed to this effort as a teacher and helped for the foundation of new schools and the creation of libraries. He became a monk (1234) and “hegoumenos” at a monastery in Ephesos (1237). He refused further teaching (1245/1246) and also to accept his appointment as a Bishop and as a Patriarch. He participated in Greek–Latin theological controversies (see his treatises on the *Procession of the Holy Spirit*). He was devoted to his monastic life and to the composition or revision of his writings. Later (1248) he founded a monastery near Ephesos, where he retired for his last years.

Through his teaching activity and his writings, Blemmydes had a reputation as one of the most erudite men of his time, both in philosophy and science. Among his students were Theodore Laskaris (the future Emperor, theologian) and George Akropolites (diplomat, historian).

Blemmydes was the author of many works, including theological, ascetic, exegetical, liturgical, hymnography, hagiographical, historical, poetical, medical, and geographical. His *Autobiography* is an important testimony for his own education and career and for the intellectual life in thirteenth century Byzantium.

### Thought

Blemmydes' philosophical work came out mostly from his teaching activity and it must be seen within the frame of Byzantine higher education. Blemmydes taught not only Orthodox theology but a wider range of subjects; in fact all the “sciences” of his time. He situates them in a monastic context where education and knowledge were conceived as a kind of exercise that contributes to soul formation: knowledge should go hand in hand with a moderate ethos (*Statue of a King*, 169). Hence, humans are “logical beings”



and “educable” and they most esteem “reason” and “education” (*Autobiography*, I.2).

The place of philosophy is dominant within this curriculum. Blemmydes (*Epitome logica*, 7) adopted the six classical definitions of philosophy that had Platonic and Aristotelian origins and prevailed through the Byzantine period. He also follows the ancient division of philosophy into theoretical and practical, including thus all sciences, that is, theology, physics, geometry, astronomy, arithmetic, music/harmony, ethics, poetics, rhetoric, law, economics, and politics.

His major philosophical work is an *Epitome* (first draft 1237–1239, composition of the final version c. 1260) in two books, the first on Logic and the second on Physics.

The *Epitome logica* was first written at the request of the Byzantine Emperor, when Blemmydes was “young and inexperienced in philosophy.” Logic, taken either as a part or as a mere tool of philosophy, was accepted throughout Byzantium as an introductory and compulsory course. But Blemmydes gives another reason for its justification: “The science of logic is quite useful for the study of Holy Scripture, as well as for all reasoning related to truth” (Proemium). If Logic is the best mean to approach the truth and since God is truth itself, then approach to the truth means approach to God; hence the necessity of a careful study of Logic.

*Epitome* is a systematic and concise exposition of the essence and the method of Logic, that is, the Aristotelian logic. It contains a summary of Porphyry’s *Isagoge* with Blemmydes’ comments (Chaps. 1–13), a fuller paraphrase of *Categories* (Chaps. 14–25), a summary of *On Interpretation* (Chaps. 26–30), *Prior Analytics* (Chaps. 31–36), and references to *Sophistical Refutations* (Chaps. 37–39) and to syllogisms and sophistic proofs (Chap. 40). Blemmydes clarifies all the technical terms and concepts and gives the necessary examples – as he usually does throughout his writings.

In his *Epitome physica* Blemmydes follows the structure and the content of the Aristotelian physics. He analyzes the basic concepts of physics, such as principium, cause, nature, matter, form, generation and corruption, time and place, and

infinite (Chaps. 1–10, based on Simplicius’ *Commentary on Physics*) and void (Chap. 31), summarizes the theory of elements (Chap. 11, based on Philoponus’ commentary on Aristotle’s *De generatione et corruptione*), outlines meteorology (Chaps. 12–23, based on Alexander’s commentary on Aristotle’s *Meteorology*), the theory on heaven (Chap. 24, based on Simplicius’ commentary on Aristotle’s *De caelo*), and astronomy (Chaps. 25–30, based on Cleomedes’ *Short Astronomy*). The latter was included in physics as a bridge to metaphysics and theology. It is characteristic that the work concludes (Chap. 32) with an explanation of *Psalms* 8.

The *Epitome* is a synthetic introduction to physics, the best available for that period in Byzantium and one that exhibits its writer’s adequate knowledge of the relevant ancient Greek literature. Blemmydes uses extensively all the available sources, not only Aristotle and Plato but also Archimedes, Posidonius, Galen, Alexander, Ptolemy, Cleomedes, Philoponus, Damascius, and Simplicius.

Blemmydes’ main principle to explain all the natural phenomena is the existence of a primordial and continuous efficient cause (God) within the Universe. He finds Aristotelian physics to be consistent with the Christian worldview and he is critical to certain points that he finds incompatible with Christianity. Thus, he argues against the eternity of the world, contrasting Aristotle with Plato; he criticizes Aristotle’s theory of the fifth element (i.e., ether); he probably disagrees with the view that the material medium (e.g., the air) has a propulsive role; he assumes that there is no void since God is everywhere; and he rejects astrology in favor of astronomy. His knowledge and his use of scientific method can be attested when he accurately describes and explains a moon eclipse that occurred in 1258.

In both these treatises Blemmydes shows his erudition and his ability to present the issues comprehensively and to rephrase intelligibly his sources. Due to its educational purpose the *Epitome* is written plainly and contains many examples, thus making the text suitable for the students and attaining their author’s purpose to “to be as clear as [he] possibly could” (*Autobiography*, II.75).

As the majority of Byzantine philosophers Blemmydes had not tried to establish not even to

compile an anthropological theory. He dealt only with certain issues mostly as a response to questions raised by the circumstances or by his students.

The treatise *On the Soul* (1263) came out when Blemmydes' students asked him to give them a simpler explanation of Aristotle's theory of the soul, and – at the most part – it is a summary of the *De anima*. He does not depart from the Aristotelian definitions that he explains. The distinctive Christian elements are the rejection of the preexistence of the created soul and the concluding reference to the inexplicable resurrection of bodies.

The short treatise *On the Body* (1267) was written as an appendix of Blemmydes' *On the Soul* for his students. Its main issue concerns corporeal principles and elements, concluding that both terms mean the same.

The two earlier treatises *On the Terminus of Man's Life* (1242–1249 or 1250s), both written in dialogue form, accumulate arguments against the predetermination of the time of everyman's death. Perhaps Blemmydes' motivation for writing these treatises was to confront the Latin opinion that had circulated in Constantinople at the middle of thirteenth century that God's preknowledge involves predetermination. For Blemmydes the Dominicans' thought was an innovation. So he prefers to argue exclusively on a scriptural and patristic basis and not with the help of "rhetorical techniques or philosophical sophistry." The use of evidence, the hundred of quotations and allusions to the Bible and to the Church Fathers and other authors, make *On the Terminus* a typical work of a Byzantine scholar on a common Byzantine topic. He is in the same line with Theophylaktos Simokattes, Photios, and Nicholas I Mystikos but contrary to Church Fathers and writers such as Germanos, John of Damascus, Niketas Stethatos, Psellos, Nicholas of Methone (and later such as Theodore Metochites and George Scholarios). Blemmydes' main concern is to defend the primacy of free choice that he thinks is violated by the belief in the predestined end of life. For him death is the consequence of sin and the responsibility for its cause lies with human beings and not with God, who nevertheless has the power to change (and to terminate) the course of human

life. Thus in his *Autobiography* Blemmydes describes the death of nine of his opponents and he explains their end by terms of their specific actions and God's wrath against them.

Blemmydes wrote a short treatise *On Virtue* where he adopts an Aristotelian view and he takes virtue to be a product of knowledge and judgment. The role of education is indispensable because it is through exercise (*askêsis*) that human beings can control irrational desire and replace it by rational will.

A conventional work, written in the ornate style appropriate to its genre, is *The Statue of a King* (c. 1250), dedicated to Blemmydes' student and future Emperor, Theodore II Lascaris. It continues the long tradition of "mirror of princes" and it is more an ethical discourse than a political treatise. Blemmydes advises how the Emperor should be, listing all his virtues and subordinating politics to ethics. The ideal king, who will regenerate the Byzantine world, must be a philosopher, having no property and no interests other than the truth and his subjects. Numerous passages from the Bible and many more from classical literature, history, and philosophy are brought to reinforce his argument; but the classical reminiscences cannot offer solutions to real political life and administration.

## Influence

Blemmydes' works, namely the *Epitome*, contributed to the study of philosophy in Late Byzantium and afterward. His work influenced later thinkers like Nikephoros Choumnos, George Pachymeres, and Joseph the Philosopher. From the end of the fifteenth century began the study of his work and its widespread educational use. *Epitome logica* served for almost six centuries in the Greek-speaking East as a handbook of Logic (until the eighteenth century) and it was also influential in the West; it survives in 100 manuscripts.

## Cross-References

- ▶ [Logic, Byzantine](#)
- ▶ [Natural Philosophy, Byzantine](#)

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## Nikephoros Choumnos

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### Abstract

Nikephoros Choumnos (c. 1250 – Constantinople, 1327). Choumnos, a scion of a noble family, held from a very early age up to almost his last years' high official positions in the administration of the Byzantine state, playing an active role in its external and religious affairs. In his last years, he launched a bitter attack on another important scholar of that time, Theodore Metochites, who succeeded him in the imperial court, being in his turn attacked by Choumnos. His nine philosophical treatises date from that period. Six of them regard natural philosophy and cosmology; the remaining concern metaphysics, anthropology, and psychology. Most of them exhibit a strong and plainly expressed intention of taking liberties from some specific doctrines of some

giants of the Ancient Greek philosophy, especially Plato and Aristotle. Choumnos argues both against the Platonic “ideas” and Aristotle’s “forms,” as well as against Plotinus’ arguments for the preexistence of the human soul. Elsewhere he subscribes to some of Plotinus’ arguments against Aristotle’s theory of the “quintessence,” which he also deems as incompatible to some other parts of Aristotle’s physics, and states that the nature of heaven is “light” or “fire.” To the traditional four-element worldview, he adds the Christian idea of the existence of some water above the firmament. He also describes the Christian God in terms of Plato’s timeless, unchangeable being and deems him as the cause of the world’s existence, nature, and structure. Further, he elaborates an Aristotle-based but Neoplatonically colored theory of cognitive faculties, the highest of them being “intellect,” which, when functioning by itself, is infallible. Choumnos’ claims for originality should be tested against his sources, which have not as yet been adequately explored. This will be practically possible whenever his writings will be properly edited.

## Life

Choumnos was born c. 1250 as a scion of a noble family, whose members had normally held high public offices and had direct access to the emperors. He received his high education from Gregory of Cyprus, the future patriarch of Constantinople (Gregory II; 1283–1289), who laid emphasis more on the *trivium* (especially rhetoric) than the *quadrivium*. Very early in his life (1272), he held the office of “quaestor” and joined a diplomatic mission to Persia. The succession of emperor Michael VIII Palaiologos (1259–1282), who promoted the union of the Church of Constantinople with the Church of Rome, by Andronikos II (1282–1328), whose religious policy was quite different, did not affect Choumnos’ career; on the contrary, he got to hold higher offices, being practically second only to the emperor himself. From such positions (*mystikos*;

*mesazôn*), he worked for the resignation of patriarch Gregory II and Athanasius I (1289–1293; 1303–1309), according to the emperor’s wish. He succeeded to have his son John married with a daughter of the Palaiologan dynasty. Probably in the end of the first decade of the fourteenth century, Choumnos was deposed from the office of *mesazôn*, placed at the head of the administration of Thessaloniki, and succeeded by the person who came to be his bitter enemy in the intellectual field, that is, Theodore Metochites (1270–1330). He also intervened to the patriarch Niphon I (1310–1314) for the solution of the so-called Arsenite schism. He also contributed to the deposition of Niphon. Gradually put aside in favor of Metochites, he devoted himself to the study of natural philosophy. His natural treatises date from this period (c. 1315–1321). In the next five years, Choumnos, vindicating for himself the pride of place in erudition, launched a bitter attack on Metochites for his ideas of what good style is supposed to consist in; then he was accused by Metochites of ignorance both of the *trivium*, especially of rhetoric and logic, and of the *quadrivium*, especially of astronomy. In 1326 he became a monk; he died in early 1327.

## Thought

Apart from few theological orations, the majority of Choumnos’ writings concern rhetoric and philosophy. Of his nine philosophical treatises, one has to do with ontology and metaphysics (*That Matter Does Not Preexist Bodies and That Forms Do Not Exist Separately, But They Both Coexist*), one with anthropology (*On the Soul, Against Plotinus*), one with psychology and epistemology (*On the Nutritive and Sensitive Soul and Their Activities*), and six with natural philosophy and cosmology (*On the World and Its Nature; On the Primary and Simple Bodies; That the Earth Stands at the Middle of the Universe and That Nothing Lies Beneath It, Since All Other Things Stand Above It; That It Is Not at All Impossible, Even According to the Natural Order; That Some Water Was Placed Separately Above the Firmament, Still Remains There and Will Remain There*

*Forever; On the Air, Why, in Spite of Its Being by Nature Warm, It Gets Cold When Blowing; Further, on the Generation of Hail and on the Nature of the Winds and Their Oblique Blowing and Movement).*

Choumnos' treatment of the nature of the "universals" places him in the minority of the Byzantine thinkers who took an anti-"realist" (not only anti-Platonic but also anti-Aristotelian) stand. Probably elaborating some ideas from Plotinus' *Ennead* II,1,1–2, he states that a "universal," for example, man, exists in the realm of sensibles only inasmuch as (and as long as) it is instantiated by particular men, that is, not in virtue of its being an eternal entity ("being") reflected on the sensibles, but in virtue of the "generation" of the sensibles, which renders the "universal" not eternal but just perpetual. He thinks that Plato's doctrine that the sensible and mutable things were made after some intelligible and unchangeable patterns collapses in view of the very fact that the copy is so radically different from the original. In other words, he rejects the Platonic doctrine of the relation between time and eternity. He also implicitly rejects Aristotle's immanent "forms" by stating that a "form" is just the result of a conception ("epinenoëmenon") of some similarities noticed in the world. He attributes the power of the "particulars" to reproduce themselves to God's will; this, though sounding as a Christian idea, roots also in a similar doctrine of Plotinus (*Ennead* II.1, 2–3; 7), according to whom the natural world cannot be explained in purely natural terms. Still, Choumnos' position is not extremely nominalistic since he stresses that the similarity between the individuals of a certain species is not imposed by our mind on the particulars, but is real. Choumnos' position looks, therefore, as an attack on metaphysics as a way of explaining the structure of the world.

Choumnos also rejects what he explicitly recognizes as the anthropological implication of the Platonic theory of ideas, that is, the preexistence of the human soul. Whereas he praises Plato's and Plotinus' description of the human soul as immaterial, simple, and immortal, he objects that this

does not entail eternal preexistence and he refutes especially Plotinus' arguments for that. He also tries to ridicule a corollary of this doctrine, namely, the transmigration of the souls, his main argument being that transmigration clashes with the rationality of the human soul as well as with the order of the created beings. Many of his arguments on this topic derive from Gregory of Nyssa's *Dialogus de anima et resurrectione*. Although he explicitly states that he combats Platonic anthropology because of its being anti-Christian, he argues not *ex auctoritate* but philosophically.

In the first and second treatise, Choumnos lays down some thoughts on the way one should philosophize in his age. Turning what the sceptics called rather negatively *dissensio philosophorum* and "perpetual seeking after truth" into a positive starting point, he states that there is still room for progress in philosophy; for it is false that the oldest an idea is, the closest to the truth it lies. He warns, however, that critically treating the doctrines of one's predecessors must not spring out of a contentious spirit but should be carried out soberly and on purely rational grounds. This looks like an implicit adoption of some Neoplatonists' critique of Aristotle's anti-Platonism as the result of his arrogance. With regard to his subject matter, he states that bodies have by nature both a temporal and a natural "limit," that is, on the one hand, a temporal beginning and an end, and on the other, some ultimate constituents or "principles." Stressing that the heaven, too, is a body, he argues, on Plotinian grounds, against Aristotle's doctrine of the "quintessence" or "aether" and states that the "principles" both of the sublunar and of the superlunar world are the four primary qualities (hot, cold, dry, and moist), which are perpetually and multifariously combined to produce the four natural elements (air, earth, water, and fire). He argues that the hypothesis of "quintessence" contradicts Aristotle's doctrine of "natural places" as well as his doctrine of the various kinds of locomotion. As for the nature of heaven, he adheres to Plotinus' view that it consists of "fire," whose essence is "light," which, if existing in itself (not

in any other “subject”), does not cause combustion. The cause of the existence as well as of the nature and the order of the world is the “will of God,” who lies beyond time, change, and limit.

In the third treatise, he argues that the world is not the result of an automatic process or of chance but was created by God, whose will and wisdom arranged matters so that the earth be placed at the center and surrounded by air, water, and fire. This can be shown by means of carefully using both one’s senses and reasoning. Contrary to the world, however, the nature, essence, and power of its Creator are incomprehensible.

In the seventh treatise, Choumnos defends the traditional doctrine of Christian cosmology (Gen. 1,7) that there is some “water above the firmament,” which he describes as “extremely thin.”

In the eighth and ninth treatises, Choumnos offers a tentative solution for one of the problems posed by Aristotle (*Problems* 945b8–34), that is, that the air is getting cold in spite of one of its natural qualities, i.e., warmness. To him, air does not really turn into a cold element; air, when blown, goes away and leaves its place to the water with which it is always mixed, which is by nature cold. He stresses that this explanation goes against the traditional views and that it should be judged impartially, that is, on the basis not of this or that old “authority” but of “reason” alone.

In the sixth treatise, Choumnos treats of the two constitutional faculties of the living beings, that is, the nutritive and the sensitive, as well as of the higher cognitive ones (representative faculty or imagination; “common sense”; reason; intellect), emphasis laid on the sensitive, which Choumnos deems as inadequately treated by Aristotle. In the course of his lengthy exposition of the function of the five senses, he tries to elaborate a theory of vision standing midway between this of Plato and that of Aristotle. Each cognitive faculty, to make its contribution to knowledge properly, stands in need of its superior. The highest of them, that is, the intellect, which is divine in nature, is the only infallible one; it can function only when the remaining faculties rest, in which case man enjoys full happiness.

Choumnos’ claims for originality should be tested against his sources, which have not as yet been adequately explored. His writings must be reedited.

## Cross-References

- ▶ [Metaphysics, Byzantine](#)
- ▶ [Natural Philosophy, Byzantine](#)
- ▶ [Theodore Metochites](#)

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## Nikephoros Gregoras

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### Abstract

Nikephoros Gregoras was a theologian, philosopher, astronomer, and historian of the Palaiologan Renaissance called “polyhistor” for his great erudition. He was a conservative, anti-Latin Orthodox who indulged in polemics against Gregory Palamas. Following his mentor Theodore Metochites, he was a Platonist with highly skeptical tendencies, which he combined with Platonism after the pattern of Philo of Alexandria. He describes God in a Neoplatonic way as the “One” that transcends everything and contains in Itself the immaterial archetypes (the “secret and ineffable reasons”) of all created beings. He regarded most philosophical and scientific theories of the heavens, the earth, and human affairs uncertain, because he deemed them as results of man’s defective postlapsarian reason. In these terms, he repudiated Aristotle as an arrogant man, who pretended to possess truth, whereas he knew that he lied. In contrast, Plato instantiated for him the true ideal of sage, because he was conscious of his ignorance and turned to the transcendental reality to attain truth.

### Life

After receiving primary education under his uncle, John of Herakleia in Pontus, Gregoras (1293–1361) moved to Constantinople, where he acquired the so-called *enkyklios paideia* under the future patriarch John XIII Glykys (1315–1320) with a stress on the *trivium* (1311–1312) and then (from 1315 on) under the learned Theodore Metochites (1270–1330) (in the Monastery of Chora, where Metochites had created a rich library of Classical education) with an emphasis

on the *quadrivium* and philosophy. He then joined the court circle of Andronikos II (1282–1328), where he served as a diplomat and started his teaching career. When Andronikos III overthrew Andronikos II (1328), the latter was forced to retire to a monastery. In 1331–1332, Gregoras held a public dispute with Barlaam of Calabria on philosophical, astronomical, and cosmological matters. Against Barlaam he composed *Florentios or On Wisdom*, in which he claimed to have put his rival to shame. Taking Barlaam for a “Latin” on account of his Italian provenance, he presented his victory as an index of the superiority of “Greek” erudition over the “Latin” and seized the opportunity to start teaching again in his private school. In 1334–1335, he pronounced a significant anti-Latin speech on the occasion of some discussions between the Byzantine and the Catholic Church. In the so-called hesychast controversy, a dispute for and against Gregory Palamas’ doctrine of the nature of the Taboric light, the attainability and the nature of the *visio beatifica* in this world, and the distinction between God’s “essence” and “energies,” Gregoras adopted at first (1336–1347) a neutral stance to the point of seeking conciliation between the disputants. On Ann of Savoy’s invitation to take part in the dispute, he expressed his disagreement with Palamas (even though he did not fully agree with Barlaam’s theology) and emerged as the leader of the anti-Palamite party, a reputation he retained until his death. In 1347–1351, he wrote his *Antirrhethica priora*. In 1351, shortly after becoming a monk, he engaged Palamas in a public dispute in a synod summoned by the pro-Palamite emperor John VI Kantakouzenos (1347–1354). The synod sided with Palamas and anathematized his opponents. Gregoras was confined under dreadful conditions in the monastery of Chora. Then he wrote his *Antirrhethica posteriora* (1351–1354) and the *Capita XL*. He was set free in 1354, when an anti-Palamite emperor, John V Palaiologos, ascended to the throne. In 1355, he held once more a public dispute with Palamas. He kept writing against Palamite theology until his death, but without meeting great success. After his death, his enemies desecrated his corpse in the streets of Constantinople.

## Thought

Gregoras, like Metochites, asserted the primacy of firmly holding Christian dogmas as absolutely true in terms of their having been revealed by the source of truth, that is, God. Like Barlaam, he combated the *Filioque* by declaring it illegitimate to use “apodeictic syllogisms” in theological matters, as the Latins audaciously and ignorantly did. On the grounds of this fideistic apophaticism, held by him as the only way of securing the transcendence of God, he also rejected Palamas’ pretension that God can be seen through the bodily eyes in this life and thus known in a way superior to that available to the conscious average member of the Christian folk. He likewise attacked Palamas’ *distinctio realis* between God’s “essence” and “energies” as being just a Christian adjustment of Proclus’ metaphysical doctrine of “henads.” At the same time, however, he confuted this doctrine both on theological and philosophical grounds. This offered to some strong opponents of his (apart from Palamas himself, Neilos Kabasilas and Philotheos Kokkinos) the opportunity to stick on him the label “philosopher,” by which they implied, according to a traditional Christian stereotype, “bad theologian.” In fact, Gregoras, like many other Byzantine theologians, built a philosophical conscience which he regarded compatible with the essentials of Christianity. In his philosophical works (*Commentary on the “De insomniis” of Synesios of Cyrene*, before 1330; *Against Those Who Do Not Recognize the Vile Character of Human Nature*, c. 1330; *Lover of Learning or on Arrogant Men*, 1332; *Florentios or on Wisdom*, 1332–1333 or after 1335; *Solutions to the Physical Problems Posed by Helena Palaiologina*; *On the Form Visible Only Through the Intellect, and on the Form That Is Seen Along with Accidents*) as well as in some special places in his theological writings, he elaborates the intellectual legacy of Theodore Metochites and proves influenced by Plato, Philo of Alexandria, Plutarch, and Sextus Empiricus. He describes God in a Neoplatonic way as the “One” that transcends everything and contains in Itself the immaterial archetypes (called by him “the secret and ineffable reasons”) of all created

beings. The realm of the sensibles as well as the sphere of human life is the region of mutability, instability, and corruption and forms an orderly whole only, thanks to God’s power and wisdom. Even the heavens cannot, for Gregoras, be known with accuracy; for, as a matter of fact, all astronomical theories, instead of starting from observation data and setting forth this or that hypothesis, start from some preconstructed ideas about how heavens go and tend to adapt the observation data to themselves. The way he sometimes puts this idea borders on epistemological nihilism, which appeared for the first time in Byzantium with him. His strong taste for “dogmatic skepticism” caused the reaction of an anti-skeptical Aristotelian, Nicholas Kabasilas (c. 1323–paulo post 1391), who wrote the only anti-skeptical medieval work (*On the Criterion of Truth, Whether It Exists or Not, Against the Accursed Pyrrho*; 1354/1361). One of Gregoras’ beloved philosophical topics was that of the cognitive faculties of man (senses, “common sense,” *phantasia*, reason, intellect). Mingling his Neoplatonic and skeptical views with Christianity, he held that the postlapsarian “ratio” (*logos* or *dianoia*) normally fails to reach truth (actually it may be regarded inferior even to the cognitive faculties of the irrational animals); whenever it succeeds, this is due to the fact that it was secretly guided by the scintilla that has remained from the light of truth possessed by man before his fall. Radicalizing Metochites’ anti-Aristotelianism, he regards Aristotle as an arrogant man, who pretended to possess truth, whereas he knew that he lied (and tried to hide his ignorance behind sonorous but empty words and phrases) and that he contradicted himself at every point (especially in logic and physics). In contrast, Plato instantiated for Gregoras the true ideal of “wisdom,” because he was conscious of his ignorance and turned to the transcendental reality to attain truth. This reality is, for Gregoras, the Christian God. Studying the *trivium* and the *quadrivium* and then being deeply trained in philosophy was for him just a way to learn the lesson of ignorance and then take refuge to revelation, which is the highest mark of God’s providence. Every sort of secular knowledge must be placed in this context. For example,

Gregoras, Christianizing a Stoic doctrine (accessible to him via Diodorus Siculus), stated that writing history (as he actually did) is a task pleasing to God, because in this way His providence both in nature and the human world is highlighted. Under this general stand toward heathen philosophy and literature, he felt as free as to integrate into Christianity any aspect of Greek thought he considered as admitting of such a usage; for instance, in a short but interesting allegorical introduction to Homer's *Odyssey*, he depicted Ulysses as the embodiment of the ideal sage, because he fully possessed all the "cardinal virtues." Some influence of his philosophical ideas, especially his bitter anti-Aristotelianism, is traced in George Gemistos (Plethon).

## Cross-References

- ▶ [Aristotelianism in the Greek, Latin, Syriac, Arabic, and Hebrew Traditions](#)
- ▶ [Barlaam of Calabria](#)
- ▶ [Gregory Palamas](#)
- ▶ [Platonism](#)
- ▶ [Plethon, George Gemistos](#)
- ▶ [Skepticism](#)

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# O

## Obligations Logic

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### Abstract

Medieval obligations logic dealt with logical duties, primarily that of granting what follow from what has already been laid down. Technically these duties were put into the context of so-called obligational disputations, where the opponent puts forward propositions, which the respondent grants, denies, or doubts. For the most part, the answers do not follow truth, but some specific obligation given at the beginning of the disputation and the technical obligation rules. The main flourishing of obligations logic can be dated to the first half of the fourteenth century with authors like Walter Burley, Richard Kilvington, and Roger Swyneshed, who all presented somewhat different sets of rules for these disputations. It seems that medieval authors aimed generally at rules that take heed of two general dialectical duties: to follow truth and to remain coherent in one's answers. The latter becomes clearly visible when exceptions to the former are allowed through issuing some special duty at the beginning of the disputation. Obligations logic, thus, can be characterized as studying what it means to be

consistent and how one can remain coherent. This way, the area also contributed to the development of such modal notions as logical possibility and necessity.

## Obligations Logic

Obligations logic is one of the branches of medieval logic that have no modern counterpart. In obligational disputations as they were known in the late Middle Ages, the opponent puts forward propositions that the respondent must evaluate. Standard answers include granting, denying, and doubting the proposition put forward. The title word "obligations" derives from the special setting that the respondent is at the beginning of the disputation given a special duty that he must follow during the disputation. In the mature form of the technique, this duty was that of holding a false sentence, called the *positum*, as something that has to be granted.

It is unclear how the historical origin of these disputations should be construed. In a wide sense, the setting derives from the dialectical encounters described by Aristotle in book VIII of the *Topics*, but obligations did not develop as straightforward commentaries of this book. Rather, the beginnings in the early thirteenth century seem to be connected to logical paradoxes like the so-called insolubles. The most important treatises on obligations date from the first half of the fourteenth century.

According to the rules formulated in Boethius de Dacia's questions on Aristotle's *Topics* (written between 1270 and 1276), the respondent should grant to the opponent anything except a proposition that is repugnant with what has been laid down as a *positum*. The gist of the game, as Boethius presents it, derives from the opponent laying progressively down a set of sentences as many *posita*, while the respondent must check that the set remains consistent.

Modern scholars have considered Walter Burley's treatise on obligations (written 1302) to be the most important one because it is a lengthy carefully argued text that presents obligations logic in a well-developed form. Furthermore, medieval authors seem to have taken Burley's rules as standard, while alternative formulations mainly appear as suggestions for a major revision. For the most part, these suggestions were rejected in the discussion. The only important revision that was accepted seems to have been John Duns Scotus' suggestion that the respondent need not deny the present when he has a false *positum* to defend. That is, the necessity of the present need not be respected in obligational disputations.

Burley's rules tell the respondent to keep the set of his answers consistent, but otherwise to follow the truth of the matter. That is, anything that follows from the *positum* together with previous answers must be granted, and anything that is repugnant with them, must be denied. Any other proposition must be deemed irrelevant and answered in accordance with truth-value. After the answer, the irrelevant proposition becomes relevant and can be used in inferences within the game.

Burley's rules have the odd consequence that the respondent can be forced to grant practically any proposition, if the selection and the order of propositions are chosen for such an end. Similarly, the correct answer to a particular proposition may depend on the order of presentation. These features are explicitly recognized by Burley and others, and no medieval author calls them problems. However, interesting revisions were put forward in the second quarter of the fourteenth century by Richard Kilvington in his *Sophismata* (written soon after 1321) and Roger Swyneshed in

a separate treatise (written 1330–1335). Neither of these revised sets of rules allows the order to have such an effect on the answers, though Swyneshed does provide a technique for achieving such effects if they are specifically aimed at.

The idea behind Kilvington's revision is straightforward, but logically unsatisfactory. He claims that propositions should be evaluated in respect to what their truth-values would be if the actually false *positum* were true. In other words, Kilvington seems to think that obligations logic should be understood as being based on counterfactual reasoning. Unfortunately, he is unable to spell out specific rules that would be unambiguous in the way Burley's rules are. Kilvington's revision seems to have received little attention among medieval authors.

Swyneshed's suggestion is based on keeping irrelevant propositions as irrelevant, not allowing them to be taken into inferences. That is, the respondent should grant what follows from the *positum* alone and deny anything that is repugnant with it alone. Swyneshed makes it clear that the whole set of answers need not be consistent if it also includes irrelevant propositions. Much attention was paid on his recognition that a conjunction can be denied when both parts have been granted (one as following from the *positum* and the other as irrelevant and true).

In the later period, the core of Burley's rules seems to have gained general acceptance. For example, Ralph Strode (later fourteenth century) and Paul of Venice (see *Logica magna*, written 1397–1398) follow this basic structure. In the later period, some further development can be found in discussions on disputational obligations concerning the meanings of the words uttered in the disputation.

In the modern research, much time has been spent in making obligations logic understandable to modern logicians. It seems impossible to give any clear counterpart for obligations among the fields of modern logic. Theories of counterfactuals and belief revisions systems have been pointed out, but they both proceed from a semantic perspective while the sets of granted sentences in obligational disputations typically lack any meaningful interpretation.

It seems clear, however, that one logically very interesting phenomenon, which is familiar to modern logicians, is especially carefully studied in obligations logic. When an increasing number of propositions are evaluated in a dynamic setting, their consistency can either be maintained or lost. Obligations logic studies this phenomenon and thus results in an increased understanding of what is at issue in determining consistency.

From the history of modal concepts, obligations thus address a crucial issue. In late medieval developments, it became increasingly important to consider possibility as related to logical consistency. But while earlier medieval logicians often defined logical notions like consistency by leaning on some kind of real possibilities, obligations provided a framework where consistency was attended to with conscious disregard to any kinds of real possibilities. That is, consistency was understood to obtain at the sentential level in abstraction from the possible interpretations of the sentences.

## Cross-References

- ▶ [Insolubles](#)
- ▶ [John Duns Scotus](#)
- ▶ [Paul of Venice](#)
- ▶ [Richard Kilvington](#)
- ▶ [Walter Burley](#)

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## Optics, Latin

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### Abstract

Medieval Latin optics had its sources in Greek and Arab thinkers, including Aristotle, Euclid, Ptolemy, Galen, al-Kindi, Avicenna, and Alhacen. Its prominent scholars had been Robert Grosseteste, Albert the Great, Roger Bacon, John Pecham, Witelo, and Theodoric of Freiburg. The medieval Latins discussed light's ontological status and whether its mode of existence in the medium is spiritual or material. They adopted from Alhacen the model of radiation from individual point-sources and the idea of spherical propagation, thereby opening their account to radial analysis. Grosseteste identified light with the first corporeal form, which inserts dimensions



onto matter, and Bacon developed the theory of multiplication of species, of which the activity of light was the observable instance. Light thus became the key to the workings of natural causality. The perspectivists formulated optical laws and applied them in explanations of natural phenomena such as the rainbow, pinhole images, and in their account of sight. They debated about the direction of the visual cone and subjected the eye to geometrical analysis. They explained sight as caused by the perpendicular species, since they are the shortest and therefore the strongest. Upon entering the eye, perpendicular rays pass through the cornea, refract at the rear surface of the crystalline lens, and project through the opening of the optic nerve. Sight perceives light and color directly, and twenty more visual qualities through complex processes of comparison, concept-formation, and reasoning. Attention was given to the various faculties of the brain – such as imagination and memory – and their role in processing visual information.

### The Sources of Medieval Latin Optics

Medieval Latin optics – called the science of *Perspectiva* – was a discipline of diverse contents, covering a much broader field than modern optics. It was founded in the thirteenth century and had its roots deep in Greek and Arab achievements.

Among the Greek thinkers, medieval *Perspectiva* is indebted mostly to Aristotle (384–322 BC), Euclid (fl. 300 BC), Ptolemy (fl. 127–48), and Galen (d. after 210). Aristotle offered a well elaborated theory of sensation, of which visual perception formed a considerable part. It was presented in his books on natural philosophy, especially in *De sensu* and *De anima*. Aristotle stressed the passivity of the senses and described the details of the cognitive process of receiving visual information. Euclid established the equal-angle law of reflection and offered a qualitative understanding of the phenomena of refraction. By contrast with Aristotle, Euclid held to an extramissionist theory of vision, stating that the direction of radiation is from the

observer's eye. Ptolemy brought together the shared geometrical foundations of optics and astronomy. He analyzed reflection in spherical mirrors, and investigated the refraction of light. Galen provided a detailed description of the tunics and humors of the eye.

Among the Arab thinkers, al-Kindi (c. 800–870), Avicenna (Ibn Sina, c. 970–1037), and Alhacen (Ibn al-Haytham, c. 965–1040/1) were the most significant sources of Latin optics.

Al-Kindi presented in his *De radiis stellarum* a universally active natural world, in which everything produces rays in every direction. Optics became thus of special significance since it treats the radiation of power – the most fundamental natural mechanism. This idea was a source of inspiration for the medieval theory of the multiplication of species. Al-Kindi's *De aspectibus* was a thorough critique of Euclid's theory of vision, and a fierce defense of extramission theory (Lindberg 1976). Avicenna, one of the most prominent among the interpreters of Aristotle, provided an account of the cognitive assimilation of the visual information gained through the radiation of light. With its emphasis on the abstraction of formal representations and intentions, Avicenna's internal sense model was a central formative source for medieval Latin perception theories (Hasse 2000; Smith 2015).

Most notably, medieval optics owed its foundation to the Arab mathematician, astronomer and philosopher Alhacen. Alhacen's great optical treaty, the *Kitab al-Manazir*, translated into Latin as *De aspectibus*, was written as a criticism of Ptolemy's *Optics* and challenged its central supposition, that vision occurs by a visual ray in the shape of a cone emitted from the eye. Alhacen devised a unified theory of vision out of the three approaches: the Aristotelian, the Euclidean-mathematical, and the physiological (Galen). He argued that the forms of light and color issue in all directions from every point of the visible object, and that transparent bodies receive and transmit these forms. Vision therefore occurs by the reception of rays and not by extramission. From the infinity of rays emanating from each point of the visual object, only one falls on the eye perpendicularly and only this one is powerful

enough to stimulate the visual power in the crystalline humor. The collection of unrefracted rays from the various points on the object's surface form a cone of which apex is at the center of the eye. With this visual cone comes all the geometrical analysis of vision by Euclid and Ptolemy (Lindberg and Tachau 2013; Smith 2001).

These Greek and Arabic optical sources were translated into Latin in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries.

The main current in medieval Latin optics was paramountly Aristotelian. The practitioners of *Perspectiva*, called the “perspectivists,” inserted three changes in the Aristotelian account of visual cognition. Following Alhacen and the Muslim thinkers, they rendered light from the actualization of the transparent medium into a visible entity; they replaced Aristotle's holistic account of radiation of forms with a model of radiation from individual point-sources; and they adopted a model of spherical propagation, thereby opening their account to radial analysis (Smith 1981).

## Writers and Texts of Medieval Latin Optics

The first medieval Latin scholar who seriously addressed perspective as a science in view of the influx of the new translations was Robert Grosseteste (c. 1169–1253). Grosseteste had at his disposal Euclid's *Optica* and *Catoptrica* (Ver Eecke 1959), Aristotle's *Meteorologica*, al-Kindi's *De aspectibus*, but not necessarily Ptolemy's *Optica* (Crombie 1953). There is no evidence that he had access to the *De aspectibus* of Alhacen. *Perspectiva*, in Grosseteste's scheme of things, was subordinated to geometry, taking its arguments from there, since “all causes of natural effects must be expressed by means of lines, angles and figures” (*De lineis*). In his treatise on the creation of the world from a primordial point of light (*De luce*), Grosseteste tied metaphysical and physical lights. He was convinced that the operations of metaphysical and physical lights are so similar that understanding the latter will aid in understanding the former (Smith 2015).

The second author to take visual theory seriously was Albert the Great (c. 1200–1280), who was well acquainted with the principal theories of vision formulated by Greek and Arabic authors. He devoted much effort to describe and refute those theories, all but Aristotle's. In *De homine* he attacked the theories of Plato (429?–347 BC), Empedocles (c. 495–435 BC), Euclid, and al-Kindi and in his commentaries on *De anima* and *De sensu* he added Democritus (c. 460–c. 370) to the rejected views. However, he did not take geometrical optics seriously enough to incorporate it coherently into his account of light and vision (Smith 2015).

The key figure in the reception of Alhacen's theories was Roger Bacon (c. 1214/20–1292). His first optical treatise, *De multiplicatione specierum*, was probably composed in the early 1260s and was followed by *Perspectiva*, and *De speculis comburentibus*. Bacon had at his disposal everything of importance from the Greek and Latin optical traditions. He knew Aristotle's works thoroughly; he was powerfully influenced by the optical works of Ptolemy and Alhacen and he cited Avicenna, Euclid, and al-Kindi. He made full use of Ptolemy's *Optica*, book six of Avicenna's *Healing*, and Alhacen's *De aspectibus*, works that had been so far totally unknown (Lindberg 1976). According to Bacon, the science of *Perspectiva* involves not only the laws of the radiation of light and the workings of the general physical causality (of which the radiation of light is an instance), but also the study of the anatomy and physiology of the eye and the parts of the brain which process visual information. It also concerns the cognitive aspects of vision, along with the internal faculties which treat and store visual information, namely, the five inner senses described in Avicenna's *De anima*. In Bacon's hands, the science of *Perspectiva* was turned from a mathematical into a physical science, which deals with sensory perception in general.

Bacon's influence was manifest in another work titled *Perspectiva*, which was written in the 1270s by the Silesian cleric Witelo (d. after 1281). It was meant to be an exhaustive, systematic account of the new discipline. Witelo endeavored

to collect in one massive volume the teachings of the entire mathematical tradition in optics, including Euclid, Pseudo-Euclid, Hero of Alexandria (c. 10 BC–70 AD), Ptolemy, al-Kindi, Alhacen, and Bacon. At about the same time, the English Franciscan John Pecham (c. 1230/1235–1292) wrote the *Perspectiva communis*, which became the most widely used textbook on *Perspectiva* in medieval universities. Pecham provided an effective summary of Alhacen's theory, with a minimal use of Bacon's doctrine of the multiplication of species (Lindberg 1976).

The fourteenth-century authors accepted the broad outlines of the perspectivist theory of vision, namely, that vision is produced by intermitted rays and that the radiation submits to geometrical analysis and the visual pyramid. They questioned this theory only on a few very restricted issues. For example, Henry of Langenstein (c. 1325–1397) inquired, in his questions on the *Perspectiva*, whether perpendicular rays are indeed stronger than oblique rays, and Blasius of Parma (c. 1347–1416), in his set of questions on the same text, inquired whether species are required for vision, and explored the possibility that bodies no longer in existence are nevertheless perceived. One also finds a text on the rainbow by Theodoric of Freiburg (d. ca. 1311), titled *De iride et radialibus impressionibus*, and a commentary on Pecham's *Perspectiva communis* by Wigandus Durnheimer (fl. 1390) (Lindberg 1976). Some optical issues can also be found in the Aristotelian commentaries on the *Meteorologica*, *De anima*, and *De sensu*. Nicole Oresme, (c. 1320/5–1382) for instance, dealt with visual theory in his *Quaestiones super quatuor libros meteororum*. He argued there that vision requires the arrangement of species within the eye exactly as the points from which those species emanated are arranged outside the eye. This was exactly the theory of Alhacen, Bacon, and Witelo (Lindberg 1976). Optical discussions occurred sometimes within the frame of the biblical commentaries on the book of *Genesis*, especially around the story of creation, and the commentaries on the *sentences* of Peter Lombard (1100–1160). Examples are Grosseteste's biblical commentary – *Hexaameron* – and Peter Aureoli's

(d. 1322) commentary on the *Sentences*, in which he inquired about the relationships among lux, lumen, and color (Lindberg 1976).

### Key Issues of Latin Optics

As the science of light and vision, *Perspectiva* primarily concerns the nature of light. The medieval scholars endeavored to discover the nature of light and dealt with the interrelations between light (as lux and as lumen) and color. The origin of these discussions was Avicenna's commentary on *De anima* (Hasse 2000), and they are found already in 1200, for example, in John Blund's (c. 1175–1248) discussion of lux, lumen, color, and sight in his *Tractatus de anima*. In most such discussions, lux is defined as light attached to matter, and receives ontological priority as the form of the source of light. Lumen is the offspring, copy, or image of lux, its species or intention (Raizman-Kedar 2006).

A debate took place concerning light's ontological status and its mode of existence in the medium. Aristotle defined light as the intervening medium (*diaphanous*) when it is in an actual state of transparency. As such, its ontological status is that of a quality. Most medieval Aristotelians followed him on this point. Albert the Great and Thomas Aquinas (1225–1274) held that lumen is an *intentio* having spiritual being in the transparent medium. The perspectivists, however, endowed light a prominent and unique position in the ontological makeup of the universe. Grosseteste elevated light's status, to the "first corporeal form," which is active by its nature, and which through its unceasing diffusion introduces dimensions into matter (*De luce*). The identification of light with the first corporeal form meant that the study of light became the key to the study of the material universe. Light thus became an observable instance of the latent processes and mechanisms of nature, and the details of its behaviour became the very features of the causal mechanism of nature. In Grosseteste's later writings light became the source of all causal action (McEvoy 1982). He laid the foundation of the doctrine of the "multiplication of species," which states that

everything in the universe acts on its surrounding through the emanation of its species in all directions. Every natural power, according to Grosseteste, propagates species along lines, and the intensity of its effect depends on the length of those lines: the shorter they are, the stronger is their power. Bacon took up the concept of species from Grosseteste and developed it into a comprehensive system. He defined species as “the force or power by which any object acts on its surroundings,” and contended that it is produced by every active nature and not by light and color alone. The rays of species issue in all directions from every point of the sensible object. A species resembles its agent in “nature, specific essence and operation” and belongs to the same category as its agent. It is brought forth out of the potentiality of the matter of the recipient and through it an agent renders its surrounding similar to itself. For Bacon, universal causation is corporeal and material, uniform and necessary. The species’ activity conforms to a set of “laws of nature” (or laws of “material forms” or of “multiplication”). Being corporeal and physical, the action of species is temporal and finite (Raizman-Kedar 2009).

Some heated debates took place as to the existence of species in general, and the function of species in vision in particular. Peter John Olivi (1248–1298), for example, questioned the cognitive function of species, arguing that they stand as a veil between the perceiver and what he perceives, (Tachau 1988; Smith 2015; Demange 2016). However, most scholastic authors accepted their existence as vital to accounts of action at a distance.

Another issue of debate was the question of whether the progression of light is made in an instant or in time. Aristotle held that since light is a qualitative change in the medium, it advances instantaneously and not by local motion. Alhacen presented the alternative view and argued at length that the travel of light, and hence visual perception, takes time. Albert the Great, Thomas Aquinas, Bartholomew the Englishman (fl. C. 1220–1240), Witelo, and Blasius of Parma (1355–1416) sided with Aristotle, while Bacon and John Buridan (c. 1300–c. 1361) sided with

Alhacen, agreeing that the speed of light is imperceptible, yet finite (Lindberg 1978).

The perspectivists held that light acts uniformly and predictably, and hence searched for optical laws. The premise of the laws was that if no impediment is on its way, light advances in a straight line, which is the most effective in the preservation of force. Grosseteste formulated two laws. The law of reflection (which he got from Euclid’s *Catoprica*) states that when a ray of light encounters an obstacle which it cannot penetrate, it regenerates itself at an angle equal to the angle of incidence (*De lineis*). In case that the ray encounters a medium which does not block its path, but is of a different density, the law of refraction applies: if the second body is denser than the first, then the ray will pass closer to the perpendicular drawn from the place of refraction; if the second body is rarer, then the ray will refract away from the perpendicular (*De lineis*, Smith 2015). Bacon had followed suit and formulated similar laws, along with a few others, under the rubric of “laws of multiplication,” “laws of species,” or “laws of corporeal things” (Kedar and Hon 2018). Witelo added the “reciprocal law,” stating that a ray crossing the interface between two media would, when reversed, retrace its original path (Crombie 1953).

By using the principles of light’s propagation stated above, the medieval thinkers endeavored to find a satisfying account for some intriguing optical phenomena, such as the appearance of rainbows, the circular pinhole image, and the apparent distorted position of the stars.

In his *Meteorologica*, Aristotle suggested that the rainbow colors are produced by the variable weakening of the solar light by reflection and transmission through the nebular mists (Lindberg 1966). Grosseteste explained in *De iride* that the cause of the rainbow was not reflection, but refraction of the sun’s rays through successively denser layers of atmospheric mist. The cloud as a whole acted as a large lens and focused the sunlight so that it appeared as an image on a second cloud opposite the sun (Crombie 1953). Albert the Great, who read Grosseteste’s *De iride*, argued in his *Meteororum* that the efficient cause of the rainbow was the multiple refractions of the sun’s

rays in the raindrops. The refracted rays formed an image on the vapor opposite the cloud, and the colors produced in this manner were real colors existing in the external world. The differences of color resulted from the variations of the density in the moisture of the cloud. Green appeared in the denser drops and red in the thinnest parts. This was similar to what happens when sunlight passes through a prism, from which red emerges near the apex and the darker colors near the base (Crombie 1953). Bacon returned, in his *Perspectiva*, to Aristotle's view that the rainbow was produced by reflection. The rainbow, he argued, is seen in the rays coming from the cloud directly to the eye, not, as Grosseteste supposed, as an image formed on a second cloud. He called attention to the function fulfilled by individual drops, arguing that the rainbow appears in different set of drops for each observer (Lindberg 1966). The rainbow moves with the observer, Bacon noted, and therefore it is a subjective appearance and of a different cause than that of colors in hexagonal crystals. He rejected Albert's theory that the colors were due to differences in the density of the cloud, on the ground that there were no such differences in crystals or dew on grasses, where similar colors appear (Crombie 1953). He suggested instead that the different colors are caused by reflections from small drops of water, from each of which "reflection occurs as from a spherical mirror" (Lindberg 1966). Bacon discovered that the sun, the observer's eye, and the center of the bow were always in a straight line, and by means of observation, he found that the maximal elevation at which the rainbow can appear above the horizon is 42 degrees (Crombie 1953). In the fourteenth century, Theodoric of Freiburg (d. ca. 1310) gave for the first time a satisfactory solution of the causes of the rainbow. He argued that the primary bow was a result of both refraction and reflection of the rays within individual raindrops. Theodoric explained correctly the order of the colors of the primary bow, and the reversal of this order in the secondary bow (Crombie 1953).

The phenomena of pinhole images – in which radiation from a spherical body, passing through a small triangular or rectangular aperture, produced a circular image – attracted the perspectivists

because it seemed to cast doubt on the rectilinear propagation of light and thereby on the entire optical endeavor. Bacon devoted to this problem about a quarter of his treatise on burning mirrors (*De speculis comburentibus*), alas with no success. Witelo considered the problem in six propositions of his *Perspectiva*. He attributed light's circularity to the intersection of rays coming from all directions, especially those intersected at the periphery of the aperture (Lindberg 1968). In his *Tractatus de sphaera* Pecham distinguished between primary and secondary lights (primary light rays are produced by a luminous source whereas secondary light rays are produced from primary light rays). Primary light is propagated in straight lines and conforms to the shape of the aperture; the secondary rays diffuse outside the primary beam and give rise to a circular image. The primary and secondary images are superimposed, hence the composite image appear circular (Lindberg 1968).

Another puzzle that attracted attention was the apparent dislocation of the stars near the horizon. Bacon used the law of refraction to explain this distortion. When the star is on the meridian line near the zenith of the observer, its rays fall perpendicularly and therefore do not refract. Thus the star is seen in its true position. But when the star rises its rays fall at oblique angles. The rays refract between the celestial sphere and the sphere of fire because these two media differ in density, and vision sees by broken lines and errs in regard to the position of the star. Oresme devoted his *De visione stellarum* to this problem. He demonstrated that refraction can occur not only at the interface of two media, but also in a single medium of a varying density. He suggested that atmospheric refraction occurs along a curve and proposed to approximate the curved path of a ray of light in the atmosphere by an infinite series of line segments, each representing a single refraction.

The laws of optics were sometimes put to practical purposes. The actual construction of instruments was quite rare, but discussions of various types of lenses and mirrors abounded. In *De iride* Grosseteste suggested the possibility of magnifying lenses, which is based on a principle he learned from Euclid and Ptolemy, that the size



and position of the visible object depends on the size of the angle through which it is seen. A thing is made invisible not by great distance but by the smallness of the angle of vision. The use of lenses is meant to increase the angle of vision by the refraction of light-rays (Crombie 1953). Grosseteste used also the law of refraction to explain the operation of the burning glass. The rays going through double refraction (one on entering the glass and another on leaving it) concentrate beyond the burning glass, and at the point of meeting combustion occurs (Crombie 1953). Witelo reported the construction of a parabolic mirror that would concentrate the sun's rays at a single focal point. He described the actual manufacture of a parabolic mirror out of a concave piece of iron. Witelo also made actual measurements of the angle of refraction at the surfaces between different media. He used the detailed description of the construction of such an instrument, which he found in Alhacen. He used the same instrument to show that not only white light, but also colors travel in straight lines in a single medium (Crombie 1953).

When medieval thinkers addressed the explanation of sight, the first issue they had to tackle was the question of its direction. They have found among their sources two opposing schools: Euclid, Ptolemy, and Galen argued in favor of extramission, namely, that sight occurs by rays emitted from the eye. Aristotle, Avicenna, Alhacen, and Averroes (1126–1198) claimed that sight is caused by the reception of forms emitted by external objects (by intromission). The Muslim thinkers argued against extramission, adducing arguments based on the appearance of an after image when the observer shifts his gaze from a bright spot to a dark region, and the injurious character of bright light. These arguments were repeated by medieval thinkers. Albert, who was the first in the West to defend Aristotle's theory of vision, argued most forcefully and effectively when opposing the extramission theory of vision. In answering the argument that animals have light in their eyes since they shine at night, he insisted that this is simply the result of fiery particles in the outer surface of the eye and not light that issues forth (Lindberg 1976).

Grosseteste and Bacon opted for a two-way transmission. Grosseteste accepted the basics of the Aristotelian account, but insisted that the eye emits visual rays in order to complete the act of vision. Bacon affirmed, along with Aristotle and Alhacen, that sight is basically a matter of intromission. It was in fact a direct derivative from the theory of the multiplication of species that the senses participate passively in the visual process, while the species is the agent. However, Bacon argued that the eye, just like everything else, emits species, and that those species have a special function in vision; they "ennoble" the incoming species and render them suitable to being received by the soul. Pecham too modified Alhacen's theory in order to admit that visual rays issuing from the eye also play an essential part in the visual process (Lindberg 1976). Olivi presented the most outspoken opposition to intromission, claiming that it denigrates the status of the will in the human soul, and that it fails to account for the selectivity of sight (Tachau 1988; Demange 2016).

An account of the process of sight is not complete without a description of the physiology of the eye. The perspectivists, following Avicenna, described the eye as made of three coats and three humors. The inner coat consisted of the *retina* – an expansion of the nerve forming a concave net which conveys nourishment, and a thicker part called *uvea* (the choroid). Outside the *uvea* were the *cornea* and the *consolidativa* (sclerotic coat). Inside the inner coat were the three humors: the aqueous humor, the crystalline humor (the lens), and the vitreous humor. The crystalline humor is called the pupil and it is identified as the seat of the visual power (Crombie 1953). In his effort to understand the act of vision, Bacon extended the geometrical analysis into the human anatomy. He held that all the tunics and humors of the eye are enclosed by spherical surfaces, the centers of which are situated on a straight line running from the center of the pupil to the opening of the optic nerve (Smith 1981).

Sight begins to act upon receiving stimulation by species. According to Alhacen, each point of lux and illuminated color on the visible object's surface multiply its species to every point on the



surface of the eye. The lens makes a coherent image out of the multiplicity of rays, by selecting only the species that reach it orthogonally, since they are the shortest and therefore the strongest. The other species are ignored (Smith 2015). Perpendicular rays enter the eye without refraction, pass through the cornea and front surface of the crystalline lens, and refract at the rear surface of the crystalline lens. Then they are projected through the opening of the optic nerve, where species from both eyes join to form a single image (Smith 1981).

According to Bacon, sight can perceive twenty-two visible qualities, among which are light, color, remoteness, shape, size, motion, rest, transparency, density, beauty, and ugliness. Only two of those qualities produce *species*, and therefore only those two are directly perceived by sight, namely light and color. All the other visual qualities are deduced by inference from those qualities which produce *species*, that is, deduced from the way the *species* of light and color are arranged on the surface of the eye. Distance is grasped from the comparison between the sensible bodies intervening between the eye and the distant object. Magnitude is grasped from the size of the angle formed at the observer's eye compared with the distance from the observed object. To assess the magnitude, the viewer must compare it with familiar objects. The unfamiliar object is instantaneously compared and reduced to some reliable measure already available in memory. Motion is discerned by comparing a moving object with another object over an appropriate time span. Now it becomes clear why Bacon states that it is not the eye which sees, for the workings of comparison, memorizing, and judgment require the involvement of several internal faculties: imagination, memory, and cogitation (*Perspectiva*).

Following Alhacen, Bacon distinguished three modes of visual perception: sense alone, knowledge, and syllogism. Light and color are perceived through sense alone: that is, through the sense of sight and the common sense, without the help of any other faculty of the soul. This sort of cognition is fully valid, yet weak and revealing merely whether things exist or not. The ability to

distinguish universals from one another and from particulars, involving comparisons and the use of memory, belongs to the second kind of visual perception called "cognition by comprehension." By comprehension we grasp not only that what we see is light or color, but also of what kinds they are and what qualities they possess. We can gather whether we are seeing the light of the sun or of the moon, or whether a particular color is white or blue. Cognition by comprehension works by comparison with previous perceptions. When we grasp the species of an object that we have not seen before, we recognize the object only as belonging to a general category. But if we manage to find in our imagination a previous image of the same object, then we can also recognize it as a certain particular, such as a certain man or a certain dog. This second mode of visual perception requires imagination and memory. The third mode of visual perception, namely, syllogism, does not involve comparisons but considers the thing at hand absolutely. It resembles reasoning, using premises to arrive at conclusions. An example of such reasoning is someone holding a transparent stone in his hand. He only perceives its transparency by comparing it with a dense object placed at a suitable distance beyond the stone. He gathers that the stone in his hand is transparent because he could not see through the other object. We reason in this way naturally and without self-consciousness. All twenty visual qualities besides light and color, such as magnitude and beauty, are thus grasped by the syllogistic mode of perception, which is common to man and animals (*Perspectiva*).

Bacon's faculty psychology divided the brain into three chambers. The anterior chamber – *phantasia* – houses the common sense and imagination. Upon receiving the species, the common sense first makes judgments concerning each sense separately, discerning the distinctive kind of information supplied by the proper senses. The species are then retained in the imagination. In the middle chamber of the brain, the estimative faculty receives the species of the substantial nature of things, and memory, at the rear chamber, retains them. The species retained in both *phantasia* and memory are multiplied all the way to cogitation,

located in the middle cell of the brain. This faculty is responsible for the syllogistic mode of cognition, and serves as the link between the sensitive and the rational soul in men (Smith 2015).

One can now appreciate the scope and complexity of medieval Latin optics, which had a considerable impact upon early modern opticians, such as Kepler (1571–1630) and Descartes (1596–1650).

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## Oxford Calculators

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### Abstract

With Richard Swineshead's *Book of Calculations* taken as its characteristic product, the "Oxford Calculators" were a group of thinkers at Oxford University in the mid-fourteenth century, most but not all of whom were associated with Merton College, for which reason they were earlier called "the Merton School," and credited with contributions to astronomy and to the development of mathematical physics. The particularly "calculatory" features of the work of this group seem to have resulted from their connection to undergraduate disputations in the Faculty of Arts, particularly those devoted to the solution of so-called sophismata.

## Historical and Systematic Development of the Movement

Several factors combined to bring about the work of the Oxford Calculators. First of all, undergraduate education at Oxford in the fourteenth century emphasized taking part in disputations as a way of training students to detect fallacies, argue logically, remember significant detail, think quickly, and so forth. The curriculum of the Faculty of Arts included grammar, logic, the quadrivium (arithmetic, geometry, astronomy, and music), natural philosophy, ethics, and metaphysics. The most important tool used in disputations was logic, especially the "new logic," which made use of the theory of supposition and related tools of analysis. All students took part in disputations on sophismata, that is perplexing propositions linked to a "case" with reference to which the truth or falsehood of the sophismata statement was to be judged. Typical calculatory sophismata from a relatively early period are those of Richard Kilvington, starting with the sophisma sentence, "Socrates is whiter than Plato begins to be white," taken together with the case that Socrates is now white in a given degree, while Plato begins to increase his whiteness from having no whiteness at all. This case and the related sophisma sentence are perplexing because "whiter" is understood to involve a geometric ratio between Socrates' whiteness and Plato's whiteness, but if Plato begins to become whiter from not being white at all, Plato will begin from zero whiteness and the initial ratios between Socrates' finite whiteness and Plato's very earliest whitenesses will be greater than any given ratio, or potentially infinite. To resolve the sophism, the respondent had to determine whether as Plato or any other subject begins to become white, there is a first instant of being white with some degree of whiteness or only a last instant of having no whiteness at all. If there were a first instant of being white, then there would be a finite ratio between Socrates' whiteness and Plato's first whiteness, but if there is no first instant of Plato's being white, as was normally assumed, then the ratios between Socrates' whiteness and Plato's whiteness will be greater than any given value as one considers

times closer and closer to the beginning of his whitening (see Richard Kilvington 1320s/1990).

Only a few of Richard Kilvington's 48 *sophismata* do not deal with situations involving natural philosophy and related issues of continuity and infinity, and thus Norman and Barbara Kretzmann are right in claiming in their edition of his *Sophismata* that it "may be taken as a paradigm of the philosophical problems and techniques that characterize the work" of the Oxford Calculators. Interestingly, Kilvington's series of commentaries on the works of Aristotle in the form of a few (usually about ten) but lengthy questions track the acceptance of the second major factor in the development of the Oxford Calculatory approach, namely Thomas Bradwardine's new theory of the relations of proportions of forces to resistances, on the one hand, and velocities produced on the other, which appeared in 1328 in his *On the Proportions of Velocities in Motions*. According to Bradwardine's new theory, the proportion of force to resistance must be "duplicated" for a velocity to be doubled, "triplicated" for the velocity to be tripled, and so forth – where "duplicated" not infrequently was rendered "doubled," and "triplicated" as "tripled." Thus the proportion of nine to one was said to be "double" the proportion of three to one, so that nine to one would, according to Bradwardine's theory, produce a velocity double that produced by a proportion of three to one.

Given that Richard Kilvington's *Sophismata* was earlier than Bradwardine's *On the Proportions of Velocities in Motions*, it follows that the context of disputations on *sophismata* was more important than Bradwardine's *On Proportions* in leading to the Oxford Calculatory movement, and yet Bradwardine's mathematical physics certainly contributed to the impact that the Oxford Calculators had, first at the University of Paris, and later at Italian, Spanish, and eastern European universities. For the next 200 years and more, university student textbooks would include the mathematics of proportions needed for Bradwardine's science of motion as well as the standard topics of logic and *sophismata*, etc. (Not discussed here are the external factors that may have contributed to the

turn to quantification, but see Kaye (1998) for an argument that economic factors were important).

In earlier surveys of the work of the Oxford Calculators, Richard Kilvington played a relatively small part, but that was because none of his work was in print until the *Sophismata* were edited in 1990; because his *Questions on Aristotle's Physics*, ascribed in manuscript to "Magister Richard," had tentatively been assigned to Richard Swineshead; and because his *Questions on Aristotle's On Generation and Corruption* and *Nicomachean Ethics*, and on Peter Lombard's *Sentences* had been little noticed. More recently Elzbieta Jung has begun to edit the rest of Kilvington's corpus beyond the *Sophismata*. Eventually, we will be able to see the application of the Oxford Calculatory approach throughout the curriculum, including theology and Kilvington will take a central place among the Oxford Calculators.

Jung has shown that the order of composition of Kilvington's works is (1) the *Sophismata*, before 1325; (2) the *Questions on Aristotle's On Generation and Corruption*; (3) *Questions on Aristotle's Physics*; (4) *Questions Aristotle's Ethics*; and finally (5) *Questions on the Sentences*, which she dates as before the end of 1334. In the *Sophismata* there is nothing to indicate that Kilvington had any idea of Bradwardine's new theory of the proportions of velocities in motions. In his *Questions on Aristotle's On Generation and Corruption*, Kilvington seems to know Bradwardine's usage according to which the proportion of nine to one is called "double" the proportion of three to one, but Kilvington rejects this approach because he says that in the case of proportions of lesser inequality (i.e., where the first term is less than the second), proportions become less by being duplicated, as the proportion of one to nine is less than the proportion of one to three. In his *Questions on Aristotle's Physics*, however, Kilvington accepts Bradwardine's theory of the relation of proportions of force to resistance to velocities. We may suppose then that in the years around 1330, Bradwardine's function came gradually to be accepted, and remained the dominant view for the next 200 years, despite a minority who protested against it, mostly on mathematical

grounds. Jung has argued that Kilvington's *Questions on the Physics* are before Bradwardine's *De proportionibus*, and hence that Kilvington influenced Bradwardine in the introduction of "Bradwardine's function" rather than vice versa. There is more evidence, however, that those who rejected Bradwardine's function often took arguments against it from Kilvington's work. It would be safer to say, then, that Bradwardine and Kilvington were sparring partners in this matter. In later years both Bradwardine and Kilvington, along with Walter Burley and others, were employed as members of the circle of Richard of Bury, Bishop of Durham (see articles on these individuals).

William Heytesbury's 1335 *Rules for Solving Sophismata* follows mainly in the footsteps of Kilvington's *Sophismata*, with some influence from the work of Bradwardine. In addition to discussing questions of dynamics – how velocities are related to the forces and resistances causing them – Bradwardine had also discussed the measure of motion with respect to effect (*tanquam penes effectum*). For instance, how should a velocity of rotation be measured? Should it be measured by the motion of the fastest moved point of the body rotating, or by some average of the velocities of the various parts or points of the body? Likewise, the question might be raised as to how motions nonuniform in time, that is, motions that are accelerated or decelerated regularly or irregularly, are to be dealt with. Heytesbury, Dumbleton, and later authors accept the so-called Merton mean-speed theorem, recognizing that a uniformly accelerated body will cover the same distance as it would cover if in the same period of time it moved uniformly with the velocity it had at the middle instant of the motion.

In Heytesbury's *Rules for Solving Sophismata* natural philosophical issues are involved in many, but not all of the chapters. Thus the sixth chapter concerns the measures of motion in the categories of place, quality, and quantity, but the earlier chapters concern: (1) insoluble sentences, such as the liar paradox; (2) paradoxes involving the terms to know and to doubt; (3) relative terms; (4) beginning and ceasing or first and last instants;

and (5) maxima and minima. Thus it is mainly the last three chapters that deal with the natural philosophical topics with which the Oxford Calculators are primarily identified.

It is generally accepted that most of the Oxford Calculators tended to follow a nominalist, ontologically minimalist, or Ockhamist line, as opposed to a realist line. Thus they assumed that there are no Platonic forms existing outside of individual substances and they tried to understand the intension and remission of forms in terms of the actual qualitative forms inhering in a body. Although they did not all discuss the matter explicitly, it appears that most of the Oxford Calculators (but not Walter Burley) followed John Duns Scotus in holding the so-called addition theory of intension or increase of quality (see Sylla 1973). In his 1968 article "Ockham and some Mertonians" (Weisheipl 1968, p. 173), James A. Weisheipl said that the Mertonians, except Walter Burley, accepted the Ockhamist teaching in logic and natural philosophy "as a matter of course." In contrast to the other Mertonian Calculators, Burley was a "realist" in the sense that he argued against Ockham's nominalism in logic.

If William of Ockham is not included as an "Oxford Calculator" – because he did not take a calculational and sophistical approach to natural philosophical problems – does it make sense to include Walter Burley? Burley had already left Oxford to study theology in Paris long before the late 1320s when Bradwardine's *On Proportions* appeared, so his Aristotelian commentaries are more like those of the late thirteenth century than like Kilvington's commentaries consisting of a short list of very long questions. Actually, Burley wrote a commentary on Aristotle's *Physics* with fairly long questions as well as an exposition of the text when he was still teaching at Oxford, not long after 1300. (Burley's early *Physics* commentary seems to have a close relationship to that of Thomas Wylton, something that has yet to be entirely sorted out.) But Burley revised his *Physics* commentary while teaching in the Faculty of Arts at Paris at the same time as his work in theology, and he completed the revision of the last books after he was already a member of



Richard of Bury's circle, back in England, and associated with Bradwardine and Kilvington. It is, however, Burley's work in logic and his separate treatises or questions that reveal his similarities to the likes of Heytesbury or Richard Swineshead. Two of his works, the so-called *Tractatus primus* and *Tractatus secundus* on the intension and remission of forms, were off-shoots of his bachelor lectures and disputations on the *Sentences* at Paris. Nevertheless, they pay the same attention to issues of indivisibles and continuity in a natural philosophical context as do the other works of the Oxford Calculators. Burley's quodlibetal question *On the First and Last Instant* is also calculatory in nature as are some of his later works composed in the 1330s.

Of all the Oxford masters who might be included among the "Oxford Calculators," it was Thomas Bradwardine, William Heytesbury, and Richard Swineshead whose works received multiple early modern editions, commentaries, and elaborations. Out of its Oxford context, Richard Swineshead's *Book of Calculations (Liber calculationum)* appears to be a work of mathematical physics, covering the sub-topics that might be expected to arise from Aristotle's natural philosophical works, but then elaborating quantitative "calculations." At Oxford itself, however, the work of Bradwardine, Heytesbury, and Kilvington was closely related to works on natural philosophy, to which logical and mathematical methods might be applied. Perhaps surprisingly, early modern printers did not choose to publish the more natural philosophical works of the Oxford Calculators, except in the case of Walter Burley, whose thorough commentary on Aristotle's *Physics*, as it was revised at the University of Paris in the 1320s and later, received multiple printings.

A larger gap in our knowledge comes from the fact that John Dumbleton's *Summa of Logic and Natural Philosophy* has never been printed. Dumbleton's explanations of the theories of latitudes and degrees shared by the Oxford Calculators and of Bradwardine's theory of the proportions of velocities in motions go a long way to reveal what is tacitly assumed about natural philosophy by William Heytesbury and

Richard Swineshead. A start to fill in this gap has been made in the article on John Dumbleton elsewhere in this volume.

Of all the individuals who might be considered Oxford Calculators, this encyclopedia contains separate articles on John Dumbleton, Richard Kilvington, Richard Swineshead, Thomas Bradwardine, Walter Burley, and William Heytesbury, but it lacks an article on Roger Swineshead, probably because Roger has sometimes been lumped together with Richard Swineshead. Given this lack, something more about Roger Swineshead will be said here.

In his thorough work on medieval theories of insolubles and on the exercise of obligations, Paul Spade has made clear the significant place that Roger Swineshead held in each of these traditions. With regard to the exercise of "obligations," Roger Swineshead directed the respondent to reply taking into account only the position, which he had been obligated to affirm, whereas Burley had earlier required that the respondent in obligations exercises take account not only of the position to which he was originally obligated, but also of all the other propositions that he had accepted, rejected, or labeled doubtful earlier in the exercise. With regard to insolubles, Roger Swineshead took a position that might be regarded as a variant of the position held by Thomas Bradwardine. According to Bradwardine, for a proposition to be true, it must not only "signify as is the case," but also not signify other than is the case. To this Roger Swineshead added that for a proposition to be true it must not "falsify itself" (see Spade 2005). From this position, Swineshead concluded that some insolubles do signify as is the case, despite being false – as is true for the proposition "*a* is false," where *a* is the proposition itself. In some valid formal inferences, Swineshead said, falsehoods follow from truths. And, finally, in the case of insolubles, two mutually contradictory propositions can be false at the same time (Spade 2005). In his 1335 *Rules for Solving Sophismata*, Heytesbury added to the debate about insolubles the requirement that the circumstances in which the insoluble is asserted must be taken into account before anything can be said about its truth or falsehood.



In his *On Natural Motions* (c. 1337), Roger Swineshead compiled a work that included both natural philosophical theory and the particular methods of the Calculators (see Sylla 1987a). Unlike Dumbleton, who was to advocate the mainstream theories that the other Calculators simply assumed, Roger Swineshead advocated theories that, whether on purpose or not, made it easy to reach apparently paradoxical conclusions. Thus he defined “uniform degrees” of qualities or velocities and uniformly difform degrees, where the “uniform degrees” were indivisibly greater than a uniformly difform distribution that included every degree of a quality less than the given uniform degree. There is only one complete manuscript of Swineshead’s *On Natural Motions*, which currently is MS Erfurt Amplonian F 135, but a famous student notebook from the 1340s still existing as MS Paris, BNF 16621 includes excerpts from *On Natural Motions* (in a more accurate version than the Erfurt manuscript), along with excerpts from Dumbleton, *Summa*; Burley, *On First and Last Instants*; Bradwardine, *On Proportions of Velocities in Motions*; and other calculatory works (see Kaluza 1978).

But it is Richard Swineshead’s *Book of Calculations* that gives the Oxford Calculators their name (see Murdoch and Sylla 1976). That book begins by discussing the measures and intension and remission of qualities and works up to more and more complicated situations. With regard to bodies that are non-uniformly qualified with whiteness or heat, Swineshead asks what degree of quality should be assigned to the body as a whole – the maximum degree perhaps, or some sort of average degree? If there is a body that has two different qualities, say it is both hot and moist, is there an overall degree that might be assigned? And how will the substantial form of a body change as the qualities change? As water is heated, will it immediately begin to become air, or only after the hotness has reached a certain degree? And if two bodies with different degrees of various qualities like hot, cold, wet, and dry act on each other and resist each other, what will determine the force with which one body acts on another – will it involve the maximum degree? The average degree? The extent of the body? The

“quantity of quality” if certain bodies have, so to speak a greater density of quality than others (think of specific heats)? If the force must be greater than the resistance for action to occur, how can hot and cold bodies interacting with each other each act on the other at the same time (this is the problem of “reaction”)?

In later treatises of the work, Richard Swineshead deals with the power of light sources, as measured by the intensity of the light they cast together with the distance to which the illumination extends. He then turns to cases of local motion. After a treatise in which he shows how Bradwardine’s function works to calculate what velocity will result if it is known what velocity results from an initial situation and how the force or resistance changes, Swineshead attacks problems where the resistance to a mover results from the medium in which the mover is exerting its force. Here the Bradwardinian theory, as well as the classical Aristotelian theory, runs into problems, because both theories indicate what the “velocity” will be for a given force and a given resistance. If, however, the degree of resistance depends on the position of a moving body in a nonuniform resistance, there will be two, most likely contradictory ways to calculate velocity – either by the ratio of force to resistance (this is the measure of motion with respect to cause) or by the distance moved in a given time (this is the measure of motion with respect to effect).

As if this were not a sufficient problem, Swineshead then supposes that the nonuniform resistance of the medium moves, as the mobile itself moves. It is not difficult to see that if there were a medium with little resistance with a boundary layer next to a medium of high resistance, and if this boundary layer were moving in the direction the mobile is moving, then the mobile might move up very quickly to the boundary layer and get stuck there, if the boundary layer were moving faster than the mobile, given its force, was able to move in the more resistant medium. But then the velocity of the mobile within the boundary layer would not correspond to the proportion of its force to the resistance of medium, but rather simply to the velocity of the boundary layer.

In all of this, it appears that Swineshead is interested providing exercises that will give the students facility in working with such calculations as applied to physical problems. The problems are much more complex than the problems that Galileo would later deal with, assuming nonresistant mediums, and they bear some relation to hydrodynamics applied to biological systems. In later Treatises, turning from local motion to alteration, and assuming that an agent of qualitative change, such as a heat source, causes a greater effect next to itself, which decreases, perhaps uniformly, the farther away from the agent one gets, Swineshead considers how, over time, the maximum degree might be induced into an extended body. In the separate article on Richard Swineshead, reference is made to Swineshead's Treatise 11, which discusses what would happen if a thin rod were to fall through a channel in the earth until it began to pass the center, in which case part of the rod would begin to try to move back toward the center.

How then are we to understand the context and purpose of Swineshead's *Book of Calculations*? On one level, it seems to be a book of mathematics applied to various natural philosophical problems. But while the natural philosophical problems are indeed like problems that had long been raised in connection with commentaries on the natural works of Aristotle, they are often more complex and technical. Much has been made of the tendency of fourteenth-century philosophers to deal with problems *secundum imaginationem*, that is supposing imaginary situations, and inquiring what would happen in such a case. It has been supposed that this resulted from the condemnations at Paris in 1277, as a result of which philosophers teaching at the university of Paris were enjoined not to deny that God might do anything that is not a logical contradiction. So, it followed, God might create a vacuum by annihilating everything inside the sphere of the moon. What then? If there was a mobile without any resistance, would it not move infinitely fast, according to the theories of Aristotle or Bradwardine?

Swineshead, however, does not seem to be invoking God's absolute power in designing the problems to which he applies his "calculations" – almost all of which, notably, involve juggling

quantities in the mind without any actual numbers or arithmetic being involved. Rather, the point seems to be to exhibit what can be achieved with the available logical and mathematical tools. There really is not a special subject matter, in which the students are expected to be interested. The point is not to study the ballistics of cannons or the motion of ships through water or any other practical problem. The obvious conclusion seems to be that, just as Heytesbury's *Rules for Solving Sophismata* was written as a handbook for students who would take part in disputations on sophismata, so Swineshead's *Book of Calculations* was most immediately to be an aid to students in their disputations, whether in the very same disputations on sophismata as Heytesbury's book, or in disputations connected with the curriculum in natural philosophy or ethics. In fact, we can see Richard Kilvington and then later scholastics applying calculatory techniques in their commentaries on Aristotle's *Ethics* and on Peter Lombard's *Book of Sentences*.

When calculatory techniques were applied in theology, was it an incredible misapplication of technical brain power to matters better left to the heart? This may very well be a reasonable judgment in the case of a theologian such as Jean de Ripa, who seems to have been influenced by the Calculators (see Coleman 1975; Kaye 1998). This issue, however, goes beyond the work of the Oxford Calculators proper, and will not be pursued here.

Very soon after the 1330s when calculatory ideas developed at Oxford, they spread to Paris, perhaps as Oxford students traveled to Paris to study theology, as was the case of Burley and Dumbleton. Nicholas Oresme and Albert of Saxony wrote treatises extending, on the one hand, and simplifying on the other, Bradwardine's theory of the proportions of velocities in motions. Later the logical ideas of the likes of Heytesbury were widely studied in Italian universities and then in eastern European universities such as Erfurt (see Sylla 1996a). At the beginning of the sixteenth century, Alvarus Thomas of Lisbon, teaching at Paris, thoroughly mastered Swineshead's *Book of Calculations*, as well as some of the extensions of his work by Nicholas

Oresme, and discussed astutely some of Swineshead's knottier problems (see Sylla 1989, 2004). Although the label "calculators" was not applied in the fourteenth century to Swineshead or the men surrounding him – at the time, "calculations" was more likely to bring to mind the work of astrologers – the label began to be used in the sixteenth century, when it became common to label the different philosophical approaches or "ways" (*via modernorum, antiqui, nominales*, etc. see Wallace 1969).

## Cross-References

- ▶ Insolubles
- ▶ Intension and Remission of Forms
- ▶ John Dumbleton
- ▶ Obligations Logic
- ▶ Richard Swineshead
- ▶ Thomas Bradwardine
- ▶ Walter Burley
- ▶ William Heytesbury

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## Pain

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### Abstract

The Latin word *dolor*, as it is used in medieval philosophy, can refer to simple physical pain or to an emotion of the sensory soul. According to Thomas Aquinas, physical pain is an unpleasant experience of something repugnant to the body; emotional pain of the sensory part of the soul is a reaction to an experience of something taking place against sensory appetite. This analysis was introduced by Plato and was often repeated in ancient sources of medieval philosophy. While medieval thinkers usually regarded physical pain as supervenient on immediate bodily sensations, some of them followed Avicenna in arguing that physical pleasure and pain are also felt directly and should be added to the touch qualities. Avicenna distinguished between 15 sorts of bodily pain. Latin authors usually located the experience of physical pleasure and pain in the sensory moving power which was also the seat of the emotions. This was in line with the Aristotelian view that nature had provided all animals with the sense of touch in order to keep them away from what is harmful – pain immediately triggered avoidance.

The most common Latin word for physical pain in medieval philosophy is *dolor*. This term, like the corresponding Greek word (*lupē*), can refer to simple physical pain or to an emotion of the sensory soul. Thomas Aquinas (*Summa theologiae* II-1, 35.7) describes external physical pain and internal emotional pain as follows: external pain is caused by something repugnant to the body and internal pain is caused by what is repugnant to sensory appetite. External pain follows an external perception, particularly that of touch, and internal pain follows an act of imagination or reason.

The distinction between physical and emotional pain was traditional. It was introduced by Plato, who argued that there are bodily motions which are not perceived and others that are; of the latter some are perceived neutrally, some are perceived as pleasant, and others as unpleasant. Pleasures and distresses which do not simply arise from the body and are associated with desires and evaluations form the feeling component of all emotions (*Phil.* 33d, 43b-c, 47d-e; *Tim.* 64d). There are similar distinctions in Aristotle and in the Stoics, who taught the extirpation of emotions as misguided judgments but separated these from bodily feelings. The central idea of the traditional analysis is the distinction between pain as an unpleasant experience of a noxious state of some part of the body and this state as the cause and the object of the experience. While the experience takes place in the soul, this involves a bodily localization of

where it hurts. This distinction is formulated in a famous passage from the Peripatetic Strato of Lampsacus: “It is not in the foot that we feel hurt when we stub it, nor in the head when we crack it, nor in the finger when we cut it . . . we suppose the hurt from the wound is not where it is sensed, but where it originated, as the soul is drawn toward the place where suffering occurred” (frag. 111 in Wehrli). A similar account was known to medieval authors through Nemesius of Emesa’s *De natura hominis* (8, 64.1–15).

According to Avicenna, physical pleasure and pain are often felt as concomitants to perceptions of particular qualities, usually those pertaining to touch, but there are also acts of touch which are experiences of bodily pleasure or pain without involving another underlying sensation (*Liber de anima* II.3, 137–8). While medieval authors usually regarded pain as supervenient on immediate sensations, some of them, such as Pietro d’Abano, argued in an Avicennian manner that physical pleasure and pain are also felt directly and should be added to the touch qualities (*Conciliator differentiarum* 77).

Latin authors usually located the experience of physical pleasure and pain in the sensory moving power which was also the seat of the emotions. (See, for example, Thomas Aquinas, (*Summa theologiae* II-1, 35.7; John Duns Scotus, *Ordinatio* III.15, 43.) This was in line with the Aristotelian view that nature had provided all animals with the sense of touch in order to keep them away from what is harmful. Pain immediately triggered avoidance. Whether physical pain was an occurrent sensory quality or a cause of emotional sadness, many authors referred in this connection to compassion between body and soul.

Physical pain was discussed in medicine and in theological questions of eternal punishment and Christ’s suffering. It was not a central philosophical issue in itself. Peter John Olivi was one of the Latin authors who were interested in its varieties – material was abundantly offered by Avicenna’s distinction between 15 sorts of bodily pain (*Canon* I.2.2.20).

## Cross-References

- ▶ [Emotions](#)
- ▶ [Ibn Sīnā, Abū ‘Alī \(Avicenna\)](#)
- ▶ [Philosophical Psychology, Jewish Tradition](#)
- ▶ [Thomas Aquinas](#)

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## Parisian Condemnation of 1277

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### Abstract

The act of censorship issued by the Bishop of Paris, Stephen Tempier, on March 7, 1277, constitutes one of the most significant events of thirteenth century intellectual history. Brandishing the threat of excommunication to prevent their circulation, Bishop Tempier condemned 219 philosophical and theological theses that he judged heterodoxical. In so doing, he was explicitly attacking the teaching of certain members of the Parisian Arts Faculty. Beyond the confrontation between orthodox ideas and contentious doctrines, the Parisian condemnation of 1277 allows us to observe a clash between divergent views of the status of philosophy and speaks to us of concurrent modes of existence. Consequently, it is not only a question of theoretical conflicts but also of epistemological and ethical issues that assume critical significance in the history of western thought.

If one tells the truth, one is sure, sooner or later, to be found out.  
Oscar Wilde

### The Protagonists and the Circumstances

On January 18, 1277, Pope John XXI, to whom suspicious ideas circulating in the Parisian schools were reported, mandated the Bishop of Paris, Stephen Tempier, to conduct an investigation into these allegations. Bolstered by a commission of 16 theologians, including the eminent secular Master Henry of Ghent, Bishop Tempier accomplished this investigative task, assigned to

him by the Pope, with great diligence. He drew up a list of 219 articles that, in his eyes, were heterodoxical and, exceeding the mandate he had been granted by John XXI, on March 7, 1277, promulgated a decree condemning these articles that, in his eyes, were nothing more than “blatant and execrable errors.” The threat that henceforth hung over the heads of the masters of Christianity’s intellectual capital were serious, since Bishop Tempier had determined on the penalty of excommunication for any individual caught deliberately spreading forbidden doctrines, as well as any person who would attend such a lecture, unless the latter denounced the wrongdoing to the Chancellor of the University of Paris or the Bishop himself within a period of 7 days. As a preface to the “syllabus” containing the 219 censored theses (it is worth noting that certain manuscripts transmitting the Parisian act of censorship contain 220 articles), Stephen Tempier wrote a letter to which we must pay careful attention if we want to grasp the explicit motives for the most important doctrinal condemnation of the Middle Ages. The Bishop identifies the target of his act of censorship as certain “scholars of the Arts Faculty” (*studentes in artibus*). This expression designates the professors and students in philosophy, since, throughout the thirteenth century, the teaching of liberal arts, then required to gain access to higher studies, which were in theology, law, and medicine, had expanded to include the teaching of the Graeco-Arabic corpus of philosophy, which is, essentially, the works of Aristotle and his Arabic commentators, in the forefront of which could be found Avicenna and Averroes. It is important to be aware that, since the first half of the twelfth century, “multicultural teams” of translators, often located in Toledo, were employed to make this philosophical corpus available in Latin for western Christian scholars. That said, the episcopal letter did not name these philosophers that it accuses of teaching ideas contrary to the Catholic faith, but several medieval manuscripts show us that the philosophical movement denounced by Stephen Tempier included in its ranks the Masters Siger of Brabant and Boethius of Dacia, key figures in the Parisian Arts Faculty in the years

1260–1270. The letter-preface of Bishop Tempier went further than condemning the presumed fact that certain members of the Arts Faculty had professed or discussed in the schools a series of doctrines judged to be heterodoxical. It also reproached those who devoted themselves to such controversial teaching for having strayed beyond the boundaries of their own faculty. Thus, it demonstrates the existing tension at the time between, on one hand, the philosophy professionals of the university, whose teaching then covered all fields of knowledge, from logic to metaphysics, including physics and ethics, and, on the other hand, the theology professors, whose concern was to clearly demarcate the borders beyond which the competence of philosophers did not extend, to preserve the superiority and institutional specificity of their own discipline. The risk of a “conflict of faculties” was very real, since the comprehensive philosophical corpus that the Arts Masters of the 1270s were responsible for transmitting touched on subjects – for example, the causality of God in the natural world – traditionally reserved for doctors in theology. What could be done with these intersecting points where the knowledge of philosophers encountered that of theologians? The statutes promulgated in 1272 for the Parisian Arts Faculty attempted to offer a response to this question with three clauses: (1) it was forbidden for Arts Masters to discuss purely theological questions, that is, subjects relating directly to the work of understanding the content of the Holy Scriptures, for example, the Trinity and the Incarnation; (2) if it happened that Arts Masters encountered questions that touched upon both philosophy and the Christian faith, they absolutely had to resolve them in accordance with the teachings of the Catholic faith, under pain of being declared heretical or excluded from their faculty if they resolved them differently; and finally, (3) if the Arts Masters found themselves in the presence of philosophical doctrines contrary to the Christian faith, they had the duty to refute them or, if they felt incapable of doing so, declare them false and erroneous or even pass over them in silence. In fact, such measures placed the Arts Masters in an untenable position, as if they had to square the

circle, since it was asked of them both to never touch theology and to always take account of the imperatives of the faith in their teaching duties which, however, had to be restricted to the field of purely philosophical knowledge. This balancing act required of the philosophers of Paris could explain, among other factors, the presence of a crucial passage in the letter-prologue that Bishop Tempier wrote, in which he accuses the scholars of the Arts Faculty of having tried to conceal their adherence to heterodoxical ideas, in affirming that what is true according to philosophy is not true according to the Catholic faith, “as if there were two contrary truths,” writes the Bishop who, to avoid alienating “simple people,” rushes to condemn such a manner of speaking that historiography would refer to as the “doctrine of the double truth.” That no university philosopher of the time supported such a doctrine is no longer contested by historians of today; that Tempier interpreted the Arts Masters’ writings in this way is an archival fact which needs to be taken into account. The episcopal letter finished with a verdict condemning the *De amore* of Andreas Capellanus, a work of courtly literature dating from the twelfth century, as well as works dealing with the divinatory arts and other occult practices, Bishop Tempier judging them all as “contrary to the orthodox faith and good morals.” Thus, as was the case for the other episodes of censorship in the Christian west, a solidarity of evil was supposed between dissident thought, libertine behavior, and occult knowledge, three themes that the Bishop of Paris subjected to the same opprobrium.

### **The Events that Led to the 1277 Parisian Condemnation**

The Parisian condemnation of 1277 did not arrive ex nihilo. On the contrary, we may consider it as the culmination of a series of crucial events marking the intellectual history of the thirteenth century. In 1210, a synod called by the Archbishop of Sens, Peter of Corbeil, ruled against the teaching in Paris, whether public or private, of Aristotle’s books of natural philosophy (*libri naturales*), as well as related commentaries.

A sentence of excommunication was pronounced against whosoever contravened this directive. In 1215, the Papal Legate, Cardinal Robert of Courçon, whom Pope Innocent III had charged with reorganizing the academic curriculum in Paris, imposed a restrictive program of studies on the Faculty of Arts. In this document, which contains the earliest university statutes known by historians, a distinction is made between compulsory (grammar and logic), optional (mathematics and ethics), and forbidden subjects. Reiterating the anti-Aristotelian measures of 1210, that were accompanied by the same sentence of excommunication, the statutes promulgated in 1215 under the auspices of the Papal Legate forbade Arts Masters from lecturing on Aristotle's natural philosophy writings (including the metaphysics), as well as the *summae* arising from these works. The institutional measures of 1210 and 1215 demonstrate beyond all doubt that, already at this time, certain members of high ecclesiastical rank perceived the peripatetic philosophical system as a threat to Christian thought as it had traditionally developed in the west since patristic times. A subtle change in orientation, with notable repercussions for subsequent decades, occurred in 1231, with the appearance of Pope Gregory IX's bull *Parens scientiarum* (the mother of sciences). Among the measures in this document, considered by historians the "basic charter" of the University of Paris, it is important to remember the following: the Pope preserved the banning of Aristotelian *libri naturales*, but he mitigated it considerably by explaining that it would only last for the period during which the contentious writings were examined in order to purge them of any errors discovered. (This undertaking of intellectual purging would never end, however.) Furthermore, for a period of 7 years, the pope abrogated the penalty of excommunication that threatened the professors who would have contravened the teaching prohibitions, and he granted university masters the right to decide themselves on the required content of their courses. In so doing, Gregory IX opened the doors of the University of Paris to peripatetic works of philosophy which had previously been prohibited. In fact, in 1255, the Faculty of Arts issued new statutes

stipulating an obligatory program of studies in which the whole of Aristotle's translated works were included, as well as apocryphal works, such as the *Book of Causes*, an adaptation of Proclus' *Elements of Theology*, which seemed to have been composed in scholarly circles in Baghdad in the ninth century of the Christian era. In this way, the Faculty of Arts became an authentic faculty of philosophy, and its professors began the vast and profound undertaking to rationally comprehend the whole of reality, an undertaking that could at any moment collide with the Christian vision of the world. Between 1267 and 1273, in a series of lectures given at the University of Paris, the great Franciscan theologian Bonaventure warned his contemporaries about the danger that certain of Aristotle's doctrines represented for the Christian faith and the peril that a pagan philosophy sought for its own sake posed for human redemption. In 1270, while another great theologian, the Dominican Thomas Aquinas, was busy using the weapons of reason to fight this supposedly Averroist doctrine that historiography, following Leibniz, would call "monopsychism," Stephen Tempier, for his part, was, for the first time, condemning the teaching of 13 philosophical theses. The content of this first doctrinal sanction issued by the Bishop of Paris prefigures in condensed form the much more developed act of censorship that he would promulgate 7 years later.

### The Principal Doctrines Censored

Given their number and diversity, as well as the apparent disorder in which they occur, it is obviously impossible to offer here an exhaustive and detailed exposé of the 219 (or 220) articles condemned on March 7, 1277. Nonetheless, we may discern a certain number of major themes that, once brought together, comprise the basis of the doctrinal issue of the Parisian censorship. Certain prohibited theses are striking because of their excessive nature and their outrageous character in the context of the sensibility and beliefs of a thirteenth century Christian conscience. This is the case for articles 16, 152, 174, 175, and 180 that claim, respectively, "that if one says

something is heretical because it is contrary to the faith, we should not care about the faith,” “that theological discourse is based on fables,” “that there are fables and falsehoods in the Christian religion, as in other religions,” “that the Christian religion prevents one from learning,” and “that one should not pray.” Other censored theses confront head-on certain of the most essential dogmatic foundations of Catholic doctrine. This is the case, for example, of those that concern the dogma of the Holy Trinity and that seem to echo the reprimands of Stephen Tempier when he writes, in his letter-preface, that “scholars of the Arts Faculty” who profess reprehensible errors “exceed the limits of their own faculty.” Consequently, it is not surprising that the Bishop of Paris prohibited articles 1 and 2 that maintain, respectively, that “God is not triune because the trinity is incompatible with supreme simplicity (. . .)” and “that God cannot engender a being similar to himself, because something that is engendered by something has an origin upon which it depends (. . .).” On the other hand, the condemnation of a number of assertions does not seem explicable, except by presupposing an ideological bias and less than impartial attitude on the part of the Bishop of Paris and his “commission of inquiry.” The interpretation of the historical significance of the Parisian censure of 1277 must thus consider the contingency of interpretative patterns that the protagonists of this event could put into place. It is not improbable that Tempier and his coreligionists, seeking to rule against the spread of teaching that they considered perilous to the truths of the Christian faith, worked as well to promote the theses of a particular school of thought to which they were attached. This would explain the presence in the syllabus of certain articles such as the following: (92) “heavenly bodies are moved by an intrinsic principle, that is the soul, and they are moved by the soul and the appetite, like animals (. . .)”; (102) “the soul of heaven is an intelligence and the celestial orbs are not the instruments of intelligences but their organs, like the ear and the eye are organs of the sensitive power”; (126) “the possible intellect is actually nothing before understanding, because in an intelligible nature, being actually something is

being what is actually understanding”; (189) “when <heavenly> intelligence is full of forms, it imprints these forms on matter by heavenly bodies as with instruments”; and (204) “separate substances are located somewhere by means of their operation (. . .).” Moreover, Tempier’s syllabus contains theses that are surprising or striking, because they appear atypical in their historical context. This is the case for articles 20 and 148, which would please vegetarians and nutritionists, in proposing, respectively, “that a man may become numerically and individually another through means of nutrition” and “that the natural law forbids the murder of animals lacking reason, as well as that of animals with reason, though to a lesser degree” or articles 150 and 200 that Kant would not have repudiated, which stipulate, respectively, “that man must not be content with authority to be certain about a question” and “that duration and time are nothing in reality but exist only in apprehension.” We are also dumbfounded by reading about the astral theory of generation that article 188 supports: “if the power of the stars in a liquid is of a similar proportion to that found in the parents’ seed, a man may be engendered from this liquid (. . .)!” Aside from these theses, a large proportion of articles censored in 1277 could be distributed over four theoretical fields where confrontation with the champions of Catholic orthodoxy was inevitable. (I) In the field of philosophical theology, numerous prohibited theses seriously undermine or actually deny God’s omnipotence or omniscience. Most of them do so in adhering to a metaphysical vision according to which the First Principle, subsisting eternally in an impenetrable folding in of itself, can only produce effects in lower strata of reality through the mediation of secondary causes emanating from itself (e.g., heavenly intelligences or heavenly bodies). In that regard, we may invoke articles 3, 43, 54, and 63 of Tempier’s decree that say, respectively, “that God knows nothing other than himself,” “that the First Principle cannot be the cause of diverse realities produced down here below, except through the mediation of other causes (. . .)” and “that the First Principle cannot immediately produce realities, since they are new effects; now a new effect requires an immediate

cause that could be other than it is,” and “that God can not produce the effect of a secondary cause without the secondary cause itself.” (II) In the area of philosophical cosmology, a number of ideas struck down by the prohibition of the Bishop of Paris claim that the world in its entirety is eternal or that one of its components has always existed and will always exist (e.g., the human species, separate substances, or elements), assertions that run counter to Catholic dogma of the creation of the world from nothing at the beginning of time (*ex nihilo ab initio temporis*). On this point, we may refer to the following articles: (5) “all separate realities are coeternal with the First Principle”; (9) “there was no first man and there will be no last one, but, on the contrary, there has always been and there will always be the generation of man by man”; (87) “for all the species contained within it, the world is eternal and time is eternal (. . .)”; and (107) “the elements are eternal, although they are the effects of something new in terms of the configuration they now possess.” (III) In the field of noetics, a number of propositions that attracted the ire of Bishop Tempier converge to support the thesis of numerical unicity and separation of the intellect (the possible or potential one, that is, the one which receives intelligible forms, as well as the agent intellect, that is, the one which produces intelligible content): this is the famous doctrine, evoked earlier, that historiography has labeled “monopsychism” and whose paternity was attributed, rightly or wrongly (that is another story), to the Arabic philosopher Averroes. We may readily understand that such a doctrine appeared scandalous in the eyes of medieval Catholic theologians. Indeed, claiming that there is only a single intellect for all men, which is metaphysically separated from any one human body, in other words that the entity who possesses the power of thought does not belong to any one human being, amounts to depriving individual man of all immortality (since if something survives the death of the body of man, it could only be his intellectual soul), and, consequently, this is equivalent to denying any possibility of retribution in the hereafter for acts committed down here. In short, “monopsychism” saps the very foundations of Christian morality. In

that regard, we may refer to articles 32, 119, and 121 that posit, respectively, “that the intellect of all men is numerically one, since even if it is separated from a given body, it is not, however, separated from all bodies,” “that the operation of the separate intellect joins to the body in the same way as the operation of something not possessing the form by which it operates (. . .),” and “that the intellect, that is, the ultimate perfection of man, is radically separated.” (IV) A final doctrinal section together thseses that attack the possibility of human freedom by favoring one form or another of determinism: astral, emotional, or cognitive. Articles 129, 136, 159, and 162 of Tempier’s syllabus tend in this direction, in that they claim, respectively, “that, when a passion and a particular knowledge are actually present, will cannot act against them,” “that the man who acts out of passion acts out of constraint,” “that the will of man is necessitated by his cognition, like the appetite of the beast,” and “that our will is subject to the power of heavenly bodies.”

### **Beyond Heterodoxy: Other Issues of the Parisian Condemnation**

Historians were able to trace the origin of most of the articles prohibited by Tempier to the writings of Arts Masters who worked in the years preceding the decree of March 7, 1277, notably those of Siger of Brabant and Boethius of Dacia. Still, many condemned theses remain unidentified, which may be explained by invoking the loss, indeed the destruction, of the contentious works in which they were found, or the existence of a heterodoxical oral teaching which left no trace, or perhaps the fact that there are still many texts emanating from the Faculty of Arts that were not edited and that continue to sleep in manuscript libraries. Nonetheless, the problem is that, even in the case of theses whose written sources are identified, historians have noted a discrepancy between, on the one hand, what the passages from which the censored articles were extracted really want to say and, on the other hand, what Tempier’s decree had them say by removing them from their original contexts. An assertion

advanced by an Arts Master in a qualified, nuanced, and careful mode becomes, once pinned by the Bishop, a radical and audacious thesis, claiming to be absolute truth. One example will suffice to eloquently illustrate this phenomenon of distortion. In his treatise *On the Eternity of the World*, Boethius of Dacia teaches that creation (in the strict sense, that is, a production *ex nihilo*) is impossible from the point of view of natural causality which the physician (the philosopher of nature) must adopt, since, as experience proves, all natural agents produce their effects starting from a matter or a subject that preexists. From this, to know the ultimate truth about the duration of the world, Boethius invites his readers to return to the teachings of the Catholic faith that claims that the world was created in time, since, as he firmly established in his treatise, philosophy possesses no method of demonstration that could prove definitively one of the two alternatives, either eternity or the newness of the world. In other words, confronting a question of this sort that transcends the limits of philosophy as rational knowledge drawing its principles from the natural course of things, the philosopher acknowledges his incompetence and, since he is a believer, sends his readers back to the teachings of the Christian faith that admits the supernatural causality of a God who is the Creator. This is a carefully measured position, respectful of orthodoxy. Now, reading the decree of condemnation of March 7, 1277, we are led to believe that the philosopher is professing a doctrine of double truth identical to that which Tempier is denouncing, as we recall, in his letter-preface. Indeed, when the Bishop of Paris transposes Boethian thought to the register of his list of condemned articles, he has him claiming this: (90) “the physician (*naturalis philosophus*) must deny without qualification (*simpliciter*) the newness of the world, because he relies on natural causes and reasons. As for the believer, he may deny the eternity of the world, because he relies on supernatural causes.” This is the position of Boethius as expressed in his treatise *On the Eternity of the World*, with the exception of one word which changes everything: “*simpliciter*” (without qualification). While the Arts Master modestly argues that the newness of

the world, that is to say, its origin in time or the fact that it began to be, cannot be conceded by the physician as such, to the extent that it exceeds his inevitably naturalist perspective, leaving to the religious authorities the task of determining the absolute truth in this matter, Bishop Tempier wrongly understood that Boethius accepted the truth of the faith only to oppose it at once with a naturalistic rationalism elevated to the level of an absolute knowledge, in the light of which the creationist thesis unequivocally had to be rejected. As a general rule, Boethius and his colleagues of the Arts Faculty never claimed “that the possible or impossible without qualification (*simpliciter*), that is, according to all modes, is the equivalent to the possible or impossible according to philosophy,” contrary to what Tempier suggests here in article 146 of his syllabus, but instead they taught that what is impossible from the limited point of view of natural reason, to which philosophy is strictly bound, is possible for the person who believes in the action of a Supreme Cause transcending the limits of nature. Behind Stephen Tempier’s manifest lack of understanding of the subtleties of the Arts Masters’ position lies what we might term “the epistemological issue” of the condemnation of March 7, 1277. In the years preceding this date, the Arts Masters, to whom devolved the task of teaching the entirety of a philosophical corpus inherited from the Greeks and the Arabs, became aware of the intrinsic value of philosophy. Consequently, they developed an epistemological theory with a twofold objective: first, circumscribing the limits of the epistemic validity of diverse scientific disciplines for which they were, according to regulations, responsible (logic, physics, mathematics, metaphysics, and ethics); secondly and correlatively, guaranteeing the autonomy of philosophy as purely rational knowledge compared to the tenets of the Catholic faith and their hermeneutic consequences, which properly concern the teaching for which Theology Masters were responsible in their own faculty. Such a position on the part of the Arts Masters was new in the history of western Christianity. The document where this is expressed most forcefully and clearly was, unquestionably, the treatise *On the Eternity of the World* written by



Boethius of Dacia. While discussing the problem which gave the book its title, the Danish scholar establishes an epistemological doctrine that can be viewed as the “charter” of professional philosophers, consisting essentially of three methodological rules for Arts Masters: (1) a specialist in a particular philosophical discipline must identify the principles on which his science is based and the legitimate area of application of these principles; (2) as well, he must draw all appropriate conclusions flowing from the principles pertaining to his science accordingly, even if some might diverge from the truths of the Catholic faith; and (3) finally, in remaining firmly within the limits of his field of knowledge, he must deny any claim or proposition contradicting or even undermining the principles on which his science is based. In the eyes of a theologian like Tempier, with a unitary and Christo-centered vision of knowledge, according to which the profane sciences have value only in as much as they serve the interests of Christian theology, such a conception of philosophy, which proclaims far and wide its epistemological independence, was absolutely inadmissible. Article 18 of the 1277 syllabus is perfectly eloquent in that respect: to the claim according to which “the future resurrection must not be conceded by the philosopher, because it is impossible that it be examined by reason,” a thesis that is totally consistent with the writings of Boethius and his Arts colleagues, the Bishop of Paris replies that “it is an error, because even the philosopher must keep his intellect captive in submission to the faith.” The Arts Masters want to build up in its entirety a philosophy that is an end in itself; Tempier and his acolytes want to bring it down to the level of a mere auxiliary to Christian wisdom. From this, we have the condemnation of article 145 that contends “that there is no question that can be rationally debated that the philosopher must not debate and determine, because rational arguments are drawn from reality and philosophy must study all of reality in its diverse parts.” There were ethical consequences to the enthusiasm for philosophy as comprehensive self-regulated knowledge that drove the Arts Masters condemned by Bishop Tempier. Indeed, prior to the decree of March 7, 1277, certain members

of the Arts Faculty conceptualized a purely philosophical ideal of life based on the acquisition of intellectual virtues and oriented to attaining joyfulness of mind through the cognitive union with divine realities. This was a rigorous ethical program that came from a tradition of thought developed by the great Arabic philosophers, from al-Fārābī to Averroes, including Avicenna, and that ultimately had its roots in Aristotle’s key texts, such as Book X of the *Nicomachean Ethics* and Book XII of the *Metaphysics*. In favoring a true philosophical asceticism that devalued the pleasures of the flesh arising from the lower powers of sensibility in favor of intellectual pleasures flowing from the exercise of man’s most noble faculty, this new way of life, a potential rival to Christian ethics, was essentially addressed to professional philosophers who, thanks to this, became aware of forming a class of elite thinkers that was superior to other social classes. Here again, it is Boethius of Dacia who offers the most complete manifesto reflecting this trend toward an autonomous practice of philosophy in which man’s intellectual essence is fully realized. In his treatise *On the Supreme Good*, after having determined that a morally good human life is that which is devoted to the knowledge of what is true, the Danish scholar concluded that the ultimate goal for human beings down here resides in the loving and joyful contemplation of the First Principle, which gives existence to all beings and at which the philosopher arrives in the end of a “journey of the mind” that traverses the ascending ladder of beings. Undoubtedly, as a consequence, Boethius and his Arts colleagues professed “that there is no more excellent status than to give oneself to philosophy,” and they let it be understood “that only philosophers are the wise men of the world,” so Bishop Tempier reports in articles 40 and 154 of the syllabus. We can well see how such propositions could appear seditious to the theologians and men of the church who formed the ruling class of medieval society. We also perceive what a threat the advancing of a system of philosophical virtues capable of competing with the order of theological values could represent for Tempier and his acolytes. Therefore, the ecclesiastical power had to condemn some theses such as

those that claim “that chastity is no greater good than perfect abstinence” (article 181) and “that charity is no greater good than perfect friendship” (article 220). The scandalous notion of man attaining salvation through philosophy started to emerge from the ethical discourse of Arts Masters, as is testified by article 157 of the Parisian decree: “if one is well ordered according to his intellect and affections, as one can be sufficiently through the intellectual virtues and other moral virtues of which the Philosopher (i.e., Aristotle) speaks in the Ethics, one is sufficiently disposed for eternal happiness.” However, with respect to what we might term the “ethical issue” of the Parisian condemnation, Tempier’s document acts as a mirror that deforms as well as reflects its object. Indeed, while the Arts Masters, as we have seen, favor an intellectual hedonism and exhort their audience to master their passions, the Bishop of Paris paints a picture of them as individuals with dissolute morals, whose life would follow such maxims as “the sin against nature, like abuse in intercourse, although contrary to the nature of the species, is not, however, contrary to the nature of the individual” (article 166) and “simple fornication, such as that of an unmarried man with an unmarried woman, is not a sin” (article 183). In doing so, Stephen Tempier’s condemnation sealed for one last time the alliance of the heretic and the libertine to better denounce the Arts Masters who, however, wanted nothing more nor less than the peaceful coexistence of the philosopher and the theologian.

### Cross-References

- ▶ [Arabic Texts: Philosophy, Latin Translations of](#)
- ▶ [Aristotelianism in the Greek, Latin, Syriac, Arabic, and Hebrew Traditions](#)
- ▶ [Aristotle, Arabic](#)
- ▶ [Boethius of Dacia](#)
- ▶ [Bonaventure](#)
- ▶ [Contemplative Happiness and Civic Virtue](#)
- ▶ [Epistemology](#)
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- ▶ [al-Fārābī, Abū Naṣr](#)
- ▶ [Greek Texts Translated into Hebrew](#)

- ▶ [Henry of Ghent](#)
- ▶ [Heresy](#)
- ▶ [Ibn Rushd, Muḥammad ibn Aḥmad al-Ḥafīd \(Averroes\)](#)
- ▶ [Ibn Sīnā, Abū ‘Alī \(Avicenna\)](#)
- ▶ [Inquisition](#)
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- ▶ [Nicomachean Ethics, Commentaries on Aristotle’s](#)
- ▶ [Philosophy, Arabic](#)
- ▶ [Siger of Brabant](#)
- ▶ [Thomas Aquinas](#)
- ▶ [Universities and Philosophy](#)
- ▶ [Virtue and Vice](#)

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## Parva Naturalia, Commentaries on Aristotle's

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### Abstract

The present entry gives an overview of the reception of Aristotle's *Parva Naturalia* in the medieval West from the twelfth to the fifteenth centuries. It shows that the content of the *Parva Naturalia*, and thus of the commentaries on them, has not always been the same as in modern editions and that even in the Middle Ages it fluctuated. In a first period, most commentators focused on *De sensu*, *De memoria*, *De somno*, *De insomniis*, *De divinatione per somnum*, and *De longitudine* only, apparently because James of Venice's translations of *De iuventute*, *De respiratione*, and *De vita* were no longer at their disposal. In a second period, when new translations had been made by William of Moerbeke, commentaries could and did focus on all of the above texts as well as on *De motu animalium*. In the second half of the fourteenth as well as in the fifteenth

century, the study of the *Parva Naturalia* at the University of Paris was delimited to the same texts with which the earliest commentators had dealt. This is reflected in the composition of several fifteenth-century commentaries, most of them from Paris. In Germany and Central Europe, the *Parva Naturalia* was mostly studied on the basis of a compendium by Joannes Kronsbein. These commentaries display a typical division of *De vita* into two parts; moreover, they often add *De motu animalium* and *De mundo* and sometimes the *Physiognomonica* to the collection.

The generic title *Parva Naturalia* refers to a collection of short Aristotelian treatises that deal with the important vital functions shared by both soul and body. It is commonly accepted since Freudenthal's study (1869) that this title came into use in the second half of the thirteenth century. In reality, late-thirteenth and early-fourteenth authors, such as Giles of Rome, Peter of Auvergne, and John of Jandun, use "parvi libri naturales" instead. The use of the neutral form *Parva Naturalia* might well have become common only after 1350 – it is certainly attested in the 1366 study program of the University of Paris (see also below).

Modern editions of this collection contain the following texts:

- On Sense and Sensible Objects (Sens.)
- On Memory and Recollection (Mem.)
- On Sleep and Waking (Somn. vig.)
- On Dreams (Insomn.)
- On Prophecy in Sleep (Div. somn.)
- On Length and Shortness of Life (Long.)
- On Youth and Old Age (Iuv.)
- On Respiration (Resp.)
- On Life and Death (Vit.)

These are usually divided into two groups: the "psychological" Sens., Mem., Somn. vig., Insomn., and Div. somn. (= Parv. nat. 1) and the "physiological" Long., Iuv., Resp., and Vit. (= Parv. nat. 2). For the last three texts, there is discussion whether they are independent entities or whether they form a single treatise or perhaps two (Iuv., on the one hand, and Resp. + Vit., on

the other hand) treatises. Similarly, in the Middle Ages and sometimes thereafter, Somn. vig., Insomn., and Div. somn. were considered as parts of one work *De somno et vigilia*, consisting of two books (Somn. vig., on the one, and Insomn. and Div. somn., on the other hand).

In turn, medieval commentaries on the *Parva Naturalia* do not necessarily cover the same treatises: some texts are omitted, and others are added. The most important text to be mentioned here that was added is Aristotle's *On the Movement of Animals* (Mot. an.), whose strong link with the Parv. nat. has been underlined by modern scholarship (e.g., Morel 2002; Rashed 2004). The reasons for this instability are various, due both to circumstances and to deliberate choice.

The following pages will focus on some ascribed and anonymous Latin commentaries from c. 1200 to 1500, yet they do not aim to be exhaustive. A list of both anonymous and ascribed commentaries can be found in De Raedemaeker (1965); questions on Parv. nat. 1 have been described by Ebbesen et al. (2016), De Leemans (2000) offers an inventory of commentaries on *Mot. an.* Information on individual authors can be found in the repertories of C. H. Lohr and O. Weijers. In recent years, several texts have been critically edited, including the editions prepared in the context of the project "Representation and Reality. Historical and Contemporary Perspectives on the Aristotelian Tradition" (Thomsen Thörnqvist and Ebbesen 2013).

A distinction will be made between three periods: a first period in which the interest in Aristotle's natural philosophy started to flourish; a second period, from c. 1270 onwards, when the Aristotelian corpus had been completed and renewed by other translations; and a third period, from c. 1366 onwards, when two opposite tendencies can be distinguished, of, respectively, delimiting and reformulating the study of the *Parva Naturalia*. (In what follows, the abbreviation Parv. nat. (1/2) will be used for the "modern" collection, the full expression for the medieval one. Likewise, Somn. vig. will refer to the Aristotelian text, and *De somno* to the cluster of Somn. vig., Insomn., and Div. somn.)

## The Rediscovery of the *Parva Naturalia* (Before c. 1270)

The *Parva Naturalia* was brought up for discussion mainly by Greek–Latin translations that were made from the twelfth century onwards. The first such translation (*translatio vetus*) was not the work of one author alone. Most treatises, namely, *Mem.* and *Parv. nat.* 2, were translated by James of Venice (*Jacobus Veneticus Graecus*). The remaining translations are anonymous: the twelfth-century translation of *De somno* and the translation of *Sens.*, to be dated before c. 1230 (Galle 2008a; see also Bloch 2008). Interestingly, these translations were not all equally disseminated. While *Parv. nat.* 1 and *Long.* were rather popular, only a few copies are extant of James' *Iuv.*, *Resp.*, and *Vit.* (For traces of another translation by David of Dinant, see below.)

In turn, the Arabic–Latin input was limited to translations of Averroes' *Epitome* of the *Parva Naturalia* – there are no long or middle commentaries on these texts. This *Epitome*, completed in January 1170, is entitled *On Sense and the Sensible* (*De sensu et sensibili*) and deals with *Parv. nat.* 1 and *Long.* It is divided into three treatises – the first discusses *Sens.*, the second *Mem.* and *De somno*, and the third *Long.* Both the *Epitome's* title and division go back to an older Arabic tradition (Martino 2003). In turn, the absence of *Iuv.*, *Resp.*, and *Vit.* is due to the fact that they had not been translated into Arabic. This might also count for *Mot. an.*, which the Arabs did not possess either. On various occasions Averroes underlined that its subject was closely related to that of the *Parva Naturalia* (De Leemans 2010). The Latin world became acquainted with the *Epitome* by means of two translations. While the anonymous *Parisina* is preserved in one manuscript only, the *Vulgata* was more widely disseminated. It was probably made by Michael Scot in about 1230 and soon influenced various Latin commentators.

Both the Greek–Latin and Arabic–Latin transmission of the *Parv. nat.* thus neglect *Iuv.*, *Resp.*, and *Vit.* (One might get the false impression – several studies err here – that at least James'

translation of *Vit.* circulated, since several medieval pre-1270 texts mention or comment on an Aristotelian treatise *De morte et vita*; yet, this was the title under which the translation of *Long.* circulated.) The dissemination of the Greek–Latin translations of these texts might have been hindered by their absence in Averroes' popular *Epitome* or by intrinsic (such as the quality of the translation) or purely circumstantial factors. Around 1250, in any case, several authors made clear that these texts were not at their disposal (see the texts quoted by Gauthier 1985, pp. 117\*–118\*).

For this period, one can make a distinction between commentaries written in Oxford and those written on the continent. The introduction of Aristotelian natural philosophy in Oxford probably took place at the end of the twelfth century (Burnett 1996). The oldest surviving commentaries are those by Alfred of Sareshel (*Alfredus Anglicus*) on the *Meteorologica* and *De plantis*. Alfred probably commented also on some *Parva Naturalia*. This is at least what is suggested by the 1664 catalogue of the cathedral of Beauvais, which mentions commentaries by Alfred on *De somno et vigilia* and *De morte et vita* (= *Long.*) (Callus 1943, p. 14). Moreover, he might have read *Resp.*, since he refers to – though he does not explicitly quote – the text in his *De motu cordis*.

The first and most important extant Oxford commentary was written by Adam of Buckfield (or Bocfeld), active in Oxford in the late 1230s and/or in the 1240s, and focused on all of the known *Parva Naturalia* (*Parv. nat.* 1 and *Long.*). Several versions of these commentaries exist, yet it is unclear whether or not they should all be attributed to the same author: for one of the versions of his commentary on *De somno*, for example, the authorship of Siger of Brabant has been suggested (Dondaine and Bataillon 1966: cf. *infra*). Moreover, Buckfield's commentary on *Sens.* was used as a source for composing the so-called Oxford gloss, a corpus of marginal and interlinear notes compiled in the Oxford schools in the (middle of?) the thirteenth century (Galle 2008b, c). It is not unlikely that this also holds for



the remaining *Parva Naturalia*. One of the students attending these courses was Henry of Renham, who wrote glosses on the corpus vetustius in manuscript London, British Library, Royal 12.g.ii.

Another leading representative of early Oxford Aristotelianism is Geoffrey of Aspell (d. 1287). Contrary to Buckfield he did not write straightforward expositions on the *Parva Naturalia*, yet proceeded per modum quaestionis. We still possess questions on Sens. (descr. Ebbesen et al. 2016, pp. 66–70), *De somno* (descr. Ebbesen et al. 2016, pp. 96–98; partial ed. Ebbesen 2014; see also Thomsen Thörnqvist 2016), and Long., which may have been written no later than the early 1260s. The questions on Mem. in manuscript Oxford, New College, 285 might also be by his hand (Macrae 1968).

Less famous than the above authors is William of Clifford (d. 1306), master around 1265 and author of a commentary on the Physics. Recently, it has been convincingly argued that he is also the author of the anonymous commentaries in manuscript Cambridge, Peterhouse, 157. Among these is a Sententia cum quaestionibus on *De somno et vigilia*, based on the translatio vetus (Donati 2008).

Also noteworthy are the abbreviations of, among other works of the corpus vetustius, Parv. nat. 1 and Long. in manuscript Oxford, Bodleian Library, Tanner, 116. These were sometimes ascribed to Simon of Faversham (d. 1306) on feeble grounds. Instead, D.A. Callus noticed the resemblance with the abbreviations of the Ethics by Robert Grosseteste, though without drawing any conclusions (Callus 1943, pp. 49–52). (In turn, Simon's authorship of Quaestiones on the *Parva Naturalia*, based on the translatio nova, appears to be certain – see below.)

Finally, Adam de Wyeby wrote glosses on Sens. and perhaps also on Mem. (Gauthier 1985, p. 125\*).

In Paris, Aristotle's natural science was initially considered a threat to Christian faith. In 1210, a prohibition was issued against the teaching of Aristotle in Paris, which resulted in the burning of the Quaternuli of David of Dinant. In this work, David had quoted, apart from other

works, several of the *Parva Naturalia*. (He, however, used none of the existing translations but paraphrased directly from the Greek – cf. Vuillemin-Diem 2003.) Still, this and other prohibitions, in 1215 and 1231, could not prevent the increasing popularity of the study of Aristotelian natural philosophy. This is strikingly illustrated by the presence of Aristotle's works (among which Parv. nat. 1 and Long.) in a manual for students of the Arts faculty in Paris, written in c. 1230–1240 (manuscript Barcelona, Arxiu de la Corona d'Aragó, Ripoll 109). In the 1240s Roger Bacon might have been among the first to lecture on Aristotle in Paris; his commentary on Sens. is sometimes dated to this period (ed. Steele). On March 19, 1255, the study of Aristotle at the University of Paris was officially adopted, when a new syllabus proclaimed by the Arts faculty imposed the study of all known works of Aristotle: 6 weeks were reserved for the study of Sens., 5 for *De somno*, 2 for Mem., and 1 for *De morte et vita* (= Long.).

In spite of the increasing popularity of Aristotle in this period, continental commentaries on the *Parva Naturalia* are rare. The main exception is the paraphrase of Albert the Great (c. 1200–1280), an enterprise begun around 1250, which is the most ambitious attempt to offer an interpretation of the *Parva Naturalia* in the whole of the Middle Ages (ed. Borgnet; see also Donati 2009, 2011, 2012). While other commentators limited themselves to the available texts, Albert wanted to offer a complete science of the soul. He thus completed his paraphrasing of Parv. nat. 1 and Long. – for which he heavily relied on Averroes' Epitome – with treatises on youth and old age (*De iuventute et senectute*), on respiration (*De spiritu et respiratione*), a paraphrase of Qusṭa ibn Lūqā's *De differentia spiritus et animae*, on the movement of animals (*De motibus animalium*), on nutrition (*De nutrimento et nutribili*; Donati 2011), and on the intellect (*De intellectu et intelligibili*). All these topics were said to pertain to the second part of the science of the soul, dealing with the functions of the soul in the body (cf. Albert, Physics). (Around 1256, Albert found a translation of Mot. an. and used it for another paraphrase, *De principiis motus processivi*. This



text was not integrated in Albert's *Parva Naturalia*; it was originally inserted in his *De animalibus* but soon extracted from it as an independent treatise – see De Leemans 2010, pp. 201–206.)

Another continental exception is the commentary on Long., by Peter of Ireland (Petrus de Hibernia), which was written in the middle of the thirteenth century and consists of a mixture of literal explanation and quaestiones (ed. Dunne 1993). In turn, Peter of Spain (1220–1277) wrote a *Tractatus de longitudine et brevitate vitae* (ed. Alonso 1952). This work, however, is not a commentary on the Aristotelian text, although it is clearly inspired by it (Dunne 2003, pp. 324–326).

Finally, some commentaries based on the *translatio vetus* have been associated with Siger of Brabant, although their authorship remains a topic of discussion. This is the case for the questions on *De somno*, probably written in the 1260s, in manuscript München, Bayerische Staatsbibl., Clm. 9559 (Van Steenberghen 1931; see also Thomsen Thörnqvist 2016; Ebbesen et al. 2016, pp. 100–101) and for the literal commentaries on *De somno* and *Long.* in manuscript Wien, ÖNB, 2330 (Dondaine and Bataillon 1966). In turn, the München manuscript also contains questions on *Iuv.*, *Resp.*, and *Vit.* that have been attributed to Siger as well (Van Steenberghen 1931); these are most likely based on Moerbeke's translation.

### The “Standard” *Parva Naturalia* (c. 1270–c. 1366)

A renewed impetus to the study of the *Parva Naturalia* was given by a translation of the entire collection (*translatio nova*), made in 1260–1270, by William of Moerbeke (d. 1286). While Moerbeke appears to have made entirely new translations of *Parv. nat. 2* (De Leemans 2012), he revised the *vetus* of *Parv. nat. 1*. The Flemish Dominican is also credited with a translation of Aristotle's *Mot. an.* and *Inc. an.* – known in the Middle Ages as *De progressu animalium* – as well as of the commentary of Alexander of

Aphrodisias on *Sens.*, which highly influenced Thomas Aquinas (Gauthier 1985).

Except for Alexander's commentary (five extant manuscripts), all these texts were soon widely disseminated. This eventually led to the reformulation of the content of the *Parva Naturalia* (as illustrated by several divisions of science of this period): not only *Parv. nat. 1* and *Long.* but also the rediscovered *Iuv.*, *Resp.*, and *Vit.*, the newcomers *Mot. an.* and *Inc. an.*, as well as the allegedly “lost” treatises *De nutrimento et nutribili* and *De sanitate et egritudine*. (Note: *Iuv.*, *Resp.*, and *Vit.* were considered as one text, often called *De morte et vita*, which was the *vetus* title of *Long.*!) Yet, this fixed content was mainly theoretical as it seems (even if one leaves the “lost” treatises out of consideration). For example, no commentaries on *Inc. an.* in this context have been preserved, a situation which is probably due to the text's very technical nature and limited philosophical relevance (De Leemans 2006).

The most influential commentaries on the *Parva Naturalia* “new style” were written by Thomas Aquinas and Petrus de Alvernia. Aquinas wrote a commentary on *Sens.* and *Mem.* (ed. Gauthier 1985; see also Ebbesen 2017), whereas Petrus wrote *Sententiae* on *De somno*, *Long.*, *De morte et vita*, and *Mot. an.* Although it is nowhere explicitly said, it is not unlikely that, by commenting on these texts, Petrus intended to complete Thomas' commentary on the *Parva Naturalia*, just as he had completed Aquinas' commentaries on *De celo* and the *Politica* (De Leemans 2004). In any case, their commentaries are often found in the same manuscripts and have been printed together, sometimes under the name of Aquinas only, up to the middle of the seventeenth century. Moreover, Petrus wrote *Quaestiones* on *Parv. nat. 1* (ed. White; ed. of *Mem.* Bloch 2008; see also White 1990; Thomsen Thörnqvist 2016; Ebbesen 2017) and (perhaps) on *Mot. an.* (De Leemans 2004, 2005).

Other authors whose commentaries reflect the reformulated content of the *Parva Naturalia* are, toward the end of the thirteenth century, Simon of Faversham and Radulphus Brito and, in the first half of the fourteenth century, John of Jandun, Walter Burley, and John Buridan.

Simon of Faversham (d. 1306), regent master in Oxford and Paris and Chancellor of the University of Oxford from 1304 to 1306, wrote Quaestiones on *De somno* (ed. Ebbesen; see also Thomsen Thörnqvist 2016; Ebbesen et al. 2016, p. 105), *Parv. nat.* 2 (excerpts of Long. in Ebbesen 1980), and *Mot. an.* (partial ed. Christensen), whereas Quaestiones on *Mem.* might be lost. It has been argued that his questions result from his teaching in Paris but may have been edited after his return to England (Ebbesen 2013, p. 90; Christensen 2015, p. 94).

From Paris master Radulphus Brito, who probably produced most of his works as an arts master in the 1290s, manuscript Firenze, Bibl. Nazionale Centrale, Conv. Soppr., E.1.252, contains questions on all *Parv. Nat.* (descr. of *Parv. nat.* 1 in Sens. Ebbesen et al. 2016, pp. 72–73, 89–90, 107–108; partial ed. of *Parv. nat.* 1 Ebbesen; see also Ebbesen 2017) and *Mot. An.* (ed. Costa) (on Brito's authorship, see Costa 2007, pp. 158–165). It is not impossible that his course on the *Parva Naturalia* also contained a literal exposition that has not (yet) come to us (cf. ed. Ebbesen, p. 13). In turn, manuscript Vaticano, B.A.V., Vat. lat. 3061, might well contain an adaptation of Brito's quaestiones on *Parv. nat.* 1 (partial ed. Ebbesen; descr. Ebbesen et al. 2016, pp. 73–74, 90, 108–109; Ebbesen 2017) and on *Mot. an.* (ed. in Costa; see also De Leemans 2000, pp. 339–341).

John of Jandun's (c. 1285–1328) Quaestiones on *Parv. nat.* (descr. *Parv. nat.* 1 Ebbesen et al. 2016, pp. 80–82, 93, 110–112; Ebbesen 2017) and *Mot. an.* (descr. De Leemans 2000, pp. 316–322) date from the very beginning of his career (cf. manuscript Vaticano, B.A.V., Vat. lat. 6768, fol. 145ra: *Expliciunt questiones supra librum de sompno et uigilia scripte per Johannem de Ganduno et ad hunc ordinem quem habent reducte anno Christi 1309*). They remained to be copied in the fifteenth century and were printed several times in the sixteenth century.

From about the same time date Walter Burley's (c. 1275–c. 1346) commentaries on *Parv. nat.* 1 (ed. *De somno* Thomsen Thörnqvist; see also Ebbesen et al. 2016, pp. 109–110), Long. (ed. of

the preface in Dunne 2003, pp. 333–335, of some fragments on the *humidum radicale* in Dunne 2009, pp. 137–147), and *Mot. an.* While his notes of *Mot. an.* are largely influenced by Peter of Auvergne (De Leemans 2000, p. 279; ed. Scott and Shapiro), Averroes is his guide in interpreting Long. (Dunne 2003, p. 332). In turn, the most important source for his commentary on *De somno*, which alternates exposition and questions, is Albert the Great, closely followed by Averroes (ed. Thomsen Thörnqvist, p. 384; see also Thomsen Thörnqvist 2016).

John Buridan (c. 1300–post 1358) wrote both commentaries per modum scripti and per modum quaestionis on the *Parva Naturalia*. One difference is that he wrote an exposition on *Mot. an.* (ed. Scott and Shapiro), whereas questions by his hand on this text have not been preserved. His Quaestiones (ed. Stanek; see Ebbesen et al. 2016, pp. 82–84, 94, 112–113; Ebbesen 2017) were printed for the first time in Paris in 1516.

Other commentators commented on only a few texts (or better: commentaries on only a few texts have been preserved). More or less contemporary with Petrus de Alvernia's are the relatively popular commentaries on *De somno* (partial ed. Ebbesen; see also Thomsen Thörnqvist 2016, pp. 308–310; descr. Ebbesen et al. 2016, pp. 102–104) and Long. by James of Douai (fl. 1270s), which offer an intermingling of *Sententia* and *Quaestiones*. James might have commented on *Sens.* and *Mem.* as well.

Other ascribed commentaries are (1) Henricus de Alemania's Quaestiones on *Iuv., Resp.,* and *Vit.* (c. 1310), which exhibit striking similarities with the Quaestiones of John of Jandun (Kouri and Lehtinen 2000); (2) Quaestiones on the same texts as well as on *Mot. an.* (De Leemans 2000, pp. 330–332) by the otherwise unknown Petrus de Flandria in manuscript Vaticano, B.A.V., lat. 2170 (these are preceded by questions on *Sens.*, which might or might not be by the same author) (descr. Ebbesen et al. 2016, pp. 76–77; partial ed. Ebbesen; Ebbesen 2017); (3) Jacobus de Blanchis de Alexandria's *Compilatio super totam philosophiam naturalem et moralem*, which deals with *Parv. nat.* 1 only; (4) Raimundus

de Biterris' (fl. 1310) commentary on Long.; (5) John Felmingham's (?) commentary on Sens. (the ascription is based on the fact that the manuscript contains Felmingham's exposition of the *Meteorologica*) (descr. Ebbesen et al. 2016, pp. 74–76; Ebbesen 2017); and (6) the above-mentioned *Quaestiones* on Iuv., Resp., and Vit., ascribed to Siger of Brabant. In turn, Boethius of Dacia's (d. c. 1284) *De somniis* is not a commentary on the Aristotelian text, although it is clearly inspired by it (ed. Pedersen; see also Fioravanti 1966–1967).

Moreover, several commentaries have been transmitted anonymously. In addition to the manuscripts discussed above in association with Radulphus Brito and Petrus de Flandria, one may mention, by means of example, the commentaries on Mem. (ed. Ebbesen) and Sens. (descr. Ebbesen et al. 2016, pp. 78–79) in MS Oxford, Oriel College, 33, which were probably collected and perhaps also composed in late thirteenth- or early fourteenth-century Oxford (ed. Ebbesen, p. 130; Ebbesen 2017) or the commentary on Sens. (descr. Ebbesen et al. 2016, pp. 74–76; Ebbesen 2017) and Mem. (ed. Ebbesen) in manuscript Paris, BnF, lat. 16,160.

### Delimitation and Reformulation (c. 1366–1500)

From the second half of the fourteenth century onwards, but mainly in the fifteenth century, some authors delimited the study of the *Parva Naturalia* to a selection of texts, whereas others expanded the collection with new texts and proposed a new division of known texts. Generally speaking, the fifteenth century was a very fruitful period for the interpretation of the *Parva Naturalia*.

#### Delimitation

When the curriculum at the Parisian Arts faculty was fixed in 1366, only Parv. nat. 1 and Long. figured among the Aristotelian books concerning natural philosophy that were prescribed for study. The same list was to be repeated almost one

century later, in the 1452 statutes. As a result, one actually gets a copy of the pre-1260 situation when the study of the *Parva Naturalia* focused on the same texts, yet for different reasons.

This curriculum appears to be reflected for the first time in manuscript München, Bayerische Staatsbibl., Clm. 4376, written between 1365 and 1367. It contains, among other works, anonymous *Quaestiones* on Mem., *De somno*, and Long., as well as *Quaestiones* on Sens. that are attributed to Albert of Saxony. This ascription, however, is uncertain: another (Erfurt) manuscript attributes them to Nicholas Oresme, and even the name of John Buridan has been suggested (ed. Agrimi 1983; cf. Agrimi 1991; Ebbesen et al. 2016, p. 84).

All other commentaries with this composition date from the fifteenth century. Not surprisingly, they were mainly written by authors active in Paris: (1) Jacobus Faber Stapulensis (Lefèvre d'Étaples; c. 1460–1536); (2) Johannes de Caulaincourt (fl. XV<sup>2</sup>), whose commentary was printed several times under the name of Johannes de Magistris; (3) Johannes Hennon (fl. XV<sup>2</sup>); (4) Johannes le Damoisiau (fl. XV<sup>2</sup>); (5) Joannes Versor (d. after 1482), who was very influential at the University of Cologne as well as at other universities in Germany and Central Europe; (6) Georgius Bruxellensis (d. 1510), whose commentary was edited in 1482 by Thomas Bricot (d. 1516), who in turn added abbreviations of the Aristotelian texts as well as some *Quaestiones*; and (7) Petrus Tartareti (d. 1522).

Three other authors who focused on Parv. nat. 1 and Long. worked only in Germany: (1) Johannes Hulshout de Mechlinia (d. 1475) (see also below); (2) Johannes Tinctoris de Tornaco (d. 1469); and (3) Nicolaus Theoderici de Amsterdam (d. c. 1460).

These commentaries have not yet been the object of extensive analysis. An impression of what one might expect of them is given by the *Tabula quaestionum*, *dubitationum*, and *conclusionum* of the works by Johannes Hennon, Johannes le Damoisiau, and Johannes de Caulaincourt (Bakker 2005, 2006, 2007) and by the lists of questions on Parv. nat. 1 of Joannes Versor

(Ebbesen et al. 2016, pp. 86–87, 95–96, 114–115; see also Ebbesen 2017).

### Reformulation

A different movement is seen in a collection of anonymous commentaries on the *Parva Naturalia* (De Leemans 2000). They were written throughout the fifteenth century and are preserved for the most part in libraries in German-speaking countries and in Central Europe. (Also among these is the commentary in manuscript Erfurt, Ampl. F. 334, which was ascribed – on feeble grounds – to Marsilius of Inghen; see also infra.) Exploratory research for Mot. an. has shown that they all have significant internal similarity. This might be a reason to assume the existence of a “proto-commentary,” used and adapted by the respective magistri for their courses.

Most remarkably, they are based on abbreviations of the Aristotelian texts by Joannes Kronsbein. Nothing is known about this author, except that he was a German Dominican who wrote compendia both on Aristotle's moral and natural philosophy and must have been active at the latest in the very beginning of the fifteenth century. It is from this compendium that the commentaries have taken over a very peculiar division of Iuv., Resp., and Vit. These are no longer considered as one, or two, or three but as four texts whose order could vary. Apart from Iuv. and Resp., Vit. is split into two independent treatises: *De morte et vita* (= 478b22–479b16) and *De motu cordis* (= 479b17–480b30). (Note that the titles cause confusion: it has been shown that *De morte et vita* is also used to denote Long. as well as the ensemble of Iuv., Resp., and Vit., whereas *De motu cordis* is also the title of works by Thomas Aquinas and Alfred of Sareshel.) Another characteristic is the fact that the content is not limited to the standard Parv. nat., but includes Mot. an. and, much more surprisingly, the pseudo-Aristotelian *De mundo*, which had also been paraphrased by Kronsbein.

Perhaps related to Kronsbein's compendium are two commentaries per modum quaestionis by Paulus de Worczyn and Nicolaus Tempelfeld de Brega, respectively. Both authors were active in Krakow in the first half of the fifteenth century.

Their Quaestiones on the *Parva Naturalia* are characterized by the division of Vit. into two independent parts. On the contrary, they do not discuss Mot. an. or *De mundo*, but add the *Physiognomonica* (which was absent in Kronsbein's compendium) to the collection; Tempelfeld's commentary on the *Physiognomonica* is clearly inspired by Paulus' (ed. Garbaczowa).

### Other Commentaries

Some commentators dealt with one or a few treatises only. Thus, for Sens., we have a commentary by Peter de Rivo (d. 1499–1500), a professor at the University of Leuven (Bartocci et al. 2013). Mem. was treated by Dominicus de Carpanis as well as by Ugo Benzi (1376–1439); the latter also wrote a *Scriptum de somno et vigilia* (ed. Fioravanti and Idato 1991). Moreover, Joannes de Slupcza (1408–1488) might have written notes on all of Parv. nat. 1. In turn, Matheolus Perusinus' (d. 1470/1480) *De memoria et reminiscencia. Ars memorativa* is an original treatise, for which Aristotle served as one of the sources (Lupi 2008; ed. Levi Donati and Sacilloto).

More important are three authors who, in spite of the above tendencies, adopt a more classical content of the *Parva Naturalia*. Marsilius of Inghen (c. 1340–1396) wrote Quaestiones on Parv. nat. (descr. of Parv. nat. 1 Ebbesen et al. 2016, pp. 85, 95, 113–114; see also Ebbesen 2017) but not on Mot. an. It is, however, unclear whether these were written in Paris or in Heidelberg. The same treatises were dealt with in a literal commentary by the Spanish author Petrus de Castrovol, published in 1498 in Lerida. A special case, in which different traditions concur, is the commentary written by Jacobus Tymens de Amersfordia (d. 1493), active at the University of Cologne. He completed the commentaries on Parv. nat. 1 and Long. by the abovementioned Johannes Hulshout de Mechlinia with discussions of Iuv., Resp., Vit., as well as Mot. an. Moreover, he had his commentary on Mot. an. followed by a set of 18 dubia on the *liber de progressionibus animalium* (= Inc. an.). By doing so, he is the first Latin author ever to realize a commentary on the *Parva Naturalia* as

defined by, among others, Thomas Aquinas and Peter of Auvergne. The latter authors might have inspired this decision: although he proclaims himself to be a follower of Albert the Great, it seems, at least in his commentary on Mot. an., that Peter of Auvergne was one of his principal sources. In turn, the influence of the Kronsbein tradition can be seen in the division of Vit. into two parts.

## Cross-References

- ▶ [Albert of Saxony](#)
- ▶ [Albert the Great](#)
- ▶ [Arabic Texts: Philosophy, Latin Translations of](#)
- ▶ [Aristotle, Arabic](#)
- ▶ [Boethius of Dacia](#)
- ▶ [Ibn Rushd \(Averroes\), Latin Translations of](#)
- ▶ [John Buridan](#)
- ▶ [John of Jandun](#)
- ▶ [Marsilius of Inghen](#)
- ▶ [Nicholas Oresme](#)
- ▶ [Peter of Auvergne](#)
- ▶ [Peter of Spain](#)
- ▶ [Robert Grosseteste](#)
- ▶ [Roger Bacon](#)
- ▶ [Siger of Brabant](#)
- ▶ [Simon of Faversham](#)
- ▶ [Thomas Aquinas](#)
- ▶ [Walter Burley](#)

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See also De Leemans 2000; Ebbesen 2017.

See also De Leemans 2000; Ebbesen 2017; Petrus de Flandria.

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## Paul of Pergula

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### Abstract

Paul of Pergula was the first to hold a chair of Philosophy at Venice. We do not know much about his life, since the chief sources of information concerning him simply indicate that he flourished from 1400 to 1454, that he studied under Paul of Venice, refused the offer to be ordained a bishop in 1448 and chose rather to administer the Church of St. John the Almoner in Venice. His most printed work, *Logica*, was published by his student and successor, Domenico Bragadino. Another of his works, *Dubia super consequentiis Strodi*, a commentary on Ralph Strode's *Consequences*, was by a statute of 1496 a required text at the University of Padua. His *Logica* went through eight editions between 1481 and 1501 and survives in ten manuscripts, including four at the Bodleian Library in Oxford.

Paul of Pergula (c.1400–1454) was the first official master of the School of Rialto in Venice and thus the first person to hold a chair of Philosophy in that city. There were a number of Pauls who taught philosophy in the Venice–Padua–Bologna area in the first half of the fifteenth century: Paul of Venice (d. 1429), Paul of Pergula (d. 1451), and Paulus Albertini (d. 1475). Often their identities became mixed. Earlier historians, such as Girolomo Tiraboschi and Giuseppe Valentinelli, tried to sort out the facts concerning these three philosophers and identified Paul of Pergula as a

student of Paulus Nicolettus, who today is known as Paul of Venice. The Paul who was the first professor of philosophy at Venice, and taught there his whole life, is now called Paul of Pergula. He taught at the School of Rialto from 1420 until his death in 1454. From the works that have come down from him, we know that he was an *artium doctor*. He has, however, also been described as a professor of theology, although we have presently no works to verify this claim. He refused the office of bishop in 1448 and in its stead he chose to administer the Venetian Church of St. John the Almoner. In 1450, he was honored by the City of Venice for his many years of teaching. He died in 1454.

Paul of Pergula wrote a number of logical works. The most often published volume was his *Logica*, an introductory text made up of six treatises that survives in eight old editions and also in a modern form. It is a very rudimentary work that in its outline follows the *Logica parva* of Paul of Venice. Paul of Pergula's six treatises are: *Summulae*, which is a general outline of terms, propositions, and arguments, which is the content likewise of Paul of Venice's first chapter in his *Logica Parva*. Paul of Pergula's opening treatise covers in a short form the logic materials of Porphyry's *Isagoge*, Aristotle's *Categories*, *Perihermeneias* and *Analytics* as digested by logicians from the time of Peter of Spain on. The titles of the other five treatises of Paul's *Logica* are identical with the chapters of Paul of Venice: (1) *On Suppositions*; (2) *On Proving Terms*; (3) *On Consequences or Inferences*; (4) *On Obligations*; and (5) *On Insolubles*, although Pergula's third and fourth treatises are an inversion of the order of Paul of Venice's chapters three and four. There is, in his first treatise, the *Summulae*, no deep theoretical discussion of terms, propositions, or arguments. The ten categories are explained in brief and there is no sign of the arguments between realists and nominalists like Walter Burley and William of Ockham over the nature of certain kinds of qualities, or any of the other categories as inhering realities. Alexander Sermoneta (d. 1486), in a question concerning Porphyry's discussion of "accident," tells us that Paul of

Pergula gives a different interpretation of “accident” according to Porphyry than does Paul of Venice. However, no such discussion is present in the *Logica* of Pergula. If there is a foundation for Sermoneta’s deeper discussion of Paul of Pergula’s position, it might well be found in another work, Paul’s unedited treatise *Universalia* found in codex 168 of the Philadelphia Free Library, where Pergula discusses the five predicables of Porphyry.

A second work, *A Treatise on the Composite and Divided Senses*, that has been joined to the modern edition of the *Logica*, is a unified portrait of the ways of avoiding the seven ways that fallacies concerning modal propositions might be committed. It was written explicitly for Petrus de Guidonibus, to be shared with others, and covers not only modal forms such as “necessary,” “possible,” “contingent,” and “impossible,” but modal propositions in a much broader sense, where they are determined by such verbs as “I doubt,” “I believe,” “I imagine,” and “I suspect.” In the *Logica parva* of Pergula’s teacher, Paul of Venice, these are treated here and there throughout the whole work and not in a unified way; in the *Logica magna* attributed to Paul of Venice, one finds, however, a special organized treatise like this work of Paul of Pergula.

The link to other logical works of Paul of Pergula quite likely goes back to Paul of Venice. Paul of Venice studied at Oxford from about 1390 to 1393 and brought back to Padua many logical works of English authors. An example of the English logic invasion can be seen by examining library catalogs, such as those of the Franciscan convent of St. Anthony in Padua. This library had no English authors in 1396. Half a century later, among the holdings, there were three copies of Walter Burley’s *On the Purity of the Art of Logic*, six copies of William of Ockham’s *Summa logicae*, a copy of Ralph Strode’s *On Consequences*, and a copy of William Heytesbury’s *Sophismata*. The focus on English logic was very much due to the dominance of Paul of Venice, a dominance criticized by Erasmus, Thomas More, and Juan Luis Vives. These works of Strode and Heytesbury were studied by many Italians,

including Paul of Pergula. From Paul’s pen we have *Dubia super consequentiis Strodi*, which was published as a companion piece in the 1477 Padua edition of Strode’s *De consequentiis* and was also reprinted with Strode’s text in the Venice editions of 1488 and 1493. This commentary of Paul of Pergula was made a required text at the University of Padua by the statutes of 1496. Paul of Pergula also commented on William Heytesbury’s *Regulae solvendi sophismata* and *Sophismata*. His *Recollecta super sophismatibus Heytesbury*, however, did not gain the same attention as his criticism of Strode’s *De consequentiis*, since Paul only dealt with seven of Heytesbury’s sophisms, whereas his contemporary, Cajetan of Thiene (d. 1465), treated all thirty. Finally, among the works attributed to Paul of Pergula is his *Commentary on the Sophismata asinina* of William Heytesbury. This work, like that of Paul’s broader treatment of Heytesbury’s *Sophismata*, is incomplete. He only deals with 9 of the 37 asinine sophisms, which gain their title from the opening words: “I wish to prove . . . that ‘you are an ass’.” Quite likely, it is because these last works of Paul of Pergula are incomplete that they did not join the ranks of required reading at the University of Padua that was accorded his *Dubia super consequentiis Strodi*.

## Conclusion

Paul of Pergula was a student of Paul of Venice and is known mostly for the part he played, along with Paul of Venice and Cajetan of Thiene, in spreading the influence of English logic, especially that of Ralph Strode and William Heytesbury. *Logica* was his most often published work, but its basic character does not set it apart from similar works, such as Paul of Venice’s *Logica parva*. His commentaries on Strode’s *De consequentiis* and Heytesbury’s *Regulae solvendi sophismata* and *Sophismata* are the works that more show his distinctive positions in discussing logical issues and providing the reasons for his personal choices.

## Cross-References

- ▶ [Categories](#)
- ▶ [Consequences, Theory of](#)
- ▶ [Insolubles](#)
- ▶ [Obligations Logic](#)
- ▶ [Paul of Venice](#)
- ▶ [Peter of Spain](#)
- ▶ [Ralph Strode](#)
- ▶ [Sophisms](#)
- ▶ [Supposition Theory](#)
- ▶ [Terms, Properties of](#)
- ▶ [William Heytesbury](#)
- ▶ [William of Ockham](#)

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## Paul of Venice

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### Abstract

Paul of Venice has been one of the most important logicians and metaphysicians of the Late Middle Ages. His philosophical attitude can be called Realist, since Paul erected a philosophical system in which different forms of medieval Realism have been combined together in an original way. Basically, Paul's philosophy has been influenced by some relevant realistic thinkers such as John Wyclif and the late fourteenth-century Oxonian realists, John Duns Scotus and Walter Burley. From Scotus, Paul inherits his major metaphysical doctrines: the univocity of the concept of being; the real distinction among categories; the extramental foundation of universals; the technical notions of formal distinction, individual differentia, and thisness (haecceitas). Paul's basic metaphysical intuition – viz. that the extramental

world is made up of individual things, which can be construed as a cluster of universal forms, formally distinct from each other – can be traced back to Burley. Upon such metaphysics, Paul grounds his interpretation of Aristotle's epistemology and psychology, which significantly departs in many points from Averroes' interpretation. On the other hand, his eclectic and epitomizing attitude toward medieval philosophy leads Paul to be open to other traditions of thought. Thus, Paul refers to Albert of Saxony and other Parisian physicians when he has to explain natural philosophy; Thomas Aquinas plays a crucial role in Paul's account of Aristotle's metaphysics; Giles of Rome instead exerts a decisive influence on most of Paul's Aristotelian Commentaries; finally, Paul does not miss the opportunity of discussing critically, in his handbooks, the logical and philosophical doctrines of many Nominalists of the fourteenth century, from William of Ockham and Gregory of Rimini up to John Buridan and Marsilius of Inghen. This methodological attitude certainly contributes to rendering his works stimulating and historically interesting, although it enormously complicates the interpreter's attempt to single out Paul's own position. Perhaps this is the reason why Paul has been wrongly regarded as Nominalist in logic, Thomist in metaphysics, and Averroist in psychology.

Paul Nicoletti of Venice (Paulus Nicolettus Venetus) was born in Udine, Italy, in 1368–1369. Around 1383, he joined the Augustinian order in the convent of Santo Stefano in Venice. His scholastic training begins at the Studium Generale of Padua, where Paul was assigned in 1387 to study philosophy; in 1390, Paul was assigned by his Order to the Studium Generale of Oxford to follow a course of theology, which usually extended over 3 years. His career as a teacher started in Padua by 1395. Paul obtained the title of Magister in Arts and Theology by 1405 and then actually began to teach: before in Padua, then in Siena (1420–1424), in Bologna (1424), and finally in Perugia (1425–1428). Besides his

academic career, the life of Paul was characterized by some other significant facts. Among other things, in 1409 Pope Gregory XII nominated Paul General Prior of the Augustinian Order and from the same year Paul served as ambassador of the Republic of Venice; in 1415 the Council of Ten of the Republic of Venice forbade Paul from taking part in the Council of Costanza, for reasons which are not yet completely clear; in 1427 Pope Martin V called him to Rome to defend the orthodoxy of St. Bernardino of Siena. Paul of Venice died in Padua on June 15, 1429.

Paul is author of many works, both philosophical and theological. Paul's philosophical writings can be classified into two groups: (1) systematic works and (2) Aristotelian commentaries (for the complete list see Perreiah 1986; Conti 1996). To the first group there belong two handbooks of logic (the *Logica parva*, c. 1393–1395 and the *Logica magna*, c. 1396–1399); a collection of sophisms (*Sophismata aurea*, c. 1399); a treatise of metaphysics and natural philosophy (*Summa philosophiae naturalis* or *Summa naturalium*, 1408); and a question on universals (*Quaestio de universalibus*, c. 1420–1424). The second group comprises, instead, the Commentaries on the *Posterior Analytics* (1406), on the *Physics* (1409), on the *Generation and Corruption* (c. 1415–1420), on the *Soul* (c. 1415–1420), on the *Metaphysics* (c. 1420–1424), and on the *Ars Vetus* (1428), that is, on Porphyry's *Isagoge*, Aristotle's *Categories*, and Pseudo-Gilbert of Poitiers' *Liber sex principiorum*. Paul's most significant theological work instead is an abridgement of John of Ripa's *Commentary on the Sentences* (c. 1400–1401).

Paul of Venice has been one of the most important logicians and metaphysicians of the Late Middle Ages. Generally speaking, Paul can be counted among the advocates of Realism in philosophy, since he erected a philosophical system in which different forms of medieval Realism have been combined together in an original way. Basically, Paul's philosophy has been influenced by some relevant Realistic thinkers such as John Wyclif and the late fourteenth-century Oxonian Realists (Robert Alyngton, William Milverley, William Penbygull, John Sharpe, John Tarteys, Roger Whelpdale), John Duns Scotus and Walter



Burley. From Scotus, Paul inherits his major metaphysical doctrines: the univocity of the concept of being; the real distinction among categories; the extramental foundation of universals; the technical notions of formal distinction and thiness (*haecceitas*). Paul's basic metaphysical intuition – viz. that the extramental world is made up of individual things, which can be construed as a cluster of universal (both substantial and accidental) forms, formally distinct from each other – can be traced back to Burley. Upon such metaphysics, Paul grounds his interpretation of Aristotle's epistemology and psychology, which significantly departs in many points from Averroes' interpretation (in spite of a well-established tradition that regarded him as an Averroes-inspired thinker: see Momigliano 1907; Nardi 1958; Ruello 1978; Kuksewicz in Olivieri 1983).

Paul elaborated his metaphysical views especially in his Commentaries on the Metaphysics (books 4–7 and 12, on which see Galluzzo 2012), on the *Categories* (chapter 5), on Porphyry's *Isagoge* (prologue), and in the *Summa naturalium* (part 6). Paul's metaphysics is a kind of realistic ontology. Its ground is the notion of being. Following Scotus, Paul holds that the concept of being must be endowed with a univocal sense, although Paul is of opinion that the doctrine of the univocity of being is not incompatible in principle with the doctrine of analogy (Conti 1996, chapter 1). This means that when we ask whether God exists or a man exists or a color exists, we are searching for the same explanatory conditions of the existence of each of these things, although such conditions are different in each case. The concept of being, as Avicenna stated, is the first and most common concept of our mind. We can have a simple concept of being, and such a concept is intensionally empty although extensionally full. With respect to being, the categorial table expresses ten different modes of internally modulating such a concept (see Exp. Phys., I, tr. 1, chap. 2; Exp. Metaph., IV, tr. 1, chapter 1). Since Paul holds with Aquinas that being cannot be a genus, it follows that the ten categories cannot be derived from being by means of formal differentiae that are external to the concept of being. Thus, the ten categories

indicate only the modes into which being can be divided immediately and exhaustively.

The categorial table classifies any created thing, both sensible and spiritual. Like Aquinas, Paul imagines that the spiritual world is populated by entities that are composed of form (essence) and being (existence), but not of matter and form. The relationship any spiritual entity bears to God, which entails a different form of individuality for each of them, is sufficient in order to individuate and differentiate such entities from each other. Such an individuation and differentiation, though, occurs at the level of the species and not of individuals, for it is impossible to multiply numerically spiritual entities because of their lack of matter (*Summa naturalium*, part VI, chapter 5). Unlike Aquinas, though, Paul thinks that Scotus is right in arguing that being and essence are formally distinct in these spiritual beings. Only God is absolutely simple, for in Him essence and existence amount to one and the same thing. Unlike the spiritual world, the sensible world is populated by entities that are composed both of essence and existence and of matter and form. When Paul applies his categorial doctrine to the sensible world, a first consequence he draws is that substance and accidents must be treated as distinct, absolute, and *per se* entities. While criticizing one of the most important sources of his Commentary on the Metaphysics, that is, the Franciscan theologian Alexander of Alexandria (fourteenth century), Paul argues that the property of “being or inhering in something else” is not an essential property of an accident, but only a property that necessarily ensues from an accident's essence. A substance is different from an accident in that, unlike a substance, an accident has been thought of by God as an entity for which it is not logically impossible to in-exist in another entity. Thus, Paul is more inclined to portray accidents as absolute coexisting entities rather than as inhering modes of being of substances (Amerini 2008; Gili 2016). Paul thinks that this Scotus-style explanation of the Aristotelian metaphysics is the best possible way of reconciling Aristotle's philosophy with Christian theology, especially when a conflict comes about (like in the case of the Eucharist). If accidents in principle can be separated from

substances, a further consequence Paul draws is that accidents are intrinsically individuated by virtue of themselves, while they are only extrinsically individuated by virtue of the substance in which they inhere.

According to Paul, any object of our ordinary experience, like men and trees, turns out to be a complex entity, made up of an underlying subject plus a bundle of properties. An individual matter and an individual form, which are really distinct from each other, compose the subject that underlies the properties. Although really distinct from form, matter has no degree of entity and actuality in its own right, but it acquires a certain kind of being only because a form actualizes its potentiality. As a matter of fact, Paul subscribes to the view that the essence of matter is that of being purely in potency to a formed substance, although Paul does not depart completely from the Augustinian conception of forms as “seminal reasons” latently contained in prime matter (Conti 1996, chapter 2). Following Scotus, but also expanding on an intuition present in Aquinas’ writings, Paul holds that it is the substantial form that plays a chief role in explaining the unity and identity of a thing, in that the form is responsible for a thing’s being, and to be and to be one are coextensive and convertible properties (Conti 1996, chapter 5; Conti 1998); nevertheless, matter too plays a role in differentiating things sharing one and the same form. In spite of the pivotal role played by the substantial form, Paul is neat in saying that neither form nor matter alone is able to individuate anything. With respect to this, Paul distinguishes between the proximate and the remote principle of individuation of a thing. The proximate principle of individuation is *thisness* (*haecceitas*), which is grounded upon an individual differentia (*differentia individualis*), while the remote principle is matter plus form in the case of material objects and form alone in the case of spiritual beings. Obviously, remote and proximate principle are logically connected (*Summa naturalium*, VI, chapter 5; *Exp. Metaph.*, III, tr. 1, chapter 1). In particular, an individual differentia plays a role formally analogous to that played by a specific differentia: just as this latter results in a species while determining a genus, so the former

results in an individual while determining a species; so any individual differentia coincides with the act by which a specific differentia shapes an individual piece of matter (*Exp. Cat.*, chapter 5). Although the substantial form is the key factor when it comes to explaining the process of a thing’s coming into being as well as its identity and that of each of its components, nonetheless a substantial form does not exhaust the whole essence of a thing. Here Paul is close to Aquinas and Gilles of Rome. Common matter and form must be included in the essence of any sensible substance. This is a first point in which Paul departs from Averroes and Averroism (Amerini 2004; Galluzzo 2005).

Once a substantial subject is brought into existence, a host of properties can settle on it. If accidental properties are treated as really distinct from each other and from the substance, what about substantial properties? In the case of properties such as “being human” or “being animal” with respect to man, for instance, Paul’s position is that they are really identical with man in the sense that none of them can be separated from man and exist of its own (this is an anti-Platonic constraint usually endorsed by medieval Realists), nonetheless they are formally distinct from each other since they can be associated with different foundations in a man and to different operations fulfilled by a man. The fact that our mind can form different but recurrent and properly predicable simple concepts as well as definitions of an extramental thing is the sign that within the thing there must be something that directs our mind toward the formation of such concepts and definitions (Conti 1996, chapters 3–4; Conti 2007).

The picture that we have sketched up to now gives the metaphysical framework into which Paul inserts his psychology and epistemology. We have said that for Paul the substantial form is the chief item in explaining the nature and the properties of a thing. In the case of man, this role is played by the soul. Here Paul breaks with the theological tradition influenced by Augustin, in that for him (1) to be the form of a body is part of a soul’s essence (*essentia*) and not only of a soul’s function (*officium*), although (2) the soul is a special kind of form insofar as it is able to fulfill

an operation that does not need bodily organs. Paul's explanation of the nature of a human being and of his activity of cognition is quintessentially the same as Aquinas'. Firstly, Paul rejects the idea that there is in a man a plurality of substantial forms or a plurality of souls as well as the idea that one and the same soul can undergo a process of perfecting (Summa naturalium, part VI, chapter 5). This is a consequence of the basic claim that a substantial form acts upon matter in an immediate and instantaneous way, by transforming it into a substance and granting it an absolute being. Secondly, Paul holds that the soul's essence is really distinct from its potencies, which are in turn formally distinct from each other. Potencies ensue from the soul's essence but are not part of it. Among the potencies of the soul, Paul significantly includes both the possible and the agent intellect. On Paul's account, Averroes as well regards the possible intellect as a faculty of the soul, although he further assumes that such a faculty is of substantial type and unique for all men. Paul thinks that Averroes' conclusion is fully in step with Aristotle's doctrine, but confesses that such a position, which in other respects seems to be logically coherent, cannot be accepted for theological reasons connected to Christian faith. Specifically, the thesis of the uniqueness of the possible intellect is incapable of safeguarding the immortality of the individual soul and any individual ethical responsibility (Exp. De an., III, t.c. 11 ff.; Exp. Metaph., IV, tr. 1, chapter 3; XII, tr. 1, chapter 3). Many scholars have misunderstood Paul's attitude toward Averroes. Conti (1992) has substantially rectified their judgment. It is worth noticing that Paul criticizes the supporters of the thesis of the uniqueness of the possible intellect by appealing precisely to the same arguments as Aquinas employed in his *De unitate intellectus*.

The explanation of the machinery of cognition and concept formation, which follows upon such an account of the soul, is quite standard. Once the soul receives a sensible species and obtains the phantasm, through the sophisticated machinery of sensation and imagination (Paul lists five exterior senses, but only four interior senses, in spite of the common Avicennian background), the agent intellect sheds its light on the phantasm and stimulates

the possible intellect, so as to enable it to abstract an intelligible species from the phantasm. Once formed, the intelligible species activates the process of intellectual cognition, which ends with the formation of a concept. A concept continues to be seen as a trail left on our mind by the activity of cognition once this latter is over, but Paul departs from such a Thomistic interpretation of Aristotle's psychology when he maintains that our mind can form individual alongside universal concepts (Conti 1992).

The metaphysics we have presented above also provides the basis for understanding Paul's logical and semantic theories. As to semantics, Paul argues that common substantial names ("man," for example) are shorthand for definitions (in our example, "rational animal"), but definitions are linguistic procedures, which are supposed to mirror the essence of the things defined and a thing's essence must include both matter and form; therefore common substantial names primarily signify a universal form that is composed of matter and form. Nevertheless, a name's modes of signifying do not perfectly reflect a thing's modes of being, given that we can signify a thing both in the abstract and in the concrete, and when we signify a thing in the abstract (for instance, by the name "humanity"), we exclusively refer to its formal features (Exp. Metaph., VI, tr. 1; VIII, tr. 1). Such an asymmetry presupposes that one is accustomed to distinguishing between signification and reference; in observance to the tradition, Paul relates such a distinction to the distinction between a name's signification and a name's supposition. A name such as "man" signifies a universal form, but supposits for the bearer of that form. Singular names essentially work in the same manner, while names of accidents are introduced into speech to signify exclusively an accidental form.

Such semantic distinction is also connected by Paul to the distinction between formal (or primary) and material (or secondary) signification, and it applies both to names and to propositions (formal predication vs. identical predication). The main source of Paul's semantics of propositions is Gregory of Rimini. Paul's treatment of propositions follows upon the basic assumption that predication is first of all a

metaphysical relation (Question on Universals), so that logical predication only confines itself to mirroring the metaphysical predication. Accordingly, a proposition such as “man is animal,” for Paul, signifies a thing in a complex way (*complexe significabile*) insofar as it makes explicit the inner stratified structure of the thing to which the subject-term refers (Pagallo 1960; Nuchelmans 1973; Conti 2004). Rather than a state-of-affairs, a proposition formally signifies the complexity of a thing according to the way in which that thing is replicated in the mind (i.e., *qua* existing in an objective way), while materially it signifies the extramental thing itself (i.e., *qua* existing in a subjective way). The distinction between the mode of objective or mind-dependent inexistence and the mode of subjective or mind-independent existence of a proposition’s signification enables Paul to handle more easily all the complications following from the different semantic attitudes of false and true sentences. On this last point, however, Paul shows to have had some hesitations throughout his career (*Logica magna*, II, 10–11; *Exp. Cat.*, chapter 5).

As to philosophical theology, Paul of Venice must be remembered especially for his contribution to the debate on divine ideas, with which Paul deals in his Commentary on the *Metaphysics* (book 7) and in the *Question on Universals* (Conti 2003). The core of his view about divine ideas is the Augustinian conviction that divine ideas serve the function of formal paradigms for any created thing. God brings into existence a creature by thinking of it by means of an exemplar. Since God’s act of thinking of a creature logically precedes God’s act of creating that creature, it follows that in God’s mind there must be a multiplicity of ideas that are different in kind and universal in character. Especially in his Commentary on the *Metaphysics*, Paul is explicit in denying that in God’s mind there can be present ideas of genera, of individuals, and of prime matter. Moreover, Paul assumes that divine ideas cannot be self-subsisting entities (as Plato believed), in that they are merely the results of the acts of God’s thinking and so they exist subjectively in God’s mind. Theologically speaking, though, divine ideas must be placed

within the Divine Word. Accordingly, divine ideas eternally coexist with God, but unlike the Divine Word, they are not co-substantial with God. In brief, divine ideas are called to play a threefold role: first, they are the counterpart of the essence of the creatures in God’s mind; second, they are God’s instruments of cognition; third, they are efficient and exemplary patterns for God’s creation of the world. Thus, divine ideas are seen as the explanatory principle of the intelligibility of reality. Most of this account of divine ideas depends upon Wyclif’s, who described divine ideas as really identical with the divine essence but formally distinct from it, insofar as each idea plays a formally different role *qua* co-cause in the process of creation. Paul is aware that Wyclif’s account was charged with heresy because of its consequences (especially divine necessitarianism and restriction of divine omnipotence). As a final step, Paul is careful to avoid such consequences by distinguishing between ideas of actually realized things, which are finite in number, and ideas of possible but not realized things, which instead are infinite in number. This distinction preserves God’s freedom, since the created world turns out to be just one of the possible worlds God can think of.

## Cross-References

- ▶ [Albert of Saxony](#)
- ▶ [Aristotelianism in the Greek, Latin, Syriac, Arabic, and Hebrew Traditions](#)
- ▶ [Essence and Existence](#)
- ▶ [Giles of Rome, Political Thought](#)
- ▶ [Gregory of Rimini](#)
- ▶ [Ibn Rushd, Muḥammad ibn Aḥmad al-Ḥafīd \(Averroes\)](#)
- ▶ [John Buridan](#)
- ▶ [John Duns Scotus](#)
- ▶ [John Wyclif](#)
- ▶ [Marsilius of Inghen](#)
- ▶ [Metaphysics](#)
- ▶ [Realism](#)
- ▶ [Thomas Aquinas](#)
- ▶ [Walter Burley](#)

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## Peter Abelard

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### Abstract

The characteristic doctrines of Peter Abelard (1079–1142) can be arranged under the headings of logic, metaphysics, and ethics.

Abelard rejects the position that logical theory deals with universals taken as things (*res*). It deals with words, whose signification is explained by their association with thoughts stripped of individuating detail. His account of propositions is shaped by his distinction between propositional force and propositional content, and by his notion of the *dictum*, the causally efficacious non-thing which is what a proposition says. His account of inference is especially focused on the nature of conditionals and the sorts of relationships between terms that can be used to verify them.

Abelard's most characteristic metaphysical view is that the only things which exist are individuals. Forms exist as individual to the things they inhabit, not as shared between things. Material objects are indeed matter/form composites, but their forms are simply arrangements of underlying matter; material objects are thus usefully subject to mereological analysis (i.e., analysis in terms of part/whole relations). Humans, but not



animals, have immaterial souls, and are capable of freedom. By contrast God is not free; he can only do the things he does.

Abelard's most characteristic ethical view is that it is the consent, not the action, that is to be judged as sinful or meritorious. A sinful consent is marked by contempt for God, and is formed explicitly in violation of God's law. Law is itself revealed both in the Old and New Testament – yielding Old and New Law, respectively – but is also innately present to humans in the form of natural law. Meritorious consent is marked by love of God – in other words, by charity. Charity is the theological equivalent of justice, which itself holds central place among the cardinal virtues. Justice and charity both enjoin regard for the interests of others, but charity additionally does this as a product of the love of God, and for that reason counts as a more fundamental virtue than justice.

Peter Abelard was a colossus of twelfth-century culture. He is widely known through his popular writings: letters, an autobiography, sermons, and hymns. But his greatness as a thinker stems chiefly from a series of technical writings in philosophy and theology.

He was born in 1079 near Nantes in Brittany. As a young man, he studied under two of the most eminent philosophical minds of the time, Roscelin of Compiègne and William of Champeaux. After conflict with the latter, he established various schools of his own – in Melun, Corbeil, and Mont Ste. Geneviève – before becoming master of the cathedral school of Notre Dame. By 1117, he had vacated this choice position following the scandal of his romance with Heloise. Removal to various monastic settings increased his literary productivity, and progressively channeled his interests toward theology and ethics. Open conflict with elements of the church hierarchy led to a condemnation of his work in 1121 at the Council of Soissons. In 1122, he established a flourishing school at Quincy, and in 1127 he took the position of abbot in a monastery in Brittany. After several tumultuous years in that situation, he resumed

teaching in Paris in 1132. His work was publicly condemned again at the Council of Sens in 1141, and he was excommunicated at that time. This sentence was lifted in 1142, just prior to his death (Clanchy 1997).

Abelard inherited (via Boethius) the Stoic division of philosophy's subject-matter into logic, physics, and ethics. The preponderance of his philosophical work may be gathered under those headings, which will appear in the following summary, except that "metaphysics" replaces "physics" as being a better fit with current usage.

## Logic

By far, the most important source for Abelard's logical theory is Aristotle's own work in this area, as conveyed in the *De interpretatione* and to a lesser extent the *Categories*, and as commented on in exegetical works by Boethius. He is also much influenced by theoretical writings in the area of grammar, particularly Priscian's *Institutiones grammaticae* and its medieval commentators.

Abelard employs a *linguistic* interpretation of logic's subject matter; logic is about language, not metaphysical objects like universals. Logicians should primarily approach a proposition like "Every human is an animal" as involving a relationship between its component words, not a relationship between humanity and animality. On the other hand, the logician studies words taken not as mere sounds but as sounds invested with semantic content. A *vox* is a mere sound. A *vox* invested with semantic content is a *sermo*. The *sermo* relates to the *vox*, Abelard argues, as a statue relates to the stone from which it is formed; in some sense, the statue and stone are the same thing, but nonetheless there are properties they do not share. An example is the property of being human-made, which the statue has but not the stone. A property often achieved by the *sermo*, but not the *vox*, is that of being predicable of many – in other words, having generality of meaning. How does "human" manage to apply generally to humans? The linguistic approach to logic rules out an answer which appeals to a

universal – humanity – as a way to answer the question. Abelard instead provides a purely semantic account of generality, the main work of which is done by his account of the thought or understanding (*intellectus*) which a word generates in the mind of the hearer. An *intellectus* is capable of recording more or less detail from the things it represents, and therefore of being a more or less general representation of those things. “Human” achieves generality of application to humans by generating an *intellectus* stripped of individuating detail; it pertains to no particular human, and therefore pertains to all humans. Hence arises the word’s generality (Abelard 1933; Tweedale 1976; Jacobi 2004).

At the next stage of logical analysis, attention is directed to the process of fusing words into propositions. Key to this process is the function of the verb. Abelard follows Aristotle in defining a verb as a sign of something’s being said of something else. As such it confers a completeness upon a whole proposition not possessed by any of its constituent words or phrases. Abelard develops this point into a distinction between propositional force and propositional content. The same propositional content can be said assertively (“Socrates runs”), interrogatively (“Does Socrates run?”), imperatively (“I command that Socrates run”), and so on, depending on the particular mode of signification attaching to the verb. It is the *same* content that undergoes this diverse treatment, and Abelard recognizes the utility of isolating it as a distinct semantic component of the proposition. He calls it the *dictum* of the proposition (Abelard 1970, 2010; Nuchelmans 1973).

This notion of a *dictum* remains a work in progress. Abelard recognizes the importance of having such a notion but never quite achieves a perspicuous account of it. He describes it negatively as not being any sort of *intellectus* associated with the proposition, or any of the things denoted by the terms of the proposition. The *dictum* is itself, in fact, not a thing at all – on that point Abelard is adamant. He describes it positively as the cause of key semantic features of the proposition: its truth or falsity, its necessity or possibility, and its oppositeness (contradictoriness, contrarity) to other propositions. A *dictum*

is what an assertive proposition says, and if that proposition is true the *dictum* is what makes it so (Abelard 1970, 2010; Guilfooy 2002). What Abelard has in mind here seems to approximate contemporary notions like “fact” or “state of affairs,” especially if these are taken as causally efficacious non-things.

This analysis of propositional content prompts further insights (Abelard 1970, 2010; Wilks 2008). (a) Abelard is able to rethink the grammar of impersonal constructions, such as “It is possible...,” “It is true...,” and “It is good...,” where the blank is to be filled in each case by a clause expressing a *dictum* (e.g., “that Socrates runs”). At first sight, it seems as if that *dictum*-expressing clause is the subject term in these cases, with “possible,” “true,” and “good” serving as predicate terms; but since, as noted, the *dictum* is not a thing, the clause cannot serve in that capacity. So Abelard is at pains to find new analyses of impersonal constructions which identify appropriate subject and predicate terms. (b) The clarifying insight that negation applies to the proposition as a whole and not just to the predicate is facilitated by analyzing the proposition into a content to which an assertive force is applied. The negation is then construed as applying to the assertive force, not to any part of the content. Abelard is thus able to distinguish between “It is not the case that S is P” and “S is not P.” He rightly regards the former as the proper form of negation. (c) Modal propositions can be expressed as impersonal constructions (“It is possible that...,” and “It is necessary that...”). But when so expressed, they appear to lack proper subject terms, and therefore seem to require reformulation. “It is possible that S is P” can in fact be easily reformulated as “S is possibly P”; this latter expression yields what is clearly a *de re* modality, as opposed to the former expression, which yields a *de sensu* (that is, *de dicto*) one. Abelard’s approach to impersonals generally makes him sensitive to the great importance of this modal distinction, a sensitivity that enlightens his entire approach to modal theory.

The final stage of logical analysis involves study of inference patterns themselves. While Abelard’s treatment of syllogistic logic presents

smaller-scale insights and novelties of formulation, we find marked innovation in his handling of conditionals (that is, statements of “if . . . then” form). He argues that the entailment present in these is as demonstrable as the entailment present in standard syllogisms. In syllogisms, the entailment of conclusion by premises stems from the fact that the content of the conclusion is already present in the premises; likewise, in conditionals, the entailment of antecedent by consequent stems from the fact that the content of the consequent is already present in the antecedent. In syllogisms, the entailment is demonstrated by appealing to the formal properties of the propositions themselves. In conditionals, it is demonstrated by appealing to the relationship between terms in antecedent and consequent, and identifying it as being the sort of relationship which grounds an entailment. “If it is a man then it is an animal” exemplifies such an entailment. The fact that the content of the consequent is present in the antecedent is evident in the relationship between man and animal; this is a relationship of species, man being a species of animal. Identifying this relationship suffices to demonstrate that entailment exists. Abelard attempts to identify other sorts of relationships between terms – referred to as “topics” (*loci*) – which likewise demonstrate that entailment exists. His attempt to codify these topics into systematic theory is one of the most elaborate philosophical exercises of any that he undertakes (Abelard 1970; Martin 1987, 2004).

## Metaphysics

Abelard’s work in metaphysics is heavily influenced by Aristotle’s *Categories*, especially as commented on in exegetical works by Boethius, and in Porphyry’s *Isagoge*; and of course the influence of Christian theism is pervasive.

Nonetheless, his most characteristic metaphysical view derives from none of those sources. That view – generally referred to as “nominalism” – emphasizes the individuality of *all* things that exist, and opposes any theoretical approach to the contrary.

Abelard’s nominalism arises in the context of a position now known as “Material Essence Realism,” which radically de-emphasizes the individuality of things. Adherents of this position do not adopt a purely linguistic reading of Aristotle’s logical writings, instead interpreting the universal terms appearing in a statement like “Every human is an animal” as universal things: humanity and animality. Boethius says of these universals that they are present as a whole in many individuals, and constitute the nature of each. So the same animality is shared by many animals, which are differentiated from one another only by the different accidents they possess. A pivotal event in Abelard’s career is his sustained attack on this theory. Individual animals cannot properly be differentiated from each other, he argues, if at base they are all the same animal – which they would be if animality were a universal in the Boethian sense. And if accidents did indeed differentiate substances from each other, then they would be metaphysically prior to those substances, which make no sense given how accidents are understood to relate to substances. So, material essence realism is rejected whole cloth (Abelard 1933; King 2004).

We have already seen what universal terms are for Abelard. They are just words. And we have seen how they work. They denote classes because of the applicability of an abstracted *intellectus* to all members of a class. There need to be no appeal to a single form simultaneously shared by all members. What animals have in common is not animality, the universal thing, but just this: being an animal, which Abelard refers to as a *status*, by which he seems to mean the condition or state that things are in (Abelard 1933; Tweedale 1976). Other than to emphasize that it is not a thing, he gives little detail about what a *status* is, and so the word proves difficult to translate. The point of the notion seems to be that things are comparable without having in common a shared form, and that this comparability is what allows the same abstracted *intellectus* to be applicable to a plurality of things.

Abelard considerably simplifies the understanding of form on this account. In fact, in speaking of material things, he describes forms as being nothing more than the arrangement or composition

of the matter in which they are present (Abelard 1919; Arlig 2012). His corresponding discussion of matter proceeds along the lines of the *vox/sermo* distinction noted earlier. The matter alone of a physical object is numerically the same as the composite object arising when that matter is imbued with form. But the composite has properties that the matter alone does not, just as an image has properties that its component material does not. So the matter and the resulting composite are not the same in property, even though they are the same in number. There is obviously a complex account of sameness and difference at work here; the provenance of this account is Abelard's discussion of the Trinity, and his ongoing endeavor to clarify how its members are in one sense the same, and in another sense different (Abelard 1969b, 1987a; Brower 2004; King 2004; Marenbon 2007; Arlig 2012). Abelard also gives us a complex analysis of part/whole relations to account for material containment and aggregation. Continuous wholes – where there are no intervals among parts – are the limiting case of individual physical objects. More complicated are discrete wholes. Some of these are mere pluralities, whose parts are spatially scattered. Some, like flocks of birds, have parts that are spatially proximate but unarranged. Others, like houses, have parts that are spatially proximate and arranged. A key point for Abelard is to define the distinct parts of this third kind of discrete whole; his claim is that they are the parts whose placement in the arrangement will have the immediate effect of bringing the whole into existence (Abelard 1970; King 2004).

Various other features of the material world are canvassed in Abelard's work, largely in response to the content of Aristotle's *Categories*: the nature of relations, space, time, change, and so on (King 2004). But as a Christian theist, he focuses his attention on two immaterial entities as well: the human soul and God. The souls of animals are material and thus perish when the animals die. The souls of humans are not material. Neither are they forms, since, Abelard argues, it makes no sense to say of a form that it has insanity, anger, or knowledge, although it makes perfect sense to say of a soul that it has those qualities. Indeed, if a

soul were a form in a form/matter composite, then it would be like other forms in such composites in having a purely material basis. Human souls are metaphysically distinct from the material order of the world, and hence can sustain thought independently of a physical body (Abelard 1921). Thus is a theological account of the special dispensation for human beings brought alongside a relentlessly materialist account of the properties of the world.

Abelard's view of God is strikingly deterministic: God can only do the things he does, and only when and how he does them, and is likewise constrained in what he omits. This is presented as a consequence of God's goodness. Divine acts and omissions are always the best among alternatives, none of which are better than, or even as good as, the acts and omissions themselves. In fact, God never even has to choose between equally good alternatives because none such ever arise for him. Presumably, this is because his goodness never allows him down a path where equally good alternatives would even be encountered; the path he is drawn to is without moral forks, where every good encountered is the decisively best one when set against alternatives. This means, in the end, that there is a reason for everything God does or omits, and that the world, which is the product of these absolutely reasoned acts and omissions, is a deterministic one. There is, of course, allowance for human freedom in this world, since the human soul is set apart by its immateriality. Humans can actually be free, even though God is not. Does this non-freedom compromise the dignity of God? Not at all, says Abelard. Being free is like eating, walking, or sinning – not properties we should expect to find in a divine being anyway and, therefore, not properties whose absence compromises the divinity of God (Abelard 1969b, 1987a; Marenbon 1997, 2013).

## Ethics

Abelard works in the tradition of Augustinian theological ethics, but is also influenced by Stoic theory, primarily through Cicero's *On Invention* (*De inventione*).

Emphasis on the believer's interior life, and the importance of the very quality of the thoughts themselves that underlie actions, is typical of the Augustinian tradition. Pagans have been able to act in an exemplary fashion just as Christians have; how the groups differ morally must therefore be a product not of action itself but of the thought process giving rise to it. This is the widespread presumption that precedes Abelard, and he develops it uncompromisingly by insisting that moral relevance attaches only to the consent (intention) from which action flows. The physical action itself makes no moral difference. Neither does any state of desire or aversion involved in the action, or even any virtue or vice. We may legitimately call an action sinful or meritorious, but only in the derivative sense that it arises from a sinful or meritorious consent (Abelard 1971; King 1995; Marenbon 1997).

If we are to judge the action based on the consent, how then are we to judge the consent? Abelard has seemed to some commentators to be left with no objective reference point for determining sinful consents. But in fact he does address this concern: a consent is sinful when it constitutes an attitude of contempt (*contemptus*) for God. It does so when it is formed explicitly in violation of one of God's laws. To consent in this way, of course, one must actually know what God's laws are in the first place, and this requirement might seem to sit uncomfortably with the fact that those in pagan cultures are in no position to be apprised of Christian revelation. But Abelard has a broad conception of God's law. It includes the superseded Old Law of the Old Testament, and the now applicable New Law of the New Testament, but, preceding both of these in time, it also includes many self-evident precepts of natural law, such as the edicts against murder, mendacity, adultery, and so on. These precepts are available as items of Old Law or New Law, but they are also available in natural law independently of the content of Christian revelation. Pagan thinkers clearly had some grasp of precepts like these, as attested in their writings. But indeed, it does not require special intellectual gifts to achieve this understanding. The general run of adults, so long as they are sound of mind, achieve it by virtue of

having a conscience (*conscientia*), which bestows insight into self-evident truths of natural law. Because they have this understanding, their consents in violation of natural law are able to be instances of contempt for God. That is why those consents are sins. Those humans who have benefited from revelation – formerly the Old Law, now the New Law – have all the more capacity to recognize consents which manifest such contempt (Abelard 2001; Marenbon 1997).

The capstone of Abelard's ethical system is his account of charity (*caritas*), which is defined as the love of God for his own sake or the love of one's neighbors for the sake of God. As a settled disposition of the soul, it counts as a virtue. Indeed, it is the central virtue. Since sin is contempt for God, habitually referencing actions to one's love for God will offer a guard against sin. Besides this theological virtue (as well as faith and hope, the two other key theological virtues), there is also a role in Abelard's theory for the traditional cardinal virtues of prudence, temperance, courage, and justice. In Stoic fashion, he argues that other nontheological virtues are reducible to these, and that among them justice holds central place as being subserved by the others. But in Augustinian fashion, he also argues that justice is a dim reflection of charity, enjoining a concern for the well-being of others, but not motivating that concern through love of God. Charity thus emerges as the theologically informed counterpart of the highest of the non-theological virtues. As such, it is the chief means of meritorious consents, but more importantly the attitude of love it implies is the chief end of human striving, the highest good for human beings. The reward of heaven is the protracted exercise of this love in the form of a beatific vision. It might seem intuitive to distinguish meritorious consents from the heavenly reward to which they lead, but on Abelard's view the consents and reward both reduce to the same thing: the love of God (just as sinful consents and hell both reduce to the same thing: the hatred of God). Heaven is not, properly speaking, even a reward, he maintains. It is an extension of the inner life of charity that leads to it (Abelard 1987a, 2001; Marenbon 2007).



## Cross-References

- ▶ [Bernard of Clairvaux](#)
- ▶ [Boethius](#)
- ▶ [Categories](#)
- ▶ [Divine Power](#)
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- ▶ [Virtue and Vice](#)
- ▶ [William of Champeaux](#)

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## Peter Auriol

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### Abstract

The French Franciscan Peter Auriol (c. 1280–1322) taught at Bologna, Toulouse, and finally Paris, where he lectured on the *Sentences* in 1317–1318 and remained as master until 1321, when he was made archbishop of Aix-en-Provence shortly before his death. Auriol composed popular treatises on poverty, natural philosophy, and the Immaculate Conception, various sets of questions on the *Sentences*, an important *Quodlibet*, and a significant Bible commentary. In his *Sentences* questions and *Quodlibet* – especially his great *Scriptum* on I *Sentences* – his explicit attacks on Thomas Aquinas, John Duns Scotus, and other giants, his proud independence, his provocative originality, and his general brilliance

made Auriol perhaps the most influential Parisian theologian in the period after Scotus, although this influence was often negative. Auriol had a broad readership into the seventeenth century, and his works were printed frequently from the 1470s to 1695. Auriol is best known for his positions on universals, cognition, divine foreknowledge, grace, and predestination. His systematic approach allows us to trace common threads in his doctrine: conceptualism and the rejection of realism, a strong emphasis on contingency and a thorough denial of determinism, and a strict interpretation of divine simplicity and necessity. His appeal to creative devices and terms to construct his theories, among them “apparent being,” “indistance,” and “indistinction,” make his opinions immediately recognizable in the works of his successors, who more often than not argued against him.

Peter Auriol (Aureoli, Aureolus, Aureolo, Aureole, Aureol, Oriel, Oriol, Oriole), the *Doctor Facundus*, was born c. 1280 or slightly earlier, near Gourdan, about 30 km north of Cahors in southwest France. Most likely before 1300, Auriol joined the Friars Minor in the Franciscan province of Aquitaine and probably began his higher studies at the province's main *studium* in Toulouse, where he seems to have met Jacques Deuze, the future Pope John XXII. In an early work, Auriol mentions that he was present at Paris at a theological lecture, so presumably he studied theology in his order's Parisian convent in the first decade of the fourteenth century, before being sent to teach theology at Minorite *studia* elsewhere, as was customary. We find him as *lector* at the order's Bologna *studium* in 1312, according to one manuscript of his only purely philosophical work, the *Tractatus de principiis philosophicis* (or *physicis* or *naturae*). Another early work, *De paupertate*, was composed in late 1311 or early 1312, perhaps also at Bologna. Afterward Auriol taught at the Franciscans' Toulouse *studium*, writing two treatises on Mary's Immaculate Conception by May 1315 in the wake of a disputation from December 1314,

during a first year of lecturing on Peter Lombard's *Sentences*. He was termed *lector* in Toulouse in early 1316, probably still reading the *Sentences*, but on May 31 of that year, the Franciscan General Chapter in Naples assigned him to lecture on the *Sentences* at Paris. By then Auriol had written much of his largest and most important work, the *Scriptum* on the first book of the *Sentences*, which he may have completed going to Paris, since a beautiful presentation copy (Vatican, Borghese 329) was finished for Pope John XXII on May 19, 1317. It is probable that some of the surviving *reportatio* material (i.e., transcripts done by students or secretaries) from Auriol's various lectures on the *Sentences* also derives from his Toulouse years.

By the time Auriol began teaching at Paris, he was already well known. Throughout the fourteenth century, bachelor lectures on the *Sentences* at Paris were delivered over one academic year, and colophons from Auriol's manuscripts indicate that he read the *Sentences* in 1317–1318, and not 1316–1318 as was once thought. Various *reportationes* of these lectures circulated, some of them revised by Auriol himself. After Auriol's lectures, on July 14, 1318, Pope John asked ("partly because of [personal] experience") the chancellor of the University of Paris to promote Auriol to master, and Auriol was regent master the following academic year, mentioned as such on November 13, 1318. Either as a formed bachelor or new master Auriol engaged in disputations with masters of the faculty of theology, notably Thomas Wylton and Hervaeus Natalis, from which some questions survive. During his term as regent master, Auriol composed his extremely popular and influential Bible commentary, the *Compendium sensus litteralis totius divinae Scripturae*. Various other scriptural texts have also been ascribed to Auriol, not all of them convincingly. During his regency, he published the 16 questions of his *Quodlibet* in 1320, ostensibly from a public disputation that took place during Lent or Advent, but surely based at least in part on earlier debates. In late 1320, Auriol was made Franciscan provincial minister of Aquitaine, but he was still active in Paris when he was appointed archbishop of Aix-en-Provence on February

27, 1321. In the late spring of 1321, Pope John XXII himself consecrated Auriol in Avignon, where Auriol died before January 23, 1322, probably on January 10. He was apparently never made cardinal, despite a myth that originated much later, confusing him with his predecessor as archbishop of Aix-en-Provence, also named Peter.

In an era of towering figures, Peter Auriol was outstanding. His works were immediately popular and remained so: the *De paupertate* was printed in 1511 and 1513, while the treatises on the Immaculate Conception were printed at least four times between 1490 and 1695, before the modern edition of 1904 (about a dozen manuscripts preserve the first tract, half of them also containing the second). Most popular of all was Auriol's Bible commentary: besides the many manuscripts, it was printed some 13 times from the 1470s to 1649. The modern edition of 1896 takes up 555 pages of text. His early *De principiis* was left incomplete and was never printed, but it still survives in six manuscripts plus fragments, and when the critical edition is complete, it will constitute a sizeable volume. Stray questions from Parisian disputations, notably in MS Oxford, Balliol 63, also survive, and some have been published. Auriol's most important works for philosophical content are his *Sentences* questions and *Quodlibet*: roughly 50 codices preserve parts of the various versions of Auriol's *Sentences* questions, and a dozen or so witnesses contain the *Quodlibet*. In 1596, the *Scriptum* on book I was printed in a huge volume, equivalent to some 2500 pages in a critical edition, and in 1605, another large tome was published including the *Quodlibet* and versions of books II–IV. The 1596 edition followed a faulty exemplar, so in 1952–1956 an improved diplomatic edition (based on Vatican, Borghese 329) of the *Scriptum*'s prologue and distinctions 1–8 was published by E.M. Buytaert in two volumes, and more of the *Scriptum* has been published on the *Peter Auriol Homepage*. In the 1605 edition, again, the manuscripts followed were often poor and the redactions themselves mixed. In the confusing case of book III, the edition combines three different versions. On the basis of a systematic

analysis of the surviving manuscripts – among them a codex containing two copies of book III that turned up in a Vermont bookshop – an international group is working to disentangle the unprinted redactions of book I and all the versions of books II–IV, eventually to publish critical editions of all redactions and the *Quodlibet*.

Peter Auriol's works were popular because of his innovative procedure and his combative independence vis-à-vis earlier theologians. He approached questions by first presenting the most important prevailing opinions of the day, and he was a pioneer in the practice of naming names. His *Scriptum* on book I of the *Sentences* abounds in over 500 explicit and often detailed citations of scholastic theologians active after 1250, especially John Duns Scotus, OFM (133), Thomas Aquinas, OP (122), Henry of Ghent (54), Hervaeus Natalis, OP (51), Durand of Saint-Pourçain, OP (47), and William of Ware, OFM (26). Several of these theologians were still alive and active in the Parisian Faculty of Theology, such as Hervaeus and Thomas Wylton. (Caution: in about 100 instances, the 1596 edition has the citation wrong.) Auriol's habit of summarizing previous positions made his *Scriptum* a reference work for those who came after him. His contemporary and confrere Francis of Meyronnes explicitly advised his readers that, if they wanted to know who thought what, they should look at Peter Auriol. Twenty-five years later, this was still the case for the great Augustinian Gregory of Rimini, who sometimes tacitly quoted earlier figures via Auriol. A more striking example comes from a century after Auriol's death, when John Capreolus, in his defense of Thomas Aquinas against the latter's attackers, commonly cited those opponents through Auriol's text.

After reviewing earlier and contemporary opinions Auriol invariably found something wrong in all of them, small or large, and then presented his own view. "Quid dicendum secundum veritatem," he would begin, emphasizing that his opinion was both different and better. A couple of anonymous abbreviations and paraphrases of Auriol's *Sentences* commentary and *Quodlibet* demonstrate that Auriol did have a following. On account of his attacks on earlier

views, however, Auriol himself became a target for almost every major theologian active afterward down to the Black Death. Whether they were Thomists, like the Dominican Bernard Lombardi, or Scotists, like the Franciscan Landolfo Caracciolo, or more independent, like the Franciscan Gerald Odonis, it was impossible for them to avoid dealing with Auriol's theories. Simple bean counting shows how preoccupied they were for more than 30 years after his Parisian *Sentences* lectures: Auriol is the main opponent – or at least the most commonly cited theologian after Scotus – in the works of virtually every Parisian Franciscan for the next quarter century. At Oxford, only the local boy William of Ockham outranks Auriol in the *Sentences* questions of the Franciscans Walter Chatton, Adam Wodeham, and John of Rodington. Among the Parisian Dominicans, Hervaeus Natalis battled Auriol directly, Raymond Bequini actually composed a polemical work against Auriol, and Bequini's and Bernard Lombardi's *Quodlibeta* are primarily directed at Auriol. To varying degrees, this is also true of the Augustinians Gerard of Siena, James of Pamiers, Michael of Massa, and probably Thomas of Strasbourg. Auriol is second only to Scotus in the amount of attention he received from the Carmelite John Baconthorpe. This continued into the 1340s: for the Augustinians Alphonsus Vargas of Toledo and Gregory of Rimini, Auriol was a close second behind Scotus, although Gregory of Rimini cited Ockham as often as Auriol. The Carmelite Paul of Perugia cited Auriol more than any other theologian of the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries. After the Black Death, this focus on Auriol faded to an extent, but even in the fifteenth century, the Thomist John Capreolus and the Scotist Peter of Nugent considered Auriol the main threat to their champions. Auriol remained an important thinker down to the Protestant Reformation and well into the seventeenth century.

Auriol was systematic and brilliant, and driving him was a search for simplicity in metaphysics, theology, natural philosophy, and even logic. Indeed, sometimes his desire for simplicity forced him to appeal to vague negative concepts, "indistance," "indistinction," and "imprecision"

being examples. At other times, the data of revelation required uncomfortable modifications. In general, however, he was very successful, "ahead" of his time even, in that some of his ideas would today seem common sense. For example, take Auriol's doctrine of place, a scientific context where his ideas are well known. The Aristotelian notion of place is the immobile inner surface of the containing body, so the place of wine in a bottle of wine is the inner surface of the bottle. Auriol rejects this in his questions on *II Sentences*, instead defending a "vulgar" (common sense?) notion of place as position in the universe, such that he is able to contemplate the concept of absolute space. Auriol's view was rejected by his successors, but it provoked innovative alternatives and was still discussed in the late sixteenth century, before his text was printed in 1605, and one wonders whether it played an indirect role afterward in the development of Newtonian cosmology.

Interest in Auriol's thought has steadily grown since the beginning of the twentieth century, and over the past three decades, his ideas have finally begun to receive the attention they deserve. Auriol is known in particular for his views on ontology and cognition, on the one hand, and God's connection with humans with respect to foreknowledge, grace, and predestination, on the other. Several excellent surveys of Auriol's thought have been published, and so here some of Auriol's ideas will be approached in part through the prism of the Cretan Greek Peter of Candia, a fellow Franciscan active c. 1380 who was elected Pope Alexander V at the Council of Pisa in 1409. Candia authored one of the most widely read sets of questions on the *Sentences* of the latter half of the fourteenth century, and he cited Auriol more often than anyone except the other Franciscans Scotus, John of Ripa, and Ockham. Writing at the distance of one lifetime, Candia chose the salient points of Auriol's doctrine and attempted to explain them as clearly as possible, without coloring his presentation with his own evaluation.

It is well known that Auriol was a conceptualist. Along with contemporary thinkers like Durand of Saint-Pourçain and William of

Ockham, Auriol holds that only particulars have extramental existence of any kind and, correspondingly, all universality and generality are products of mental activity. As a good Aristotelian for whom "nothing is in the intellect that was not first in the senses," Auriol grounds all human knowledge in sensory perception. Nevertheless, Auriol argues strenuously for the active nature of both the senses and the intellect, asserting that all cognitive powers mold data in one way or another. In reaching this conclusion, Auriol begins with his famous examples of "erroneous" sensory perception. Taking vision as his example, Auriol presents eight visual "experiences" where what we see is not a reflection of "reality" per se. One is the classic example of a person watching the shore from a moving ship: it appears that the objects on shore move. Another is that a stick partially submerged in water seems to be broken. Auriol claims that, when we have visual sensory experiences like these, we are having intuitive cognitions; for Auriol, then, unlike for John Duns Scotus, for example, whether a cognition is intuitive or abstractive has to do with how that cognition appears to us (a phenomenological criterion) as opposed to whether the object is actually present and existent (an ontological criterion): if the object appears to us to be directly present (whether it is in fact present or not), then for Auriol we are having an intuitive cognition and not an abstractive cognition. The sense of sight, for Auriol, always delivers intuitive cognition, even when we are experiencing sensory illusions. More importantly, Auriol claims on the basis of these experiences that the senses are fundamentally active. The stick in the water is not broken; it just appears to be broken. According to Auriol, the fact that we have a broken stick as the object of our sense cognition, when in fact there is no broken stick in extramental reality, proves that the senses actively create something upon perceptual acquaintance. Specifically, according to Auriol, the senses place the extramental object of cognition into what he calls "apparent being" (*esse apparens*, but he also calls it "objective being" and "intentional being"). The activity of the senses is the only way of explaining how we see a broken stick when there is no broken stick.

Moreover, for Auriol these cases of nonveridical sensory perception show us how the senses work in general: even in veridical sensory perception, the senses are fundamentally active for Auriol, putting the perceived object into apparent being, which itself is the term or object of the sensory act. When the *esse apparens* – what appears – matches the external object, the perception is accurate, and when it does not, the perception is erroneous. Auriol was not a skeptic: he had confidence that most of the time we are not fooled and he did not worry about the negative ramifications for certitude that his theory posed. Nevertheless, he was attacked on this point immediately.

What is *esse apparens*? Auriol claims that it is the object of cognition itself but put into another mode of being by the activity of the senses. When he says this, he means it literally: the extramental object of cognition and the *esse apparens* by which we perceive it are identical according to strict numerical identity. Thus, an extramental thing in *esse apparens* is just that object as perceived, that is, as the object of a cognitive power. If this were not the case, according to Auriol, then a type of veil of perception would fall between our cognitive powers and the extramental world. When we perceive something, we are literally perceiving that thing, not that thing as it exists extramentally, but rather that thing as it exists as an object of cognition. These are two different modes or ways that numerically the same thing exists. This is as true for intellectual cognition as for sensory cognition. For Auriol, when we form a concept of something, our intellectual faculties put that something into *esse apparens*. Yet that concept is nothing other than that something as conceived, not a separate entity with its own real existence. According to Auriol, then, every particular thing that exists has two modes of being: real being in extramental reality and apparent being, but the latter can only be actualized by someone cognizing the thing.

As mentioned above, for Auriol the world is made up exclusively of individuals. Nevertheless, individuals can have extremely similar characteristics. For Auriol, these characteristics (*rationes*) are the extramental foundation of our universal concepts, since each of these characteristics is

able to lead us to form a different concept, and since the extreme similarity of these characteristics leads an intellect to form precisely the same universal concept about several individuals belonging to what we would call a natural kind. So Auriol grounds our universal concepts in extramental reality (and hence in sense cognition), while maintaining that actual universality or generality is merely conceptual (since the characteristics are proper to one and only one individual, being merely extremely similar to the proper characteristics of another individual of the same natural kind). Moreover, the universal concepts that we form of any individual simply are that individual put into apparent being (as we saw above). On the basis of perceptual acquaintance with Socrates, for example, I can form the concepts “Socrates,” “man,” and “animal,” and all of these concepts are (by strict numerical identity) Socrates. The universal concept “animal” is all animals, but this does not entail that there is an extramental “animality” separate from these individuals.

Because Auriol asserts that, on the most basic level, everything that exists outside the mind is an individual, he not only rejects the realism of the major scholastics of the thirteenth and early fourteenth centuries, parallel to what Ockham would soon do at Oxford, but he insists that the search for a principle of individuation, something that makes an individual an individual, is a waste of time. External reality is made up exclusively of individuals, and any attempt to explain how these individuals are in fact individual will simply generate the same question about the purported principle of individuation (why is that individuated?), and so on ad infinitum. Accordingly, his understanding of Aristotelianhylomorphism includes the denial that prime matter can be understood as existing separately from form. In this way, he rejects the predominant position of the Franciscan philosophical tradition, which attributed to prime matter some minimal actuality. Rather, matter is always understood as existing with form in a sensible substance. The same applies to accidental forms. Therefore, there is no reason to multiply separately existing entities: that a particular individual man is tall, fat, and pale, does not mean that

these forms have any separate being apart from the substance. (The one possible exception to this claim is the rational soul, which Auriol often discusses as though it is a form different from other forms inasmuch as it is able to have continued existence without the matter in which it inheres; this might make Auriol a type of pluralist when it comes to human substantial forms, but Auriol is rarely, if ever, explicit on this topic.) Not all of the nine Aristotelian categories of accidents have even this sort of real being in a substance, but only quality, quantity, action, and passion. Relation, place, time, position, and state/habit have no existence outside the mind, not even in substances.

Fixed as he was in a generally Aristotelian intellectual world, however, it took ingenuity for Auriol to come up with an intelligible explanation of qualitative and quantitative change that saved the phenomena. Auriol's solution will bring us to his theory of God's connection with humans, since his main treatment of qualitative change is in the context of the increase or decrease of grace, a form, in the soul, a substance. Peter of Candia (*I Sentences*, q. 5, a. 3) fixes on Auriol's own words and then lists the main elements. The problem is, what happens when grace increases, or more precisely, what exactly is added to the existing grace and how?

Lord Peter Auriol imagines that that reality according to which the smaller [existing] grace is made more intense cannot be a whole grace that is distinctly discrete, participating in the reality or specific nature [of that grace] as if it were one separate piece of grace, but rather it participates in the reality and nature of grace through a certain reduction, so that it could be called 'con-grace'. But this reality is completely inseparable (*impraecisibilis*) in reality and in the intellect. Thus is it not per se able to be made, even by divine power, such that it would receive separate and demonstrated being. Nor is it per se intuitively intelligible, but only 'co-intelligible', so that an angelic intellect could not intuitively divide the augmented grace into two parts of grace. Rather the increased grace always occurs to that intellect as something to which 'something of grace' has been added, and not grace. And one must imagine in a similar way concerning *all other qualitative or quantitative forms*... On this basis three propositions are inferred: first, what is added in the increase of grace is not properly grace; second, what is added

cannot come about by itself without that to which it is added, because in its own nature it is unseparated (*impraecisa*) reality; third, this reality is not separately conceivable without the prior reality. And this is his intention on this matter, via which, as he says, one saves the numeric unity of a form and its simplicity, and the actual infinity of things is avoided, and similarly one saves the continuity of motion, and briefly everything required for the increase in intensity of forms is beautifully preserved in this way.

Grace is of course linked to salvation, predestination, and divine foreknowledge of future contingents, perhaps the context that best demonstrates the depth and extent of Auriol's impact and the one in which the reception of Auriol's theories has been investigated most fully. Auriol argues at length in rejecting the prevailing views, those of Aquinas and Scotus. Auriol approaches the general problem from two directions, the first from the perspective of God. We can again do no better than quote Peter of Candia's succinct summary (*I Sentences*, q. 6, a. 2):

Because God is eternity, and consequently excludes every temporal characteristic, while every creature is temporal and consequently formally excludes every characteristic of a being of eternity, therefore strictly speaking there is no priority, posteriority, or simultaneity between God and creature. Thus He can neither be said to be distant from that creature by duration nor be at the same time with it, because this would either be on the basis of eternity or on the basis of temporality. But it cannot be by either of these, since neither is common to the other. And so truly and strictly speaking, God's knowledge attains the 'actuality' of a contingently future creature via some sort of negative *indistance*. From this it appears that His knowledge of the actuality of a future contingent does not make a proposition about the future true or false, but leaves it neutral, since with respect to that future contingent He does not have 'expecting' knowledge. This is because He would then be distant from such a future, which is not true, unless the line of [temporal] succession were applied to Him. But that is false, because such a line is repugnant to the nature of eternity.

Approaching from another direction, Auriol centers his argument on the contingency or "freedom" of human actions, at least with respect to sin. Auriol holds that any metaphysical or logical predetermination with respect to future events would entail that they occur of necessity. Having denied that God's knowledge precedes the future



or makes propositions about the future true or false, he argues more generally as follows: if every proposition about the future is either true or false, the future happens necessarily. Since it appears that not all things are determined beforehand, and indeed human free will and divine justice require that at least some things come about contingently and not necessarily, propositions about the contingent future are neither true nor false, but neutral. Auriol – and some other major scholastics – claims that this was Aristotle’s opinion as well.

Auriol’s stress on the contingency of human action entailed modifications not only in his theory of propositional truth but also in his view of salvation. The standard view was that the only cause of the elects’ predestination is God’s mercy, whereas the reprobates are justly damned for their faults. A recent minority, represented by Henry of Ghent and Thomas Wylton, maintained that human free will was somehow involved in both predestination and reprobation. Trying both to avoid Pelagianism and to preserve the transcendence of divine predestination, Auriol asserts that humans who will be saved are a quasi-privative, negative, or passive cause of their predestination in that they do not place an obstacle or impediment in the path of grace. Auriol suggests that God freely sends out His salvific grace to everyone; those who do not place an obstacle are saved; those who place an obstacle thereby block this grace and are justly damned. For Auriol, this scenario better balances human “freedom” and God’s omnipotence and transcendence.

The view had the added advantage of safeguarding divine simplicity and necessity. For Auriol, immutability and necessity are the same thing. To the extent that something is immutable, it is necessary. Since God is both immutable and eternal, God is necessary to the highest degree, absolutely, such that He cannot be otherwise. If God foreknew something or actively predestined someone, this would entail the absolute necessity of the outcome. The only difficulty is that God does act. This forces Auriol to make a distinction between God’s intrinsic and extrinsic will: the intrinsic will is identical to God – atemporal, immutable, and absolutely necessary – and

cannot be the source of activity and change; the extrinsic will is that by which, for example, God creates. Auriol refers to the first as the “will of complacency” and the second as the “will of operation.” Further, in order to preserve divine freedom, Auriol has to tailor his notion of freedom to include complacency or pleasure: what is done complacently or with pleasure is done freely, but not in an everyday nonphilosophical sense of “freedom”:

The defining note of freedom belongs to a power through its having an act of experiencing pleasure (*complacentia*) and delight. For the act of taking pleasure (*complacentia*) is formally free. A power is called free that does whatever it does because it takes pleasure in it (*ex complacentia*). Nothing else is required for the notion of freedom. (*Scriptum* I, d. 1, q. 8, trans. Hoffmann [2015], p. 69)

Auriol connects divine necessity, complacency, and intrinsic acts of the will and intellect in his related doctrine of the necessity of grace. Once again, Peter of Candia provides an overview (*I Sentences*, q. 5, a. 2), nicely linking the issue back to Auriol’s theory of intuitive cognition, where we began:

Every created grace (*caritas*) is intrinsically grace, such that it includes a contradiction for it to exist and not to be love (*dilectio*), just as whiteness is intrinsically whiteness and it is a contradiction for it to exist and not to be color. And consequently, just as it is impossible for whiteness to be subjectively in something that does not designate that it is formally white, it is also impossible for grace to exist in something that is not dear (*carum*) to God. Thus this form falls *necessarily* under God’s complacency, such that when it is posited in a soul, it necessarily follows that that soul is dear (*grata*) to God. And just as being white is the formal effect of whiteness, so being dear (*carum*) is the formal effect of grace. Therefore it is just as impossible for something to be white without whiteness as it is for something to be called dear (*carum*) without grace. And so being dear does not stem effectively from divine acceptance, just as being white does not stem from whitewashing. But this form cannot be produced effectively except by God. And through this the definition of grace according to [Auriol] is apparent: grace is the habitual love of God infused immediately by Him in the rational appetite, over which divine complacency passes immutably and from eternity, from which complacency it does not flow effectively. And this doctor speaks about grace

just as he speaks generally about *all acts of intellect and will* that are intrinsically such. Thus for him intuitive cognition (*notitia*) is a certain absolute quality that is intrinsically such, and so he maintains that it can exist without the presence of the object.

Aspects of Auriol's views on divine simplicity received a sympathetic hearing, and William of Ockham, Gerald Odonis, and Thomas of Strasbourg put forth theories of predestination that resembled Auriol's in some way. Generally, however, Auriol's positions on predestination and, especially, divine foreknowledge provoked a vehemently negative reaction over the next century and a half. Auriol's way of distinguishing between different modes of divine willing was subject to ridicule, as was his notion of complacency, but the attempts to dissolve Auriol's arguments against previous positions were rather feeble. Although Peter of Candia presented Auriol's opinion at great length and in neutral fashion, as was his practice, Auriol's only vocal follower was Peter de Rivo at the University of Louvain after 1465, and Rivo's view met with papal condemnation in 1474. Still, it is possible that Auriol had an impact on his great Jewish contemporary Gersonides on this issue, and even after Pope Sixtus IV's condemnation, Auriol gained an important follower in the early sixteenth century in Pietro Pomponazzi and he may have influenced Martin Luther himself. Auriol's view was still widely debated in the seventeenth century. This may be true for many other philosophical issues as well, but we have yet to take most of their histories beyond the Black Death.

## Cross-References

- ▶ Adam Wodeham
- ▶ Certainty
- ▶ Durand of St. Pourçain
- ▶ Epistemology
- ▶ Form and Matter
- ▶ Future Contingents
- ▶ Gerald Odonis
- ▶ Gersonides
- ▶ Gregory of Rimini
- ▶ Henry of Ghent

- ▶ Hervaeus Natalis
- ▶ Intension and Remission of Forms
- ▶ Intuitive and Abstractive Cognition
- ▶ John Baconthorpe
- ▶ John Capreolus
- ▶ John Duns Scotus
- ▶ Landolfo Caracciolo
- ▶ Michael of Massa
- ▶ Modal Theories and Modal Logic
- ▶ Peter de Rivo
- ▶ Peter Lombard
- ▶ Peter of Candia
- ▶ Robert Holcot
- ▶ Sense Perception, Theories of
- ▶ Skepticism
- ▶ Thomas Aquinas
- ▶ Thomas Wylton
- ▶ Truth, Theories of
- ▶ Universals
- ▶ Walter Chatton
- ▶ Will
- ▶ William of Ockham
- ▶ William of Ware

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See also the Peter Auriol Homepage: <http://www.peterauriol.net>

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## Peter Damian

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### Abstract

Peter Damian (c. 1007–1072), an Italian cardinal and religious leader, has a modest place in the history of philosophy because of his little treatise *De divina omnipotentia* (*On Divine Omnipotence*). Damian is often depicted as a thinker who, in his attempt to defend divine omnipotence, denied the universal validity of the principle of contradiction and affirmed that God can change the past. Such a view is based on a misinterpretation of Damian's statements. He actually held that the past cannot be changed, but he did not see this as a limitation of divine omnipotence but as an expression of God's power. Damian's treatise reflects an early phase in the scholastic deliberation on philosophical theology.

Peter Damian (Petrus Damianus or Petrus Damiani) was born c. 1007 in Ravenna, Italy. He acquired the name Damianus or Damiani after his elder brother Damianus, who cared for him in his youth. He studied liberal arts and law in Ravenna, Faenza, and Parma, and then became a teacher of rhetoric. In 1035, he experienced a religious conversion and entered the Benedictine monastery at Fonte Avellana. He became prior of Fonte Avellana

in 1043. Damian was actively involved in monastic reform and the reform of the Church. He was nominated cardinal in 1057 and died in 1072.

Damian was a voluminous writer. The most important part of his production is his letters, some of which are actually lengthy treatises. Of the surviving 180 letters, the most significant philosophically is Letter 119, known as *De divina omnipotentia*. Damian sent this letter c. 1065 to Abbot Didier (or Desiderius) of Monte Cassino and his monks. The letter is related to a live discussion which had taken place during Damian's recent visit to the monastery. It is highly rhetorical in both style and structure, which makes it liable to misunderstanding.

In the live discussion at Monte Cassino, Damian had affirmed that God in his omnipotence is capable of everything. Some of those present then asked him whether God can bring it about that what has happened has not happened. For example, can God bring it about that Rome was never founded? Damian does not tell us how the debate continued. In *De divina omnipotentia*, he strives to show that divine omnipotence remains intact even though the past cannot be changed. However, he never actually utters the statement "God cannot change the past" while he does this. Damian thinks that an alarming claim like this is better left unsaid when talking to a wider audience. (Damian's letters were circulated among a larger audience than the addressees.)

An important part of Damian's strategy in *De divina omnipotentia* is to argue that the past is not so different from the present or the future when it comes to divine power. To begin with, Damian connects the query of his opponents to a disputed question within contemporary logic, referred to as "the question about the consequence of necessity and impossibility." This question, inspired by the Aristotelian problem of future contingents, is concerned with statements like "What has been, necessarily has been, and it is impossible that it has not been," "What is, necessarily is, as long as it is, and it is impossible that it is not," and "What will be, necessarily will be, and it is impossible that it will not be." Damian lets us understand, rightly or wrongly, that the consequence of necessity and impossibility is the reason why the opponents have presented their query. Damian retorts

that a similar problem arises with the present and the future. If God has no power over the past because of the consequence of necessity, then he has no power over the present or the future either. Stating this does not solve the problem at hand but it does put the matter in a different perspective.

Damian continues by focusing on God's eternity and the immutable presence of the created history in the divine sphere. The past is past for us, but it enjoys a permanent existence in the divine providential plan. The day when God created the world still exists there and so does any other day. Damian also draws attention to the divine will as the cause of the created existence. There are things because God has chosen them, and he gives to them whatever existence they have. What God wills to be cannot but be. The efficiency of God's will brings it about that there is no room for contradiction in his creation. The principle of contradiction is valid for the created history because God gives being in an unequivocal manner. For the same reason, the consequence of necessity and impossibility is valid. What has been, necessarily has been, because the past thing cannot lose the status that God has given to it. The past cannot be changed, but this is not a limitation of God's power but a consequence of his insuperable command.

Another question treated in *De divina omnipotentia* is the following: Can God restore virginity to a woman who has lost it? It is important to note that Damian views this as a separate query which is not to be confused with that about changing the past. He emphatically affirms that God can restore virginity to a woman who has lost it, but the restoration that he thinks of does not include removing some events in the past. Damian singles out two senses in which virginity can be restored. First, God can restore virginity "according to the fullness of merits." This kind of restoration concerns the moral status of the individual before God. Second, God can restore virginity "according to the integrity of the flesh" (*iuxta carnis integritatem*). This restoration concerns the physical state of the female sexual apparatus. To support his judgment that God can restore virginity in the latter sense, Damian offers a discussion of miracles and God's power over the laws of nature. The restoration of virginity that

Damian affirms as possible does not change the fact that the virginity was lost, as the restoration of life to Lazarus (John 11: 1–43) did not change the fact that Lazarus had really died.

The background of Damian's views in *De divina omnipotentia* is to be sought in the works of Augustine and Boethius. Augustine discussed themes like eternity, providence, foreknowledge, and necessity in a number of works, for example, *The City of God* and *On Free Choice*. Boethius developed a different approach in *The Consolation of Philosophy* and his two commentaries on Aristotle's *De interpretatione* (the problem of future contingents). These works of Augustine and Boethius also contain remarks on divine omnipotence. Peter Damian was familiar with these late antique texts. However, the immediate backdrop of Damian's views is in the eleventh-century school discussions based on the sources just mentioned. Damian knew well the developments in the Italian town schools due to his secular teaching career in the 1020s and 1030s, and *De divina omnipotentia* is one of our main witnesses to this early phase of scholastic deliberation. Another author with the same kind of schooling is Anselm of Canterbury, who received an Italian education before he left his home country in 1056. Damian's *De divina omnipotentia* can serve as a useful point of comparison for many aspects of Anselm's thought.

## Cross-References

- ▶ [Anselm of Canterbury](#)
- ▶ [Augustine](#)
- ▶ [Boethius](#)
- ▶ [Divine Power](#)
- ▶ [Future Contingents](#)
- ▶ [Modal Theories and Modal Logic](#)
- ▶ [Time](#)

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theology, and served three times as rector of the university. He was a canon of Mechelen and *plebanus* of Saint Peter in Louvain. He wrote a series of commentaries on Aristotle, a Gospel Harmony, and treatises on the dating of Easter and calendar reform, some of which stemming from a quarrel with Paul of Middelburg. He is best known as the leading protagonist in the so-called Quarrel over future contingents against the Louvain theologian Henry of Zomerem. The dispute between the two goes back before 1450, but really erupted in 1465. Until Henry's death in 1472, Rivo defended the position of Peter Auriol on the subject of divine foreknowledge of future contingents, maintaining that propositions about the contingent future are neither true nor false, but neutral. Henry countered by accusing Rivo of heresy. The long dispute involved the Faculties of Arts and Theology at Louvain, the Faculties of Theology at Paris and Cologne, the bishop of Tournai, the duke of Burgundy, the Greek Cardinal Bessarion, and Pope Paul II. A number of treatises were composed in the quarrel by Rivo, Henry, and several members of Bessarion circle. One of the latter group, the Franciscan Francesco della Rovere, was elected Pope Sixtus IV in 1471 and in 1474 officially condemned Rivo's doctrine, and by extension Auriol's.

The long life of Peter de Rivo, alias Pieter van der Beken, was intertwined with the development of the University of Louvain. Founded in 1425, the university quickly became one of the most vibrant in Europe. Rivo had a long career in teaching and administration and was personally involved in two controversies that raged in the university's early history: the first is the so-called Quarrel over future contingents; the second dealt with the dating of Easter. Born in the early 1420s in Aalst, a city of the County of Flanders belonging to the diocese of Cambrai, Rivo enrolled in the university in 1437, became arts master in 1442, and was named professor of philosophy at the College of the Castle in 1443. Already a canon in the cathedral of Saint Rumbold in Mechelen

## Peter de Rivo

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### Abstract

Peter de Rivo (c. 1420–1499) was a controversial scholar active at the early University of Louvain. He was professor of philosophy and rhetoric in the Faculty of Arts, professor of



(from 1442), in 1460 he received the canonry in the collegiate church of Saint Peter in Louvain that provided the salary for the chair of rhetoric, which he held until 1470. Rivo started his studies in theology right after obtaining the title of master of arts. He lectured on the *Sentences* in 1448–1449, but after that date his theological career appears to have slowed down, since he remained for decades a simple *baccalaureus formatus* and was not made doctor until 1477. He next became ordinary professor, obtaining the chair of theology connected to the plebany of Saint Peter, which had belonged to his old teacher Johannes Varenacker (d. 1475). Besides his teaching activity, Rivo served as the official letter writer of the university in 1456 and was appointed rector three times, in 1457, 1477, and 1478. He was also involved in the social and political life of Louvain. During the series of riots that shook the Burgundian Low Countries after the death of Charles the Bold (5 January 1477), the succession of Mary of Burgundy, and her marriage with the Archduke Maximilian of Habsburg, Rivo was among those city notables who tried to temper the urban revolt in Louvain, mediating first between the internal factions, and then between the city and Maximilian. In August 1477, as rector and renowned rhetorician, Rivo was also in charge of pronouncing the official speech for the first entry of the archduke into Louvain. The text of this panegyric, the *Relatio seu propositio coram Maximiliano Lovanii reserata in primo introitu terrarum sponse sue*, is preserved in two manuscript copies dating to the fifteenth and seventeenth century (Glasgow, University Library, Sp Coll Hunterian Bf.3.15, handwritten on the blank verso of k8 and continuing onto the recto and verso of an inserted vellum leaf; Brussels, KBR, MS. 17320–17330). He died on 26 January 1499.

As a professor at the College of the Castle, Rivo lectured on some of the texts in logic and natural philosophy that constituted the basis of education in arts at that time. His lectures survive in written form in four manuscripts: Greifswald, Bibliothek des Geistlichen Ministeriums, 34.D. IX; Berlin, Staatsbibliothek – Preußischer Kulturbesitz, Magdeburg 201, 220, and 227. These manuscripts were copied and read in

Dominican convents of the province of Saxony between the 1460s and the 1480s and contain Rivo's commentaries on Porphyry's *Isagoge* (one copy), along with Aristotle's *Categories* (one copy), *On Interpretation* (one copy), *Prior Analytics* (one copy), *Posterior Analytics* (two copies), *Topics* (two copies), *Physics* (three copies), *On the Heavens* (two copies), *On Generation and Corruption* (one copy), *Meteorology* (two copies), *On the Soul* (three copies), and *On Sense and the Sensible* (two copies). A copy of his now lost commentary on the *Metaphysics* was preserved, together with an extra copy of all his commentaries on the *Organon*, in a codex in the Magdeburg Dom Gymnasium (MS. 165) until its destruction in World War II. Rivo also composed a philosophical treatise on the will that can be found in only one partial witness, copied and annotated in the margins by Adrian of Utrecht (later Pope Adrian VI), who studied at the Faculty of Arts of Louvain beginning in 1476 (Louvain, Maurits Sabbe Library [GBIB], Cod. 17). Most of these texts are still unedited; provisional editions of a number of Rivo's commentaries are available online. From a first general survey and selected case studies, Rivo seems to have pursued the path of the *via antiqua*, abiding by the directives prescribed by the early statutes of the Louvain Faculty of Arts, which forbade the teaching of John Buridan, Marsilius of Inghen, and William of Ockham, and listed instead Albert the Great, Thomas Aquinas, Giles of Rome, and Averroes as "truthful commentators" of Aristotle. In particular, Rivo seems to have shown a preference for Albert, although this tendency is not a slavish or explicit dependence.

Rivo is best known for his role in the quarrel over future contingents at Louvain. Ironically, until recently he was more famous in this regard than the scholastic whose theory he resurrected: the Franciscan Peter Auriol (d. 1322). Peter de Rivo entitled his collective works on the subject *A Defense of the Doctrine of Lord Peter Auriol in the Matter of Future Contingents*. In late 1446, the arts faculty asked him and the dean to investigate the suspect doctrines of a group of arts masters led by Henry of Zomerem (c. 1417–1482). With the approval of the Faculty of Theology, in mid-1447

the Arts Faculty published a statute proscribing 11 propositions, including that “determinately one part of a contradiction in future contingents is true and the other false, just as in present and past contingents” – in fact, this and two of the others “must be totally suppressed.” Prima facie the poorly worded statute supports Peter Auriol’s opinion. Among authors whose works are preserved, however, Auriol’s stance had been almost universally attacked in the 130 years since its first expression. For his part, Henry of Zomeren claimed that the propositions censured were based on the teachings of Scotus.

Henry was in Paris for much of the 1450s, becoming master of theology there in 1462. Back in Louvain he was given the prestigious chair of theology that Heymeric of Camp had left vacant at his death, so Henry could now set things right. In a quodlibetal disputation in the Arts Faculty in Advent, 1465, Rivo defended Auriol’s doctrine. The debate continued the following year at the same venue. After a hiatus, in November 1469, Henry spoke out against what he considered the heretical position that Rivo had defended. When the Advent quodlibetal session opened, Rivo resumed the debate on 18 December. Henry responded 2 days later, again calling Rivo’s opinion heresy. The next day Rivo replied and the Arts Faculty asked the university to force Henry to abide by the statute of 1447. Despite the university’s repeated efforts to silence both sides, the quarrel escalated, coming even to physical violence among the supporters. Both Rivo and Henry composed treatises, several in the case of Rivo who, as professor of rhetoric, used his skills to the fullest extent to gain supporters that he would otherwise probably not have had. To this day, six manuscripts preserving the texts that Rivo composed for the quarrel are known to survive: four in the BnF in Paris (Lat. 3169, 4152, 12390 and Nouv. Acquis. 1179), one in the Vatican Library (Vat. lat. 4865), and one in the University Library of Basel (A VI 12).

Rivo adopted Auriol’s defense of Aristotle’s “demonstration” in chapter 9 of *De interpretatione* that propositions about future contingents are neither true nor false, but neutral.

Furthermore, for Auriol and Rivo, not even God’s knowledge makes such propositions true or false, because divine knowledge of what is future to us does not precede the future’s coming about, otherwise everything would happen necessarily. Following Auriol, Rivo claimed that God’s atemporal knowledge of future contingents cannot be expressed properly by any proposition, so denying truth to future contingent propositions does not affect His knowledge.

Rivo’s main innovation is his articulation of various ways to take “truth.” If we tell the editor on 14 July 2017, “We will submit this on 14 February 2018,” this proposition is true, but only in the “popular” sense that the editor knows we are trustworthy and we intend to follow up. In the Aristotelian sense, however, by the “rigor of logic” and with truth “inhering” in it, our proposition is not true. We may have our entry ready and intend to submit, and then be punished with sudden administrative tasks. Rivo’s example is this: if Plato, whom Aristotle trusts, says to Aristotle, “I will have lunch with you tomorrow,” Aristotle will believe it faithfully, and say that it is true, but he will not maintain that the truth inheres in Plato’s assertion. The main problem with this is prophecy. Here Rivo agrees with Auriol that prophetic propositions signify divine knowledge by the “intention” of the prophets. In Rivo’s terminology, although they are not true in Aristotle’s sense, by the rigor of logic and with the truth inhering in them, they are nevertheless true by the “Uncreated Truth” that the prophet makes them signify. And if we can believe Plato’s promise about lunch, then we can believe God’s prophecies so much more, without maintaining that truth actually inheres in them.

For Rivo, when a proposition about the future is strictly speaking true, this truth is “unimpedible.” It simply cannot be true now in the Aristotelian sense that “We will submit this on 14 February” and yet still be possible for us not to submit. This also applies to prophetic and other propositions that express God’s foreknowledge: “If true propositions about future contingents are required to express divine foreknowledge, one asks of my adversary, by what truth must they be true, unimpedible truth or impeded truth? If by

unimpedible truth, it follows that all futures will come about unimpedibly. If by impedible truth, it follows first that God's foreknowledge can be maintained along with the said opinion of Aristotle, by which he only denies unimpedible truth in propositions about future contingents."

Rivo also rejects, with some ridicule, the traditional logical devices used to reconcile divine foreknowledge and the contingency of the future. The common solution to the problem of the consequence "God foreknows that we will submit, therefore we will submit necessarily" is to appeal to the composite and divided senses of the proposition, and the distinction between absolute and conditional necessity. Rivo remarks, in a way that Auriol had and Martin Luther would later: "I have been astonished at some people who explored the greatest causes with the utmost subtlety, so that they scarcely left a particle undiscussed, and yet they are satisfied with these solutions."

Lacking the university's support, Henry denounced Rivo and his cohort to Pope Paul II and called on his allies for assistance: the duke of Burgundy, his alma mater the Faculty of Theology at Paris, and the powerful Greek Cardinal Bessarion in Rome. Rivo counterattacked, accusing Henry of the determinist heresy of Wyclif, and the university appealed to the Faculty of Theology of Cologne. Pope Paul ordered the bishop of Tournai to investigate, while Bessarion held a philosophical inquiry, soliciting tracts from Fernando de Cordoba, Guillaume Baudin, the Dominican Giovanni Gatti, and the Franciscans Giorgio Benigno Salviati and Francesco della Rovere, the latter about to be elected Pope Sixtus IV in August 1471. Rivo wrote a commentary on della Rovere's treatise and refutations of Baudin's and Henry's own works. In the end, Sixtus held an inquiry and, after Henry of Zomerens' and Bessarion's deaths in 1472, Rivo was forced to retract his position in 1473. When he tried to interpret his retraction in a benign manner, he was investigated for backsliding. New light on this final phase of the quarrel is shed by a series of texts contained in MS. Leuven, Universiteitsbibliotheek, 1635, composed between 1473 and 1476 in opposition to Rivo's doctrines by an anonymous Thomist

theologian active in Louvain at the time. Meanwhile, in 1474, Pope Sixtus IV published the bull *Ad Christi vicari* formally condemning the opinion of Peter de Rivo and, therefore, Peter Auriol. Rivo signed a new retraction in 1476 and he was allowed to resume his activities in 1477, when he was finally promoted to doctor and professor of theology. In his last will and testament, however, he seemed to have professed again his old belief, stipulating that his beneficiaries "should conform in their teaching to the statute drawn up by the Faculty of Theology at the request of the Faculty of Arts," that is, the same statute that during the quarrel he advocated as defending his own position in the matter of future contingents.

The memory of the quarrel and of Rivo's "heresy" lingered among the historiographers of Brabant from the end of the fifteenth to the twentieth century. Petrus Impens (d. 1523), prior of Bethlehem in Herent, recorded a short report on the events in his *Chronicon Bethlemiticum*. Texts related to the debate, including some preserved in MS. Leuven 1635, were still circulating in Louvain at the beginning of the seventeenth century, as witnessed by the Jesuit Cardinal Juan de Lugo (1583–1660), who discussed them in his *Disputationes de mysterio incarnationis* (1633). One century later, they were also mentioned in Martin Ortiz's *Caduceus theologicus et crisis pacifica de examine thomistico in tres partes divisa* (1733). The editing of the *corpus* of treatises and documents connected to the quarrel began with the works of the Louvain historian Valerius Andreas (1588–1655) and of the theologian Charles du Plessis d'Argentré (1637–1740), and it is still in progress.

Despite the papal condemnation for heresy, Peter de Rivo spent the last 25 years of his life as a well-respected theologian and member of the city élite. Among the texts that he wrote at this stage, works related to chronology take pride of place. Rivo had an interest in matters concerning the dating of Christ's life and the calendar at least since 1449. In 1471 he composed the *Dialogus de temporibus Christi*, which imagines a discussion between a Jew, Gamaliel, and a Christian, Paul, concerning the conflicting theories on the day and hour of the birth and the passion of Christ, by examining issues such as historical and

computistical methods and a proposal for the reform of the calendar (New York, Columbia University, Rare Book & Manuscript Library, Western MS. 31). Later in his life, Rivo specifically dedicated a short treatise to calendar reform, the *Reformatio kalendarii*; this text was considered lost until it was discovered bound in an incunabulum of the Cambridge University Library (Inc 3. F.2.9 [3294]).

Another example of his interest in establishing chronologies is the *Monotesseron*, a harmony of the Gospels echoing in the title the more famous work by Jean Gerson. Its purpose was to provide a coherent account of the life of Christ, putting in order the texts of the four Gospels and trying to resolve their discrepancies. Through this work, the reader would then be able to get an overview of the events in their correct historical order and to memorize their sequence using the system of rubrics, tables, and mnemonic verses that accompanied the text of the Vulgate. In the prefatory dialogue Rivo explains the criteria he followed for establishing the order among the four narrations (he takes Luke as the leading evangelist) and describes this complex system of paratexts. The *Monotesseron* is transmitted in two versions: a synopsis, authored by Rivo and partly accompanied by a commentary, and a unified harmony, which is probably an anonymous reworking. It is preserved in five manuscripts, in which the layout of Rivo's work is differently reshaped according to the needs of his readership – in particular, those of the Brabantine priories of Augustinian canons affiliated with the Congregation of Windesheim, where the liturgical calendar was central to devotional life (MSS. Brussels, KBR, 129–130, 5570, 11750–11751; Paris, Bibliothèque Mazarine, 300/1; and Wien, Österreichische Nationalbibliothek, Cod. Ser. n. 12890).

Rivo's most famous contributions in this domain, however, are the computistical works he wrote against Paul of Middleburg (1445–1533), former student of theology and medicine in Louvain, then doctor of medicine and professor of astrology at the University of Padua, as well as personal astrologer and physician of the dukes of Urbino. The occasion was a dispute on the dating of Easter, initiated by Paul in 1487, when he

proposed in an *Epistola* addressed to the University of Louvain that the traditional opinion according to which Jesus died on Friday 25 March and was resurrected on the following Sunday failed to harmonize the events described in the Gospels with the astronomical calculations. According to Paul's estimate, Christ died instead on Monday 22 March and was resurrected on the following Thursday. Peter de Rivo reacted in defense of the traditional dating by publishing in 1487 the *Opus responsivum ad epistolam apologeticam Magistri Pauli de Middelburgo de anno, die et feria dominicae passionis*, followed, 4 years later, by the *Tertius tractatus de anno, die et feria dominicae passionis atque resurrectionis*, probably in response to other letters addressed to him by Paul of Middelburg. The controversy probably went cold shortly after 1492.

Among the writings by Rivo that have come down to us, one should finally mention three short texts: a dialogue in verses, an example of biblical exegesis, and a case of pastoral theology. The first was published in Leiden in 1509 with the title *Libellus quo modo omnia in meliorem partem sunt interpretanda* and consists of a dialogue between Man and Reason about how the dramatic events of the history of salvation should be considered as a path to the greater good. The second is a brief explanation of Ambrose of Milan's commentary on Ps. 118:154 "Judge my judgment and redeem me: quicken thou me for thy word's sake" (*Explanatio verborum Ambrosii in versiculo secundo vicesimi octonarii psalmi CXVIII*), presented as an appendix to Ambrose's text in a manuscript in the Bibliothèque Mazarine in Paris (MS. 567). The last is a letter to an anonymous friend, *frater professus* of the priory of Augustinian canons of Groenendaal, in which Rivo addresses three doubts in matters of confession; the text is followed by Rivo's epitaph (Stuttgart, Württembergische Landesbibliothek, Cod. HB I 10).

## Cross-References

- ▶ [Basil Bessarion](#)
- ▶ [Future Contingents](#)

- ▶ [Heymeric of Camp](#)
- ▶ [John Gerson](#)
- ▶ [John Wyclif](#)
- ▶ [Modal Theories and Modal Logic](#)
- ▶ [Peter Auriol](#)
- ▶ [Universities and Philosophy](#)

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### Abstract

Peter (Petrus) Helias (c. 1100 – after 1166) (PH). A student of Thierry of Chartres in the 1130s, he was an influential and renowned grammarian and rhetorician at Paris. About 1155, PH became a canon at Poitiers.

PH's major work is his *Summa* on Priscian's *Institutiones grammaticae*. Being both a commentary and a well-structured textbook, it is the starting point of a new current in grammar teaching. Doctrinally, PH is deeply indebted to the anonymous grammarians of the *Glosulae* tradition, William of Conches, and the moderate Boethian–Neoplatonistic teaching of the philosopher and theologian Thierry of Chartres. Adopting the *summa* model gives him the opportunity to rephrase and expound Priscian's text and to systematically focus on major linguistic problems, for example, the explanatory principles or causes of invention, the semantic well-formedness of a sentence, the Boethian three-pronged interpretation of “substance,” the distinction between the *nomen complexivum* and *collectivum* in the discussion on equivocal nouns, the division of the grammatical *accidentia* into *secundariae significationes* and *proprietas communes*, the distinction between construction at word level and a construed sentence, and the assessment

of the syntactic aspect of (grammatical) government against the traditional view that emphasized its semantic character.

The first part of his *Summa* (on Priscian, I–XVI) was widely spread during the Middle Ages, but the part on Priscian, XVII–XVIII, on syntax, was soon replaced by the *summa Absoluta cuiuslibet* often incorrectly attributed to him, for example, by Robert Kilwardby. In the later Middle Ages, his fame continued and several grammatical commentaries and metrical treatises were published under his name.

In rhetoric, PH composed a commentary on Cicero's *De inventione* (not published); there, he followed a well-established tradition and appeared to be strongly influenced by Thierry. Other works traditionally attributed to him, are inter alia a commentary on the *Auctor ad Herennium* and Boethius' *De trinitate* are spurious.

## Cross-References

- ▶ [Cicero in Political Philosophy](#)
- ▶ [Robert Kilwardby](#)

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## Peter John Olivi

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### Abstract

Peter John Olivi (1248–1298) was in his time well known as social reformist, but in histories of philosophy, he has often been ignored. He was, however, a very original thinker who had

a major influence on well-known Franciscan thinkers of the time. In social philosophy, he was an active participant in the influential debates concerning the Franciscan ideal of absolute poverty. From more theoretical perspectives, freedom of the will and the activity of the soul in respect to the corporeal world are the most important tenets of Olivi’s thought, and it was in this area that he had the most lasting influence on the western intellectual heritage. Olivi laid the ground for distinctively modern habits of thought. His thought centered around self-reflexive and free human subjectivity, and its place in the corporeal, mechanical world on the one hand, and in the social-political order on the other.

## Biography

Peter John Olivi (1248–1298) entered the Franciscan order at the age of 12 in 1261, and within the order got as good an education as one could at the time get. From 1267 to 1272, he studied in Paris with St. Bonaventure and other famous thinkers. He did not receive a doctorate, possibly because of his controversial opinions. Nevertheless, he taught at Franciscan schools in southern France until 1283, when some of his views were condemned. He was rehabilitated in 1288 with the help of his former teacher, Cardinal Matthew of Aquasparta, and moved on to teach for 2 years at Florence. Then he returned to France, to Montpellier, and to Narbonne, where he died on March 14, 1298.

## Precursor of Modern Thought

Although Olivi has not always been recognized even by medieval scholars, he was one of the most original thinkers of the age, and he also had a major influence on the development of intellectual history. His ideas are clearly present in writings by well-known Franciscan philosophers like John Duns Scotus, Peter Auriol, and William of Ockham, who nevertheless rarely cite Olivi by name. The silence is partly due to the dubious reputation

Olivi had as the leader of a social reformist movement and the recurring doctrinal suspicions against him. Some of his views were condemned by the Council of Vienne (1311–1312) and in 1326 by Pope John XXII. Most of his works have survived in the Vatican library but remain in obscurity. As research has shown beyond doubt, Olivi's ideas on the philosophy of history, on Aristotelian metaphysics and especially on human freedom were highly original but gained currency through discussions by these well-known thinkers. In fact, Olivi turns out to be a central innovator in respect of distinctively modern views developed in the later Middle Ages.

Olivi's modernity is obvious from the style of his writing. He composed works that fit the standard medieval genres of academic writing: commentaries on Peter Lombard's *Sentences* and the Bible, quodlibetal questions, etc. However, he writes with a personal tone that seems to spring from an intimate experiential touch of his philosophical thinking. He clearly has a liking for arguments, and often puts forward positions only to later reject them. In many cases, he states the common view, shows its problems and puts a new, innovative view against it, but ultimately refrains from taking a formal stance on the issue. This is not because of general hesitation, since in many cases he does not hesitate to take a strong, controversial, view. Rather, it seems that Olivi enjoyed philosophical reasoning even in matters that he himself thought to be of limited real significance and thus could be left open. In general, his writings do not have the abstract, universalizing overtones that are so typical for the Scholastics.

## Social Philosophy

In his commentary on the Apocalypse and in his *Questions on Evangelical Perfection*, Olivi discusses the Franciscan ideal of absolute poverty and articulates in his own way, how using the necessities of life is possible without claiming property of them (*usus pauper*). Olivi was an early leader of the "Spiritual" reform movement, and indeed it seems that to some extent the

doctrinal condemnations against him seem to be connected with the reactions against this radical reform movement. Nevertheless, such major thinkers as John Duns Scotus and William of Ockham follow Olivi in some central features of their own theories of ideal poverty. These discussions led to the idea of subjective rights that got a very central position in modern social philosophy. In Olivi's view, rights must be constituted by an act of free will, and thus the natural order does not imply any rights. This view is stated clearly in his theory of property acquisition and of political power.

As Olivi formulates it theoretically, Franciscan poverty is based on giving up one's freedom, the most valuable thing any person has and the very foundation of personhood. In giving up one's freedom, the Franciscan brother accepts absolute obedience to God and gives up all kinds of property rights, private as well as common. This did not mean absolute obedience to any authority of the church, but rather made the issue of obedience an issue of conscience. Olivi is known as an apocalyptic thinker who thought the Antichrist would be a Pope. Indeed, he saw a widespread decay of the Church: "the whole Church is infected from head to toe, confused, and turned into a new Babylon as it were." He saw the Franciscan movement as having brought a new age to the Church, emphasizing the role of the Holy Spirit in this new historical era.

## Human Freedom

Free will is one the most central philosophical topics in Olivi's writings and clearly something that he thought was crucial. This is a topic where he did not hesitate to claim what he thought the truth was, and his fiercest opposition to "worshippers of Aristotle" concerns denials of the absolute freedom of the human will. As Olivi argues, our main social practices like political power and judicial punishment, and emotions like love, hatred, shame, and gratitude, are all based on the assumption that people act freely. Even personhood depends on taking oneself to be free. Such a fundamental assumption shared by all humans

cannot be wrong, Olivi argues. He has also some more metaphysical arguments to prove human freedom, but they are interesting primarily in showing how he understood the freedom at issue.

As Olivi saw it, the freedom of the human will is based on the capacity to control one's will oneself so that the will is a self-mover. This is not to be understood in the sense that the will could not be moved from the outside. Rather, Olivi claims that normal healthy adult humans have a will that is able to move itself independently of external influences. That is, he admitted that the will in children, madmen, and drunkards can be and often is moved by external forces. A strong emotion may force a madman do something, but a mentally healthy adult person is able to control himself even in the face of a strong emotion. Freedom is, thus, a self-reflexive capacity where a person takes, with a second-order act, control over the first-order acts of the will directed at external objects. That is, people make genuinely free choices when and only when they make the choices consciously as their own choices. Olivi did not think that the will would be constantly active in making free choices, though he did think that all humans have the potential for free self-control. People do not always think about what they are doing, but they are always free to take control of themselves.

Olivi rejected the Aristotelian assumption that given the premises of a practical syllogism, the action follows as a necessary conclusion. A free person may choose otherwise, he says, though admitting that people do often consider rationally what would be the best course of action for a certain end. But people are free to follow the best course of action or not, even without giving up the end. Positing the end is also dependent on the will, even in the case of the ultimate end that is sought for no other further end. In Olivi's example, if you hate your enemy and find by reasoning the best way to harm the person, this reasoning does not bind you to an action. You are free not to harm the person you hate, and you are even free to begin loving the person for his or her own sake.

Olivi uses the idiom "intellectual beast" to describe what a human being without freedom would be. Personhood is grounded on freedom,

and Olivi thinks that free will is the ground for human dignity. He claims that if given the choice to continue life without freedom, anyone would prefer nonexistence.

## Mind–Body Dualism

Corporeal entities are not capable of the kind of reflexivity required for freedom, Olivi argues. In intentionality, there is a distinction between the subject and the object, and in divisible matter this makes the subject and the object necessarily distinct things, whereas in self-reflexivity the subject and the object are the same. Thus, the free, intellectual soul must be incorporeal. Olivi does not, however, give up the Aristotelian universality of the form–matter distinction. He accepts that all individuals consist of matter and form, but claims that the human soul informs two distinct kinds of matter: the corporeal and the spiritual. As the intellectual part of the soul does not inform any corporeal matter, the human soul is the form of the body only in respect to its sensitive part. The intellectual soul informing spiritual matter becomes, thus, a full-fledged individual capable of existence and its own kinds of action even in separation from the body.

Some authorities within the church saw Olivi's view as denying the true doctrine that the soul is the form of the body, and condemned the view. However, many important later thinkers, for example, William of Ockham, followed Olivi in affirming that the intellectual soul is genuinely independent from the body and capable of existing by itself as an individual. As the idea of spiritual matter was given up, Olivi's theory can be seen as a direct predecessor of René Descartes' seventeenth-century dualism.

Olivi held strongly to the view that the mind is active and that corporeal bodies are passive. He describes sensory perception in terms of an intentional relation where the mind comports to the world, thus rejecting the standard Aristotelian model where corporeal things act upon the sensory and cognitive systems. In vision, for example, one ought not to say that the object causally produces an act of seeing, but that the soul

actively produces a visual act where the object is merely a “terminative cause.” Looked at as a theory of attention, Olivi’s discussion contains interesting philosophical insights.

## Self-Reflexivity

Olivi’s questions on Peter Lombard’s *Sentences* contain a comprehensive philosophical psychology developed within the general context of the Aristotelian faculty psychology dominant at the time. In building this system, Olivi rarely puts forward strong claims. It is interesting to see, however, that he did not think of consciousness as a distinctive human capacity despite the strong claim that the strong kind of self-reflexivity needed for freedom is strictly limited to humans in distinction to other animals.

A certain kind of self-reflexivity is to be found already at the level of touch, the most basic of all the senses. Touch, as Olivi tentatively defines it, is a sense by which an animal feels its own body in relation to health, welfare, and success in action. It is not, thus, a sense defined through proper sensibles like heat and hardness. In a way, even the simplest animals thus have the capacity for reflexive perception of themselves as bodily entities. Olivi also mentions the Classical Stoic example of a dog sacrificing its leg to save the head, thus showing awareness of the respective values of the different parts of the body.

Animals are not, however, capable of self-reflection in the spiritual manner typical for humans. Olivi appears to think that an animal has an image of its own body, a kind of self-image, but it cannot understand itself as the perceiver of this image. This is limited to humans. Olivi seems to accept, but not emphasize, the traditional Aristotelian idea that humans differ from other animals through the power of understanding universally. Rather, Olivi’s understanding of the human distinction emphasizes self-reflexivity and free self-control. This distinction is, for him, the distinctive human capacity, and the foundation of human dignity.

## Cross-References

- ▶ [Bonaventure](#)
- ▶ [Consciousness](#)
- ▶ [John Duns Scotus](#)
- ▶ [Matthew of Aquasparta](#)
- ▶ [Peter Auriol](#)
- ▶ [Peter Lombard](#)
- ▶ [Poverty](#)
- ▶ [William of Ockham](#)

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## Peter Lombard

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### Abstract

Peter Lombard was a theologian and bishop of Paris who wrote Glosses on select books of the Bible and a theological textbook called the *Book of Sentences*. He had a significant impact on the development of medieval theology through his *Sentences*, as this work became the central textbook of theology from the early thirteenth century until the sixteenth century. Most of the philosophers and theologians of the later Middle Ages wrote commentaries on the *Sentences*. Through his systematic ordering of Christian theology, Peter Lombard deeply influenced the development of medieval philosophy and theology.

Peter Lombard (b. c. 1095/1100 – d. 1160), theologian, and later bishop of Paris, was born near Novara in Lombardy and died in Paris on August 21. He studied under Bernard of Clairvaux for a brief period at Reims, and it was Bernard who recommended Peter to Gilduin, the prior of St. Victor in Paris, for further theological studies. Peter arrived in Paris in 1136 to study with Hugh of St. Victor around the time that Hugh was completing his *De sacramentis* (1137). Besides attending the lectures of Hugh, Peter Lombard probably also sought out Peter Abelard who was lecturing in Paris and whose works he came to know well.

Peter Lombard began teaching at the cathedral school of Notre Dame around 1145. He became a canon in 1145, subdeacon in 1147, and subsequently deacon and archdeacon, eventually being consecrated bishop of Paris on July 28, 1159. During this period, he was also consulted on various theological issues by Pope Eugene III; for example, Peter was called to the

consistory in Paris in 1147 to discuss the trinitarian theology of Gilbert de la Porrée, Bishop of Poitiers. Gilbert's trinitarian theology was revisited by Peter Lombard, Bernard of Clairvaux and abbot Suger of St. Denis at the council of Reims in 1148. The works of Peter Lombard include his *Gloss on the Psalter* (1536), *Gloss on the Pauline Epistles* (1148–1159), and his *Book of Sentences* (1155–1157).

### Biblical Commentaries

Peter Lombard's *Gloss on the Psalter* is a revision of Anselm of Laon's *Gloss on the Psalter*. The work was edited and defended by Peter's student, Herbert of Bosham, after Gerhoch of Reichersberg charged Peter with Christological-Nihilism (claiming that Jesus in his humanity *non est aliquid*/is not a something; see below). The work offers a figurative interpretation of the *Psalms*, and does not engage in sustained doctrinal or theological discussion. Despite this fact, the work was important to subsequent tradition for its comprehensive treatment of the Psalter and its detailed introduction (*accessus*) to the work.

*The Gloss on the Pauline Epistles*, known to subsequent generations as the *Collectanea* or *Magna glossatura*, is a collection of Peter Lombard's notes and lectures on the Pauline Epistles. The work was under continual revision until Peter was elected Bishop of Paris in 1159. This commentary, in comparison with his earlier work, relies on a broader range of patristic and medieval sources and continues the *accessus* method of organization. Peter's two Glosses served as primers for his *Book of Sentences* as he continued to develop his distinctive methodological approach to the Scriptures and Christian doctrine.

### The Systematization of Theology

The *Sentences* of Peter Lombard became the standard doctrinal textbook between the mid-thirteenth century and the sixteenth century in western Europe. The gradual systematization of

theology that took place in the long twelfth century (1050–1215) had its roots in the early theological works of Anselm of Canterbury and continued through the works of Peter Abelard, Hugh of St. Victor, Robert of Melun, and Odo of Lucca's *Summa sententiarum*. The process of accumulation is already evident in Robert of Melun's amalgamation of Hugh of St. Victor and Peter Abelard and in Odo of Lucca's reliance on Hugh of St. Victor and Anselm of Laon. But, of the various sentence compilations that were composed during the mid-twelfth century, it was the *Sentences* of Peter Lombard that became the standard.

Like the other high medieval sentence compilations, the *Sentences* of Peter Lombard are primarily a collection of patristic citations from Saints Ambrose, Hilary of Poitiers, and Augustine. For his sources, Peter relied heavily on his previous *Glosses on the Psalter* and the *Pauline Epistles* as well as his medieval predecessors. When compared to contemporary theological systems, such as Hugh of St. Victor's *De sacramentis*, it is clear that Peter abandoned earlier attempts to construct a historical or chronological interpretation of Christian doctrine. Peter's theological work is a more systematic project grounded in Augustine's *De doctrina Christiana* and employs Augustine's distinction between things (*res*) and signs (*signa*). For the bishop of Hippo all of Christian doctrine is of things or of signs (*omnis doctrina vel rerum est vel signorum*). Certain things (Trinity) do not signify anything, but signs do; all signs are also things, but not all things are signs. Further, the distinction between things and signs is coupled with the distinction between things to be enjoyed (*frui*), things to be used (*uti*), and things that are both used and enjoyed. This latter distinction between things to be enjoyed and things to be used is between: (1) things enjoyed (*frui*) in the sense of delighting in the thing for its own sake (not for the sake of something else), and (2) things used (*uti*) as a sign for, or as a means of arriving at, something else.

Employing Augustine's analysis Peter divides the four books of the *Sentences* into: book I, Trinity (thing/s to be enjoyed); book II, creation, angels, the fall and grace (things to be used);

book III, the Incarnation of the Word and the virtues (things that are objects of enjoyment and use); book IV, the sacraments and last things (signs). The above distinctions are developed in the introductory sections of book I and book IV of the *Sentences* (I *Sent.*, dist. 1; IV *Sent.*, dist. 1 (prol.)). Peter argues that the Triune God is the only proper object of enjoyment. Everything else in the cosmos is a thing (including the sacraments as signs) to be either used and enjoyed or simply used. Peter's Augustinian ordering of Christian doctrine and theology is a rational structure that eventually replaced the historical or chronological approaches to Christian doctrine that antedated his own work.

The success of Lombard's *Sentences* is due primarily to his balanced approach to the opinions of the Fathers and the Masters. His work often achieves a *via media* between contradictory opinions. But, despite Peter's attempt to reconcile various opinions, certain positions held in the *Sentences* became the object of heated debate in the schools. Two examples are Lombard's discussion of the Holy Spirit as charity (I *Sent.*, dist. 17); and his analysis of the hypostatic union in which he argues that Christ, in his human nature (*qua human*), is nothing (*nec aliquid*; III *Sent.*, dist. 10). Lombard's claim in book III, distinction 10 is not a variant of docetism, but argues that since Jesus' human nature did not have an independent human hypostasis, it was not, strictly speaking, a human thing. Both of these distinctions attracted the attention of theologians from the mid-twelfth century up through the time of Johannes von Staupitz and Martin Luther; two sixteenth-century theologians who were sympathetic to Lombard's analysis of the Holy Spirit in distinction 17 of book I.

Alexander of Hales made the *Sentences* of Peter Lombard his doctrinal textbook for the study of theology at the University of Paris around 1222. The introduction of the *Sentences* was to compliment the study and interpretation of Scripture that was dominant at Paris in the twelfth and early thirteenth century. This decision was followed by Richard Fishacre at Oxford (c. 1245), despite opposition from Robert Grosseteste and Richard Rufus who wanted to maintain the centrality and sufficiency of the



Scriptures for theological study. Regardless of such critiques, the *Sentences* of Peter Lombard became the standard theological textbook in western Europe up until the sixteenth century. Commentaries on the *Sentences* became the chief method, along with commentaries on the Bible and Peter Comestor's *Historia scholastica*, of attaining the level of Master of Theology.

The initial commentaries on the *Sentences* were balanced works that functioned as instruments for learning the entire breadth of scholastic theology. Early commentators such as Alexander of Hales and Albert the Great commented on (glossed) all four books of the *Sentences*, a practice that was continued by their respective students in the mid-thirteenth century: Bonaventure and Thomas Aquinas. Both Bonaventure and Thomas commented on all four books of the *Sentences* distinction by distinction, thus following closely the logical ordering of Lombard's work. Later, by the late thirteenth and early fourteenth centuries, the commentaries became topical treatises that addressed the most important philosophical and theological questions of the day. This is evident in Scotus' *Ordinatio* where he considers fewer questions within each distinction and omits (or collapses into each other) certain distinctions all together. Both as a representative of the twelfth-century *Sentences* collections, and throughout the various subsequent genres of *Sentence* commentaries, the *Sentences* of Peter Lombard were the single most important theological work of the Middle Ages.

## Cross-References

- ▶ [Albert the Great](#)
- ▶ [Alexander of Hales](#)
- ▶ [Anselm of Canterbury](#)
- ▶ [Augustine](#)
- ▶ [Bernard of Clairvaux](#)
- ▶ [Bonaventure](#)
- ▶ [John Duns Scotus](#)
- ▶ [Peter Abelard](#)
- ▶ [Richard Fishacre](#)
- ▶ [Richard of St. Victor](#)

- ▶ [Richard Rufus of Cornwall](#)
- ▶ [Robert Grosseteste](#)
- ▶ [Thomas Aquinas](#)

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## Peter of Abano

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### Abstract

Peter of Abano (c. 1250–1316) was a very influential medical thinker from the fourteenth century. He also had an influence on fourteenth-century philosophy in Paris and Padua.

Peter of Abano was Italian by birth and received his basic education in Padua. At some point in his life (unclear when), he traveled to Constantinople where he is said to have learned Greek. Toward the end of the thirteenth century, he moved to Paris. In Paris, he soon got into serious trouble with the inquisition. He was, for example, accused of having held the position that the intellectual soul is derived from the potentiality of matter. He was, however, never convicted and left Paris in the early fourteenth century (c. 1306) to return to Padua. In Padua, he got into trouble again with the inquisition, but died before he was charged with anything. Apparently, his bones were later burned in Padua as a sign of his heresy (Hasse 2001, p. 636).

Peter's most famous work is the *Conciliator differentiarum philosophorum et praecipue medicorum*. Presumably, it was written during his time in Paris and then perhaps revised later on in Padua. Its possible influence on fourteenth-century philosophy has been very little studied (it is in general very little studied), but it later

became a standard text in medicine and was printed numerous times in the late fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries (see Siraisi 1987, 2001; Nardi 1958).

Peter also wrote another work that was perhaps not as influential as the *Conciliator*, but which was also printed numerous times in the late fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries, namely an *Expositio problematum Aristotelis*. It seems also to have been written during his Paris period and then revised in Padua. It was often circulated later in the fourteenth century in a shortened version by John of Jandun.

## Cross-References

- ▶ [John of Jandun](#)
- ▶ [Medicine and Philosophy](#)

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## Peter of Ailly

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### Abstract

Peter of Ailly was one of the most important thinkers and philosophers of the later fourteenth and the early fifteenth century. He was deeply involved with the Papal politics of his time and wrote several philosophical works that remained influential well into the sixteenth century.

Peter of Ailly was born in 1350 in Compiègne. His philosophical background was formed from 1364 onward at the College of Navarre. He obtained his Arts degree in 1368, and joined the Faculty of Theology from which he graduated in 1381. He then became Regent Master. He was appointed Grand Master of the College of Navarre in 1384 and then Chancellor of Paris University in 1389.

From this time on Peter of Ailly was involved in the struggles surrounding the Great Western Schism, which divided Europe between 1378 and 1414. After the return of Gregory IX to Rome, the College of Cardinals, reduced in number, convened to elect a Pope. But later it was argued that it had acted under pressure and another Pope was elected. From that time on there existed two opposed series of Popes, one in Rome and another in Avignon. It was only with the Council of Constance in 1414–1418 that the schism ended.

In 1381, Peter of Ailly became the voice of a group of students who demanded a council to put an end to the schism. After having published a pamphlet (*Epistola Leviathan*), he was forced to flee to Noyon, but then returned to Paris in 1384. He is involved in fights against the Chancellor of the university, which was forced to resign in 1385, and against the Dominicans. He became the Chaplain of King Charles VI. He then argued in support of the Popes of Avignon. He became Bishop of Le Puy in 1395, and then Bishop of Cambrai in 1397. He experienced both good times as the time when he in 1403 was the ambassador of the King to Benedict XIII in Avignon, and moments of difficulty during which he devoted himself to his diocese, as for example when he in 1408 had to take refuge in Cambrai. Peter of Ailly was appointed Cardinal in 1411 and Papal legate in Avignon of Pope John XXIII in 1413. He participated in the Council of Constance that marked the end of the schism with the election of Martin V, and the resignation of the Pope of Rome and the deposing of others. During this same council, he took an active part in the conviction of John Huss. He spent the remaining years of his life in Avignon, where he died in 1420.

Peter of Ailly was a great scholar. He possessed a very extensive library, and was associated with early French humanists. He wrote a considerable number of books (about 170 are known). His philosophical works include a *Tractatus de anima*, written between 1377 and 1381, and a *Tractatus de consolatione philosophiae Boethii*, dating from the same period. He also wrote the *Conceptus*, which gives an exposition of the different kinds of conceptual terms and their organization in the early 1370s, and a treatise on the *Insolubilia* (between 1372 and 1375) dealing with the truth and falsity of propositions in general, and self-reflexive propositions in particular. There is also a *Tractatus exponibilium*, in six chapters, written between 1384 and 1388, outlining, in a systematic fashion, propositions with adverbial or syncategorematic terms in such a way that they should be explicitly explained by several underlying propositions. The authenticity of the treatise *De destructione modorum significandi* has been

challenged but is now accepted. It was written before 1388. His *Questions on the Books of the Sentences* (read in 1377–1378) manifests the trend of the fourteenth century to reduce the number of issues dealt with, then to amplify them and insert many strictly philosophical developments. All these works were widely circulated up until the early sixteenth century.

His *Imago mundi*, a geography text, is still famous because Christopher Columbus owned a copy of it. But this is mostly a compilation made from ancient authors, in particular Ptolemy. He also composed a dozen other cosmographic, astronomical, and astrological works. In the latter, he defends the validity of astrology as a study of the influence of the stars on the course of human history.

Among his ecclesiological and political works, two works from his mature period should be mentioned, namely the *Tractatus de materia concilii generalis* (1402–1403) and the *Tractatus de ecclesiastica potestate* (1416), as well as a small compendium written for the Council of Constance, *Tractatus de reformatione Ecclesie*. He is also the author of many sermons in both Latin and French.

In logic and philosophy of language, Peter of Ailly manifests the influence of Ockham's philosophy in Paris. He gives all his attention to the theory of mental language. William of Ockham represents a major turning point in treating the domain of concepts as a true language, subject to a principle of compositionality, governed by syntax, and bearing semantic properties. According to Peter of Ailly, the level of concepts, organized into a language, is the major area, if not the only, of all logical, semantic, and epistemological analysis. The division and classification of the types of terms, by which logic usually begins, becomes a classification of concepts, that is, into simple or complex, absolute or connotative, but also into categorematic or syncategorematic, nominal or verbal, adjectives or substantives, etc. All logical and grammatical differences within spoken language are dependent on differences in mental language. This is why Peter of Ailly, in the *Conceptus*, and in the *Destructio modorum significandi*, denies that there are principles of

construction of spoken language, which was the function performed by the "modes of signifying" of speculative grammar. The construction or the grammatical "regimen" results from the conventional subordination of spoken terms to concepts, which are by themselves ordered in a certain way. But we have to make a distinction, which Peter of Ailly picks up from Gregory of Rimini, between mental language improperly speaking, which is only the mental image of the spoken language, and is as such conventional, and mental language properly speaking, which is the determining structure of the semantic properties and the epistemological significance of language. A simple apprehensive cognition is the mental term itself, which is a concept and which naturally signifies something.

In this context, there is no room for the idea, developed in Oxford in the late 1320s and made famous in Paris by Gregory of Rimini in the 1340s, of the "proper and adequate significate of the proposition." In the *Commentary on the Sentences* (Book I, Dist. 35, q. 1), this issue is discussed regarding the compatibility between the divine science and the contingency of the future. Paradoxically, as often, the general framework is dependent on Gregory of Rimini's commentary. Some future contingents are *incomplexe significabilia*, that is, they are possible entities, which will possibly be expressed in the future. But are the complex enunciatives that can be expressed in the present about the future, *complexe significabilia* as some believe? Peter states that they are rather *complexe significantia*. The whole complexity is then located in the significant complex expressions and not in the significates. He then deviates from Gregory and returns to a Buridanian position in which only individual things are signified, and in which these are signified either in a simple or in a complex manner. The only other difference that we find in the *Conceptus* is that terms are also signifying *aliquiditer*, in a certain way. In fact, according to an expression that we shall find again, for example, in the early sixteenth century in John Mair, concepts signify "*aliquid vel aliqua vel aliquiditer*." They can signify one thing or several things or in a certain way, somehow, in the case of syncategorematic terms,

given that there are mental syncategorematic terms. This kind of signification is not only a modification of the signification of categorematic terms, of the direct reference to some entitates, not just a way of signifying, but it is the adverbial signification of mental syncategorematic terms. In the *Insolubilia*, Peter of Ailly is very harsh on the theory of complexe significabilia that he considers to be “irrational and unintelligible.” He rehashes a Buridanian argument, namely that all that there is, is either one thing or nothing, either a substance or an accident, either God or the creation, and the complexe significabile can in no way be situated in this scheme. In the same treatise, Peter of Ailly admits that some propositions, since they are self-reflective, signify something about themselves, for example, they signify that they are false. He refuses, however, the generalization proposed by Thomas Bradwardine in his own *Insolubilia* that any proposition implicitly signifies its own truth or falsity.

The relation of a cognitive power to an object is called a notitia. The different kinds of cognitions are discussed in the *Tractatus de anima*. A notitia can be both sensitive and intellectual. That which is known or knowable is called an obiectum. But the object is not an intentional being distinct from the thing. It is the thing itself as it is in front of the cognitive power. Every thing is not ipso facto an object, but it is as far as it is directed to a cognitive power, at least in the case of a present thing. In the case of past or future things, or things simply absent from my field of apprehension, it is an image, a species, which takes the place of the object so that the cognitive power can perform its function. The concepts or notitie are acts of the intellect, characterized as *immutatio vitalis*, vital actions or changes. In the *Commentary on the Sentences*, we find as a general definition: “a cognition is an act representing something in a vitally perceptive power.” Speaking of acts implies refusing any idea of a concept as mental content. This is why the model here is that of a direct relationship, not that of mediation by a representation.

The question of the intermediate, however, reappears together with the distinction between intuitive and abstractive cognition. In his

*Commentary on the Sentences* (Book I, q. 3), Peter of Ailly defines first of all an abstractive cognition as one that abstracts from the existence or nonexistence of the thing, while an intuitive cognition cognizes it as present, according to its actual existence. Furthermore, he insists on the fact that an abstractive cognition gives us the object “in a thing which represents it.” Agreeing with the definitions of Gregory of Rimini, which is close to Scotus, Peter of Ailly outlines, in the *Commentary on the Sentences* and in the *Treatise on the Soul*, intuitive cognition as that by which something is known formally in itself, whereas abstractive cognition is that by which something is known through a representation.

This idea leads (especially in the *Insolubilia*) to a distinction between formal and objective signification. The first is that by which a concept refers itself to the thing it signifies, the second explicates the mediation through which a cognition or a concept refers to something. This intermediate being is like an image (species) or a spoken sign. This duality between formal and objective signification will later be crossed with the idea of an objective or intentional being. Then it will be found in the theory of formal and objective concepts at the end of the sixteenth century.

The *Commentary on the Sentences* is also famous for strictly theological reasons, particularly regarding its doctrines of predestination and justification, which are known until the sixteenth century. The absolute simplicity of the divine being prohibits all distinctions within it, whether it be that of faculties or ideas. The order of established secondary causes is contingent. It is the level of ordained power. But by his absolute power, God can directly do what he ordinarily does by the secondary causes. This applies to the sacraments as well as to grace. In the established order, the habit of created charity, freely given by God, is necessary to avoid sin, although *de potentia absoluta* the one does not imply the other. Prescience of merits is not the cause of justification, because justification is unmotivated. But in the established order, sin is the cause of reprobation. Our concept of God is obtained by an abstractive cognition from what is created. If we cannot have an evident cognition of God we

have, however, a probable (*probabilis*) cognition of him.

In the first question on Book I of the *Sentences*, about the evident knowledge of theological truths, Peter of Ailly exposes his theory of evidence and certitude. The contingent propositions about truths of experience can only be the object of a conditioned evidence, though doubting of them would not be reasonable. Only the evidence or propositions such as “I know that I am, that I live” is possible for men down here. More generally, in his *Questions on Sentences*, Peter of Ailly, following John of Mirecourt, develops a theory of probable knowledge which broadens the field of the probable. Most of theological propositions must be sustained *probabiliter*. They are not evident but can be based on arguments having a certain force of persuasion.

Peter of Ailly’s probabilism does not lead to fideism, and a fortiori certainly not to skepticism. Absolute evidence is limited to the non-contradictory and (according to the ordained power) to the intuition of what exists, but reason gives us relative certainty and conditional evidence in the natural order of ordained power, in which causal relationships, such as the commandments, are contingent, and the same hold in matters of Trinitarian theology.

The Treatise on the Consolation of Philosophy of Boethius is presented as a work of moral philosophy. It includes a eulogy of philosophy in the beginning, and ends with a part on future contingents. But the main problem is that of happiness. Peter wonders if a philosopher can attain true happiness through natural means. He develops a purely philosophical approach. However, the philosopher reaches only a probable cognition. Peter of Ailly does not adopt, even as a relative truth, the doctrine of intellectual happiness, and he has reservations about the Aristotelian theory formulated in the *Nicomachean Ethics*. At the same time, he revisits the position of Scotus, accentuated by Ockham, that faith is required for understanding the true good. Peter admits the existence of a human tendency toward the ultimate good, a *summum bonum*. And he even recognizes, through a convincing argument, that God is the *summum bonum*. However, the supreme good

cannot be attained by a human being in this life, since only God gives happiness through the beatific vision.

Peter of Ailly does not develop a real political philosophy, but political theories are present in his ecclesiological work. These are marked by the context of the Great Schism, and his position in favor of a council to resolve the crisis. He supports the distinction of civilian and spiritual power whose purposes are different. The spiritual power is superior in dignity but does not exercise the prerogative upon civil power. It is the universal Church, not the Pope, that has the “fullness of power.” He often takes on the ideas of John of Paris, and he applies the Aristotelian analysis of the ends of the government to the Church. The political authority must ensure the good of the community as a whole. The Council does not have to judge the Pope, but if the survival and unity of the Church is no longer secured with the Pope, the General Council becomes the representative of the Church. The source of authority is the consent of the community.

The most famous pupil of Peter of Ailly was John Gerson, but Peter exerted a widespread influence for two centuries in philosophy of language, theology, and political ecclesiology. He was for a long time viewed negatively, but his ideas are now revalued thanks to a better understanding of what absolute power means as well as a more measured assessment of his doctrines of grace and justification. His works are seen as important sources for understanding the logic and the epistemology of his century.

## Cross-References

- ▶ [Future Contingents](#)
- ▶ [Gregory of Rimini](#)
- ▶ [Insolubles](#)
- ▶ [Intuitive and Abstractive Cognition](#)
- ▶ [John Buridan](#)
- ▶ [John Duns Scotus](#)
- ▶ [John Mair](#)
- ▶ [Mental Word/Concepts](#)
- ▶ [William of Ockham](#)



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Peter was strongly influenced by Thomas Aquinas' interpretations of Aristotle. However, his own interpretations should be understood not only as expanding or continuing Thomas' commentaries but as adding a particular accent of his own (Flüeler, *Rezeption und Interpretation der Aristotelischen "Politica" im späten Mittelalter*. Grüner, Amsterdam, 1992; Galle, *Questions on Aristotle's "De caelo": a critical edition with an interpretative essay*. Leuven University Press, Leuven, 2003; Toste *Virtue and the city: the virtues of the ruler and the citizen in the medieval reception of the "Politics."* In: Bejczy IP, Nederman CJ (eds) *Princely virtues in the Middle Ages, 1200–1500*. Brepols, Turnhout, pp 75–100, 2007). After more than two decades as a teacher in the Faculty of Arts, Peter secured a chair at the theological faculty. In the years that followed, his teaching duties led to the production of six *Quodlibeta*, which also found a wide audience.

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## Peter of Auvergne

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### Abstract

Peter of Auvergne was both master of the Faculty of Arts and of the Faculty of Theology at the University of Paris in the last three decades of the thirteenth century. He is one of the major promoters of medieval Aristotelianism and the most productive commentator from the Faculty of Arts at that time. His substantial body of work consists mainly of Aristotelian commentaries pertaining to nearly all books taught at the Paris Faculty of Arts. His interpretations on natural philosophy and especially his groundbreaking commentary on the *Politics*, shaped later readings of this text. Like all of the Paris scholars of arts in the late thirteenth century,

## Biography

Peter of Auvergne (Petrus de Alvernia, less often Peter de Croco) was a master at the Paris Faculty of Arts during the 1270s, 1280s, and 1290s. Although Peter is among the few masters of this period who are known by name, we have practically no biographical information about him (Hocedez 1933). In 1296, he was promoted to *doctor theologiae*, then appointed bishop of Clermont by Pope Boniface VIII on January 21, 1302. He held this office until his death on September 25, 1304. It is possible, though not certain, that this same Petrus de Alvernia was rector of the University of Paris in 1275.

## Works

The surviving works of Peter of Auvergne are all directly or indirectly connected with his teaching duties at the University of Paris. What is unusual about the surviving body of his work is the fact

that it includes commentaries on most of Aristotle's works that were in the curriculum of the Faculty of Arts at the time. The breadth and intensity of this engagement with Aristotelian philosophy marks Peter as one of the most influential commentators on Aristotle during the Middle Ages. The commentaries can be formally classified as commentaries in question form and literal commentaries. The literary form of the question commentaries – influenced by the instructional techniques used in the other faculties – is, in the case of Peter as well as of all the other masters, determined by strictly regulated discussion practices used at the university and results from the use of various techniques for recording these disputations. Peter's commentaries in question form are as a rule made up of a list of central questions, presented together with some counterarguments built on Aristotelian assertions, and concluded with an answer. As these *quaestiones*, or question commentary texts, were obviously based on transcripts or notes (with the possible exception of the *quaestiones* about the *Metaphysics*), we can assume that they were composed during the time when Peter taught at the Faculty of Arts. The structure of the literal commentaries is different, in that each one carefully subdivides and structures the content of an Aristotelian work, then provides a sentence by sentence interpretation. Like other commentators of his time, Peter follows the practice of commenting on variant readings in different manuscript copies of the same Aristotelian text. The production and dissemination of Peter's literal commentaries are markedly different from those of his commentaries in question form (again with the possible exception of the questions on the *Metaphysics*). They are obviously not notes taken by a listener, but rather complete written texts, indicating that they could only have come from the period when Peter taught at the theological faculty. This later date of composition is indicated by, among other factors, the method of dissemination, as these and other Aristotelian commentaries by well-known theologians (Albert the Great, Thomas Aquinas, Aegidius Romanus) were copied using the so-called *pecia* system.

On the *Logica vetus*, only commentaries in question form have survived, and the questions on the works in the *Logica nova* ascribed to him are of questionable origin. In addition, a series of *sophismata* address logical questions. These commentaries highlight similarities to some of the modists. His particular interest in posing questions of metaphysics and natural philosophy is apparent not only in the commentaries on Aristotelian natural philosophy and metaphysics, but also in the known works on practical philosophy and the theological *quodlibeta*, which treat such questions in exhaustive detail (e.g., in *Quodlibet IV*, q.8: “*Utrum potentia in materia et forma ad quam est, sint idem secundum rem*”). The two commentaries on the *Politics* may be considered prime examples of practical philosophy. The so far unedited commentary in question form (the most important exemplar of this text is Paris, BnF, lat. 16089) contains a total of 126 questions about the first seven books. It is the oldest surviving commentary on the *Politics* of Aristotle produced at the University of Paris, a work that directly or indirectly influenced all later question commentaries on the *Politics*. This commentary not only advances the necessity of a political philosophy as a subdiscipline of practical philosophy, but also endeavors to establish this separate field of study on the basis of a set of central questions. In order to demonstrate the status of political philosophy as a valid scholarly field, the commentator makes a thorough exploration of concepts from metaphysics and natural philosophy. This commentary was used by, among others, Marsilius of Padua in *Defensor pacis* (Dictio 1, c. 16), who obviously regarded it as an important transmission of political Aristotelianism (Flüeler 1992, I: 120–131). Peter also wrote a literal commentary on the *Politics*, the so-called *Scriptum* as a continuation of a commentary left unfinished by Thomas Aquinas, incorporating Books III–VIII.

As a bachelor of theology, Peter had also read the *Sentences* of Peter Lombard, though only one group of questions on this work has survived in a single manuscript. Chief among the theological works are the six *Quodlibeta*, which he disputed after earning the title of master (1296), continuing

the series year after year during Advent until 1301 (Schabel 2007). There are 108 questions in all (in 19 surviving manuscripts), treating completely different questions, of which the one concerning Peter's understanding of the "verbum mentis" was the most often quoted among theologians of the fourteenth century (Cannizzo 1961).

Peter influenced the reception of individual Aristotelian works until early modernity through the broad dissemination of his commentaries. This enduring influence in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries could be related to the fact that Peter continued two commentaries on Aristotle left incomplete by Thomas Aquinas (*De caelo*, *Politica*) as well as to the fact that his other literal commentaries on Aristotelian natural philosophy (*Meteorologica*, *Parva naturalia*) were often copied, and later even printed, together with the commentaries of Thomas Aquinas.

## Cross-References

- ▶ [Political Philosophy](#)
- ▶ [Thomas Aquinas, Political Thought](#)

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## Peter of Candia

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### Abstract

The Greek Franciscan Peter of Candia (c. 1340–1410) was a towering figure in intellectual and ecclesiastical affairs during the Great Schism. His education and early teaching took him all over Europe until he began lecturing on the *Sentences* at Paris just as the Schism began. Afterward he was active in northern Italy in the service of the future duke of Milan and as a prelate, rising to archbishop of Milan and cardinal. He was also associated with leading humanists and the Palaiologan dynasty. Joining the conciliar movement, he was elected Pope Alexander V at the Council of Pisa in 1409, but he died the following year. His election no doubt helped make his main writing, his questions on the *Sentences*, a best-seller in his day. In this work, Peter provides a history of many of the main philosophical and theological developments of the fourteenth century, presenting with exceptional clarity and in unbiased fashion the views of many leading thinkers from earlier in the 1300s, especially John Duns Scotus, Peter Auriol, William of Ockham, Gregory of Rimini, Thomas Bradwardine, and John of Ripa. He also offered the main criticisms of these views from a variety of perspectives. He did not attempt an original synthesis, but his perceptive observations constitute a useful tool for understanding scholasticism in the fourteenth century.

Peter of Candia, modern Herakleion, was born to Greek parents on Crete c. 1340, during the island's long period of Venetian rule (1211–1669). Peter – a.k.a. Petros/us Ph/Filargis/

o/us, Philaretus, and Cretensis – was orphaned during the Black Death and raised by local Franciscans, who recognized his intelligence. Around 1357, Peter joined the order and embarked on a career reflecting the Franciscan school network, studying at Minorite *studia* in Padua, Norwich, and Oxford, where he attended theological lectures. Peter claimed to have heard the Franciscan William of Cremona lecture on the *Sentences*, which he is said to have done at Paris in 1365–1366, and in Bologna 2 years later, so Peter probably studied at one of those *studia* as well, most likely at Paris. He was then sent to teach in convents in Russia, Bohemia, and Poland. His superiors rewarded him by assigning him to lecture on the *Sentences* at Paris as bachelor of theology, which he did in the 1378–1379 academic year, and not over the 2-year period 1378–1380, as was previously thought. (Colophons stating otherwise must refer to the completion of the edited version in 1380 or 1381.) Peter began with his first *principium* on September 24, 1378, 4 days after the outbreak of the Great Schism. He was licensed at the end of 1381 and incepted as master of theology in early 1382.

By 1384, Peter had moved to Italy, where he helped develop the University of Pavia. There Peter joined Giangaleazzo Visconti's service. Recognized as the most illustrious member of a court that included Baldus de Ubaldis and Manuel Chrysoloras, Peter became deeply involved in humanist circles, associating closely with Umberto Decembrio, Pier Candido Decembrio, and Coluccio Salutati. Peter's principal sermons delivered before his lectures on each book of the *Sentences* already revealed that he was a master Latinist, but he did not forget his Greek. Considering Plato and Aristotle his compatriots, Peter retained links to the Palaiologans in Constantinople and the Morea and translated some of St Jerome into Greek. Thus, he represents an early bridge between the Latin and Greek phases of the Italian Renaissance.

In late 1386, the Roman Pope Urban VI appointed Peter bishop of Piacenza. He was then transferred to Vicenza (early 1388) and Novara



(mid-1389). Still active as Giangaleazzo's ambassador on various missions, Peter obtained for his master the title "Duke of Milan" from Emperor Wenceslas in 1394, and when the see became vacant, Peter was made archbishop of Milan on May 17, 1402. The duke died 4 months later, but Peter continued his professional ascent: in 1405, the Roman Pope Innocent VII named Peter cardinal-priest of the Church of the Twelve Apostles. When the rival popes refused to take steps to end the Great Schism, Peter joined the conciliar movement, giving the sermon to open the Council of Pisa on March 26, 1409. The council deposed Popes Gregory XII and Benedict XIII and, on June 26, elected Peter of Candia pope as Alexander V, the only Greek pope after the eighth century. The election effectively created three popes, although Alexander won the support of most of Catholic Christendom. Unfortunately for Alexander and his legacy, his eventful papacy lasted only 10 months and he died in Bologna on May 3, 1410. Thus, the Schism continued and much later Alexander V was labeled an "anti-pope."

Among Peter of Candia's philosophical writings are the logic treatises *De consequentiis*, published by Maria Bertagna, and *De obligationibus*, edited but not yet published by Stephen F. Brown. Peter also wrote the theological tract *De divinis nominibus*, printed in early modern editions of Francis of Meyronnes' works. Peter's most important work is his questions on the *Sentences* of Peter Lombard, parts of which survive in at least 50 manuscripts, making it one of the two or three most popular examples of the genre in the latter half of the fourteenth century. Editors have privileged Vat. lat. 1081 as allegedly the best manuscript, but it is not without flaws, including omissions *per homoeoteleuton*, and any critical edition should also employ the half dozen or so other good witnesses. Peter's text – principal sermons and questions plus a mere 11 questions (6, 3, 1, and 1 for the four books) divided into 33 articles – would occupy roughly 2,000 pages in a critical edition and is being published online. The work's greatest merit is that it serves as a virtual history of fourteenth-century thought on many issues. For

this reason, Cardinal Ehrle's seminal book on the era, from 1925, takes Peter's questions on the *Sentences* as its focal point. Peter summarizes clearly, succinctly, and in his own words the opinions of the giants from earlier in the century. Of Peter's over 350 explicit citations of 32 university scholastics, only 42 refer to a mere eight thirteenth-century authors, including 17 for Thomas Aquinas and eight for Bonaventure. By contrast, the 24 fourteenth-century theologians cited receive over 300 mentions, with roughly 92 for John Duns Scotus (four for Scotists), 58 for John of Ripa, 54 for William of Ockham (11 for Ockhamists), 34 for Peter Auriol, and 13 for Gregory of Rimini, with fewer for Francis of Meyronnes, Landolfo Caracciolo, Adam Wodeham, Thomas Bradwardine, Richard Brinkley, Francis of Marchia, and many others, including several of Peter's contemporaries.

These numbers underestimate Peter's "historical" tendencies, because whole sections are devoted to expounding the thought of Bradwardine or Auriol, for example, on certain issues, after introducing them only once. Peter was so talented at this that, concerning his portrayal of Auriol's doctrine of divine foreknowledge, in 1470 Peter de Rivo would remark that "Peter of Candia explained his opinion with clearer words" than had Auriol himself. Not only would Peter survey these earlier opinions, but he would usually give a succinct abstract afterward, summarizing his survey by beginning like this: "Therefore this doctor's view, as I see it, consists in the following..." Because of Peter's objectivity, his abstracts are a wonderful tool for understanding fourteenth-century thinkers. The following typical statement is characteristic of his unbiased approach, in this case concerning a position of Auriol: "I don't care whether it's true or not, because right now I am not reciting it to adhere to it, but just to make clearer the truth of what will be said later." Thus, the opening question to Peter's Prologue to the *Sentences* has been aptly called his "Hundred Year 'History' of the Theologian's Role."

Peter of Candia also offers an independent appraisal of earlier scholars' theories, criticizing and approving where he thinks best, often with



a touch of humor. For example: “Thus appears the solution to the arguments of the Subtle Doctor, which in truth include many things that are not proven demonstratively, such as that God understands outside Himself, that He has an infinite intellect, and that He wills, so almost every argument includes something that is believed or only probable.” And elsewhere: “But although these things appear beautifully said, they generate no melody in Ockham’s ears.” Concerning Ockham: “Although one can maintain this position, because it would be hard to disprove it, in truth, if one pays close attention, it does not fish as deeply as the previous two.” In another context: “I once heard this response from Master William of Cremona, when he was lecturing on the *Sentences*, but with all due respect, he did not then have the mind of a doctor.” Peter often speaks “with all due respect,” and sometimes “for the sake of argument.”

It has been suggested that Peter was not a brilliant theologian in the sense of having an original system. Looking back over the long university debates over the previous 180 years and the thousands of treatises produced in that era, perhaps Peter realized the futility of trying to be absolute and yet consistent. In book II, question 3, article 2, when Peter saw that what he was saying on the issue of the univocity of being was contradictory to what he had said before, he quipped: “I upheld this position in my second *principium*, against Master Gerard Calcar, and now I am holding the opposite here – not that I consider one position to be truer than the other, but in order to illustrate several ways of conceiving the problem, for the pleasure of those who sometimes want to eat bread and sometimes cheese.” In book I, question 6, article 2, on divine foreknowledge of future contingents, Peter presents objectively and at length the opinions of Auriol, John of Ripa, and Scotus. He finds them all wanting and offers a rather vague “safer way.” In conclusion, he lists six possible solutions, all with their own problems, and ends by declaring: “I, like a little dog, have started the hare for you. Capture it through whatever path of the aforesaid ways you wish.” In book I, question 1, article 1, on the nature of theology, Peter presents the positions of Auriol and Gregory of Rimini,

respectively, that theology is merely declarative, helping the theologian to better understand what he believes, and that it is instead deductive, taking the truths of Scripture and deducing further truths. Peter of Candia studied these positions and the reactions of other theologians, coming up with his own evaluation. He criticized certain aspects of each side and appreciated their merits, adopting finally a middle course, following Scotus and Ockham, he claimed.

Given the nature of Peter of Candia’s major writing, perhaps it is best to finish in his own words: “But because I have written enough, and visibly, I believe the school has been oppressed enough with listening to me, I will refrain.” Or better, Peter’s last words in his entire work: “I was prepared to make a long discussion of this material, but God wants me to rest from my labors.”

## Cross-References

- ▶ [Conciliarism](#)
- ▶ [Gregory of Rimini](#)
- ▶ [John Duns Scotus](#)
- ▶ [Manuel Chrysoloras](#)
- ▶ [Peter Auriol](#)
- ▶ [Thomas Bradwardine](#)
- ▶ [William of Ockham](#)

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## Peter of Maricourt

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### Abstract

Petrus Peregrinus de Maharncuria (Peter of Maricourt, Pierre Peregrin, or Pierre de Maricourt) was a French scientist, the author of a *Letter on the Magnet* (*Epistula de magnete ad Sigerium de Foucaucourt*), a short, systematic treatise on the properties and uses of lodestone (magnetite), and a *New Construction of a Peculiar Astrolabe* (*Nova compositio astrolabii particularis*). *De magnete* includes a reference to an apparently lost treatise *On the Properties of Mirrors* (*De operibus speculorum*, cf. *De magnete* II.2, 353). Due to the precision of his work, Maricourt may be considered one of the earliest scientists in the Latin West.

The only certain information we have concerning Pierre de Maricourt is that he was at the siege of Lucera, perhaps for the army of Charles I of Anjou, where the *Letter on the Magnet* was signed on August 8, 1269 (*De magnete* II.3, 397–8). The rest of our (conjectural) information depends on identifying the author of the *Letter* with a certain "Magister Petrus" mentioned in the works of Roger Bacon (*Opus majus* IV.2: Bridges I.116; *Opus tertium* 11, Brewer 35; 13, Brewer 43ff). However, Maricourt's full name occurs only as an addition in some manuscripts of the *Opus tertium* (Schlund 1911a, pp. 445–449, 455), and even if the identification is true the information is very limited: Bacon states that he was a Picard; from his surname ("Peregrinus") we may conjecture that he was a crusader (see Schlund 1911a, pp. 453–454); and from the dates we may infer that he probably studied at Paris in the 1250s (cf. Arnold and Potamian 1904: x). The estimated date of the *Nova compositio* (after 1263; cf. Sturlese and Thomson 1995: 113) and Bacon's

*Opus majus* and *tertium* (written before 1267) is a good argument to identify Pierre de Maricourt with Bacon's "Magister Petrus." In any event, Bacon praises "Magister Petrus," for his emphasis on the use of mathematics and experimentation in physics, as opposed to the dialectical methods and the commentary tradition dominant at Paris. These traits are confirmed in the texts of the *Epistula* and the *Compositio*.

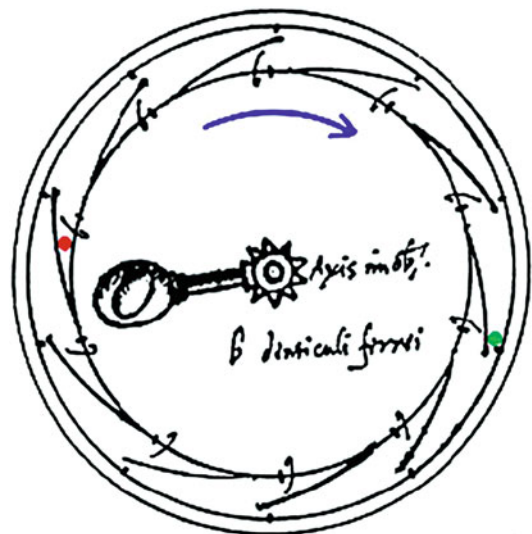
*De magnete* is his most famous work, the main treatise on magnetism in Europe until William Gilbert's *De magnete* (1600). The letter is divided in two parts: the first one discusses the properties of magnets, and the second proposes the construction of some devices based on these properties. Maricourt calls the parts of lodestones "poles," as a reference to geographical poles (*De magnete* I.4, 73–77), provides a method to determine the poles of the magnet (I.4–5, 90–118), and describes magnetic fields (I.4, 78–89). He states the basic laws of attraction (I.6, 120–143), the magnetization of iron (I.7, 150–161), and the change of polarity by a stronger magnetic field (I.8, 163–177). Based on his observations, Maricourt concluded that the orientation of the magnet depends on the arrangement of the skies (I.10, 260–265).

Maricourt's preamble to the letter describes the qualifications of the natural philosopher. He states that the construction of the instruments is necessary to understand the properties of the magnet (cf. I.1, 32–34), and that implies "to be proficient in manual works" (I.1, 43–44). Moreover, Maricourt appeals to the "evidence of experiment" (I.6, 147), the "truth proved by experience" (I.7, 160–161), and the "experienced truth" (I.9, 220) as support for his conclusions. These features anticipate the approach of scientists beginning in the seventeenth century, so Bacon's praise would be rightly deserved. However, sometimes Maricourt's vocabulary reveals his scholastic training in Aristotle's *Physics*, appealing, for instance, to "agents" and "patients" (cf. I.9, 180–185) and to "natural desires" (cf. I.9, 202) to explain magnetic attraction.

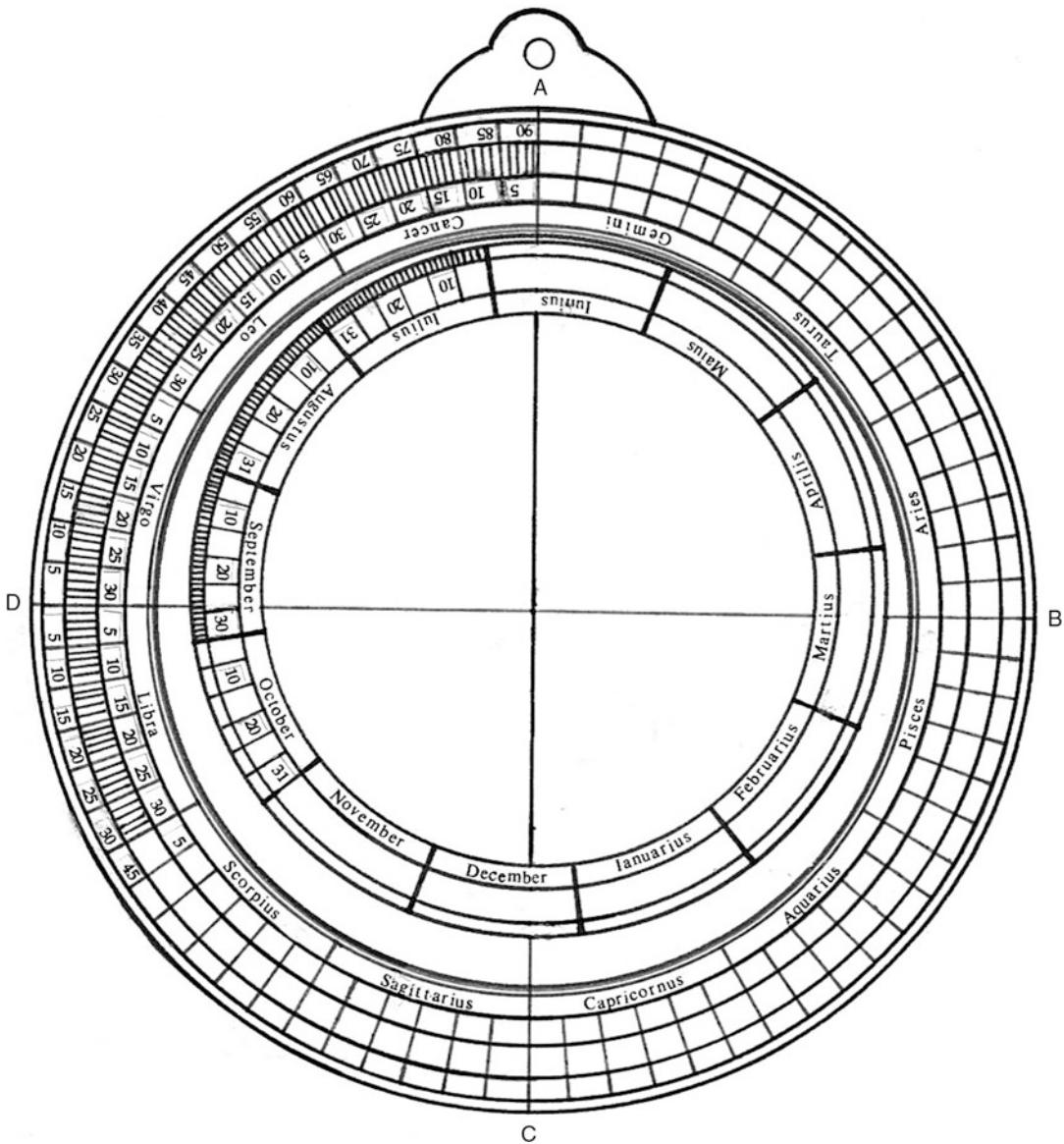
Maricourt's own proficiency as an engineer is reflected in his description of the construction of two compasses (floating and dry) and an alleged

perpetual motion machine, both in the second part of *De magnete*, and in his *Constructio astrolabii particularis*.

Maricourt's compasses are relatively standard, but his perpetual motion machine is peculiarly based on the properties of the magnet: a silver cylinder with iron nails around the borders and a fixed silver rod with a lodestone near the iron nails. The idea is that the lodestone should pull the iron nails upward because of the laws of attraction ruling the magnet. To improve the performance of the device, small beans of silver or brass (to prevent magnetizing them) may run between the nails and the borders of the cylinder, adding speed as the beans pull the capsule downward on the right side and the magnet pulls upward on the left (Fig. 1). Regardless of the feasibility of such a device, it is noticeable that Maricourt's machine appealed to two fundamental interactions of physics: electromagnetism and gravitation.



**Peter of Maricourt, Fig. 1** A model of Maricourt's perpetual motion machine. The arrow (blue in the online version of this Encyclopedia) indicates the direction of the movement of the wheel; the lodestone is the egg on the left of the fixed silver rod, pulling upward the iron nails (here as slanted black lines on the borders of the wheel), while the (silver or brass green and red) bullets fall on the right side, allegedly to improve performance. (Reproduced with kind permission from Kleinert 2003, p. 168, 2005, p. 33)



**Peter of Maricourt, Fig. 2** A partial view of one plate of Maricourt's astrolabe. (Reproduced with kind permission from Maricourt 1995, p. 126)

Maricourt's astrolabe (Fig. 2) is also "peculiar" on its own: he tried to combine the features of the classical astrolabe in Ptolemy's tradition, mapping the skies above the Tropic of Cancer but requiring a plate for each latitude at which it was used, and the more general astrolabe by al-Zarqālī, projecting the eastern and western

halves of the heavens from the pole to the equator. Maricourt chose to map each half of the northern and southern hemispheres onto a plane through or parallel to the equator, chosen as the limit of projection. In spite of its ingenuity, this device never seemed to be very popular, and the text of the *Nova compositio* survives



only in four manuscripts, without much evidence as to determine the stemma (Sturlese and Thomson 1995, pp. 116–117).

## Cross-References

- ▶ [Natural Philosophy](#)
- ▶ [Roger Bacon](#)

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## Peter of Spain

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### Abstract

The identity of the author known as Peter of Spain is disputed, but what is clear is that he wrote two works on logic, the famous *Tractatus* or *Summule logicales magistri Petri Hispani* and a *Syncategoremata*. The *Tractatus* was the most influential logic work of the Middle Ages, and it was standard, reading well into the seventeenth century.

## Life and Works

There are two works attributed to the author known as Peter of Spain. The first one is the enormously influential *Tractatus* or according to the manuscripts *Summule logicales magistri Petri Hispani*. It is one of the most influential logic works of the Middle Ages and was standard, reading well into the seventeenth century. It was famously commented on by John Buridan in the fourteenth century. The other work is a *Syncategoremata*. In almost all of the manuscripts of this work, it follows the *Tractatus*, and this, together with doctrinal similarities, has led to the assumption that it is by the same author as the *Tractatus*. Other works have traditionally been ascribed to the author of the *Tractatus*, for example, a treatise on the soul and also commentaries on Aristotle's *De anima*, but it seems unlikely that they are by the same author.

There have been many theories as to who Peter of Spain actually was. The most known is that he was Portuguese and became Pope in 1276 under the name John XXI. Another theory is that he was Spanish and a Dominican. A third view, which has been around since the fifteenth century, is that he was Petrus Ferrandi Hispanus (d. between 1254 and 1259). There are other theories as well, but

there is no way to know which one is correct and even whether any of them are correct. Both works mentioned above are from the early part of the thirteenth century, however, and the content is closely related to other logic textbooks of the same time.

## The *Tractatus*

The *Tractatus* is divided into 12 treatises; they are:

1. On propositions (or statements)
2. On predicables
3. On categories
4. On syllogisms
5. On topics or loci
6. On supposition
7. On fallacies
8. On relatives
9. On ampliation
10. On appellation
11. On restriction
12. On distribution

The *Tractatus* is a summary of logic covering both the so-called *logica antiquorum* and the *logica modernorum*.

The first treatise is an introduction dealing with the subject matter of dialectics (or logic) and the different kinds of propositions dealt with in logic. He defines dialectics in the following way:

Dialectics is the art that holds the road to the principles of all methods, and therefore dialectics should be first in the acquisition of all the sciences. (I.1, 4–6)

This definition reflects the absolute fundamental aspect of logic for the scholastics. Logic is a tool or an art that, according to scholastics, is presupposed in all science. All study must start with logic.

Dialectics or argumentation presupposes discourse (*sermone*), and discourse presupposes utterance (*vox*), which in turn is sound (*sono*) of a special kind. A sound is either an utterance or not. If it is not an utterance, then it is not of interest

to logic. An utterance is either significative or not. An utterance that is significative is a sound, which represents something, for example, “human being.” A non-significative utterance does not represent anything. A significative utterance is either a name (*nomine*) or a verb (*verbo*). It is a name if it signifies conventionally something without a time, while a verb signifies conventionally (*ad placitum*) something with a time. The difference is simply that since a verb signifies a doing of something, it requires time in which the doing takes place, but a name is atemporal; it does not require time for naming something.

An expression (*oratio*) is a complex significative utterance, that is, it is a sentence such as “The human being is white.” There are also two kinds of expressions, namely, perfect or proper expressions and imperfect or improper expressions. An improper expression is, for example, “white human being.” It is improper since it does not contain both a name and a verb. There are, of course, different kinds of expressions according to the different grammatical modes, such as indicative, imperative, perfect, etc., but only indicative expressions are called proposition, and hence only they are important for logic.

A proposition is hence a perfect or proper expression in the indicative mode, which is either true or false. There are furthermore two kinds of propositions, namely, categorical and hypothetical. The two kinds of propositions also divide into two kinds of logics; one for categorical propositions and the other for hypothetical.

A categorical proposition is a proposition that has a subject and a predicate as its principle parts. In the proposition “A human being runs” (“*homo currit*”), “human being” and “runs” are, respectively, the subject and the predicate. The logical form of this proposition is not “A human being runs,” however, since there is a copula or something binding the subject and predicate (or verb) assumed in between them. The logical form is therefore “A human being is running.”

There are three kinds of hypothetical propositions, namely, conditional, copulative, and disjunctive. A conditional proposition is made up of



categorical propositions conjoined with the words “If . . . then.” A conjunctive proposition conjoins two categorical propositions with “and,” and a disjunctive proposition does the same thing with “or.” It is also common to state the conditions under which these hypothetical propositions are true. A conditional proposition is true, if, given the truth of the antecedent, the consequent is also true. A copulative proposition is true if both conjuncts are true, and a disjunctive proposition is true, if at least one of the disjuncts is true.

After having outlined the different distinctions between various propositions, the *Tractatus* returns to the traditional order, which means that the next part of it deals with the predicables, that is, the topic of Porphyry’s *Isagoge*. The predicables are universals, which means that they are what can be predicated in the most general sense. The division is the traditional one, namely, between genus, *differentia*, species, property (*proprium*), and accident.

The treatment of the theory syllogisms in the fourth treatise of the *Tractatus* is traditional. It does not include a discussion of modal syllogisms. There is no discussion of demonstrative syllogisms in the *Tractatus*.

Peter’s discussion of dialectical arguments in treatise five is also traditional. The treatment of the *loci* (or *topoi*) deals with the same issues as Aristotle dealt with in the *Topics*, but the medieval discussions of the *Topics* had changed quite a lot, however, and it was Boethius that set the subject matter of this part of logic for the Middle Ages. Peter’s discussion of *loci* is hence based on Boethius’ discussion in *De differentiis topicis*.

The properties of terms are part of the so-called *logica modernorum* and are dealt with by Peter in treatises VI, IX, X, XI, and XII, which contain discussion about signification, supposition, copulation, appellation, ampliation, restriction, and distribution. To draw the distinction between signification and supposition, Peter notes that some things are said with construction, such as “A human being runs” or “a white human being,” and things said without construction, such as “animal.” Unconstructed terms have signification, and they signify something in one of the ten categories.

Supposition is defined by Peter as the acceptance of a substantive term for something. Signification is prior to supposition in the sense that signification is what a term has all by itself, while supposition is what a term has in a composition. The division of supposition differs a little bit between the textbook authors, but it is foremost only a difference in terminology.

Supposition is either common or discrete, according to Peter. Common supposition is what common terms such as “human being” have, while discrete supposition is what discrete terms such as “Socrates” and “this human being” have. Common supposition is divided into natural and accidental supposition. The natural supposition of “human being” includes all that is naturally apt to stand for, that is, all humans that have been, are, and will be. Accidental supposition is the supposition of a term such as “human being” has in conjunction with something else such as “a human being exists.” In that case, “human being” stands for presently existing humans.

Accidental supposition is divided into simple and personal supposition. A common term has simple supposition when it stands for a universal, like in “human being is a species.” Personal supposition is the acceptance of a common term for its inferiors. It is divided into determinate and confused supposition. A common term has determinate supposition if it is taken indefinitely or with a particular sign; for example, in “a human being runs” or “Some human being is running.” Confused supposition is the acceptance of a common term for several things by means of a universal sign. In “Every human being is running,” “human being” has confused supposition.

Peter makes a further division of confused supposition. There is confused supposition by the necessity of the mode or sign (*necessitate signi vel modi*) and confused supposition by the necessity of the thing (*necessitate rei*). In “Every human being is an animal,” “human being” is by the necessity of the mode taken confusedly and distributively for all its supposita. Given that all humans have their own essence, the copula “is” is taken by the necessity of the thing for all essences that “human being” supposits for, and therefore, “animal” is taken by the necessity of the thing for

all animality in each human being. By this reasoning, “human being” is said to supposit confusedly, mobilely, and distributively. It supposits confusedly and distributively because it holds for all humans, and it supposits mobilely because descent can be made from it to any of its supposita. “Animal” is said to supposit confusedly and immobilely, since descent is not allowed.

In relation to supposition, Peter also discussed notions such as ampliation, appellation, restriction, and distribution. Ampliation and restriction are a division of personal supposition. Restriction is the narrowing of a common term from a larger to a smaller supposition. In “A white human being is running,” “white” has a narrowing effect on the supposition of “human being.” Ampliation is the opposite, that is, the broadening of the supposition of a common term. In the proposition “A human being can be the Antichrist,” the term “can” extends the supposition of “human being” to future things. Tensed or modal proposition tends to have amplified supposition.

Appellation is related to these two notions. Appellation is the acceptance of a term for an existing thing. It is distinct from signification and supposition, since it only concerns existing things, while signification and supposition are wider than that and include also nonexistence. The appellata of a term are the existing things it stands for. Distribution, which has already been mentioned, is the multiplication of a common term by a universal sign. In “Every human being,” “human being” is distributed for all humans.

The discussion of fallacies is by far the largest part of the *Tractatus*. His discussion begins by a treatment of disputations. A disputation is an activity of one person “syllogizing” with another to reach a conclusion. Peter explains that five things are needed for a disputation: the originator or the opponent, a respondent, a disputed proposition, the act of disputing, and the instruments of the disputation.

There are four kinds of disputations, namely, didactic (doctrinal), dialectical, probative (temptative), and sophistical. The didactic disputation comes to its conclusions from premises peculiar to each discipline and not from what

seems true to the respondent. The instruments of such a disputation are demonstrative syllogisms. A dialectical disputation draws contradictions from probable premises. Its instruments are the dialectical syllogisms. Probative disputations argue from what seems true to the respondent. Sophistical disputations argue from what seems probable but is not. The difference between the last two is that the first disputation from what seems true or probable to what is true, but the latter from what seems true or probable but is not.

There are five kinds of sophistical disputations, which derive from the five goals of such disputations, namely, refutation (*redargutio*), falsity (*falsum*), paradox (*inopinabile*), babbling (*nugatio*), and solecism (*solecismus*). Refutation is the denying of what was previously granted or granting what was previously denied. Falsity occurs in the case when a proposition does not conform to reality. A paradoxical disputation is when the conclusion is contrary to the opinion of the many or the wise. Babbling is simply the repetition of the same thing, and finally, solecism is a disputation developing a discourse contrary to grammar.

The presentation of logic in the *Tractatus* became standard and all discussions started on the foundation presented there. Buridan chose to base his own view on Peter’s not because he thought it was the best of clearest presentation, but because it was most influential.

### The Syncategoremata

Peter’s treatise on syncategorematic words is part of a genre that developed in the early thirteenth century. The term itself comes from Priscian, and it is used to capture words that do not have a meaning, or signification, on their own, but only in combination with the so-called categorematic words. Peter’s treatise is divided into ten chapters. They are as follows:

1. On composition
2. On negation
3. On exclusive words
4. On exceptive words

5. On consecutive words
6. On the verbs “begins” and “ceases”
7. On the words “necessary” and “contingent”
8. On conjunction
9. On “how much,” “than,” and “whatever”
10. On answers

Composition is about “is,” and negation is about “not.” With exclusive words, Peter means words such as “only” and “alone.” Exceptive words are “except” and “unless.” Consecutive words are words such as “if” or “if not.” The conjunctive words he discusses are “or,” “and,” “unless,” “in that,” and “that not.”

There are two kinds of compositions, Peter claims, namely, (a) composition of things and (b) composition of modes of signification. He further divides (a) in five kinds. There are compositions of (1) form and matter, (2) accident with a subject, (3) power or faculties with that which they belong to, (4) integral parts with a whole, and (5) a difference with a genus to make a species. There are also two different compositions of modes of signifying. The first composition is a quality with a substance, and the second is an act with a substance. The first composition is signified by a noun, Peter claims. For example, “human” signifies “a thing that has humanity,” and if you break this apart, then there is a thing, which is a substance, and humanity, which is a quality. He is careful to say that there really are only two things, a substance and a quality, but formally, he notes, there are three things, namely, a composition of the two as well. The composition cannot be a real thing though because then there would need to be a composition of the substance with the composition and this would lead to an infinite regress. The second kind of composition is exemplified by a participle. It is interesting how he thinks word kinds can be shown to correspond to real things.

Modal propositions are treated a little differently in the *Synkategoremata* than in the *Tractatus*. The first distinction drawn is between the necessity of mode and the necessity of things. This is a rather uninteresting distinction simply noting that there is a difference between a proposition which explicitly includes a modal term and one which does not although it is necessary. The

example he uses is “Socrates is necessarily running” and “A man is an animal.” The first is a modal proposition with the mode “necessarily” in it, although it is contingently true, and the second is an assertoric or *de inesse* proposition, although it is necessarily true. “Things” is ambiguous he also notes. It can cover intentions such as “genus” and “species,” and it can cover the things that the intentions concern. As we shall see, it is the necessity of things that is important.

The distinctions of contingency Peter presents are standard to the thirteenth century. First of all, contingency is divided into that which can both be the case and not be the case, that is, traditional contingency, and into that which is predicated of both necessity and contingency, that is, traditional possibility. It always generated confusions calling both these contingency, but it was standard in the thirteenth century and ultimately derives from Aristotle.

Contingency in the first sense is also divided into three, namely, contingency that naturally occurs (*contingens natum*), contingency that regards either of two outcomes (*contingens ad utrumlibet*), and contingency that rarely occurs (*contingens in paucioribus*). This notion is based on some kind of statistical view of contingency where the frequency of its occurrence is important for how to classify something as contingent. It is natural that men grow old and gray, and hence although contingent it is close to a necessity. Other things may occur rarely and are hence closer to what is impossible. There is then also a space in between where there is a 50-50 chance of something occurring, and thus it is statistically indeterminate, hence the term “*ad utrumlibet*.”

The notion of the necessity of things is greatly expanded under the question whether necessity and contingency determine the compositions of subject and predicate. Necessity and contingency is found in things, he emphasizes. He writes that “it is because a composition found in a proposition is necessary only because of the necessary relationship between the subject and the predicate, and therefore necessity primarily occurs in the thing that is the subject and the thing that is the predicate and secondarily in the composition.” The necessity expressed here is twofold he notes. It is the necessity of substances and the

necessity of acts. He explicates it by saying that “one sign of necessity is that which signifies necessity as a disposition of a substance, that is, the name (noun) ‘necessary’. In another way a sign of necessity is that which signifies necessity as the disposition of an act, that is, the adverb ‘necessarily’.”

He also develops a different view of ampliation in the *Syncategoremata*. Almost all logicians of the thirteenth century argued that necessity propositions do not amplify their terms, but are only about actually existing things. Peter on the other hand argues that necessity propositions are amplified. This might have had an influence on Buridan.

## Cross-References

- ▶ [John Buridan](#)
- ▶ [Modal Theories and Modal Logic](#)
- ▶ [Supposition Theory](#)
- ▶ [Terms, Properties of](#)

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## Peter of Trabibus

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### Abstract

Peter of Trabibus was a Franciscan theologian who worked in the 1290s probably at Santa Croce, the Franciscan convent in Florence. Peter’s thought fits roughly into the post-Bonaventurean Franciscan current that also

includes Matthew of Aquasparta, John Pecham, and Roger Marston, but he is best known as having held views clearly influenced by Peter John Olivi.

Peter of Trabibus was a Franciscan theologian, probably from Italy, and active during the last decade of the thirteenth century. We have from his hand a large commentary on books I, II, and IV Sentences that survive in, respectively, 1, 3, and 2 manuscripts (Huning 1964: 208–213; Friedman [forthcoming](#)); these are clearly “ordinationes,” works carefully revised for publication by the author, and they are quite substantial (in total some 1.2 million words distributed over more than 1300 quaestiones). In addition, very strong arguments can be made for Peter’s having authored several anonymous texts found in one Florentine manuscript, including commentaries on II Sentences (a version earlier than the *ordinatio*) and III Sentences, two sets of *quodlibetal* questions, and a set of disputed questions. These latter works place Peter’s activity in Florence, undoubtedly at the Franciscan convent there, Santa Croce, and they can be rather precisely dated to 1294–1296 (Huning 1964: 213–223; Piron 2006: 409–410, 2008: 80–82). Peter John Olivi, who in the areas studied to date is the single most important (if unacknowledged) influence on Peter of Trabibus’ thought, taught at the same convent in the years 1287–1289, and thus Olivi may have had a personal impact on Peter of Trabibus (Piron 2008: 78, 83–86).

In general, Peter can be counted among a group of Franciscan authors from the later thirteenth century who took many of their doctrinal cues from Bonaventure, while taking Thomas Aquinas as their usual doctrinal target. This group includes such figures as Matthew of Aquasparta, John Pecham, Roger Marston, and Olivi and it has often been characterized with some justification as an “Augustinian” current. While Augustine and numerous Augustinian doctrines do play an enormous role in the thought of these Franciscans, Peter of Trabibus, like the other members of this group, is highly conversant with Aristotle, Avicenna, and Averroes, citing them often and using

their ideas in nuanced ways (Huning 1965: 20–26). In his epistemology, it appears we can trace an evolution in Peter’s thinking concerning divine illumination: from a disputed question in which he accepts the doctrine but is aware of Olivi’s criticisms of it, to his *Ordinatio Sentences* commentary in which under the influence of Olivi’s critique he rejects it (Huning 1964: 216; Piron 2008: 82). In his cognitive theory, Peter takes an explicitly Augustinian line, arguing that the intellect is a purely active power, the object of intellection serves merely as a trigger for the intellect to act; in line with this, Peter denies any distinction between the possible and agent intellect, since the agent intellect just is the intellect insofar as it elicits its act (Longpré 1922: esp. 280–285). Whenever we understand – even in the beatific vision – the intellect produces a “species” (di Noto 1963: 86–87), and by “species” Peter means here nothing other than the intellect’s act, i.e., the concept (Pelster 1938: 397). Peter supports both the plurality of substantial forms and the existence of spiritual matter, saying that one human being is a composite of a body with its own corporeal form and a rational soul, which is itself an aggregate of a number of forms or formal parts all rooted in the same spiritual matter (Huning 1968a). He claims explicitly that while all the powers of the soul are *essentially* united to the body, not all are *formally* united to it (i.e., united to it as its form and actuality), thus making room for a libertarian freedom of the will that Peter maintains is incompatible with a direct, formal union of the will with the body; the essential link between the will and the bodily powers nevertheless sometimes leaves the will unable to exercise its native freedom (Simoncioli 1956: 164–175, esp. 224–226). When discussing the formal parts of the soul as well as the distinction between the divine attributes, Peter uses the notion of a “formal” distinction in a way reminiscent of John Duns Scotus’ later use (Huning 1968b); Peter also has a sophisticated discussion of transcendental unity, which he holds is an objective feature of existing things arising from their form (Houser 1979). In line with his Franciscan contemporaries, Peter rejects the real distinction between essence and existence saying that they differ only

according to a mode of signifying (Pelster 1938: 387–388) and he argues that the world cannot possibly be eternal since that would involve a contradiction (Ledoux 1931). One area in which Peter does not seem to have been appreciably influenced by Peter Olivi is in his attitude toward the Church and the Franciscan order, where Peter of Trabibus is a measured voice in comparison to Olivi's rather radical defense of Franciscan poverty (Huning 1964: 222–223, 1965: 41–43; Piron 2008: 84; Lambertini forthcoming).

How much impact Peter of Trabibus had on later thinkers is still a matter for investigation. In the early years of the fourteenth century, James of Trisanto explicitly acknowledged his use of passages from Peter of Trabibus' *Ordinatio* on II Sentences (Huning 1964: 197, 205–206; Piron 2008: 79). Evidence can also be given of Peter's influence on his obscure contemporary John of Erfurt (Piron 2008: 81–82). More speculatively, Sylvain Piron has argued that Dante may have taken part in Peter's first quodlibetal disputation when the two men overlapped in Florence (Piron 2006: 434–435, 2008). Only more editing and study of Peter's work will allow us to trace in more detail any further impact he may have had.

## Cross-References

- ▶ [Bonaventure](#)
- ▶ [Essence and Existence](#)
- ▶ [Form and Matter](#)
- ▶ [John Duns Scotus](#)
- ▶ [John Pecham](#)
- ▶ [Matthew of Aquasparta](#)
- ▶ [Peter John Olivi](#)
- ▶ [Roger Marston](#)

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For question lists of Peter's works, along with discussion of the manuscripts and text editions, see Friedman forthcoming.

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## Petrarch

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### Abstract

Petrarch made vital contributions to several fields that are intrinsically interconnected. The intellectual center of gravity unifying these topics was his consistent orientation towards Roman antiquity.



He thoroughly and categorically excoriated the dominant Aristotelian scholastic philosophy and theology. He accused the scholastics of verbal ineptitude, scientific irrelevance, practical inefficiency, and a metaphysical and religious misorientation. He countered their approach by developing a radically innovative philosophical program, which was thematically focused on topics concerning man, while formulating as principal goals the restitution of a sophisticated Latin style, the establishment of a practically effective moral philosophy, and a return to simple faith. His models were the great authors of Roman antiquity, including both pagan writers and Church Fathers, first and foremost among them, St. Augustine, followed by Cicero, Seneca, and St. Ambrose.

Petrarch was distinctly dissatisfied with his own times, both with the political state of affairs and with the intellectual status quo. His broad knowledge of classical Roman literature led to an innovative structuring of history. He divided history into antiquity, the long-running “middle” period, and a future age which he hoped was soon to unfold. In its core, he thus anticipated the well-known division still used today by all disciplines working in the field of history: antiquity, the middle ages, and modern times. Petrarch also organized these eras hierarchically. Roman antiquity was the shining paradigm; the middle ages were “dark”; and, if his philosophical and political program was put into action, the future era would shine more brightly than the middle ages, approaching the level of antiquity.

Finally, Petrarch also developed an innovative project concerning the political state of Italy, one intended to guide its future, while also equally inspired by ancient Rome. Petrarch’s two complimentary goals consisted of freeing Italy from foreign rule and establishing a “nationwide” unity.

## Biography

Francesco Petrarca, known in English as Petrarch, was born on July 20, 1304 at Arezzo. His father

was a notary and the family, who had been banished from Florence 2 years previously, lived in modest circumstances. In 1312, they moved to Carpentras, a small village in the vicinity of the papal seat at Avignon. Here Petrarch was educated in Latin grammar and rhetoric. He quickly developed a deep love of the Latin “classics,” especially of one author whom he was to favor throughout his life: Cicero.

In 1316, following his father’s wishes, Petrarch began to study law at near-by Montpellier. Immediately after his father’s death in 1326, however, he abandoned his studies without graduating. During this decade wasted on a topic he deeply disliked, Petrarch began writing poems in the Italian vernacular. But most of all he spent his time devouring Latin poetry, philosophy, and historiography – anything he could get his hands on. The works of St. Augustine, which he got to know in 1325 at the latest, left a vital impact on Petrarch’s sense of self and of the world, as can be traced in his *Secretum*, completed in 1353. The influence exerted by Augustine exceeded even that of Cicero.

Having taken minor orders, in 1330 Petrarch entered into the service of the Colonna family in Avignon as chaplain. In the following years Petrarch, who was financially well cared-for, traveled extensively, further developed his Italian poems and started on several large-scale works in Latin. His renown grew constantly. In 1341, he was crowned *poeta laureatus* in Rome. From then on, he was officially recognized as the supreme poet of his day, a distinction he holds even now.

In 1353, Petrarch finally left Provence and returned to Italy. He lived at the court of the Visconti in Milan until 1361, then with the Carrara in Padua, spent some time in Venice and Pavia, again lived with the Carrara, and from 1368 onwards stayed primarily in his country estate in Arquà near Padua. These years were filled with diplomatic missions, traveling at the behest of his patrons, but mostly he was occupied with studying, reading, and writing. Thus, in the seclusion of Arquà, in 1370 he not only wrote the extremely valuable autobiographical sketch *Epistola posteritati* (“Letter to Posterity”) but also his programmatic philosophical work, *De sui ipsius et*

*multorum ignorantia* (“On His Own Ignorance and That of Many Others”).

In the night of July 18, 1374, Petrarch passed away in his country house – according to legend, with his head bent over a book.

## Philosophical Program

Petrarch was not a professional philosopher. And yet, he was to influence the further development of the history of philosophy, since in his mature work *De sui ipsius et multorum ignorantia* he presented a revolutionary program. It consists of two complimentary elements. On the one hand, Petrarch broadly and drastically criticized the intellectual status quo, and, on the other hand, he voiced the principles of a radical paradigm change.

Petrarch identified two characteristic features of the status quo: depressingly low standards and an intellectual misorientation caused by the “insane and clamoring hordes of scholastics” (*De ignorantia*, 1114). Since they lacked creativity but had an overwhelming urge to write, they simply used other people’s thoughts and transformed them into their own, noisily advertising them as original ideas and overstocking the world with a flood of commentaries on the *Sententiae* (“Sentences”) of Peter Lombard or the works of Aristotle (*De ignorantia*, 1112/1114). These professional commentators, who gave themselves the airs of theologians or philosophers, had managed to replace originality with sterile exegesis, attaining control over the “market of opinions.” But there was more: their countless treatises were written in execrable Latin, lacking any stylistic artistry whatever (*De ignorantia*, 1032/1034).

Petrarch was especially resentful of the multitude of Aristotelian exegetes, who were active everywhere, but especially dominant in the universities of France and Italy (*De ignorantia*, 1106). They had ludicrously made Aristotle their God, replacing the *lex christiana* (“Christian law”) with the *lex aristotelica* (“Aristotelian law”) (*De ignorantia*, 1040, 1048)! In their blind enslavement to Aristotle, they had committed

three fundamental mistakes. First, they concentrated on amassing heaps of insights taken from the field of natural philosophy, which were often unproven and often unprovable or even faulty. These insights were completely irrelevant, since they did not even touch on the central questions concerning man’s nature, origins, and destination (*De ignorantia*, 1038/1040, 1062, 1066). Second, they offered theoretically unsatisfactory and practically ineffective ramblings on essential topics such as morals or felicity (*De ignorantia*, 1062/1064, 1104/1106). Third, while it would have been best to avoid Aristotle in the field of metaphysics, his followers daringly spread their master’s theories, which were profoundly wrong and highly dangerous (*De ignorantia*, 1090/1092, 1098, 1102).

In short, Petrarch scathingly criticized the entire habitus, contents, and verbal presentation of the “scholastic” philosophy and theology which had developed since the mid-twelfth century.

But his overall attack was not only directed at the “scholastics”; it basically aimed at their *spiritus rector* (“guiding spirit”), Aristotle himself. To start with, Petrarch was very critical of his style (*De ignorantia*, 1104). Then, Aristotle was the founder of natural philosophy, the results of which were not only highly questionable but also completely superfluous, as they lacked solutions for the existential problems of mankind (*De ignorantia*, 1038/1040, 1062). Furthermore, Aristotle had also failed in the field of moral philosophy. On the one hand, he had spoken extensively about felicity, although he had an inadequate idea of it since his thoughts were not founded on the Christian faith (*De ignorantia*, 1062/1064). On the other hand, while educating his readers on the nature of virtue, he did not achieve any practical effects since he was unable to inspire either a love of virtue or a hatred of sinful behavior (*De ignorantia*, 1106/1108). That is why he was not, on any account, to be listed among the canon of “true moral philosophers and helpful teachers of virtue” (*De ignorantia*, 1108/1110). But most of all, Aristotelian metaphysics was to be avoided (*De ignorantia*, 1102) since the thesis of the eternity of the world, in particular,

stood in stark opposition to both the truth and the Christian faith (*De ignorantia*, 1092, 1098–1104).

Accordingly, Petrarch's overall judgment was entirely negative: Aristotle had occupied himself extensively with minor matters while misperceiving the decisive truths about both human and divine nature (*De ignorantia*, 1062, 1068, 1102). As such, his philosophy was dangerous and had already led many "into the depths of delusion" (*De ignorantia*, 1066).

Petrarch's revolt against the reigning spirit of his time, which was based on Aristotle and supported by "the scholastics", rested on four leitmotifs: style and rhetoric; moral philosophy; metaphysics; and Christianity. In each of these domains, Petrarch proposed a general change of paradigm.

In the domain of style and rhetoric, Petrarch was an energetic advocate of using Cicero as a model. Since his adolescence Petrarch had admired the eloquence of Cicero, who to him surpassed every other author in this field of whatever origin (*De ignorantia*, 1068, 1082, 1122). This orientation, however, should not lead to losing one's own creative voice; so, while concisely defining his own position as "*Ciceronianus sum*" ("I am a Ciceronian"), Petrarch simultaneously and explicitly warned against slipping into a blind, unreflective *imitatio* ("imitation") of the model (*De ignorantia*, 1122).

In the field of moral philosophy, Petrarch presented luminaries whom he referred to as "ours" (*De ignorantia*, 1106), especially Cicero and Seneca, as well as Horace (*De ignorantia*, 1106). These three were all "true moral philosophers," since they had not only educated the minds of their readers through the force of their words but had also correctly formed their willpower (*voluntas*) by instilling in them a love of virtue and a hatred of sin, which then led to good actions and a virtuous life (*De ignorantia*, 1106–1110); and goodwill was a more dependable basis for moral action than intellect, however well developed it might be (*De ignorantia*, 1110).

In metaphysics, Petrarch wanted Plato to replace Aristotle. Plato, in his view, was the true *princeps philosophiae* ("prince of philosophers"), since among all philosophers he had come closest to truth in matters of religion (*De ignorantia*,

1104, 1112, 1118). On the one hand, his *Timaeus* had presented a theory of divine creation of the world that was compatible with the Christian faith, and, on the other hand, he had developed the theory of ideas (*De ignorantia*, 1092, 1118).

In matters of religion, Petrarch believed in the need for a simple humble faith, the "*fides humilis*" (*De ignorantia*, 1046/1048, 1064/1046). Faith to him constituted the "highest, most certain, and finally also the most felicitous of all sciences" (*De ignorantia*, 1126). It meant following the examples of the Church Fathers St. Jerome, St. Ambrose, and, first and foremost, the "great St. Augustine" (*De ignorantia*, 1064, 1100, 1114, 1124/1126).

But the paramount position of highest religious authority was not the only role that Augustine played for Petrarch. Augustine also functioned as the guiding light in Petrarch's entire spiritual universe. It was on his authority that Plato replaced Aristotle as the new "prince of philosophers" (*De ignorantia*, 1112/1124, 1118); he had successfully rebuffed Aristotle's envious attack on Plato's theory of ideas (*De ignorantia*, 1118); he sanctioned the turn to new models in the field of moral philosophy such as Cicero or Seneca (*De ignorantia*, 1106/1108, 1122); he legitimized raising the status of Cicero to a paradigm of style and rhetoric (*De ignorantia*, 1122); he endorsed the moral philosophical relevance of eloquence (*De ignorantia*, 1108); and, finally, he consolidated Petrarch's conviction that both Plato and Cicero, had they lived later in time, would have been true and proper Christians, which he considered them to be in spirit (*De ignorantia*, 1122/1124).

To sum up, *De ignorantia* presented the following key positions:

1. The wretched Latin of the "scholastics," which entirely lacked style and eloquence, was to be replaced by a return to "classical" Latin as exemplified by Cicero.
2. Natural philosophy, which had been followed with expansive effort by Aristotle and his followers, had produced a wealth of unproven, unprovable, or faulty results and had distracted mankind from the basic essentials. It was, therefore, not only useless but exceedingly

dangerous and should therefore be definitively abandoned.

3. Scholars should concentrate on specifically human issues. To this end, a practically effective moral philosophy was required, sweeping away the dominant intellectualistic Aristotelian approach and replacing it with an orientation based on Roman models such as Cicero and Seneca.
4. In metaphysics, the predominance of the dangerous Aristotelian theories was to be abolished once and for all. It was to be replaced by Platonic philosophy, which was much more in harmony with the Christian faith.
5. In religion, the *Summae* and the innumerable commentaries on the *Sententiae* were to be abandoned. In their place, a simple faith and a return to the thoughts of the eminent Church Fathers, especially St. Augustine, was to be promulgated.
6. Irrespective of whether it concerned matters of style and rhetoric, moral philosophy, metaphysics, or religion, only "classical" authors were to be regarded as worthy models. To counter "scholasticism," based on Aristotle, an entirely new canon of authors was to be promoted. With the exception of Plato, who was introduced in the canon on account of Augustine's praise, this new canon consisted exclusively of Roman authors, whose luminaries were Cicero and, above all, St. Augustine.
7. A certain basic attitude was to be taken in the face of the Roman models. Irrespective of admiration and enthusiasm, one was to be attentive not to drop into sterile imitation. Rather, the goal was to develop a creative appropriation of the "classical" heritage.
8. With pride, Petrarch referred to Roman authors as "ours" and thus created a "national" tradition in the field of intellectual history, paving the way for the construction of a specifically Italian identity.

There were, however, two important aspects of the *studia humanitatis*, that is, the range of disciplines we now refer to as "the humanities," which Petrarch did not mention in *De ignorantia*: history and politics. Yet he did, in fact, make important contributions to both.

## Structuring History

A recurring constant in the intellectual biography of Petrarch was his keen interest in history. It is no coincidence that already in the 1320s he had copied the entire text of Livy obtainable at the time. Furthermore, Petrarch himself had been an active historiographer since the 1330s, when he started writing *De viris illustribus* ("On Famous Men").

Petrarch's relevance for historiography was not, however, founded on unveiling some detail about one or the other odd battle, consul, or emperor. It lay in his radical reappraisal and reorganization of history as such.

Since his youth, Petrarch had felt a thorough dislike for his own era ("*ista aetas*") (*Epistola posteritati*, 262). This is why he soon engaged in intensive reading of historians, trying to gain knowledge of another era, that of antiquity ("*vetustas*") (*Epistola posteritati*, 262). Thus, Petrarch established two fundamentally divergent epochs of history: his own and antiquity. The difference between them was one of quality: antiquity, which to Petrarch primarily meant the long period of Roman dominance, was an era of peace, justice, and virtue (*Al popolo romano*, 182), and, as indicated in *De ignorantia*, the age of intellectual greats spanning from Cicero via Seneca through to Ambrose and Augustine. In other words, antiquity was presented as the "good old days." In contrast, his own era, which had already lasted for several centuries and which Petrarch at one point referred to as the middle ("medium") age (*Ad Franciscum priorem Sanctorum Apostolorum de Florentia*, 322), was an epoch of extensive "darkness" ("*tenebrae*") (*Ad Agapitum de Columna*, 29). In order to overcome this darkness, both morally and intellectually, Petrarch mapped out a new direction with his *De ignorantia*. If this new path was adhered to, there was hope of the dawning of a third, more felicitous age ("*felicius aevum*") (*Ad Franciscum priorem*, 322).

Petrarch was thus the first to ever formulate a clear apprehension of the existence of epochs – both in intellectual and in real history. These eras extended over a long time period, encompassing several centuries, and were constituted by a

coherent set of specific characteristics that influenced every sphere of life. Petrarch defined three different eras: antiquity, the ongoing “middle” age, and an era that he hoped would dawn in the near future. Basically, Petrarch thus anticipated the chronological classification of epochs into Antiquity, the Middle Ages, and Modern Age that is still in use today. Petrarch also introduced a definite hierarchy between these three eras: the zenith was the luminous period of antiquity, the nadir his own gloomy “middle” age, with the hope of a third epoch in the future, when, by basing itself on Roman models, humanity would be released from the contemporary darkness and return to a relatively high level. In other words, Petrarch envisioned the course of history neither as permanent degeneration nor as continuing progress, but rather as an up and down journey driven by humanity itself.

Both Petrarch’s high esteem for antiquity and his disparaging of the middle ages as a “dark” era turned out to be extremely influential during the following centuries.

## Political Visions

The second vital motif in Petrarch’s dislike for his own era was the political situation of his native land. Italy was politically fragmented. Alongside the kingdoms of Sicily and Naples, which were under Spanish and French rule, the Papal States, the mighty seafaring republics of Venice, Genoa, and Pisa, as well as regional centers of power such as Milan and Florence, there were also dozens of autonomous city states in central and northern Italy. Armed conflicts and skirmishes between the innumerable political organisms were the order of the day. What is more, they were internally rekindled by endless factional controversies, rebellions, expulsions, and forceful attempts at repatriation.

From early on, Petrarch was acquainted with this pitiful reality through the fate of his own family. Accordingly, his diagnosis was as outspoken as it was harsh: “In our times, Italy groans like a slave” (*Sine nomine*, 102). The much-needed remedy was accordingly radical: even in politics,

ancient Rome and its extraordinary greatness were exemplary, since in the Roman world there had been peace and tranquility, and justice and virtue had thrived to the full. This meant that the fragmentary state of Italy had to be overcome and the unity of Italy, which in antiquity had been imposed by Rome, had to be restored. Also, foreign rule must be abolished and the old autonomy regained.

To reach the first goal, Petrarch set his hopes on Charles IV, who in 1347 became King of Bohemia and in 1355 Holy Roman Emperor. Alluding to the example of Julius Caesar, Petrarch beseeched Charles to fulfill his “highest and most holy duty” by uniting Italy in peace and tranquility (*Ad Carolum quartum*, 374/376). Drawing on all his Ciceronian eloquence and a wide repertoire of classical Roman literature (e.g., *Ad Carolum quartum*, 488–500), from 1351 onward Petrarch entreated Charles again and again for an entire decade, but to no avail.

Petrarch could not expect a monarch from the House of Luxemburg to help him realize the second goal, since Charles was merely another foreign prince (“*princeps externus*”) (*Ad Carolum quartum*, 374). A few years previously Petrarch’s hopes had been raised on the occasion of a rebellion organized by Cola di Rienzo, who, in 1347, freed the city of Rome, the “capital of Italy”, from the rule of foreigners coming from “some despicable corner of the world” (*A Cola di Rienzo e al popolo romano*, 76/78, 90). An enthusiastically supporter of Cola, Petrarch was quite confident that this event would set an example and that Italy, which was currently wasting away, would rise up and end its servitude (*A Cola di Rienzo e al popolo romano*, 76, 90). But in the very same year, Cola’s rule collapsed miserably, crushing Petrarch’s hopes along with it.

Petrarch did not manage to make a direct improvement to the political situation in Italy. He was, however, the first to develop the political project of freeing his native land and building national unity, an aim that was only to be realized much later, in the mid-nineteenth century. But his aspirations remained constantly present in the “collective mind” of Italy. It does not come as a surprise, therefore, that Machiavelli’s *Principe*,

proposing the same political program to the sovereign of Florence, Lorenzo di Piero de' Medici, ends with a quotation from Petrarch.

## Cross-References

- ▶ [Aristotelianism in the Greek, Latin, Syriac, Arabic, and Hebrew Traditions](#)
- ▶ [Augustine](#)
- ▶ [Church Fathers](#)
- ▶ [Metaphysics](#)
- ▶ [Natural Philosophy](#)
- ▶ [Peter Lombard](#)
- ▶ [Philosophical Theology, Byzantine](#)
- ▶ [Platonism](#)

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## Philip the Chancellor

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### Abstract

Philip the Chancellor's *Summa de bono* (1225–1228) was developed around a central controlling analogy. Just as creatures are good in three ways (transcendentally, in their natural species or kinds, and in their perfective acts), so also are human acts morally good in three ways (through “generic goodness,” the goodness of moral species, and meritorious goodness). Philip focused his account of goodness in creatures on the transcendentals and his account of moral goodness on the theological and cardinal virtues.

### Biography

Philip the Chancellor (b. 1165–1185, d. December 23, 1236) was a “renaissance” man: poet, preacher, theologian, and ecclesiastical politician. He was made Archdeacon of Noyon in 1202 by

one noble cousin and Chancellor of Notre-Dame de Paris in 1217 by another, and his right to confer the *licentia docendi* placed Philip amidst controversies at the University of Paris. Friend to the friars, under him the Dominicans attained two chairs in theology, the Franciscans one.

### Thought

The *Summa* begins with a scriptural conundrum. God found all creation “very good” (*Genesis* 1.31), but when called a “good teacher,” Jesus replied: “Why do you call me good? No one is good but God alone” (*Luke* 18.19). Philip answered with a distinction: goodness “is said commonly of all things” but is also “appropriated” to God; divine goodness is “absolute,” that of creatures “relative.” The *Summa* concentrates on creatures: first on the “good of nature” and secondly on the “good of grace” found in moral actions. Philip began each half of his work with a preface laying down philosophical principles useful for theology.

### Transcendentals

The transcendentals (*comunissima*) are taken from “the philosophers,” especially Avicenna, who is unnamed. An individual creature is intelligible at two levels of universality. Its essential features fall within Aristotle's ten categories, but it has even more universal features that stand to its categorical attributes as higher genera stand to species. These are the four transcendentals: “a being (*ens*), one, true, and good.”

Since it is the “first” notion, “a being” cannot be defined using a higher genus. But since the transcendentals are “convertible,” they can be described through each other, and also through their subdivisions. “A being (*ens*)” is divided into substance and accident, but Philip uses a second distinction to explain his metaphysical doctrine of creation. “Every creature differs in this way from the first essence, because in it being (*esse*) and what is (*quod est*) differ.” Here “being” refers to the creature's “essence

(*essentia*)” and “what is” refers to its individuality. The hallmark of the creature is unity achieved through ontological composition.

To describe the other three transcendentals, Philip turned to Aristotle’s description of unity: “the one is undivided in itself and divided off from others.” About truth, Philip recognized Aristotle’s notion of truth in the mind, but he preferred the Avicennian notion of ontological truth. The true is “what has *indivision* of being (*esse*) and that which is (*quod est*).” A creature is true to the extent it realizes its own essence. Philip noted the Aristotelian description of the good as “what is desired by all things” and also the neo-platonic conception that “the good is diffusive or communicative of being,” but moved beyond both: “The primary definition of the good is not given causally, but through a ‘difference’ that consists in a negation.” So the good is “what has indivision of act from potency.” This definition provides the metaphysical foundation for distinguishing goods of “nature” and “grace.” A creature is good primarily through a first act that gives it an actual essence; moral goodness is achieved through a second act – human action.

### The Good of Nature

Creatures are divided into three kinds of goods. First is “the intellectual creature” or angel. An angel is “intellectual” by having a “simple essence” devoid of matter and is a “creature” having been composed from two metaphysical principles “being and what is,” or essence and the individuality of a spiritual person.

Second come the inanimate things, plants, and animals recounted in the *Genesis* creation story, “the good which is a corporeal creature.” They are composed in several ways: substance and accident, substantial form and matter, substance whose form is a soul.

Finally, Philip turns to “the human,” who is a “conjunction of corporeal and incorporeal substance” or “body and soul.” The soul “perfects the body,” but Philip’s three definitions of the human soul all emphasize it as “an intellectual spirit ordained... to beatitude” (Seneca). As both perfection of the body and intellectual spirit,

the soul is itself composed substantially, not of form and matter but of essence and individuality, “in the manner of an intelligence.” The multiplicity of psychic powers – vegetative, sensory, and the trinity of concupiscible, irascible, and rational powers – then bring the spiritual soul close to the body.

### Moral Goodness

The moral half of the *Summa* begins with three senses of moral goodness: “a certain action is called ‘good generically (*bona genere*),’ for example, feeding the hungry; it is also called ‘good from its circumstances,’ for example, giving to this indigent as much as suffices for him or to the extent that he is poor; and finally it is called good from the infusion of grace and from having the required intention.” Since actual grace produces the highest sort of virtue, the study of human morality becomes the study of virtue.

### Theological Virtues

Love is the basis for distinguishing generic and specific theological virtues. “Charity is called *general* love, which is not some determinate virtue, but is the reason and cause of each virtue.” And “*specific charity* is different from *general charity*, because specific love has the same thing for its matter and for its end, since it loves the highest good for its own sake.” General charity has God as its end, but not as its object or matter. Specific charity has God for both. The other two theological virtues have God as their end, but not as their “matter.” God as “first truth” is the “matter” of faith, while hope has the “certain expectation of future glory” as its matter. Though all three theological virtues lead to eternal life, “merit absolutely pertains to charity, to the other virtues only relatively.”

### Cardinal Virtues

The cardinal virtues also “can be taken in two ways.” “For the existence of virtue four things

are required: to know, to will, to persevere amid difficulties, and to attain the mean between excess and deficiency.” These general or “universal conditions” of all virtue respectively “come from” prudence, justice, courage, and temperance. It follows that for the cardinal virtues, considered generically, “whoever has one virtue has all.”

Taken in a second way, however, a cardinal virtue is considered “according to the act of its proper *power* and concerning the proper *matter* of that power.” For the specific cardinal virtues, “it is *not* necessary that when one has one virtue one has all.” Courage resides in the soul’s irascible power; its object is “the difficult in the realm of exterior passions impressed by another,” such as fear and confidence. Temperance resides in the concupiscible power; its objects are “passions generated within us,” such as desire and aversion, and especially “desire of corporeal pleasures.” Both prudence and justice reside in the power of reason. Their objects, while different, range wider than those of courage and temperance. Prudence “does not have its own proper and limited matter” because it is concerned with the objects of all the virtues. And the object of justice is also wide: “to order all these (moral acts) to our proximate end.”

Since the cardinal virtues are “universal conditions,” there are “other virtues *reduced* to these [cardinal] virtues either as parts or as species or as their dispositions.” The parts of courage are patience and perseverance; the parts of temperance are modesty, sobriety, continence, virginity, and the “golden crown” awarded an outstanding Christian life. The parts of justice are “worship” owed to God, “reverence” owed to prelates, and “obedience” owed to both. Prudence has no parts.

## The Good of Grace

The third sense of moral goodness comes “from the infusion of grace and from having the required intention” of not just “leading up to our end (*ad finem*)” but “into our end (*in finem*),” God. Virtues in this highest sense add “meriting eternal life” to the content of the theological and cardinal virtues.

In addition to a title, Philip’s *Summa* offered later scholastics the transcendentals and the seven principal virtues, expanded to include

acquired as well as infused cardinal virtues, a patrimony they would embrace.

## Cross-References

- ▶ [Albert the Great](#)
- ▶ [Thomas Aquinas](#)
- ▶ [Thomism](#)
- ▶ [Virtue and Vice](#)

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## Philoponus, Arabic

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### Abstract

Yahyā al-Naḥwī, that is, John the Grammarian, is the Arabic name for John Philoponus (c. CE 490–575) in the medieval Arabic literature. His image in the Arabic sources, though embellished with legendary details, is not far from reality. He was a pupil of the Neoplatonist Ammonius in Alexandria of Egypt and a commentator of Aristotle and Galen. He wrote independent philosophical treatises against Proclus and Aristotle. Being a Christian, he

also wrote theological treatises in which he expounded his views about the Trinity and his anti-Chalcedonian tenets in the disputes of his age. Above all, he became famous for his arguments against the eternity of the world, which formed the basis of argumentation not only in the Syro-Arabic Christian theology but also in Arabic-Islamic (al-Ġazālī) and Arabic-Jewish theology on the creation of the world (Maimonides).

## Sources

The main sources about Philoponus' life and writings in the medieval Arab world are three bio-bibliographical works: First, the *Fihrist* of Ibn al-Nadīm (d. 995) written in CE 987; second, the *History of Wise Men* of Ibn al-Qifṭī (d. CE 1248), who quotes Ibn al-Nadīm but with further additions and embellishments; and third, a collection of biographies of a number of physicians and authors of medical writings composed by Ibn Abī Uṣaybi'a (d. CE 1270). Some further references to Philoponus are also found in Ḍahīr al-Dīn al-Bayhaqī (d. CE 1170), while minor ones occur here and there in various other works.

## Life

According to Ibn al-Nadīm, Yaḥyā al-Naḥwī lived in Alexandria of Egypt in the first half of the seventh century. He supports this incorrect claim by an observation he makes on the basis of a statement in John Philoponus' commentary on Aristotle's *Physics*, saying: "like this year of ours, which is the three hundred and forty third Coptic year of Diocletian" (Ibn al-Nadīm, *K. al-Fihrist*, vol. 1, p. 255). This date suggests that he was writing in CE 627. But this mistake is already found in some Greek manuscripts. Based on this date, Ibn al-Nadīm adds that Yaḥyā al-Naḥwī lived in the time of 'Amr ibn al-Āṣ, the commander of the Arab armies, who invaded and conquered Egypt from CE 639 onward. He also

says that the two men met and 'Amr ibn al-Āṣ held him in high esteem. Ibn al-Qifṭī adds that 'Amr ibn al-Āṣ heard with admiration Yaḥyā al-Naḥwī's arguments against the Trinity and the eternity of the world. Further, Ibn al-Qifṭī alone presents a legendary story in the form of a dialogue between Yaḥyā al-Naḥwī and 'Amr ibn al-Āṣ regarding the books in the Ptolemaic Library in Alexandria and the burning of them at the command of the Caliph 'Umar (r. 634–644). Again, Ibn al-Qifṭī and Ibn Abī Uṣaybi'a (both quoting 'Ubayd Allāh b. Jibrīl), cite a curious story that Yaḥyā al-Naḥwī in his youth was a ferryman carrying to the "House of Sciences" the eminent men who taught there. By their contact, he became eager for acquiring knowledge, so he sold his boat and began his studies with patience and perseverance. Quoting Abū Sulaymān al-Sijistānī (d. c. 1001), Ibn Abī Uṣaybi'a states that Yaḥyā al-Naḥwī was competent in grammar, logic, and philosophy. He also adds that he was a pupil of Ammonius who in turn was a pupil of Proclus and that he was a Christian of the Alexandrian Church. Ibn al-Nadīm says that Yaḥyā al-Naḥwī was a pupil of Severus and a Jacobite Christian. He also incorrectly claims that Yaḥyā al-Naḥwī was a bishop in Egypt (in Alexandria, according to Ibn al-Qifṭī), but later deposed, because he insisted in professing tritheism; but when 'Amr ibn al-Āṣ met Yaḥyā al-Naḥwī, he "honored him and found a position for him." Citing some Christian chronicles, Ibn Abī Uṣaybi'a offers another story involving Philoponus' refutation of Eutyches' teachings in the Christological disputes in the Council of Chalcedon.

## Works

Our three bio-bibliographers list a number of Arabic translations of works attributed to Yaḥyā al-Naḥwī. First, they list Arabic translations of commentaries on Aristotle's *Categories*, *De interpretatione*, *Prior Analytics* (partial), *Posterior Analytics*, *Topics*, *Physics*, and *De*

*generatione et corruptione*. The work entitled *Commentary on Aristotle's "mā bāla,"* as Steinschneider suggested, probably was a commentary on a collection of *Physical questions* beginning with the phrase *mā bāla*. Then, they list Arabic translations of a commentary on Porphyry's *Isagoge* and a commentary on Galen's *De usu partium*. Apart from the commentaries, Arabic translations of the following separate treatises are attributed to him: *Refutation of Proclus on the Eternity of the World*, in 18 books, *Refutation of Aristotle*, in six books, *That the Force of Every Finite Body is Finite*, in one book, *Refutation of Nestorius*, in one book, and two other unidentified works against the doctrines of some other people. Furthermore, a history of medicine and 20 other medical treatises have also been attributed to "Yaḥyā," but Meyerhof has argued against their attribution and authenticity. None of Philoponus' genuine works translated into Arabic survives in full. What has turned up so far are long extracts in a summary form from his *Commentary on Aristotle's Physics*, a summary of his *Book on the Proof for the Temporal Creation of the World*, few quotations from his book *Contra Aristotelem* and from his book *De aeternitate mundi contra Proclum*, and some other reworked extracts from the same work.

## Thought and Influence

Philoponus' thought in the Arabic tradition must be examined and assessed on the basis of works that survive in Arabic as well as on the basis of explicit references to his doctrines by Muslim authors. So the extracts from his *Commentary on Aristotle's Physics* that are found in the Leiden codex (written in 1129–1130) of the so-called "Baghdad Physics" contain some of his major points of disagreement with Aristotle, namely: (1) on place as being a three-dimensional extension; (2) on vacuum as logically possible, though it never becomes actual in nature; (3) on the motion of projectiles, which move on account of the force imparted to them by the mover, while

this force exhausts itself in the course of the movement (*impetus* theory); (4) on time, that it has a beginning, since a temporal instant need not bound a preceding as well as a following period; (5) on the impossibility of an actual and traversed infinity, so that Socrates cannot have an infinite number of ancestors. Both Yaḥyā b. 'Adī (d. 974) and Ibn al-Samḥ (d. 1027) object to Philoponus by adding fatuous remarks here and there in the "Baghdad Physics." Next, the arguments against actual infinity were used by Philoponus in order to build his proofs against Aristotle's and Proclus' tenet of the eternity of the world. Similar arguments are found in the surviving summary of the *Book on the Proof for the Temporal Creation of the World*, which, as Pines suggested, may well derive from a lost work of Philoponus, different from the polemical ones against Proclus and Aristotle. This summary work consists of three treatises: In the first treatise, it is argued that the world cannot be eternal, for the Universe, being a corporeal object, contains only finite force. This treatise seems to be identical with the work *That the Force of Every Finite Body is Finite* mentioned by the Arab bio-bibliographers. Again, Ibn Suwār (d. after 1017), probably refers to the same work, since he reports that Philoponus' proof for the creation of the world is based on the finiteness of the force of all bodies. In the second treatise, it is argued that in order to obtain an infinite past time, one has to suppose that the number of individuals was infinite, but the sum of the finite life duration of a finite number of individuals can only be finite. This argument is connected with that of the third treatise, in which it is said that the eternity of the world involves the eternity of mankind. This thesis entails the consequence that Socrates was preceded by an infinite number of ancestors. But this is impossible because of the impossibility of an actual and traversed infinity. Now, although the work *Contra Aristotelem* does not survive in Arabic, some of the arguments are quoted and criticized in a treatise of al-Fārābī (d. 950) against John Philoponus. Al-Fārābī's opposition to Philoponus is followed by Ibn Sīnā (Avicenna) (d. 1037), Ibn Bājja (Avempace) (d. 1139) and

Ibn Rushd (Averroes) (d. 1198). None of them acknowledges any debt to Philoponus, although they follow some of his arguments, especially those relevant to the impetus theory. All of them sided with Aristotle on the issue of the eternity of the world. Again, some of the Christian philosophers of the School of Baghdad opposed Philoponus probably for religious reasons. As Davidson has shown, Philoponus' arguments were the source for medieval Islamic and Jewish proofs for the creation of the world. For example, the Muslim philosopher al-Kindī (d. 870) and the Jewish writer Saadia (d. 942) draw upon Philoponus' arguments without mentioning him by name or quoting him directly. The case is similar with other Muslim writers, as for instance, the Mu'tazilite al-Khayyāṭ (d. 913), the Ash'arite al-Ġazālī (d. 1111), or al-Shahrastānī (d. 1153). As for al-Ġazālī, Bayhaqī in his biographical work on learned men of Islam reports that Ibn Sīnā had claimed that what al-Ġazālī had written in his *Tahāfut al-falāsifa* was a rearrangement of the words of Yaḥyā al-Naḥwī. However, Christian and Muslim writers knew Philoponus' celebrated arguments against the philosophers' tenet of the eternity of the world, as Ibn Suwār and al-Bīrūnī (d. 1050) clearly testify. In the end, the fact remains that Philoponus' influence was profound and his views and arguments were transmitted from the Arabs to the Latin West, as Zimmermann has shown in the case of the impetus theory.

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- ▶ Ibn Rushd, Muḥammad ibn Aḥmad al-Ḥafīd (Averroes)
- ▶ Ibn al-Samḥ
- ▶ Ibn Sīnā, Abū 'Alī (Avicenna)
- ▶ Ibn Suwār (Ibn al-Khammār)
- ▶ Impetus
- ▶ John Philoponus
- ▶ al-Kindī, Abū Yūsuf Ya'qūb ibn Ishāq
- ▶ Moses Maimonides

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## Philosophical Psychology, Byzantine

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### Abstract

Byzantine psychology can be characterized as a complex of problems connected with the relation between the soul and the body, divisions of the soul (tripartite division), the immortality of the soul, internal senses (imagination, memory), the theory of pneuma, passions, emotions, dreams, etc. A specific feature of Byzantine psychological thought is the continuity with the ancient theories on the soul, mainly of Aristotle. Some of the sources of Byzantine psychology were Aristotle's *De anima*, Galen's works, late commentaries on the *De anima* (Simplicius, Philoponos, Stephanus), and Patristic texts. The most influential ideas about psychology in early Byzantine period come from Nemesius, Gregory of Nyssa, Gregory of Nazianzus, Maximus the Confessor, and John of Damascus. The Byzantine scholars who were interested in such issues were Michael Psellos, Michael of Ephesus, Nikephoros Blemmydes, Sophonias, Nikephoros Choumnos, Theodore Metochites, Nikephoros Gregoras, Gregory Palamas, George Gemistos Plethon, and Gennadios Scholarios.

### Byzantine Psychology

Psychological theories derive from anthropology. The classical Byzantine definition of man springs from the Greek philosophical tradition and is common to theologians, philosophers, and even elementary school textbooks. In general, man is a rational, mortal being, or corporeal essence, endowed with speech and thought, capable of reason and knowledge (Michael Psellos, Nikephoros

Blemmydes). Man, a being that unites two natures in one person, was already the favorite model for hypostatic union from the sixth century. In this context the soul or spirit of man is contrasted to the body in negative terms (in-corporeal, immortal, incorruptible), and man is perceived as a simultaneous synthesis of opposites: as a being of different essences united ineffably and simultaneously (Anastasios of Sinai), or as a mixture of opposites (Maximus the Confessor). Man is not his soul, but a substantial composite, a hypostatic unity of two independent substances – the soul and the body. The nature of the soul is a self-moving incorporeal substance, therefore immortal and incorruptible (Leontius of Byzance). The human being is a perfect creature between the corporeal and incorporeal worlds, a microcosm (*mikros kosmos*, “little universe”) – man possesses in himself all the elements of the macrocosm (Nemesios of Emesa). He is conceived as the essence “lying on the borders” (*methorion*) between the spiritual and the material, and serves as the mediator of a natural synthesis (Maximos the Confessor Gregory of Nyssa), as “the bond (*syndesmos*) of the entire creation” (Kosmas Indikopleustes). Created by God, man is like the world, “a miniature world within the larger one” (John of Damascus); he is composed of two natures (divine and bestial) and occupies an intermediate place (Gemistos Plethon).

The ideas and notions of man (a single animal, mortal, and immortal, visible and invisible) as a king (*basileus*) of the created world are adopted from the Church Fathers (Gregory of Nazianzus, Makarios of Egypt). The concept of man as animal derives from ancient Greek philosophy and early Patristic thought, where a rational animal (*zoon logikon*) is a standard definition of man (Athanasios, Nemesios of Emesa). While some Christian writers seem to have conceived of the human person as a simple dichotomy of body and soul, threefold definition of man is characteristic of Byzantine patristic, monastic, and philosophical literature. This arrangement is found in ancient Platonism and Neoplatonism, as well as in the Biblical notions of man, which refer to body, soul, and spirit (Epistles of Saint Paul).

The Byzantine thinkers were concerned with psychological phenomena such as dreams, passions, emotions, humoral imbalances, mental disorders as melancholy, mania, and epilepsy. The Byzantine physicians followed the Hippocratic tradition and, in particular, Galen in attributing mental disorder to humoral imbalance. The humoral account was often supplemented by another tradition in which different disorders were often linked to different areas of the brain. The mental disorders were often associated with disturbances of function in one or more of the cerebral ventricles. The central issue of Byzantine psychology is characterized by the attempt to ascribe a certain set of mental powers or “faculties” to defined localizations within the brain and particularly its ventricles. Brain functions were carried out in the cerebral ventricles by the psychic pneuma, or animal spirit endowed with the power to perform sensitive and mental activities. Although opinions differed as to which specific function belonged to each of the ventricles, the idea of ventricular localization was accepted until the end of Byzantium. The internal senses were assumed to be located in the ventricles of the brain. These ventricles were supposed to be sense organs performing functions such as remembering or imagining. The theory was created by assigning the various perceptual and cognitive faculties identified by Aristotle in his *De anima* to the spirit-filled cerebral ventricles described by Galen in his discussion of the anatomy of the brain. The description of processes of the inner sense (especially, *phantasia*) was important for the explanation of the various psychological phenomena connected with dreams, visions, or demonology.

## Writings

A vivid interest in the problems of the soul is demonstrated in the writings of Byzantine philosophers such as Michael Psellos, Nikephoros Blemmydes, Sophonias, Michael of Ephesus, Nikephoros Choumnos, and Gennadios Scholarios. A large number of short treatises discussing particular philosophical issues on the

unity of the soul and the body, and the faculties of the soul appear in Byzantine thought. There were also various texts in which psychological issues were dealt with – such as theological treatises on the soul (Nicetas Stethatos) or medical works (Symeon Seth).

Most Byzantine philosophers wrote compendia, paraphrases, and commentaries on the classical authors, and Byzantine thought was influenced by the rigorous revival of the interest in commentaries on Aristotle from the earlier period (sixth century). Especially Philoponos' commentary was extremely influential in Byzantium and most Byzantine thinkers adapted his commentary on the *De anima* to their anthropological treatises (Michael Psellos, the work *Doxai peri psyches* falsely attributed to Michael Psellos, John Italos, Nikephoros Blemmydes, Sophonias, Theodoros Metochites, and Gennadios Scholarios). Philoponos held that Aristotle agreed with Plato about the three kinds of soul – the vegetative soul, which is inseparable from the body, the irrational soul which is separable from the body but inseparable from the pneuma, and the rational soul which is the substance which transcends all body (separable and immortal).

Authors like Gennadios Scholarios relied not only on the ancient philosophers but also on Latin philosophers (Albert the Great, Thomas Aquinas).

### Ancient and Patristic Sources

Byzantine psychology represents a fusion of Galenic physiology and anatomy with Aristotelian psychology. In Byzantine anthropologies we find various concepts deriving from Ancient Greek philosophy and medicine side by side with significant commentators of Aristotle and the anthropological concepts of the Church Fathers. In general, the most important source was Aristotle, whose psychological thinking is contained principally in his work *De anima*, although some specific aspects of psychology, relating to sensation (*De sensu*), memory (*De memoria et reminiscentia*), and sleeping and dreaming (*De somno*, commented by Theodore Metochites) are contained in *Parva naturalia* (commentaries by Michael of Ephesus,

Sophonias). For instance, in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, Sophonias' paraphrase of Aristotle's *De anima* or Nikephoros Blemmydes' *De anima* draws on John Philoponos' lost commentary on book 3 of the *De anima*. Later Gennadios claimed that even Thomas Aquinas' commentary on Aristotle's *De anima* was dependent on Philoponos.

An important figure in terms of psychology in Byzantium is Galen, especially his adaptations of the Hippocratic four humors, his use of Plato, Aristotle, and the Stoics in creating an all encompassing medical theory. He was a significant source for the learned Byzantine physicians and philosophers. By the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, Galen was regarded by the Byzantines to be the greatest medical authority they inherited from the time of the early Roman Empire. As a proof of that are the Byzantine transcriptions of Galen's works which survive in large numbers. Galen adopted Aristotle's basic threefold classification of the internal senses (imagination, cognition, and memory) and he specified the localization of these faculties in the anterior, middle, and posterior ventricles of the brain. The head was the centre of psychic life, and mental faculties were localized in the ventricles of the brain. The Byzantines accepted the Galenic notion of the brain as the organ responsible for the conversion of vital into animal spirits. The so-called cell doctrine remained almost unaltered during the whole of Byzantine thought.

A more coherent account of the soul is presented in the work *On Human Nature* by Nemesius of Emesa; it is a systematic attempt to harmonize medical philosophy and Christian anthropology. This treatise is a distillation of classical learning and attracted the attention of Early Byzantine thinkers (Maximus the Confessor, John of Damascus); through them it influenced later Byzantine thinkers such as Meletios the Monk, whose synopsis of Christian and pagan ideas on the human constitution is composed almost entirely of excerpts from earlier authors. Through the works of Nemesius of Emesa and John of Damascus, Byzantine authors were also acquainted with a classification of emotions (pleasure, distress, fear, and anger).

## The Relation of Body and Soul

Most Byzantines accepted the Aristotelian view which defines man as a composite of body and soul. Thinkers mostly influenced by Aristotle accepted the definition of soul as the vital principle and energy that gives existence and form to body. The soul is the primary principle of nourishment, sensation, movement, and understanding. Aristotle's definition of the soul as "the actuality of a natural body which potentially has life" presented a formidable challenge to Byzantine thinkers (Nikephoros Blemmydes, Gennadios Scholarios).

The soul is the vital life principle. Some early Byzantines perceived the soul in physical terms, as breath (Didymos the Blind) or blood (this notion was criticized by Nemesios), but later Gregory of Nyssa insisted on a purely intellectual definition of it as *ousia noera* (intelligent substance of the rational soul). The soul unceasingly kindles the body to life, and suitably endows it with life and is defined as everlasting, ever-living, immortal, and eternal. The soul was considered as a guide for the body, giving it life and movement and causing its growth. The soul is not harmony, temperament, or any other quality, but it is an incorporeal being that is immortal but usually united with the body (Nemesius of Emesa). The soul is divided into three parts, the rational (*to noeron*), the spirited (*to thymikon*), and the appetitive (*to epithymetikon*). This terminology proves the Neoplatonic influence. Despite the apparent affinities between the Christian and the Neoplatonic tradition, however, important differences were continuously stressed by Byzantine thinkers. In general, late Byzantine philosophers rejected Neoplatonic theories on the preexistence of the soul. Some systematic criticism of Proclus' (Anonymous (eleventh century), Nicholas of Methone) or Plotinus' concept of the soul appeared (Nikephoros Choumnos). The soul and the body are created simultaneously and their coexistence is definite from the embryo (Gregory of Nyssa, Arethas, Nikephoros Choumnos). The soul cannot exist before its body, nor does it in ecstasy depart from its own nature into the nature of God. The soul does not have the attributes of

the sperm or of the father of the rational being but of God, because it is produced by God and entered in the creature (Arethas). After death the soul retains its identity and is linked to its former body, which it recovers at the future resurrection (John of Damascus, Nikephoros Blemmydes).

Although the soul is united with the body, it is itself immaterial and does not consist of any of the four material elements (earth, water, air, fire) or a combination of them. Unlike the soul, the body is construed as three-dimensional, visible, and corruptible (mortal). It consists of the four elements and has four humors (black bile, phlegm, blood, yellow bile). The Byzantines rejected the image of the body as the cage or prison of the soul (Plato, Stoics) or as the embodiment of evil (dualistic heresies, Manicheism).

The body, created by God himself, was conceived of as ethically neutral, an instrument through which the soul could sin. The soul is moved by free choice, it acts by means of the body, whereas the body is changeable by nature and it does not have its own motion. Byzantine thinkers were concerned to retain an important place for free will in their psychologies and to deny deterministic accounts of behavior (contra-astrology). But there were attempts at a reconciliation between the belief in astral influence over the natural world and the Christian doctrines of divine providence and human free will (Nikephoros Gregoras). However, some thinkers, being influenced by Neoplatonism, insisted that the astral bodies were vehicles to transfer false images, fantasies, and hallucinations, and to deceive man in which phantasia played an important role (Michael Psellos).

## Immortality of the Soul

Late Byzantine philosophical writings show the difficulties of the interpretation of Aristotle's account of the soul, whether he thinks that the soul is immortal or not (Theodore Metochites). Some Early Byzantine authors claimed that Aristotle believed the soul to be mortal, and they condemned him for it (Ps.-Justin Martyr, Gregory of Nyssa). Some other thinkers claimed that

Aristotle defined the soul as immortal and assigned to it an incorporeal mode of being (Michael of Ephesus). Through the interpretative tradition of the Neoplatonic commentators (Philoponus and Ps.-Simplicius) the Byzantine thinkers defended Aristotle's position that the rational soul alone is immortal (John Italos, Sophonias). They referred to Aristotle's texts (*De anima*, *Physics* 7–8) in which he considers the intellect as functioning separately and possessing an activity which does not require the body. Aristotle's comparison of the intellect in the body to the pilot of a ship was used to show that he thought the rational soul was separable and immortal (Nikephoros Blemmydes, Theodore Metochites).

Throughout the long era of Christian Byzantium, as with other branches of knowledge, Byzantine psychology shows the vitality of ancient Greek philosophy. Apart from continuity with the ancient Greek philosophical tradition and Greek Patristic sources, Byzantine psychology is characterized by an absence of Arabic philosophical-medical tradition (Avicenna, Averroes). Moreover, the relationship between the Byzantine and Latin West is of interest in connection with philosophical approaches to Aristotle's philosophy. The existence of numerous translations of Latin works (mostly by Thomas Aquinas) in Byzantium opened more gates to western scholasticism (Gennadios Scholarios). The discussion between Platonic and Aristotelian accounts of the soul continued in the background of the dispute between Gemistos Plethon and Gennadios Scholarios, and the debate continued after the fall of Constantinople 1453 mainly in Italy (Bessarion, Theodore Gazes, John Argyropoulos, George Trapezountios).

## Cross-References

- ▶ [Aristotelianism in the Greek, Latin, Syriac, Arabic, and Hebrew Traditions](#)
- ▶ [Emotions](#)
- ▶ [Epistemology, Byzantine](#)
- ▶ [George Scholarios \(Gennadios II\)](#)
- ▶ [Gregory Palamas](#)

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- ▶ [Natural Philosophy, Byzantine](#)
- ▶ [Nikephoros Blemmydes](#)
- ▶ [Nikephoros Choumnos](#)
- ▶ [Nikephoros Gregoras](#)
- ▶ [Philosophical Psychology, Jewish Tradition](#)
- ▶ [Plethon, George Gemistos](#)
- ▶ [Sophonias](#)
- ▶ [Theodore Metochites](#)

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## Philosophical Psychology, Jewish Tradition

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### Abstract

During the Middle Ages (especially c. 900–1500) the Jews developed a rich and varied tradition of philosophical psychology, ranging from the stoically-inspired theories of Saadia Gaon to the Neoplatonism of Isaac Israeli, from the Aristotelianism of Maimonides and Gersonides to the anti-Aristotelianism of their sharpest critic, Hasdai Crescas. Jews made original contributions to the technical discussion of the soul, in discursive treatises and commentaries on philosophical texts. They also discussed the soul in traditional texts and genres – commentaries on Bible and rabbinic literature, sermons, and liturgical poetry – thus introducing “foreign” ideas into the very heart of classical Judaism.

This brief survey of Jewish psychological writings during the Middle Ages will focus on major figures and systematic works of philosophy and theology; it will make only occasional reference to the exegetical, homiletical, and liturgical material. The major developments will be presented chronologically, beginning with Judaeo-Arabic writings from the Islamic world, then turning to Hebrew texts from Christian Europe.

### Saadia Gaon (882–942)

One of the first rabbinic Jews to write systematically about the soul, or about any other philosophical-theological subject, was Saadia Gaon, rabbinic leader and controversialist in Iraq during the early tenth century. Saadia discusses the soul in his biblical commentaries and commentary on *Sefer Yetsirah*. The fullest discussion,

however, is found in his theological summa *The Book of Beliefs and Opinions*.

In Book 6 of *The Book of Beliefs and Opinions* Saadia surveys and rejects six definitions of the soul – as accident, air, fire, a duality (soul and spirit), two kinds of air, and the blood – before presenting his own view: that the soul is a luminous substance akin to, but even finer than the substance of the celestial spheres. It has its seat in the heart, works in the body through the veins and nerves, and possesses in general three faculties, which he associates with three biblical terms: *nefesh* refers to the appetitive faculty of the soul; *ruah* to the irascible or passionate; and *neshamah* to the rational. The soul, he maintains, is created in the heart when the body is fully formed, lives with the body a fixed duration of time, then separates after death, remaining apart till body and soul are reunited during the time of resurrection. Only then is the single composite existence that is human being – body and soul together – judged and given reward or punishment.

Already in Book 6 Saadia shows his primary concern to be not with abstract theories of the soul per se but with divine reward and punishment. In Books 7 through 9 this becomes the primary focus, as he presents a detailed explication of his eschatological theories. In general these sections draw much more from biblical texts than rational inquiry. Nevertheless, some philosophical and theological ideas are worthy of note. For example, his discussion of resurrection confronts a basic problem of individuation found already in earlier Christian theology: What body exactly is reconstituted and in what state? Old or young? Sick or healthy? The problem also of how flesh is reconstituted when combined with other things is raised. Thus to cite one famous example: A man is eaten by a lion, the lion drowns and is eaten by a fish, the fish is caught and consumed by a fisherman, who is subsequently burned to ashes. How can the flesh of the original man be reconstituted once digested and incorporated physiologically into another being?

These types of paradoxes are characteristic of Saadia's treatment of resurrection and redemption. Although they are not directly related to

psychology, they are worthy of consideration in the history of the problem of individuation.

### Isaac Israeli (c. 855–955)

Saadia was not the only Jew engaged in philosophy during the late ninth and early tenth century. He was rivaled by his near contemporary Isaac Israeli – philosopher and physician in Kairouan – who produced a very different literary corpus with strong ties not to Stoicism and Muʿtazilite *kalām* but to Neoplatonism. Each of Israeli’s surviving philosophical works includes discussions of the soul; a brief discussion of them will be given here.

Israeli’s *Book of Definitions* is Neoplatonic in form as well as content. Following the Alexandrian school tradition (and more directly its Arabic epigone al-Kindī), it presents a list of some 57 philosophical terms which are organized not alphabetically but conceptually. Following the definitions and descriptions of “philosophy” itself, he presents terms from above to below, according to their place within the cosmos: wisdom, intellect, soul, celestial sphere, sublunar, and celestial body.

The definitions given by Israeli are strongly metaphysical and generally fit into standard Neoplatonic emanationist cosmologies. Intellect is the first emanation or hypostasis, the specificity of all things and genus of genera; it knows itself and through knowing itself knows all other things; it is, however, of three types or stages: actual intellect; potential intellect; and a “second intellect” – which refers to the process of acquiring possible knowledge through sensation and experience, which can then be transformed into actual knowledge. Soul is second to intellect; it is a substance that perfects the body that possesses life potentially (according to Aristotle), or a substance connected with the celestial body (according to Plato).

After harmonizing these two views (following the standard Neoplatonic practice of harmonizing Plato and Aristotle), Israeli provides more detailed information about the different souls or types of soul, set in emanative order: The rational emanates from the intellect; it is highest in rank, is

responsible for learning and knowledge in both the theoretical and practical spheres; it is because of the rational soul that one can receive reward or punishment. The animal soul is lower than the rational, from whose shadow it emanates; it is possessed by animals, is concerned primarily with sensation and movement, rather than reason and understanding; because animals cannot reason, they are not subject to reward and punishment. The lowest soul is the vegetative, which emanates from the shadow of the animal; it is concerned primarily with desire and governs the functions of nutrition, reproduction, growth, and decay. Contrary to humans and animals, vegetables are not in possession of reason, movement, or sensation.

The emanative scheme presented in *The Book of Definitions* is reproduced, with some variations, in *The Book of Substances*, *The Chapter on the Elements*, and *The Book on Spirit and Soul*. In these treatises Israeli’s ideas about soul and spirit are also sometimes explained in light of biblical terms and expressions. It is in his work where I Samuel 25:9 – “The soul of my Lord shall be bound in the bundle of life with the Lord thy God; and the souls of thine enemies, them shall he sling out, as from the hollow of a sling” – emerged as a popular biblical proof-text of both eternal reward and punishment for the soul, and where a Jewish eschatology is first developed out of Neoplatonic ideas and images. Like Saadia, Israeli combines biblical and rabbinic images with philosophy – in this case Neoplatonic philosophy – to create a striking image of the hereafter. For him, the soul is purified through good acts which correspond with reason, and is sullied by bad acts which are governed by the appetites of the animal soul. The pure soul is released into the spiritual realm, whereas the dark turbid soul remains below, caught in the cosmological sphere of fire, revolving eternally in this literal hell-fire.

### Moses Maimonides (1138–1204)

In the two centuries following Saadia and Israeli, Jewish thought was largely under the influence of Muʿtazilite *kalām* and Neoplatonism. This is

especially the case in Islamic Spain, where Israeli inspired a long line of Jewish Neoplatonists. In the twelfth century, however, *kalām* and Neoplatonism gave way to Aristotelianism, which would come to dominate Jewish philosophical discussion about the soul for the remainder of the Middle Ages.

The most important and influential of the Jewish Aristotelians was Moses Maimonides, legal scholar, communal leader, physician, and philosopher in Egypt. To be sure, Maimonides does not fit neatly into any school tradition of Aristotelianism, nor did he write systematically on the soul (or any other philosophical subject). Yet his nonsystematic eclectic discourses and his enigmatic judgments did much to stimulate Jewish thought for several centuries to come. A brief description of his most fruitful discussions of the soul will be given here.

Maimonides' early commentary on the Mishnah, like all his writings, was novel in many ways. It is comprehensive, providing explanation of all Mishnaic tractates, including those without Talmudic explication; and it includes three systematic prefaces, two of which relate to the soul. As introduction to tractate *Avot*, a collection of Tannaitic wisdom sayings, Maimonides provides a synthetic primer in Aristotelian ethics, which would become the standard textbook in philosophical ethics used by Jews throughout the later Middle Ages. In the first few chapters, as introduction to the doctrine of the mean, he presents a brief discourse on the soul and its faculties. Borrowing from al-Fārābī's *Select Aphorisms* (sometimes word-for-word), he defends the unity of the soul, the uniqueness of the human soul (which is essentially different than animal and plant souls), and describes the soul's faculties and their functions: nutrition, sensation, appetite, imagination, and reason – both practical and theoretical. By knowing the soul the physician of the soul, that is, the ethicist, can diagnose, treat, and cure the soul's sicknesses, leading it from extreme behavior to the mean and from a life of vice to a life of virtue. Yet the question remains: how does one determine what the mean is? Here Maimonides diverges from al-Fārābī (and Aristotle), identifying knowledge of God as the orienting ethical principle toward which all actions should lead.

The other introduction relating to psychic matters prefaces an earlier chapter of the Mishnah, Chapter. 10 ("Heleq") of *Sanhedrin*. Working off the qualified first sentence of this chapter – all Jews have a share (*heleq*) in the world to come, except . . . – Maimonides presents a survey of different conceptions of the "world to come." He counts five: the garden of Eden and Gehinnom construed as places of corporeal pleasure or pain; the messianic age, governed by an eternal king who rules an elite population of immortal giants; the time of resurrection, when all deserving souls are reconstituted with their bodies and live forever in peace; a this-worldly "world to come," characterized by universal health, wealth, peace, and security; the final view, according to Maimonides, combines all the others: a messianic age, when the dead are resurrected, experience infinite pleasure in the garden of Eden, and live forever in peace and security. Following a brief excursus on education and exegesis, in which the primarily rhetorical and heuristic character of any doctrine of reward is exposed, he presents his own purely spiritualistic view: that knowledge of God is the highest goal and contemplation of God the greatest reward; this alone is true delight; it has no share whatsoever in anything material.

Maimonides' ethics and eschatology are repeated in his comprehensive code of law, the *Mishneh Torah*. In the "*Laws of Ethical Dispositions*" Maimonides presents a complete ethical theory – in Jewish legal context – governed by the principles of Aristotle's doctrine of the mean (although there is constant tension between ethical moderation and intellectual extremism). In the "*Laws of Repentance*" the spiritualistic intellectualistic orientation of the Introduction to Heleq is reproduced in striking form: true love of God results from knowledge of God ("according to the knowledge, will be the love"), as exemplified by the single-minded passion of the lover in Song of Songs, who seeks conjunction with her beloved active intellect, or the rabbinic ideal in *Berakhot*: "In the world to come, there is no eating, drinking, or sexual relations, but rather the righteous sit with their crowns on their heads enjoying the radiance of the divine presence."

*The Guide of the Perplexed* – Maimonides’ philosophical-theological magnum opus – also includes significant material about the soul and intellect, although generally it is difficult to determine what his true opinion might have been on any particular subject. The text itself is framed by the noetic nature of man – created in the (intellectual) image of God (*Guide* 1:1), and directed toward intellectual perfection as his final end (*Guide* 3:54) – and has discussions of soul and intellect throughout. For example, in *Guide* 1:72 and 2:6–7 Maimonides presents a fairly standard Neoplatonized-Aristotelian emanationist cosmology, with the active intellect – the last of the celestial intelligences – construed as the cause of existence and final aim of knowledge. In *Guide* 1:40–42 he lists various definitions – philosophical and nonphilosophical alike – of the equivocal terms “soul,” “spirit,” “life,” and “death.” And in *Guide* 1:68 he presents a summary of the Aristotelian doctrine of the identity of knower and thing known. Many of the traditional theological doctrines in the *Guide* are understood with the help of the theory of the active intellect. Both prophecy and providence are explained as resulting from a divine overflow through the active intellect to individuals with properly prepared intellects.

There are other chapters in the *Guide*, however, which complicate matters, suggesting that cognition, for Maimonides, is far more difficult than it might first appear. In contemporary Maimonidean scholarship these chapters have led to a series of studies and counter-studies, arguing that Maimonides, who seems to place such great emphasis on intellectual perfection, conjunction, and knowledge of God, in fact believed that these designated goals could not possibly be achieved by any human being (except, perhaps, by Moses). Based on remarks about the limitations of the human intellect – incapable of apprehending even the celestial world, let alone God – recent scholars have suggested that Maimonides was a metaphysical critic (akin to Kant) or even a skeptic.

In Maimonides’ own time, in contrast, he was accused of exactly the opposite: being far too enamored with the intellectual life. Based mainly

on his commentary on the Mishnah and *Mishneh Torah*, he was charged with denying the religious doctrine of resurrection, and of promoting a purely elitist noetic doctrine of eternal reward, based solely on intellectual accomplishment. In response to these accusations, he wrote his “*Letter on Resurrection*,” an apologetic tract, which might be considered his last philosophical-theological writing. Resurrection, he writes there, is rabbinic dogma, and he accepts it, just as others should; he does not deny it or explain it metaphorically. On the contrary, precisely because it is dogma and cannot be proved rationally it should simply be accepted on faith; and moreover denying it affects belief in other related subjects, such as miracles. Nevertheless, he reaffirms what he stated in earlier works: that the final reward, beyond any other reward, the “world to come” where one reaches true life without death, is incorporeal – made up of “souls without bodies, like angels.”

### **Levi b. Gershom, Gersonides (1288–1344)**

The thirteenth century was largely a time of transition in the history of Judaism, as the centers of Jewish thought moved from the Islamic world to Christian Europe. Dozens of translations of philosophical writings from Arabic to Hebrew, along with Hebrew encyclopedias, summaries, glossaries and other reference works, laid the foundations for the emergence of a tradition of philosophy in Hebrew. Although the thirteenth century produced some creative and original thinkers, it was not till the fourteenth that the hard work of the translators produced a mature philosophical culture. This is represented most fully by Gersonides, generally considered the most original Jewish philosopher in the later Middle Ages.

Among the many subjects that preoccupied Gersonides during his productive career are the soul, the intellect, and the possibility of conjunction with the agent intellect. He discusses these in his commentary on Averroes’ *De anima*, in his commentaries on the Bible, and most

systematically in Book 1 of his theological summa, *The Wars of the Lord*. The latter will be our focus here.

Gersonides' discussion of intellect and immortality in the *Wars* is framed by Aristotle's *De anima*, especially the notoriously ambiguous text at 3:5. There Aristotle introduced the notion of a passive (or potential or material) intellect, which can "become all things," and an active intellect, which causes or "makes" all things; the latter is "separate, impassible, unmixed . . . it alone is immortal and eternal." Gersonides does not engage Aristotle directly. For him the study of Aristotle means the study of the commentators (Alexander, Themistius, al-Fārābī, Averroes), who developed different and incompatible interpretations of Aristotle and inconsistent theories of intellect and intellection. Gersonides' aim in the *Wars* is to explain clearly the different views, show their weaknesses, and develop his own position out of and in contradistinction to theirs. His opinion, he claims, will emerge as superior in terms of philosophical argumentation. It will also help support the traditional doctrine of individual immortality – at least in some degree.

The discussion of the different views, leading to his own original hypothesis, can be summarized as follows:

According to Alexander of Aphrodisias (as Gersonides construes his position), the material or potential or human intellect is a disposition in the soul which comes to be with the body; it is the capacity to know, and nothing more. It knows through a process of abstraction: the senses provide material forms to the imagination, and the imagination intelligible forms to the intellect, which can see them with the help of an agent or active intellect – an external celestial incorporeal cause of thinking, which shines light (as it were) on a potentially intelligible substance, in the same way that the sun shines light on a potentially sensible substance. When the intellect is thinking an intelligible, it is actually thinking; when it is thinking an intelligible substance completely separate from matter, it can become one with this separate intelligible and survive eternally through it. The sum total of its thoughts is called acquired intellect; when these acquired thoughts are

separate intelligibles, they survive, having achieved some sort of union with the eternal thoughts the mind is thinking.

Themistius, according to Gersonides, defends a completely contrary – largely Platonizing – reading of Aristotle, a view which Averroes then develops in detail (as Gersonides understands him). According to this view, the material or potential or human intellect is not a disposition that comes to be with the body, but rather a separate substance, which is an incorporeal one, and eternal by nature. It itself possesses universal knowledge; in contrast, it can know individual particular things only through the individual body or soul. As with Alexander, Themistius (as developed by Averroes) considers the agent or active intellect an external cosmic intelligence, but it is identical with the material intellect. In other words, the potential or material or human intellect is an individual instantiation of the universal active intellect. Although the material intellect can acquire particular knowledge with the help of sense and imagination, this knowledge does not perish. Only the material intellect, with the death of the body, when it returns, as it were, to its original state in the active intellect, survives the destruction of the body.

In Gersonides' opinion all of these views are deficient in some way, and through his criticism of them he develops his own view, which for him answers all the problems of the others. To sum up his criticism, in Gersonides' opinion Alexander can account for particular knowledge – through abstraction – but seems incapable of explaining universal knowledge; for if the material intellect comes to be with the body, it is also subject to destruction (following a basic principle of Aristotelian science), yet universal knowledge, in Alexander's acquired intellect, is eternal. Themistius, for his part, cannot account for particular knowledge, for the only way a separate intellect can know individuals is by mixing with the body, but if it mixes with the body, it is no longer separate. That the material and active intellects are one in essence, different in accident, is given the lengthiest discussion by Gersonides. He focuses on problems of individuation: if the active intellect is really one, then the material intellect in

all humans should be one, but there is a manifest difference between individuals; and if the material intellect, on the other hand, is many, then one would conclude that a single thing is both one and many at the same time.

What then is Gersonides' own view? For him, the material intellect is a disposition or capacity created in the imagination. It is created, but can become eternal – for the principle that nothing that comes to be can become eternal is false (he argues this in Book 5). Here, for the most part, he agrees with Alexander, and rejects the view of Themistius and Averroes. With the active intellect, however, Gersonides begins to break new ground. He agrees that the active intellect is a separate external incorporeal cosmic intelligence, which is a cause of existence and knowledge, but the way he defines it is different. For Gersonides, this active intellect is the cause of all existence in the lower world, insofar as it possesses all forms that prime matter is capable of receiving, and in their myriad relations. And, for the same reason, it is the cause of thought, since in it are all the possible intelligible forms, in all their myriad relations – it provides the grounds, as it were, for all thinking. In this sense the active intellect is – to use Gersonides' terminology – the order, justice, pattern, or “*nomos*” of the sublunar world.

One question remains: If the active intellect is the pattern of the world, can an individual human intellect know it completely and conjoin with it, and what would conjunction mean? For Gersonides, all knowledge comes through experience of the world; all knowledge is scientific or inductive; it is always the result of learning. In his opinion, there is no innate knowledge or illumination from above; even first principles are learned. Therefore any sort of complete cognition or union with the active intellect is impossible; human beings, through rational study, cannot possibly acquire complete understanding of all forms in the world in all their complex relations; they cannot possibly see the world from the perspective of the active intellect. Yet precisely because the active intellect is the pattern of the world, and the world is a reflection of it, the knowledge

gained through empirical study provides some share in or taste of this universal pattern.

It is this combination of ideas, perhaps born of Gersonides' own inclination toward the empirical that led him to a remarkable conclusion: that immortality consists in the little knowledge one acquires through the rational scientific empirical investigation of the world, and this little knowledge is different – and unique – for each individual intellect. In this way does Gersonides – the staunch Aristotelian, the sturdy empiricist – defend the doctrine of an individual immortality.

### **Hasdai Crescas (c. 1340–1410/1411)**

Although Gersonides was critical of his Aristotelian forebears, and often worked hard to undermine their theories, he was nevertheless committed to constructing a positive scientific understanding of the world. Hasdai Crescas, in contrast – chief rabbi of the Jews of Aragon, legal scholar, polemicist, and theologian – mastered Aristotelianism for a different reason: to topple it from within. Through his careful study of the massive corpus of philosophical texts available in Hebrew, he set out, in his *Light of the Lord*, to free Judaism from the doctrines of Aristotle and his Jewish epigones. In particular, he focused his attention on philosophical proofs for the existence, unity, and incorporeality of God (and the Aristotelian principles upon which they were based), philosophical ideas about the origin of the world, divine knowledge of individuals, prophecy as a natural perfection, providence as consequent upon the intellect, and – most important for our purposes – the noetic doctrine of immortality, achieved through conjunction with the active intellect.

The main discussion of intellect and immortality in *Light of the Lord* is found in Book 2, Part 6, where Crescas first presents a summary of the Aristotelian theory of knowledge and conjunction – based mainly on Jewish adaptations – followed by a refutation of it. The ideas of the philosophers, as Crescas understands them, are as



follows: through the acquiring of true knowledge, the human or potential or material intellect can become constituted as an incorporeal substance, called the “acquired intellect,” which will exist forever. This state of existence, this achieving of knowledge, is considered by them the final aim of human existence; and the intellect’s eternal contemplation of universal truths after death is what it means to be truly happy: it brings with it true beatitude and leads to the highest form of pleasure.

How one can achieve this state of intellectual bliss, however, is not entirely clear. For Crescas, there are two different ways of understanding it. First, the view that knowledge of any truth whatsoever will lead to some degree of acquired intellect and some level of immortality. This idea, which Crescas seems to draw from Gersonides, is dependent on the view that intelligible forms in the sublunar world are part of the plan or order or “nomos” in the active intellect, thus to know any part of the plan is to know a part of the active intellect. According to this opinion, the more knowledge one attains the greater one’s pleasure and larger one’s share in eternal bliss. The second view – which Crescas seems to draw from Maimonides – is that the intellect can become constituted as an incorporeal eternal substance only when it contemplates an incorporeal separate intelligence, such as God, the angels, or the active intellect; conjunction requires knowledge of the intelligence itself, not any part or instantiation of it.

The philosophical theory of conjunction – no matter which way it is construed – is, for Crescas, not only incoherent but also dangerous. First, if one achieves some share in immortality simply by knowing any rational truth, then anyone can attain it. Reason and philosophy, moreover, would seem to be superior to revelation and law, for it is through thinking, not through acting and obeying, that final reward is achieved. The second theory is no less problematic – on different grounds. The problem is that, according to Maimonides, knowledge of God (and apparently all incorporeal substances) is possible only through negation, and

negative knowledge, knowing what God, the angels, or the active intellect is not, cannot lead to any positive identification between knower and known. By knowing what is not the active intellect one is not led to any union with the active intellect. If conjunction with the active intellect requires complete and positive knowledge of the active intellect, and knowledge of the active intellect is impossible, then conjunction is impossible. Or, to modify slightly an infamous conclusion attributed to al-Fārābī: immortality of the soul is nothing but an old wives’ tale.

Crescas has another argument as well, which is more creative, and which, in many ways, leads more directly to his own opinion on the subject. If the final aim of human existence, he argues, is knowledge and intellectual cognition, which constitutes the intellect as a separate incorporeal substance, then the final aim of man is to become not-man. That is, the final aim of man as composite of form and matter is to become pure intellect, completely separate from matter. Not only is this incoherent, he concludes, but it is in violation of divine justice, for how can the intellect alone, existing eternally, joyfully contemplating universal truths, receive this reward for what was accomplished by the human being during life, as body and soul.

What then is the final aim of human existence, according to Crescas? And if immortality is possible, and not trivial, what is it and how is it achieved? Here Crescas draws more from Scripture and tradition to present a theory contrary to that of the philosophers. For him the soul is a self-subsisting spiritual substance disposed toward thinking. That is, the soul is not a substrate, which serves and is subordinate to intellect; rather thinking or intellectual cognition is just one of several things that contribute to the happiness of the soul – which is the final perfection. In fact, thinking is itself subordinate to action, to obedience to the law and observance of the commandments, by which love – the highest ideal and truest happiness, is achieved. As the Rabbis say: “Which is better, study or action? Study, because it leads to action.” This is why eternal reward is

achieved even by the minor child who does nothing more than say amen after the communal prayers.

Crescas' critique of the Aristotelian ideas of acquired intellect and conjunction with the active intellect had varying success. It was used, borrowed, modified, and developed by a host of students and followers during the fifteenth century, including Joseph Albo; and it was rejected by others, such as Abraham Shalom, who attempted to defend Maimonides and Gersonides against Crescas' attacks. As in other areas of Crescas' philosophy, perhaps here also it was only in Renaissance and early modern times when his ideas were fully appreciated – for example, in the philosophy of love of Judah Abarbanel or the intellectual love of God of Spinoza.

## Cross-References

- ▶ [Abū l-Barakāt al-Baġdādī](#)
- ▶ [Alexander of Aphrodisias and Arabic Aristotelianism](#)
- ▶ [Aristotle, Arabic](#)
- ▶ [Avicenna](#)
- ▶ [Consciousness](#)
- ▶ [Contemplative Happiness and Civic Virtue](#)
- ▶ [Dominicus Gundissalinus](#)
- ▶ [Doxographies, Graeco-Arabic](#)
- ▶ [al-Fārābī, Abū Naṣr](#)
- ▶ [Galen, Arabic](#)
- ▶ [al-Ġazālī, Abū Ḥāmid Muḥammad](#)
- ▶ [Gersonides](#)
- ▶ [Happiness](#)
- ▶ [Hasdai Crescas](#)
- ▶ [Ibn Bājja, Abū Bakr ibn al-Sā'īġ \(Avempace\)](#)
- ▶ [Ibn Sīnā, Abū 'Alī \(Avicenna\)](#)
- ▶ [Ibn Ṭufayl, Abū Bakr \(Abubacer\)](#)
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- ▶ [al-Kindī, Abū Yūsuf Ya'qūb ibn Ishāq](#)
- ▶ [Moses Maimonides](#)
- ▶ [Parva naturalia, Commentaries on Aristotle's](#)
- ▶ [Philosophical Psychology, Jewish Tradition](#)
- ▶ [Plato, Arabic](#)
- ▶ [Plotinus, Arabic](#)

- ▶ [Saadia Gaon](#)
- ▶ [Themistius, Arabic](#)

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## Philosophical Theology, Byzantine

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### Abstract

The history of Byzantine philosophical theology balances between doctrinal elaboration and a distinctive mystical tendency. Its study may be either of a theological or of a rationalist approach. The first asserts firmly the special weight of the works of theologians like John of Damascus, Maximus the Confessor, Photios, Gregory Palamas, and others. The second approach focuses on the decisive part that ancient Greek philosophy played in Byzantine theology. Although the history of this latter offers a series of charismatic individuals, the concluding phase of Byzantium presents two ideal-types of philosopher theologians' personalities: Gregory Palamas, who maintained the traditional articulation and hierarchy of the outward (Greek) *Paideia* and the inward (Christian) *Paideia* and George Gemistos Plethon, who transcended this model in favor of Greek philosophy. Mysticism and the relation to the Latin Church are the other main issues that occupied the intellectual activity of the late Byzantine philosophico-theological thought, but the general trends do not succeed to account for all the individual positions of the Byzantine intellectuals who by their theories and activities challenged the purity of the relevant classifications.

Byzantine philosophical theology covers a thousand years of history, a period that corresponds to the evolution of a state that was simultaneously a successor to the Roman Empire, a Christian kingdom and a home for Hellenism. Byzantine theology was shaped through a series of philosophico-theological debates in which the ancient Greek philosophical heritage was at the same time

rejected and presupposed by the intellectuals of the new faith. The struggle against heresies like *monophysitism* created the need for the formulation of dogmas at a time when doctrinal matters were the subject of popular discussion. Following a period of anti-philosophical apologetics, a distinction was inaugurated between inward *paideia* (Christianity) and outward (Greek) *paideia*. The Cappadocian Fathers, Gregory Nazianzus, Gregory of Nyssa, and Basil the Great, together with John Chrysostom (fourth century) became the key figures in the Byzantine synthesis of Greek philosophy and Christianity. Maximus the Confessor (580–662) transmuted the negative theology of Pseudo-Dionysius Areopagita, that was largely based on Neoplatonism, together with the legacy of Origen into a new Christian philosophy; the negative or apophatic theology became the special characteristic of the eastern Christian tradition.

The Iconoclastic crisis, from 730 to 843, that concerned the acceptance or not of the cult of the icons, generated a discussion about the degree of abstraction and representation that could be theologically admitted. John of Damascus (Mansur ibn Sarjun to his real name, c. 665–749), a great personality of Byzantine theology, although living and working beyond the Byzantine borders in Syria defended philosophically the cause of the icons and contributed significantly to the Byzantine philosophical theology with his work *The Source of Knowledge*, a *summa* of theological and philosophical knowledge. When the Iconoclastic crisis was over, the ecclesiastical men felt stronger to assume a humanistic role regarding the Greek letters while the dogmatic argument progressively became less inspired and constantly referring to the classical intellectual syntheses of the Fathers of the Church.

The Schism with the Church of Rome demanded for a large amount of polemical rhetoric and an imposing Patriarch like Photios (c. 820–893), a great humanist himself, is exemplary as to the evolution regarding an ecclesiastical man's use of philosophy. The tenth/eleventh centuries were marked by the powerful mystical writer Symeon the New Theologian; but a little later we witness a strong philosophical fermentation that created a tension between the

philosophers and the Church. The most controversial of them, John Italos, possibly experimented in a new synthesis between reason and faith. The threatening rise of the power of the Ottomans made some men of the state and some intellectuals consider the union with the Latin Church as a solution to the problem, but in the meanwhile the Byzantine Orthodoxy had acquired a national character; the people and the monks were strongly opposed to the idea of a possible union of the two Churches.

In the Hesychast crisis (fourteenth century), it was Gregory Palamas (1296–1359) the defender of the mystical method of the hesychast-quietist monks – named by their contemptuous opponents the “*omphaloscopes*/navel gazers” – who triumphed by insisting on the tradition of the orthodox spirituality and mysticism, while using no less of philosophically grounded arguments. Among his adversaries, a Latinophile party led notably by Demetrios Kydones who translated and was influenced by the works of Thomas Aquinas. The last great philosopher of Byzantium, George Gemistos Plethon (c. 1355–1452), a neo-pagan philosopher, believed that the rescue of the state could be achieved, between other things, by the adoption of a state religion inspired by the Hellenic twelve-gods paganism, but this idea found no echo in the Greek nation who could not be regarded as distinguished from Orthodoxy. Only a limited number of Byzantine intellectuals who fled the Turks mainly to Italy were converted to Catholicism. The passage to the West was not so successful for many of them and the reason for this “failure” is likely to be found in the disillusionment of the Greeks with Renaissance humanism; their Byzantine identity found again comfort in the Orthodox spirituality and the Hellenic tradition.

The study of Byzantine theology is a historical science not to be confused with Orthodox theology although the two domains are often intermingling (see Hans-Georg Beck, 7 ff.). Two issues are thus open to the study of the Byzantine philosophical theology: (a) the perception of Byzantine theology as philosophically meaningful, with the most important personalities being theologians like John of Damascus, Maximus the



Confessor, Photios, Gregory Palamas; (b) the categorization of the Byzantine philosophical theology into philosophical problems that were historically dealt within the Greek philosophical tradition. There lies the difference between a theologian's and a historian's of philosophy approach. The first historian of Byzantine philosophy, Basil Tatakis (Tatakis 1969), combined the demands for a value-neutral history of philosophy and a respect for the Orthodox tradition. The example of two distinctive Byzantine theologians can illustrate the difficulties of the above classification: John of Damascus' *The Source of Knowledge* is divided into three parts: *Dialectica* – a Defense of Orthodoxy – a Catalogue of Heresies. The *Dialectica* was influenced by Aristotelian Logic and for that the writer has been regarded as a forerunner of Scholasticism. Although the influence of John of Damascus was great, it did not exhaust all the philosophico-theological possibilities and so Patriarch Photios represents a genuine Byzantine spirit of another type; he was a very distinctive Byzantine, a combination of an Orthodox, a Hellenist, and a philosopher. Yet, the blend was quite different from that of John of Damascus mainly because the part of the Hellenist *littérateur* in him was of greater importance. In a way, the move from John of Damascus to Photios and what followed in the intellectual life is a measure of the evolution of the Byzantine thought. The general process leads from Christian philosophy to the beginnings of Humanism.

There is no doubt that the history of philosophical theology in Byzantium is a history of personalities as well as a history of ideas. In the face of historical challenges, the reactions of the scholars had often a distinctive individualistic character that facilitated the formation of factions. The Byzantine eleventh century is a real turning point that marked not only the beginning of a new cultural development but also the start of a fatal political decline. The final phase of Byzantium offers two ideal-types concerning philosophical theology: Plethon, the Hellenocentric, and Gregory Palamas, the man of the Orthodox tradition. Three problems were central to the Byzantine philosophical theology: (a) First, how much could a Byzantine advance in the study of ancient

philosophy without endangering his Christian faith? As we have seen, a limit was adopted between outward and inward *paideia* that should never get crossed. While, the declarations of distancing oneself from Greek philosophy were numerous, they often meant little as to the acknowledgment of the value of Greek philosophy. The only intellectual that crossed definitely the limit in favor of paganism was Plethon. (b) Another important problem concerned the relation with the Latin Church. Progressively, the Byzantines became conscious of the development of western Scholasticism. The formation of a Latinophile party and the translation of Thomas Aquinas' works testify to this evolution, but the anti-Latin tendency that expressed the convictions of common people was to prevail. (c) The final problem was that of Byzantine mysticism. Any excess of mysticism was always dealt by an unstated but nonetheless real common sense principle.

Even within these distinctions, the categorization of individual cases is not easy and the classification of the various tendencies is extremely difficult. Gregory Palamas' ideas were contested by Barlaam of Calabria, an Orthodox at the start but later a Catholic, by Demetrios Kydones, a later convert to the Latin rite but initially a friend of Palamas' supporter John Kantakuzenos, and also by Nikephoros Gregoras who was equally hostile to Palamas and to Rome. Men interested in Latin theology were otherwise pious Orthodox like Joseph Bryennios. George Gennadios Scholarios, the adversary of Plethon, was an anti-unionist but interested in Scholastic theology. The hellenocentric Plethon was opposed to the Union of the Churches; his pupil Bessarion supported the effort for the Union and later became a cardinal and renown humanist. Yet, the modern use of the word "*hellene*" seems to have its origin in the Orthodox-Hesychast milieu by the theologian Nilus Kabasilas. The various philosophical oppositions were formed more easily because in Byzantium there was traditionally a distinctive permeability between lay and clerical intellectuals. Still, religion persisted as a unifying factor on the basis of the Byzantine's profound sense of *eusebeia* (piety) that related the earthly to the celestial world.



## Cross-References

- ▶ Barlaam of Calabria
- ▶ Basil Bessarion
- ▶ Demetrios Kydones
- ▶ George Scholarios (Gennadios II)
- ▶ Gregory Palamas
- ▶ John Italos
- ▶ Maximus the Confessor
- ▶ Nikephoros Gregoras
- ▶ Photios of Constantinople
- ▶ Plethon, George Gemistos

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## Philosophical Theology, Jewish

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### Abstract

Medieval Jewish philosophers, like their Islamic and Christian contemporaries, were concerned to harmonize the tenets of Judaism with ancient Greek philosophic teachings that held sway at successive periods of Jewish history. Confronting problems in which there seemed to be a conflict between philosophical speculation (*iyyun*) and acceptance of dogmas of the Judaic faith (*emunah*), the goal of the Jewish philosopher was not only to buttress faith with understanding, but to reconcile two distinct bodies of knowledge. We shall focus upon the attempts of several major medieval Jewish figures, including Saadia Gaon (882–942), Maimonides (1135–1204), Gersonides (1288–1344), and Crescas (c. 1340–1410/1411), to reconcile the strictures of faith and reason in the context of the following issues: divine predication, creation, and theodicy.

### Divine Predication

Do the different attributes of God constitute distinct aspects or persons in the Divine essence? Jewish philosophers were divided on this question, as were medieval thinkers in general. Saadia Gaon, a tenth-century Jewish philosopher whose works reflected the influence of the Islamic Mu'tazilite, set the stage for subsequent Jewish discussions. In his major philosophical work *The Book of Doctrines and Beliefs*, Saadia followed the tradition of Philo and the *kalām* thinkers in denying multiplicity to God: the three attributes of Life, Power, and Wisdom are implied in the very notion of God. It is due to the deficiency of human

language that they cannot be expressed in one single term.

Maimonides' *Guide of the Perplexed* is the most important work of medieval Jewish philosophy and exercised a profound influence upon all subsequent Jewish thought, as well as upon Christian scholasticism. His theory of divine predication followed the Neoplatonic tradition and was built primarily upon the distinction found in al-Fārābī and Avicenna between essence and existence. This distinction implied that in the case of contingent beings existence is accidental to essence, whereas in God essence and existence are one. Hence God's nature is totally unlike ours, and terms used to describe God must be used either in a homonymous way or as negative predicates. The four essential attributes of God – life, power, wisdom, and will – are of one simple essence; all other attributes are to be conceived either as descriptive of divine action, or as negative attributes. However, even these four attributes, when predicated of God, are used in a homonymous, or equivocal, sense (Maimonides 1963, 1.56.131). The difference between human and divine predicates is qualitative: since the terms are applied by way of perfect homonymity, they admit of no comparison between God and His creatures.

In chapters 1.58–60 of the *Guide*, Maimonides develops his celebrated theory of negative predication, arguing that ultimately negative predication alone brings the human mind closer to an understanding of God: "Know that the description of God, may he be cherished and exalted, by means of negations is the correct description" (Maimonides 1963, 1:58:136). This third piece of Maimonides' theory of divine predication represents the logical culmination of his theory of language. Maimonides' point in these chapters is that because every affirmation about God is to be understood as a negation, not as a privation, it follows that the negation of a weakness does not imply that its opposite power is indirectly attributed to God. Rather it implies that the term or its opposite does not apply to God at all. So God is said to be neither weak nor powerful, just as a wall is neither seeing nor blind. The term "power" is

inapplicable to God; so are all other terms. God is simply the sort of being who neither has or fails to have any predicate we might to apply. To apply either privations or affirmative predicates of God is to be guilty of a category error. Maimonides presents an epistemological taxonomy according to which "with every increase in the negations regarding Him. . .you come nearer to that apprehension than he who does not negate with regard to Him that which, according to what has been demonstrated to you, must be negated" (Maimonides 1963, I:59:138). In other words, the individual who describes God in glowing, flowery language is epistemologically further away from God than the individual who recognizes that God cannot be described at all. Maimonides is explicit on this point: whenever a person affirms of God positive predicates, the said person recedes from God's true reality. The implications of this doctrine with respect to prayer are striking. Ultimately silence is the only appropriate linguistic response to divine predication: "silence with regard to You is praise" (Maimonides 1963, I:59:139).

Gersonides, on the other hand, disagreed with Maimonides' theory of negative theology. In his major work *The Wars of the Lord*, a sustained examination of the major philosophical issues of the day, Gersonides subjects Maimonides' theory to critique. He sides with Averroes who, rejecting the Avicennan distinction between essence and existence, argued that existence is not an accident of Being. In following Averroes, Gersonides paves the way for a positive theology, which permits of positive attributive ascription. Gersonides disagrees with Maimonides, claiming that divine predicates are to be understood as *pros hen* equivocals, or derivative equivocals, rather than absolute equivocals (as Maimonides had argued). That is, according to Gersonides, predicates applied to God represent the prime instance or meaning of the term, whereas human predicates are derivative or inferior instances. So, for example, knowledge when applied to God is perfect knowledge and constitutes the standard for human knowledge, which is less perfect than divine knowledge (Gersonides 1987, III.4: 107–115). The

implications of this discussion will become apparent when we turn shortly to the predicate of divine omniscience.

## Creation

The problem of creation is a good example of the attempted synthesis between philosophy and Jewish tenets rooted in Scripture. Working within a framework which upheld the infinity of time, Aristotle posited an eternal universe which had no temporal beginning. Jewish thinkers as far back as Philo had already grappled with reconciling this framework with the Biblical account of creation. Saadia, for example, argued that both the Platonic and Aristotelian theories of eternity and uncreatedness of the universe are incompatible with the Jewish view of creation *ex nihilo* (from nothing). After examining and rejecting the current philosophical views of creation, he stressed the philosophical significance of the Biblical viewpoint. Subsequent thinkers were equally committed to a cosmology in which the deity willed the universe to exist.

Maimonides' discussion of creation is fraught with interpretative difficulties. Warning (in the introduction to the *Guide*) of the dangers of expounding upon creation, he asserts that this topic must not be taught even to one individual. In light of this warning, Maimonides' analysis of the doctrine of creation has been interpreted as a highly nuanced presentation. In *Guide* II.13 Maimonides summarizes what he considers to be the three standard views on creation as the Scriptural, Platonic, and Aristotelian views. The main elements of each theory, as depicted by Maimonides, can be summarized briefly as follows. The view of Scripture (1) is that the universe was brought into existence by God after "having been purely and absolutely non-existent;" through His will and His volition, God brought into "existence out of nothing all the beings as they are, time itself being one of the created things." (Maimonides 1963, II.13: 281) The Platonic view (2) states that inasmuch as even God cannot create matter and form out of absolute non-existence, there "exists a certain

matter that is eternal as the deity is eternal. . . He is the cause of its existence. . . and that He creates in it whatever He wishes" (Maimonides 1963, II.13: 283). According to Maimonides, the view of Aristotle (3) agrees with (2) in that matter cannot be created from absolute non-existence, but concludes that the heaven is not subject to generation/corruption; that "time and motion are perpetual and everlasting and not subject to generation and passing-away" (Maimonides 1963, II.13: 284).

Which of these three views is espoused by Maimonides himself? Ostensibly, at least, Maimonides supports (1). Having dismissed (2) as a weaker version of (3), he argues that (1) is no more flawed than is (3). Then, pointing to the possibility of (1), coupled with its Mosaic (and Abrahamic) sanction, Maimonides argues that the very plausibility of (1) suggests the non-necessity of (3). Why does Maimonides not accept (2)? The main reason, as he tells us, is that the Platonic view has not been demonstrated (*Guide* II.25: 329). If we take Maimonides at his word, then, it is clear that (1), creation in time of the universe out of absolute non-existence, is his view. Some scholars, however, reading an esoteric subtext into the *Guide*, have dismissed his espousal of (1) as an exoteric stance and have searched for the underlying, or concealed, interpretation which is Maimonides' real view of creation. And as commentators working through the text have demonstrated, there is certainly ample evidence to support either (2) or (3) as his esoteric view. In fact, there is so much conflicting evidence, all of which can be supported with plausible argument, that some recent scholars have suggested that ultimately Maimonides upheld a skeptical stance in light of the evidence and did not take to heart any of the three positions. Although such a skeptical view would not be quite as heretical as espousing either (2) or (3), it still constitutes a provisional rejection of (1), which is tantamount to a rejection of the Mosaic theory.

Gersonides' discussion of time and creation is contained primarily in *Wars* VI.1. Like Maimonides, he is concerned with whether time is finite or infinite, as well as with whether the creation of the

world can be said to have occurred at an instant. In order to uphold the finitude of time, Gersonides refutes the Aristotelian arguments by attempting to demonstrate that time must have been generated. He will argue that just as quantity is finite, so too is time, since time is contained in the category of quantity (Gersonides 1999: 270). Having posited that the world was created at an initial instant of time by a freely willing agent, Gersonides must decide whether the world was engendered out of absolute nothing or out of a pre-existent matter. Arguing that creation out of nothing is incompatible with the facts of physical reality, he adopts a Platonic model of matter drawn ultimately from the *Timaeus*. The opening verses of Genesis 1 are used to distinguish two types of material reality: *geshem* and *homer rishon* (Gersonides 1999: 330–331). Totally devoid of form, *geshem* is the primordial matter out of which the universe was created. Since it is not informed, it is not capable of motion or rest; and since it is characterized by negation, *geshem* is inert and chaotic (Gersonides 1999: 330–331). This primordial matter is identified with the “primeval waters” described in Genesis 1:2. However, Gersonides points out that *geshem* does not itself exemplify absolute non-being, but rather is an intermediary between being and non-being (Gersonides 1999: 334–344).

## Divine Providence

We turn now to one of the most intractable problems in medieval Jewish thought, namely that of divine providence, and its implications for the presence of evil in the world. Medieval philosophers, concerned with safeguarding the freedom of human action, worried whether God’s foreknowledge of future contingent events entailed the necessary occurrence of these events. That the force of God’s knowledge need not be causal was already claimed by Saadia Gaon. In answer to the apparent paradox that God’s foreknowledge necessitates the objects of his knowledge, Saadia’s response is that “he who makes this assertion has no proof that the knowledge of the Creator concerning things is the cause of their existence” (Saadia Gaon 1948: 186). What concerned medieval philosophers in general,

and Jewish philosophers in particular, was the fact that if God is infallible, then the objects of his knowledge cannot fail to be what God already knows them to be. How to account for the ability of humans to contravene the prior infallible knowledge which God has of their actions became of paramount importance to later Jewish philosophers.

Under what conditions does God know unactualized particulars? Maimonides emphasizes that the term knowledge is predicated equivocally of God and humans, maintaining that God is in no way affected by what He knows. God remains one even though His objects constitute a plurality, and He remains unchanged even though the objects of His knowledge are mutable. These points are reflected in two brief assertions: first, that God’s knowledge does not contain plurality, and second, that God cannot acquire at a certain time knowledge He did not possess previously. Since the divine knowledge is a priori, it is not affected by the ontological status of objects which result from this knowledge. Hence Maimonides argues that since the objects of God’s knowledge do not causally act upon His knowledge, His essence is unaffected by their multiplicity. The second claim, that God’s knowledge is unaffected by any change in its objects, is supported in the context of a distinction between absolute and relative non-existence. Absolute non-existence is never an object of God’s knowledge (Maimonides 1963, III.20: 480). Relative non-existents, or future contingents, are possible objects of God’s knowledge. It is not impossible, Maimonides claims, that God’s knowledge has as its object those “non-existent things about whose being brought into existence we knew beforehand” (Maimonides 1963, III.20: 481). Like Averroes, Maimonides asserts that God’s knowledge of future possibles does not change their nature; neither is His nature altered by a change in the objects of His knowledge.

Gersonides is one of the only Jewish philosophers who upheld a form of indeterminism as a solution to the paradox of divine omniscience. Although intimated in a number of texts, this position is developed most fully in treatise III of *Wars*, wherein he develops his main argument that

an omniscient, immutable deity cannot know changing particulars. The underlying premise in this argument is that all future particular objects are in fact mutable: that is, they change from a state of non-existence to one of existence. Gersonides claims that an immutable deity cannot be omniscient, if omniscience entails knowing objects which undergo change. But does it follow from God's knowing a future contingent that it is necessary? In contradistinction to Maimonides, who claims that God's knowledge does not render the objects of his knowledge necessary, Gersonides will want to maintain that divine foreknowledge and contingency are incompatible.

Arguing that divine omniscience severely compromises the contingency of the objects of God's knowledge, Gersonides dismisses Maimonides' form of compatibilism. Having rejected Maimonides' attempts to harmonize foreknowledge and contingency, and having upheld the existence of contingency in the universe, Gersonides adopts the one option left to him, namely that God does not know future contingents. According to Gersonides, God knows that certain states of affairs may or may not be actualized. But in so far as they are contingent states, he does not know which of the two alternatives will in fact be actualized. For if God did know future contingents prior to their actualization, there could be no contingency in the world (Gersonides 1987, III.4: 116ff). Gersonides claims that God's inability to foreknow future contingents is not a defect in his knowledge (Gersonides 1987, III.4: 235–236). With respect to future contingents, God knows their ordered nature or essence, and he knows that they are contingent, but he does not know which alternative will become actualized. But has Gersonides in fact solved the problem of divine omniscience? Despite his admonition to the contrary, I have argued in other works that ultimately Gersonides' theory of divine omniscience does not fully account for other theological concerns, for example prophecy (Rudavsky 2000).

Hasdai ben Judah Crescas is the last outstanding original Jewish philosopher in the late medieval period. His major work *Sefer Or Adonai* (*The Book of the Light of the Lord*, 1405–1410),

finished several months before his death, was written as a polemic against his two Aristotelian predecessors Maimonides and Gersonides. In this work, Crescas sought to undermine the Aristotelian cosmology and physics that pervaded the works of his predecessors. Crescas rejects the views of both Maimonides and Gersonides, arguing that God acts toward the world with goodness, love, and grace. Against Gersonides, for example, Crescas affirms God's knowledge of future contingents, even those determined by human choice. He then argues that human freedom is only apparent and not genuine: humans think they are free because they are ignorant of the causes of their choices. Human responsibility for action lies not in the actual performance of the action, but rather in the agent's acceptance of an action as its own. The feeling of joy an agent feels at acquiescing to certain actions, for example, fulfilling the commandments, is the reward for that action. So too, God experiences joy in giving of himself to the world (Crescas 1990: 123–205).

## Theodicy

In this last section, we shall focus upon the problem of evil as portrayed by Maimonides in *Guide II*: 10–13. Maimonides' discussion represent a model attempt to explain how it is that an omniscient, omnipotent, and benevolent deity permits the existence of evil in general, and the suffering of innocents in particular. Many Jewish thinkers took into consideration *The Book of Job*, and Maimonides is no exception; his discussions of evil and divine omniscience are applied to the travails of Job. In chapters II.11 and 12, Maimonides undertakes a classical theodicy, drawn on conventional distinctions. Maimonides claims that the preponderance of moral evils (those that occur between humans) are the result of ignorance, or the privation of knowledge. Reflecting the platonic maxim that to know the good is to do the good, Maimonides suggests that it is as a result of ignorance that we inflict harm upon ourselves and upon others. It is only because we view the universe from our limited perspective that we perceive matters as worse than in fact they are;



were we to adopt a more holistic view, we would realize that humans are but a speck of sand, and that our travails represent but a minor chord in the vast orchestra of the universe.

Nevertheless, Maimonides realizes that this response is not in itself satisfying for the vast number of individuals who are unable to attain this intellectually detached perspective. He therefore introduces a straightforward typology, distinguishing between metaphysical, natural, and moral evil. The first type of evil refers back to the ontological make-up of matter itself: it is because we are endowed with matter that we suffer the material infirmities we deem evil. Laying the groundwork for his subsequent discussion of divine omnipotence, Maimonides dismisses the obvious objection of why could not God have created “coming to be” without “passing away” with an *ad hominem*:

He who wishes to be endowed with flesh and bones and at the same time not be subject to impressions and not to be attained by any of the concomitants of matter merely wishes, without being awareness of it, to combine two contraries, namely, to be subject to impressions, and not to be subject to them (Maimonides 1963, III.12: 443).

In other words, the very nature of “being a human being” requires essentially that we be subject to generation and corruption, and the latter carries with it all the pains and imperfections we associate with human life. Maimonides adumbrates the strain to be popularized by Leibniz, namely that this is the best of all possible worlds. God could not have created a matter with a more perfect nature: material stuff “is generated in the most possible way in which it is possible to be generated out of that specific matter” (Maimonides 1963, III.12: 444). Maimonides’ second category of evils we may term “social evils,” namely those pertaining to political upheaval or moral behavior. These two are relatively rare, in Maimonides’ mind.

It is the third category of evil, what we may call personal evils, that most concern Maimonides. Here we hear echoes of Maimonides the physician, admonishing his flock not to overindulge in eating, drinking, sexual licentiousness, etc., resulting in personal harm. Maimonides divides personal evils into evils we bring upon ourselves

physically (diseases of the body), and those we introduce psychically (diseases of the mind). With respect to the first, it is clearly overindulgence that is to blame: reminiscent of Socrates’ exhortation in the *Phaedo* not to indulge in bodily pursuits, Maimonides reminds us that vice with respect to eating, drinking, and copulation are due to “excess in regard to quantity or irregularly or when the quality of the foodstuffs is bad” (Maimonides 1963, III.12: 445).

Diseases of the soul are a bit more complex. In the first place, overindulgence on the bodily side cannot help but affect our moral temperament, and so that is reason enough to exercise physical restraint. Furthermore, as a result of physical overindulgence, we tend to lust after items that will satisfy these physical desires: unlike the pursuit of items necessary to human survival, the desire for superfluous possessions is endless and leads to infinite desire, lust, and avarice. Interestingly enough, the “necessaries” such as air, water, and food, tend to be more accessible and cheaper, while the less necessary luxuries tend to be less accessible and hence more expensive. Were we to eliminate our desires for these luxuries, our soul would cease to suffer needless anxiety and the concomitant evils that accrue upon their pursuit. Hence, it is human will that introduces this third variety of evil.

But evil must be understood against the backdrop of divine providence, for it might be argued that a benevolent, omniscient, and omnipotent deity should and would be able subvert evil and suffering. Maimonides presents in chapters III: 15–22 a theory of divine providence according to which the Active Intellect watches over humans in the sublunar world as a result of a divine overflow with which human intellect is united. That a ship goes down at sea is the result of chance, but “the fact that the people in the ship went on board. . . is, according to our opinion, not due to chance, but to divine will in accordance with the deserts of those people as determined in his judgments” (Maimonides 1963, III.17: 472). In other words, providence is consequent upon the perfection of human intellect and reflects the causal and ontological grid whereby God orders reality: in order for God to permit a causal nexus according to which certain people board the ship and others



not, God must know, as it were, whether or not they are deserving of providence.

Already commentators in Maimonides' own time were aware of the apparent discrepancy in Maimonides' position. Maimonides too was not unaware of the difficulties inherent in this position, as evidenced by his attempt once more at the end of the *Guide* to explain why it is that often the righteous (who ostensibly should be most firmly united with the divine overflow) nevertheless suffer. Claiming that divine providence is constantly watching over those who have obtained the intellectual overflow from God, Maimonides argues in *Guide* III.51 that evil attends to those who withdraw their attentions from God: "providence withdraws from him during the time when he is occupied with something else" (Maimonides 1963, III.51: 625). Prophets or excellent persons suffer evil only during times of distraction, the "greatness of the calamity being proportionate to the duration of the period of distraction or to the vileness of the matter with which he was occupied" (Ibid).

## Conclusion

We have seen that Jewish philosophy arises out of a clash of two worldviews: the tenets of Jewish faith and belief on the one hand, and the strictures of philosophy on the other. This clash permeated much of Jewish philosophical debate in the Middle Ages. Discussions pertaining to divine predication, creation, divine omniscience, and theodicy have reflected this tension. In short, both these philosophers reflect the medieval Jewish attempt to reconcile traditional Jewish beliefs with what they feel are the strongest points in Greek philosophy, be it Plato, Aristotle, or Neoplatonism; although a synthesis of these systems is their ultimate goal, the strictures of philosophy often win out at the expense of theology.

## Cross-References

- ▶ [Gersonides](#)
- ▶ [Hasdai Crescas](#)
- ▶ [Moses Maimonides](#)
- ▶ [Saadia Gaon](#)

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## Philosophy, Arabic

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### Abstract

In Islam, the revealed text reminds human beings of their need to know (Qur'ān, XVI, 78). Muslims embarked on an intellectual task, which was expressed in different discourses: theology, jurisprudence, mysticism,

linguistics, history, and philosophy. The latter took shape when Islamic thought came into contact with Greek philosophy, giving rise to a movement called *falsafa*: philosophy. This movement continued and recreated Greek philosophical thought in the Islamic world. The great issues that interested philosophers were the relationship between philosophy and religion, the explanation for and conception of the universe and its origin, and human beings and their social and political conduct. *Falsafa* enjoyed productive expansion and diffusion throughout the Islamic world, first in the East and later in the West, where it exerted a powerful influence on the thought of Latinized areas: it contributed to the transmission of Greek philosophy to Europe and to new developments in the medieval philosophy of the Latin world.

Islamic thought was grounded in the hermeneutic situations Muslims found in their religious sources. The first part of the profession of faith, "There is no god but God," began a process of knowledge, which generated a kind of philosophy built on the divine unity of the First Principle as opposed to the multiplicity of the universe. The second part, "Muḥammad is the messenger of God," reveals another aspect of Islam, in which it defines itself as founded on prophecy. This called for a doctrine that was able to explain divine revelation and prophethood.

Many different thinkers took up the task, and among these were the philosophers. They attempted to find a rational justification for prophethood, affirming that the ability to have visions and the special relationship prophets maintain with the Active Intellect, as well as the special enlightenment they receive, were all part of human nature.

Was this a "prophetic philosophy?" There was certainly a strain of philosophy that developed in this direction, produced by the party of 'Alī, the *Shī'a*. They focused their thought on prophecy and originated a prophetic brand of philosophy, in which there can be seen considerable Gnostic and Zoroastrian influences from the Persian

world. The central idea of their philosophy lies in reaching the hidden meaning of divine revelation. On this depends the truth of human existence: the meaning of humankind's origin and destiny. The resulting esoteric and Gnostic thought revealed a cognitive and scientific universe applied to the exegesis of revelation, in which the sciences of the Hermetic–Pythagoric tradition had their place. This is what can be inferred from the *Epistles*, written by the Ikhwān al-Ṣafā', the Brethren of Purity, or Brethren of Sincerity. Their philosophical system is a mixture of religion and Pythagoric, Platonic, and Neoplatonic doctrines. The central idea is the hierarchy running downward from the One, according to Pythagoric numeric combinations. It concludes with the exposition of the return of Unity.

But philosophy in the Islamic world was also something else. It has been maintained that philosophy comprised the different aspects and forms taken by Islamic thought, by virtue of the eastern idea of *ḥikma*, wisdom, which implies a broad conception in which the divine and the human, the mundane and the religious, are two facets of the same reality. However, more detailed study of the uses of the terms *ḥikma* and *falsafa*, identified in many classical Arabic texts (Aristotle was called the "wise" and the "philosopher"), reveals that not all of the disciplines making up Muslim thought should form part of something as specific as *falsafa*. The latter emerged as a form of learning independent from, although linked to, other expressions of Muslim thought.

This is the conception that can be inferred from some writers. Ibn Qutayba (d. 889) held that the training of wise men and religious authorities should be based on several sciences: religion, philology, ethics, and also Greek philosophy, in order to be able to refute it. 'Umar Khayyām (d. 1131) maintained in his *Epistle on Existence* that among the categories of thinkers there are Greek-influenced philosophers who use rational arguments, endeavor to know the laws of logic, and are not content with mere arguments from personal conviction. For al-Ġazālī (d. 1111), the philosophers are a group of researchers characterized by the use of logic and deductive reasoning. Ibn Khaldūn (d. 1406) states that the intellectual

sciences differ from traditional sciences in that the former are innate in humans and may be grasped through rational and reflective ability and therefore may also be called philosophical sciences.

Philosophical thought was therefore an expression of Islamic thought with its own specific characteristics. Philosophers were able to adopt and adapt Greek philosophy to find answers to theoretical and experiential problems. Due to its evolutionary maturity, philosophy was able to find ways around obstacles that emerged and hindered the development of ideas. Arabic philosophy was not external to the context in which it emerged; its existence was possible because the thought structured around the ideas of the Qurʾān and the *ḥadīth* had already reached maturity. Philosophy could be seen as a set of doctrines that attempted to interpret Islam from outside Muslim thought using non-Muslim tools; but also as a new way to finding a meaning in the law of God using very different means from those used up to that point. Philosophers explain and interpret the meaning of Qurʾānic *āyāt* in the light of new methodological principles. This philosophy was religious and is inseparable from other aspects of the culture in which it was born. Its originality lay in the discovery that human reason was capable of leading humankind to the understanding of Truth.

The reading of Platonic, Aristotelian, and Neoplatonic texts gave it an eclectic character. The synthesis that structured philosophical thought was a mixture of Neoplatonism and Aristotelianism, until Ibn Rushd. The link maintained by this philosophy with science was another of its characteristics, because Greek knowledge was seen as being the unifying intellectual element. Practical knowledge helped to complete the education of the perfect human, able to master nature, and understand all its secrets. The assimilation, use, and transformation of this material from outside Islamic culture resulted in doctrines dealing with issues such as the relationship between philosophy, revelation, and the rational justification of prophethood; the explanation of the Oneness of God, the First Being, and the formation of the universe, as well as the relationship between the affirmation of the individual and social reality of humans, and the political implications of

membership of the Muslim community. The basic doctrines of Islamic philosophy were articulated around these three main issues and their most important exponents were al-Kindī (d. c. 873), al-Fārābī (d. 950), and Ibn Sīnā (d. 1037), in the East; Ibn Bājjā (d. c. 1138), Ibn Ṭufayl (d. 1185), and Ibn Rushd (d. 1198), in al-Andalus.

The first of these issues to be raised was the explanation of the relationship between philosophy and religion. Aristotelian texts had made clear the existence of Reason, by means of which humans can reach Truth. Conceived as a tool providing rules applicable to human knowledge and endeavor in order to avoid error, the Arabic term for logic was *al-mantiq*. The term derives from the root *n-t-q*, whose verbal noun, *nutq*, originally meant “articulated, uttered, pronounced word”; from this, it came to mean “reason,” because only someone equipped with reason can articulate words with meaning. Therefore, logic in Arabic meant “the place of reason” or, rather, “the place of rational words.” But Islam, as a religion, already had another word: the word of God as expressed in the Qurʾān, which is God’s revealed word given to human beings; and as such, non-logical, nonrational word. What is the relationship between these two words? Do they contradict or complement each other? Are they mutually exclusive or integrable? The problem was therefore posed between faith in the given word and a word-creating reason; between religion as the Word of God and philosophy as the word of humankind. It has been said that this problem was raised to reconcile philosophy and religion and bring them into line with each other; some have seen it as a rejection of religion by philosophy; others as the concealment of philosophy under a blanket of religion. However, the dichotomy only makes sense when seen simply as two different paths converging on the same Truth.

Al-Kindī recognized that philosophy is the search for truth, a long road on which traveling requires effort, as it demands that the traveler integrates previous contributions. Truth can be attained through reason, provided it has the support of those dedicated to it, through the contribution made by each of their efforts. The path of

philosophy is made up of different levels, the highest of which is that relating to knowledge of the First Truth or knowledge of the divine nature and the oneness of God, of the virtues to be espoused, and the evil that must be avoided. According to al-Kindī, this is the same goal announced by the prophets, who have obtained the same knowledge via a different route from that used by the philosophers: they did not need effort, dedication, or time, nor did they have to resort to the discursive reasoning of logic and mathematics; rather they attained it with the aid of divine Will, which inspired the prophets and revealed the truth to them in an instant. There is agreement as to the goal of philosophy and religion. Both propound the truth; there is no disparity between their contents. But there is a difference in the method used; one rational, the other revealed. They are two different paths leading to the same destination.

Al-Fārābī deepened this approach and pointed to the superiority of philosophy over religion; the former has its origin in reason and the latter is fruit of the imagination. Philosophy is concept; religion is representation. In philosophy, truth can be discovered by humans intellectually whereas in religion, the prophet must translate it into symbols that the rest of humankind is able to understand. Neither is there any distinction between them regarding their origin and purpose: both come from the enlightenment of God through the Active Intellect, the last of the realities emanating from the first Being in the intelligible order. The result will either be philosophy or religion, depending on the individual faculty of the person that is enlightened in this way. If the emanation of forms that flows from the Active Intellect activates the intellect, then humans acquire intelligible truths, and become philosophers; but if that enlightenment activates the imagination, the prophet, i.e., the only human being able to receive this enlightenment in all its perfection, reproduces the intelligible truths in the form of images, and communicates them to humankind. For this reason, there is only one philosophy, one thought structure that is valid for all of humanity, while there are many religions, because of the different languages used as vehicles for the symbols.

Although Ibn Sīnā did not raise this problem directly in the same terms, it seems that he was inclined toward a solution that gave more weight to religion, which was of great importance in his thought. But he also clearly stated that the existence of the prophet is compatible with reason, and proposed a rational explanation for prophecy as something innate in human beings. On the other hand, all of his work is an account of reality following the strictest rules of reason. He did not reject the approach of his two predecessors and was attacked fiercely by al-Ġazālī for supporting doctrines that were incompatible with religion.

In al-Andalus, Ibn al-Sīd al-Baṭalyūsī (d. 1127) pointed to the possibility and need to bring reason and revelation together, as both search for and teach one single truth. He said this while defending a poet accused of *kufṛ* (infidelity or unbelief).

Ibn Bājja did not raise the issue explicitly either, but his affirmation of the superiority of the intellectual and contemplative life could be taken as a statement in favor of philosophy. The idea of the recluse dedicated to knowledge, the only one who can attain total and complete happiness by cultivating rational faculties, appears to suggest the idea of the superiority of reason over that given in revelation.

In *Ḥayy ibn Yaḡzān*, also called *Philosophus autodidactus*, Ibn Ṭufayl develops the theme of the recluse who attains the pinnacle of knowledge. This text has been interpreted mystically, but in it the author clearly puts forward the idea that what the recluse attains through the use of reason does not contradict what is propounded by religious teaching: the recluse can build a philosophical system with his own rational faculties, an interpretation of the universe that allows the ultimate and radical principle that underlies all reality to be attained from the most mundane. Contemplation is the supreme aim to which all humans must aspire, because knowledge, perfection, and happiness are attained using the intellect, in accordance with human nature.

Ibn Rushd maintained that philosophy is nothing more than the reflective study of the universe, a task to which believers are invited by revelation, because the rational consideration of the

universe cannot lead at any conclusion that runs contrary to revelation: there is only one truth and, consequently, philosophical truth, rational truth, cannot contradict the truth of religion. There are diverse paths taking humans to this truth. The author recognizes the superiority of philosophy when he maintains that the rational path is that which leads to science through the use of demonstrative argument. The other paths provide valid, but insufficient, arguments for accessing the truth.

Another issue was that related to the explanation of the entire universe by having recourse to a unique First Principle. From a religious perspective, this could be couched as the problem of creation by God. In Islam, the problem of God's relationship with the universe and whether this was eternal or had a beginning was raised. If one recognizes God and the world's eternity, then the relationship between them must also be eternal, as eternity and necessity imply, according to the Aristotelian doctrine, that an eternal relationship would be limited by necessity. As necessity excludes volition, the eternity of the universe would imply that God lacks volition and is subjected to necessity. But if the universe has been created, will and freedom can be attributed to God, because from this will originates the action that created the universe.

Theologians affirmed the radical temporality of the universe: to deny the creation of the world meant unbelief. The opposite opinion was held by philosophers, with the exception of al-Kindī, who was influenced by the theological roots from which his thought evolved. He devoted part of his writings to showing the finite, transitory, and multiple character of the universe and proving the need for an infinite, eternal, and truly unique Creator, the cause of the unity that underlies all multiplicity. Creation depended on divine will: God simply wants things to be and they are, as stated in Qur'anic passages, of which he gives a philosophical explanation, based on the idea that being originated out of non-being.

The philosophies of al-Fārābī and Ibn Sīnā, developed from Aristotelian and Neoplatonic teachings, affirmed the eternity of the universe, and offered an explanation articulated around a

process of emanation, the affirmation of the theory of causality, and the necessary nature of the universe. Al-Fārābī proposed the distinction between necessary being and possible being. A necessary being is one that cannot be not existent. Possible beings are those whose existence can be denied without being contradictory or absurd, and whose existence depends on another. The Necessary Being of al-Fārābī endorses the features of a combination of Plotinus' One and, at the same time, those of the First Unmoved Mover of Aristotle's *Physics* and *Metaphysics*. It is the absolute One; the perfect, self-sufficient, eternal, uncaused, immaterial, and without opposite being, that moves as an intelligible and benign principle. Because it is an intellect, it is able to think about itself. Its superabundance gives rise to a process of emanation that causes multiplicity to appear. This process is purely a consequence of its existence, without volition or choice; it generates a first intellect in which is present the duality of the subject that thinks and the object that is thought about. This first emanated being, through its thinking about the First Being from which it originated, generates a new intellect; on thinking about itself, it generates the first heaven. The second intellect, in turn and by the same process, causes a second intellect and a third heaven, that of the fixed stars. In this way, successive intellects are generated, until the tenth, along with the spheres of Saturn, Jupiter, Mars, the Sun, Venus, Mercury, and the Moon. The tenth intellect, identified with the Active Intellect of the Aristotelian tradition, generates the Earth, the world of generation and corruption. The universe is conceived according to an ontological hierarchy, based on six principles: the First Being, the separate intellects or second causes, the Active Intellect, the soul, form, and matter. The first three are not bodies nor are they in bodies; the last three are not bodies either, but they are joined to bodies. Matter and form are the most imperfect principles. The union of matter and form creates the physical bodies, which are subject to generation and corruption. The soul is the principle of movement, because in each being it produces a tendency, that in human beings culminates in the desire to know the cause that originated it and their first cause, the

First Being; this implies that the human being is able to trace the universe back to its origin.

Ibn Sīnā accepted this framework, although he perfected some of al-Fārābī's metaphysical concepts. He developed the idea of being as a primary concept perceived by direct intuition. He broadened the study of necessary being and possible being: that which is absolute unity, and cannot therefore have an essence–existence composition, in so far as it has no genus or difference, is indefinable and indemonstrable. In relation to possible beings, he established a distinction between those that were possible in themselves and those that were necessary, once they had received existence from the necessary being. Using this distinction, he was able to modify the emanation process, explaining it in the following way: the Necessary or First Being brings into existence, when it thinks, the first intellect. The first intellect carries out a double act of thought from which emanate three entities: this thought exists purely because it has received its existence from the First, and generates the soul that moves the first heaven; it thinks of itself as possible and generates the body of this first heaven; it thinks of the First Being, which is its cause, and brings another intellect into being. This process is repeated until the active or tenth intellect. In this process, it is the necessity of the universe that determines its eternity.

The controversy over the universe and its origin was resolved by Ibn Ṭufayl using empirical observation to examine the phenomena that surrounded him. The recluse discovers the answers to the questions formulated in his daily existence and he progresses in knowledge through experiments. He studies nature and the multiplicity of beings existing in it, reaching the conclusion of the unity of the species. He works his way up from the lowest levels of being to the highest and discovers that everything that exists has an efficient cause. Concerning the problem of the eternity or creation of the universe, he concludes that it is necessary to admit the existence of a maker from which everything emanates, whose essence is unique and whose being is similar to sunlight, which is the unmoved mover and final cause of the universe.

Ibn Rushd sets out several theories advanced on the origin of the universe. He maintains that Aristotle's theory is the most congruous with the nature of being: the agent does not produce anything, but simply unites two things that already exist, matter and form, to actualize that which is potential. For him, all creation, production, or generation is a deduction of the forms which exist in matter. In wanting to reject the Platonism of his predecessors, he had to put form within matter, as they do not exist separately. In so far as they are present in matter simply as potentiality, deduction, or extraction implies actualization. Matter is the necessary prerequisite for all production, for all creation. But it is not matter that deduces, or causes the forms potentially contained within it to come out, because its potentiality is purely passive. It requires the action of the agent, which Ibn Rushd, in several passages of his works, identifies with God. Matter is therefore unable to transform itself. The consequence of this was the affirmation of the eternity of the world.

The third issue deals with the reality of human beings, as individuals and at the political and social level, as members of a community. The philosophers extensively developed the idea of the human as a summary of the cosmos, a microcosm that reflects its reality onto the structure of the universe; with a body, a soul, and an intellect. Their intention was to follow Aristotle's *De anima* and its conception of humans, but it was the Neoplatonic vision that left its mark on their theories. The human was seen as a soul joined to a body, which, according to Ibn Sīnā, constitutes the self, the true nature of human beings. The soul, as substantial form and beginning of life, is a fundamental reality, unique and single, known by its many manifestations. These correspond to the different functions undertaken by humans and which follow Aristotle's thinking: vegetative, sensitive, appetitive, imaginative, and rational. These faculties are actualized through bodily organs, except the latter, which does not require any organ to manifest itself, due to its immaterial nature. The Arabic philosophers recognize the interdependence that exists between the body and the soul. The analysis of the soul is usually



limited to the study of knowledge processes. They speak of sense perception, which is produced when humans grasp objects that can be sensed using the sensory organs. They give great importance to the imagination as a faculty. For them the functions of imagination are not restricted to those relating to the perception of individual sense images in the absence of an observable sense object, on one hand, or the creation and composition of new sense forms based on those already perceived or on the decomposition of known images, on the other. Al-Fārābī granted imagination a new function: imitation, by virtue of which intelligible truths can be imitated, and in this way are transformed into symbols and images, implying imperfect knowledge of the intelligible truths. This provides a natural explanation for the reality of the prophetic faculties of some men, the prophets, who receive divine revelation via the enlightenment of their imagination by the Active Intellect. Finally, intellect is the faculty that is studied in depth, because it is intellect that perfects the soul and allows us to attain happiness. Following Aristotle's text, the philosophers recognize its different levels: from its initial state of pure potentiality to the level at which it acquires the intelligible forms, which is after the intermediate level where intellect obtains the first principles of science, which are the basis of the different forms of knowledge; and finally to practical life, where intellect is the faculty that allows the distinction between good and evil. The knowledge process is explained by the intervention of the Active Intellect, identified with the tenth separate intellect, that of the intelligible forms, which are conferred upon human intellect by enlightenment. This intellect is called "Giver of forms."

Humans cannot survive nor develop, unless they can associate with other human beings. Humanity will find plenitude in association. Ibn Sīnā dealt with this problem, but it was al-Fārābī who produced a theory on the social and political character of humankind. Society is necessary for happiness to be attained. There are imperfect and perfect societies, and it is only in the latter that supreme good and ultimate perfection is achieved, the real definition of true happiness. These should be states ruled by political science and organized

according to the hierarchy of the human soul. The Head of the State is Plato's philosopher-king, who must master political science. Juxtaposed to the perfect society and the virtuous city are the states whose motivations are not found in true virtue and happiness, but in the pursuit of worldly goods, which only give the appearance of goodness. These states are those of the ignorant, corrupted, disordered, lost city; those that set their ultimate goal as subsistence, honor, wealth, or pleasure; their rulers and citizens hold false conceptions of what should be the basis of the state, because they have substituted the principles of the virtuous city for others; also, it is possible that their conceptions are just, but their actions are not. All lack political science, which is the true architectural science.

Ibn Rushd maintains that, due to its independence from the body, there is only one material intellect for all individuals. He arrived at this opinion after revising his initial doctrine. At first, Ibn Rushd maintained that the material intellect was an aptitude that existed in humanity to enable the reception of intelligible forms. Later on, he maintained that this intellect was generated every time the Active Intellect acted upon an individual. In the final version, found in his *Middle Commentary on Aristotle's De Anima*, the material intellect is a single and eternal substance, shared by all humankind. This affirmation is part of an argument he had with Alexander of Aphrodisias, who, having conceived the possible intellect as individualized matter in each person, understood it as something transitory and divisible. According to Ibn Rushd, this implied that human beings did not possess their own actions, other than the purely passive action of being informed by the Active Intellect. Because Ibn Rushd maintained the oneness of the material intellect, which has the potentiality to receive all that is intelligible, he was able to provide an account of how humans can know the universals through the action of the Active Intellect.

Ibn Rushd, who dealt extensively with politics, was convinced that supreme good, ultimate perfection, and happiness could only be attained in the Perfect City, identifiable with the ideal caliphate of the first four caliphs. He develops the theory

of eudemony as fundamentally social – not merely individual – happiness, and points out the importance of political discourse for the community, since language should give rise to virtuous and just actions as an essential condition for an honest and reasonable human life. He states that rhetoric is composed of the arts of discourse and ethics; that is, of politics. He differentiates between the object of practical or political science and that of the theoretical sciences, because its purpose consists of acts that belong to volition, based on free will and choice. Although it belongs to the practical sciences as for the nature of its object, its principles and its purpose, two parts can be identified within it: the first, that is general or theoretical, dealing with the ways and habits of the soul, and the second, that is strictly practical, showing how these ways and habits are established in the soul and their organization within social groups. He insists that the main purpose of ethical discourse is the governance of the city and, more specifically, the good that that government must strive for. The central point here is the noble art of city governance. For him, the theoretical part of politics should teach to the political government how to proceed toward the happiness of citizens, and should contain all general principles relating to that happiness. Ibn Rushd moves away from al-Fārābī in that he does not succumb to purely theoretical speculation, rather he makes continual reference to Islamic history and the politics of his era, which allow us to better situate his view on Islamic society.

## Cross-References

- ▶ Aristotle, Arabic
- ▶ Doxographies, Graeco-Arabic
- ▶ al-Fārābī, Abū Naṣr
- ▶ al-Ġazālī, Abū Ḥāmid Muḥammad
- ▶ Ibn Bājja, Abū Bakr ibn al-Sā'ig (Avempace)
- ▶ Ibn Rushd, Muḥammad ibn Aḥmad al-Ḥafid (Averroes)
- ▶ Ibn Sīnā, Abū 'Alī (Avicenna)
- ▶ Ibn Ṭufayl, Abū Bakr (Abubacer)
- ▶ Ismā'īlī Philosophical Tradition
- ▶ al-Kindī, Abū Yūsuf Ya'qūb ibn Ishāq

- ▶ Logic in the Arabic and Islamic World
- ▶ Natural Philosophy, Arabic
- ▶ Plato, Arabic
- ▶ Political Philosophy, Arabic

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to stretch from Saadia Gaon (882–942) to Isaac Abravanel (1437–1508). In between these two bookends exist a handful of “Neoplatonists” (e.g., Solomon ibn Gabirol, Abraham ibn Ezra), their critics (e.g., Judah Halevi), the towering Aristotelian synthesis of Maimonides (1138–1204), followed by a series of epigonic thinkers (e.g., Samuel ibn Tibbon, Joseph Kaspi), and several more original thinkers (e.g., Gersonides and Hasdai Crescas).

Such is the master narrative of medieval Jewish philosophy. In what follows I subscribe, for the sake of convenience, to this narrative; however, it is important to be aware that too strict an adherence to it potentially prevents us from including individuals traditionally left out of this canon (e.g., Judah al-Harizi, Isaac Polleqar), movements (e.g., rabbinic thought, kabbalah), or issues (e.g., animals, literature, genres). With this in mind, what follows presents the general contours of medieval Jewish philosophy and, even though it mentions specific individuals, this entry works on the assumption that more details concerning many of these thinkers will be dealt with more exhaustively in cognate entries.

### Problematics

Medieval Jewish philosophy, like all religious philosophies, is the attempt to reconcile the potentially irreconcilable: rationalism under the guise of Greek philosophy and faith as taught by religious scripture. For some, let us call them “religious philosophers,” reason and faith naturally went together *at least when properly interpreted*. For most, however, the two worldviews could never coexist because they represented two completely different modalities and thus two mutually exclusive sets of authority. If reason was based on the free exercise of the rational faculty, religion was dependent upon a series of commandments derived, not from reason, but from revelation. Whereas the majority of philosophical speculation was, for example, predicated on the eternity of the universe (as Aristotelian

## Philosophy, Jewish

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### Abstract

Although “medieval Jewish philosophy” as a concept and field of study was not coined until the modern period, the term nonetheless denotes a series of features and concerns shared by a number of individuals between the tenth and sixteenth centuries. The tendency however has been to draw a fairly circumscribed line defining *the* “canon” of medieval Jewish philosophy that is perceived

physics presupposed), religion needed an omnipotent and omniscient deity who created the world *ex nihilo*.

We witness all of these tensions, and others, in medieval Jewish philosophy. The Bible presents a God who creates the universe from nothing, who is described using anthropomorphic and anthropopathic language, who chooses one people (i.e., the Jews) over others, and who will redeem the world at the end of times. On the human side, Jews possess a series of commandments – many of which, on first blush, appear to be irrational (e.g., the mixing of various substances) – that govern every aspect of their life (from circumcision to diet to death) and whose performance is connected to religious, if not necessarily intellectual, perfection.

The reconciliation of faith and reason, religious practice and intellectual speculation, becomes the goal of Jewish philosophy. As a result, medieval Jewish philosophers engaged in the interpretation of each one of these apparently contradictory activities in terms of the other. If the first chapter of Genesis, for example, claims that God created the world *ex nihilo*, then how might this act of creation be compatible with Neoplatonic or Aristotelian metaphysics? If the commandments dictate that Jewish males must be circumcised on the eighth day after birth or that Jews must refrain from mixing meat and dairy, how can such practices be reconcilable with larger and more universal sets of ethical claims?

This reconciliation was facilitated by a series of readings that included a number of hermeneutical strategies, the most important of which was allegory. Beginning as early as Philo of Alexandria (20 BCE–50 CE), Jewish philosophers engaged in the practice of using allegory to show that when the biblical text says something that *apparently* does not coincide with the dictates of reason, it is not the case that the Bible is wrong, only that our understanding of it is. The result is that the literal level of the Bible must be reinterpreted – critics would say interpreted away – so that it may now be seen to coincide with reason. This use of allegory would subsequently be employed by virtually every medieval Jewish philosopher as a way to smooth over the

potential roadblocks that prevented the smooth harmonization of philosophy and religion. If the philosophers thought that they had succeeded in this, their critics accused them of perfidy and of making a mockery of religious texts and the commandments derived therefrom.

## Canons

As should be apparent from the above, the canons of Jewish philosophy are twofold: Jewish and non-Jewish. As for the former, all Jewish philosophy can be understood, at least phenomenologically, as the attempt to explain rationally the traditional sources of Judaism (e.g., Torah, Talmud). As for the latter, all Jewish philosophy is the explanation of these concepts using the interpretive grids supplied by non-Jewish philosophical schools (e.g., Neoplatonism, Scholasticism, Humanism).

There exists, with one or two possible exceptions, virtually no works written by Jews devoted solely to the topic of philosophy. There is, for example, no “Jewish” Averroes i.e., someone who was interested solely in interpreting Aristotle and who had very little concern for religion or religious ideas. This led Leo Strauss to make his famous (or perhaps infamous) proclamation that the most famous and important work of Jewish philosophy, Maimonides’ *Guide of the Perplexed*, “is not a philosophic book – a book written by a philosopher for a philosopher – but a Jewish book: a book written by a Jew for Jews” (1963: xv). This signals that Jewish philosophy, while certainly a speculative enterprise, is first and foremost an exegetical endeavor, the attempt to read philosophy into the Torah and *vice versa*. If we want to find “pure” philosophical treatises, devoid of religious concerns, we often search in vain.

Despite the fact that there exist very few pure philosophical treatises, nineteenth-century German-Jewish scholars associated with the movement *Wissenschaft des Judentums* (“The Science of Judaism”) nevertheless had no problems in defining an object of study that they labeled as medieval Jewish philosophy. They subsequently created a canon of thinkers, and

treatises, that they believed adequately contributed to such a field of study. Like all such canons created in the nineteenth century, it put pride of place on great men and original works, and tended to marginalize others – especially those who wrote commentaries to these earlier works – as epigonic and unoriginal. Perhaps because of the apparent freedom that Jews enjoyed under eleventh- and twelfth-century Muslim rule and the concomitant desire for equality in Germany, these *Wissenschaft* scholars tended to focus on the philosophers from Muslim Spain (al-Andalus). They identified these medieval Andalusí Jewish thinkers with a classical “golden age” and viewed the period between this golden age and their own as one of gradual decline. In their quest to revivify Jewish life they created, what Shmuel Feiner calls, a “pantheon of historical heroes” (2002: 50–65) and, in many ways, they shaped this pantheon in their own image.

In their desire to make Judaism a religion of reason, to use the phrase of Hermann Cohen, all that did not fit within a rather strict definition of “rationality” was excluded and often ridiculed as obscurantist. In other words, “Jewish philosophy” was artificially extracted from “Jewish mysticism” (kabbalah) or “Talmudism” when in fact the boundaries between them were often quite porous. The end result is that “medieval Jewish philosophy” was developed – and a canon of thinkers and works imagined – as a way to correct perceived excesses and lacunae in modern Judaism.

This is certainly not to claim that medieval Jewish philosophy was simply an invention of nineteenth-century German-Jewish scholars, however. What it does signal is that we must be aware of the potential artificiality of the enterprise and thereby realize that their definition of Jewish philosophy may in fact be too narrow or too ideological. Moreover, we should not let received opinion about medieval Jewish philosophy shackle the way we imagine it, the various relationships configured between philosophers and its discontents, in the future.

A case in point that tests the potential artificiality of “medieval Jewish philosophy” is the curious work of Solomon ibn Gabirol (1021–c. 1058)

entitled *The Fountain of Life*, which, although written in Arabic, survived only in a Latin translation known as the *Fons vitae*. This treatise is a purely metaphysical work and – with the possible exception of one quotation (from the mystical *Sefer Yetzira*, and not the Bible) – makes no mention of Judaism whatsoever. We thus have no idea how Ibn Gabirol either extracted his ideas from scripture or read them into it. As a result, subsequent Jewish philosophers largely ignored the work, although it would come to play an important role in Christian scholasticism, where its author was assumed to be a Muslim (the so-called “Avencebrol”). It was not until the nineteenth century that Solomon Munk found Hebrew excerpts of the work and proved their identity with the *Fons vitae* that the text finally became associated with Ibn Gabirol. So what do we do with Ibn Gabirol? Is his *Fons vitae* a work of Jewish philosophy just because its author was Jewish? The tendency is to focus less on his *Fons vitae* and more on his “Jewish” works such as his philosophical poem *Keter Malkhut* that explicitly addresses Jewish themes and is replete with biblical prooftexts.

## Schools

In the opening line of his *Die Philosophie des Judentums*, Julius Guttmann writes: “The Jewish people did not begin to philosophize because of any irresistible urge to do so. They received philosophy from outside sources, and the history of Jewish philosophy is a history of the successive absorptions of foreign ideas which were then transformed and adapted according to specific Jewish points of view” (1964: 3). Although the particular datum of Jewish philosophy has not changed, the philosophical lenses used to interpret this datum have largely been contingent upon the larger intellectual worlds in which Jews lived. In the period under discussion there were primarily three such philosophical schools: Neoplatonism, Aristotelianism, and Humanism.

After the thought of Philo who, *pace* Harry Wolfson’s formulation, had very little influence on subsequent Jewish philosophical speculation,

rationalism reenters Judaism in the Islamic period, initially under the guise of rational theology (*kalām*). One of the earliest Jewish rationalists was Saadia Gaon (882–942), whose main work, *The Book of Opinions and Beliefs*, was an attempt to integrate Jewish theological speculation with Greek thought as mediated by Muslim rationalist theologians. In this, he largely sets the stage for the majority of Jewish philosophical speculation in the Islamic world for the next three centuries. For example, Saadia held that Torah and philosophy mutually reinforced one another and that scientific speculation could be invoked to defend traditional Jewish beliefs such as God's unity and the creation of the world.

Although Saadia was primarily a theologian, albeit with a rationalist temperament, "Jewish philosophy" would begin in earnest in the generations after him. In this regard, Neoplatonism became the dominant philosophical worldview between the ninth and twelfth centuries. Although largely the product of Plotinus and Proclus, Neoplatonic ideas tended to circulate in the name of Aristotle (e.g., *The Theology of Aristotle*, *The Book of the Apple*). Two ideas central to Neoplatonism in all of its many guises were the doctrine of the emanation and the myth of the soul. Based on Aristotle's obscure discussion in *De anima*, and later comments on it by the likes of Alexander of Aphrodisias and Themistius, emanation sought to solve the problem of how multiplicity arises from unity. As it came to be worked out, the self-reflection or self-intellection of the One entails the emergence of a pure Intellect. By contemplating itself and its source, this pure Intellect gives rise to a second intellect and the outermost sphere of the heavens. The subsequent sequence of intellects and spheres carries down to the tenth and lowest of the supernal or heavenly intellects, the Active Intellect, and the nethermost celestial sphere, that of the moon. As developed by later Aristotelians, the Active Intellect is responsible for the projection of universal forms or archetypes onto matter, and for actualization of human intellect.

The myth of the soul conceives of the human soul as ontically related to the universal Soul, whence it departs to live in a human body. Trapped in the body, the soul can either aspire to

reascend to its celestial home or become mired in the filth of matter. The way for the soul to reascend is by means of the study of philosophy. Typical Jewish Neoplatonists include Isaac Israeli (850–c. 932), Bahya ibn Paquda (fl. first half of the eleventh century), Solomon ibn Gabirol (1021–c. 1058), Abraham bar Hiyya (d. c. 1136), Joseph ibn Zaddik (d. 1149), and Abraham ibn Ezra (1089–1164).

In the late twelfth century, Aristotelianism largely displaced Neoplatonism as the regnant discourse among Jewish intellectuals. It was certainly not a clean break: If Neoplatonism had absorbed many Aristotelian elements, the opposite also held true. As a result, Aristotle's metaphysical structures were altered by the adoption of the doctrine of emanation, and the purpose of knowledge took on religious connotations since its ultimate goal was perceived to be the apprehension of the metaphysical world. However, the monism of Neoplatonism was gradually replaced by the dualism of form and matter, and the human soul – no longer regarded as an emanation from the universal Soul – became defined as the form of the body. The Neoplatonic theory of knowledge as recollection or remembrance gave way to the Aristotelian theory of observation and abstraction from sensual phenomena. Finally, Aristotelian ethics lacked the religious character of Neoplatonic ethics that enjoined humans to liberate themselves from the bonds of matter and to elevate themselves to the celestial home by means of spiritual perfection. Important early Jewish Aristotelians include Abraham ibn Daud (1110–1180) and Moses Maimonides (1138–1204).

Perhaps owing to both the novelty and the potential for misunderstanding, early Aristotelians such as Ibn Daud and Maimonides tended to write esoterically, only hinting at implicit connections between Judaism and philosophy. In the post-Maimonidean era, however, many of those who commented on Maimonides' work were not as concerned with maintaining the same level of secrecy. The result is that Maimonides was translated, both literally and linguistically, into other conceptual idioms, revealing his secrets, as it were. Samuel ibn Tibbon (c. 1165–1232) who lived in Provence, for instance, translated the



*Guide* and many other philosophical works produced by Jews and Muslims (e.g., Avicenna, al-Fārābī) into Hebrew.

Samuel ibn Tibbon also wrote two original treatises: A commentary on Ecclesiastes and a philosophical-exegetical monograph by the name of *Ma'amar Yiqqawu ha-Mayim* (Treatise on *Let the Waters be Gathered* [i.e., *Gen 1:9*]). Both treatises discuss philosophical ideas in the form of biblical exegesis; and they both borrow and apply methods developed by Maimonides in his *Guide*. Ibn Tibbon, as well as other members of his family – for example, his son-in-law, Jacob Anatoli (c. 1194–1256) and his son, Moses ibn Tibbon (fl. 1240–1283) – was responsible for helping the thought of Averroes make further inroads into Jewish philosophy. Anatoli is noteworthy because he was one of the first Jewish philosophers that had direct contact with Christian Scholastics, including the famous scholar Michael Scott, when he was the court physician to Emperor Frederick II Hohenstaufen at Naples. The thirteenth century, to quote Colette Sirat, was “a century of translations and encyclopedias” (1985: 231). Both of these were ultimately responsible for the dissemination of philosophy and science to a growing class of upwardly mobile Jewish court bureaucrats (Tirosh-Samuels 2003: 251–252).

In many ways we can consider Samuel ibn Tibbon as the founder of Maimonideanism, a philosophical-exegetical movement that radicalized Maimonides and that would continue for centuries. This new movement however did certainly not go unchecked or uncriticized. The rise of Maimonideanism gave way to series of intra-communal tensions usually referred to as the “Maimonidean Controversies,” which revolved around the reception, role, and function of Maimonides’ writings. These controversies were not simply a matter of academic debate, but were a series of acrimonious personal and communal conflicts about the direction of Jewish culture, including the age-old struggle religion and philosophy.

The goal of philosophy in this period was to inculcate the values of philosophy in as large an audience as possible as opposed to working out

technical philosophical problems in obscure treatises. The main way that philosophy was produced in this period was, as mentioned, through encyclopedias and commentaries, in addition to sermons, dialogues, and poetry (Hughes 2008: 53–106). Major thinkers in these debates included philosophical popularizers such as Shem Tov ibn Falaquera (c. 1225–c. 1295). In its most radical form, Maimonideans – as articulated in such individuals as Joseph ibn Kaspi (1280–after 1332) – claimed that philosophy represented the inner, hidden meaning of the Torah. Whereas Maimonides had tried to keep philosophy and religion in creative counterpoint, such individuals held that the plain meaning of the Torah, and thus all the teachings and practices of Judaism, were simply the means to a higher, intellectual end.

In the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, Jewish philosophy continued to be written and disseminated primarily in the form of commentary. It is, of course, important to be aware that although the genre of commentary outwardly appears conservative, upon closer inspection much original thinking goes on in it, as commentators propound new and often highly original ideas in the guise of earlier thinkers. In this period it is difficult to determine to just what extent Jewish philosophers were familiar with developments in scholastic philosophy. Many of the major Provençal philosophers – e.g., Gersonides (1288–1344), Moses Narboni (d. c. 1362) – reveal little signs of such influence, and the major thinker that they seem to struggle with is Averroes. In contrast, philosophers who flourish in the late fourteenth century and early fifteenth – e.g., Profiat Duran (c. 1350–c. 1415), Joseph Albo (c. 1380–1444), Abraham Bibago (c. 1446–c. 1489) – are much more conservative and their main task, in the aftermath of strong persecution and proselytizing efforts on the Iberian Peninsula, was to combat what they perceived to be the pernicious influence of Averroism on Spanish Jewry.

If Maimonides was the most important Jewish thinker in the medieval period, second place must surely go to Gersonides. He wrote philosophical commentaries on virtually all of the books of the Bible, in addition to composing an original treatise, *Wars of the Lord*. Although Gersonides lived

in a larger intellectual environment permeated by scholasticism, his philosophical world was that of Muslim Spain, despite the fact that he could not read Arabic. Gersonides' thought is largely concerned with reconciling the Aristotelianism of Averroes with the theology of Maimonides.

Increasingly in the fifteenth century, we begin to witness the absorption and systematization of Christian thought and philosophy, including the different currents of Scholasticism (Thomism, Scotism, Nominalism) in Jewish philosophy. This may well be the result of better knowledge among Jewish elites, possible Jewish attendance at Christian schools and academies, and perhaps even the existence of similar Jewish institutions. As a consequence we begin to see the employment of Scholastic methods, especially by Iberian thinkers, and even explicit references to Latin Scholastic authors by so-called "Jewish Averroists" (Zonta 14–15). Such thinkers include Abraham Bibago (c. 1446–c. 1489), Abraham Shalom (d. 1492), Isaac Arama (c. 1420–1494), and Isaac Abravanel (1437–1508).

Some have argued that Hebrew Scholasticism in Iberia is part of the attempt to defend Judaism from its two main intellectual opponents at this time: Christianity and radical Averroism (Tirosh-Samuelson 2003: 504–505). Others, however, claim that the absorption of Scholasticism was primarily for philosophical reasons (Zonta 2006: 22). Hebrew Scholasticism was also popular in Italy, where individuals included Judah Messer Leon (c. 1470–c. 1526) and his disciples Abraham Farissol (1451–1525); the last major Jewish Averroist and one with Scholastic leanings was Elijah del Medigo (c. 1458–c. 1493).

Jewish philosophy in fifteenth-century Italy was also heavily influenced by parallel developments of Humanism in Christian thought. The recovery of Greek texts and the revival of Platonism and Neoplatonism in the middle of the fifteenth century coincided with a parallel movement in Jewish thinkers. One of the earliest Jewish thinkers to absorb these Humanistic trends was the aforementioned Judah Messer Leon, whose *Book of the Honeycomb's Flow* attempted to show how the rhetorical and aesthetical innovations actually derived from the biblical

narrative (Hughes 2010). For Messer Leon, it was the Torah, as opposed to the ancient orators, that exemplifies perfect speech. Perhaps the best example of humanism in Jewish garb is the enigmatic Judah Abravanel (c. 1465–after 1521). His *Dialoghi d'Amore* represents one of the first treatises in Jewish philosophy written in Italian, and it shows the influence of Ficino's interest in pagan ancient wisdom and its compatibility with Judaism.

## Critics

The rationalist agenda in Judaism was certainly not without its critics. Although we have already witnessed this criticism of Maimonides during the so-called Maimonidean Controversies, there also exist several important individuals who tried to offer alternatives to philosophy. Although often trained in philosophy, their goal was to undermine the philosophical enterprise from within. In this regard, perhaps the best known is the pre-Maimonidean Judah Halevi (c. 1075–1141). At the age of 50, so the legend goes, Halevi turned his back on what he perceived to be the inauthenticity of Judeo-Arabic cultural forms. Disillusioned with the inter-confessional Neoplatonism of his day, he was especially critical of how it ignored the particularities of the historical record, especially when it came to Judaism. In his *Kuzari*, a dialogue, the rabbinic protagonist responds to the philosopher's articulation of the "God of Aristotle" with the credo that "I believe in the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob." With this claim he signals the importance of experience over intellection, and that without the proper actions belief is ultimately unimportant. He also faults the philosophers for their improbable speculation about divine intellects (e.g., why should there be only ten) and about causation.

Like Halevi, Hasdai Crescas (1340–1410) attempted to undermine the dominant philosophical system of his age, now the Aristotelianism of Maimonides and Averroes. He did this primarily by trying to disprove Aristotle's physics. In so doing, he rejected Aristotle's conception of a self-contained universe wherein everything

moves toward its natural place. He further rejected the Aristotelian account that ruled out an actual infinite series of causes. Crescas argued, on the contrary, that infinite time, infinite space, and an infinite series of causes was indeed possible. This infinite universe, in turn, was held together by infinite divine love that regulated both cosmic and human affairs. Crescas also sought to undermine the Maimonidean *summum bonum* of intellectual perfection and the conjunction between the human and Active intellects. Rather, he argued that human perfection was based on the love of God actualized through the performance of the divine commandments as revealed in the Torah.

Isaac Abravanel (1437–1508) – father of Judah Abravanel – was highly critical of Maimonides. He faults Maimonides, and his later followers, for defining Judaism in accord with the foreign fashion of other nations. For Abravanel, however, Judaism has nothing in common with foreign sciences because the teachings of the Torah are revelations from God. He particularly faulted Maimonides’ attempts to define the principles or articles of faith of Judaism. Such a task, according to Abravanel, was impossible because all the commandments are of equal value. He is also highly critical of Maimonides’ conception that prophetic visions were creations of the imaginative faculty and thus susceptible to rational description. On the contrary, Abravanel argued that they were miraculous occurrences and he thus defends the irrationality of miracles and their importance for Judaism.

## Themes

Since Aristotelian cosmology and all of the sciences that followed in its wake were predicated on the eternity of the universe, this seemed, at first blush, to contradict the biblical account of creation *ex nihilo*. The creation of the universe from nothing implied an omnipotent and omniscient God that could work freely in the universe, and subsequently make other facets of Judaism (e.g., revelation, redemption, miracles) possible. Some Jewish philosophers contended that God did in fact create the world out of nothing (e.g., Saadia

Gaon); others contended that the world was created but that it would exist without end (e.g., Gersonides); other that the universe was eternal (e.g., Moses Narboni); and still others (e.g., Crescas) that the world is eternally emanated from God by means of the eternal divine will. The biggest debate in medieval Jewish philosophy concerns the opinion of Maimonides on the status of the universe (Seeskin 2005: 6–34). Because he nowhere specifies his opinion clearly, later (and modern) commentators have ascribed to him both the opinions of creation *ex nihilo* and eternity, in addition to the Platonic belief that the world was created out of preexistent matter.

Another issue of concern to medieval Jewish philosophers was prophecy. Because biblical books tended to be full of various anthropomorphisms and anthropopathisms, these were often difficult to reconcile with the rational teachings of philosophy. The fullest discussion of prophecy occurs in Maimonides’ *Guide of the Perplexed*, wherein he argues that revelation is the product of the prophet’s imaginative faculty. This permits prophets to take rational truths and enwrap them in poetic and rhetorical flourishes so as to communicate philosophical truths to nonphilosophers. It is up to the philosopher, however, to retranslate, as it were, these highly literary and figurative images back into the language of philosophy (Hughes 2010). Indeed, as mentioned, this is in many ways the *raison d’être* of the medieval Jewish philosophical program.

The problem of immortality also concerned medieval Jewish philosophers. Virtually all agreed that there existed some part of the individual, that which constitutes the essence of humans *qua* humans, that survives the death of the body. For them, this essence was the intellect or rational soul. Whereas traditional Judaism and more conservative thinkers would argue that immortality is derived from the proper relationship that the individual has with God through the observance of the commandments, the philosophers tend to locate immortality in the acquisition and mastery of the secular sciences. There is also some debate as to whether immortality is personal or impersonal. Most seem to imply that it is the latter since only the perfected intellect can become immortal, with

the corporal and hence individualizing aspects departing with the death of the body.

Another central feature of medieval Jewish philosophy was the status of divine attributes. Ontologically, how are we to assign attributes to God (e.g., might, justice) without jeopardizing his unity? If God does possess attributes, in what way can they be said to exist? When the Bible speaks of God's strength or God's speech, how does it employ such terms? Are they symbols, metaphors, or analogies? Most of the Jewish philosophers stress the absolute unity and unfathomability of the divine essence, while at the same time claiming that we can know something of God's attributes of action (e.g., righteousness, lovingkindness). Saadia, for example, denies the existence of separate divine attributes and instead insists on the perfect unity of God with His knowledge, wisdom, life, and so on. Maimonides, on the other hand, argues that all of the attributes that are applicable to God are "negative," that is, they are attributes whose opposites are to be negated of God. To say that God possesses life, for example, means that we negate of God the trait of death. In an attempt to preserve divine unity, however, Gersonides argued that attributes are predicated of God primarily and only predicated of creatures in a secondary manner. So although God and his creatures may appear to be similar, they are in fact only analogous and no relation between the two need be implied.

Increasingly in the post-Maimonidean period, the issue and status of belief became central to Jewish philosophy. In the twelfth century, belief (*emunah*; Ar. *I'tiqād*) referred primarily to a "belief" or a "conviction," which led those like Maimonides to distinguish between rational and traditional beliefs. Maimonides' cognitive approach made certain beliefs obligatory (e.g., creation, prophecy, messiah) and this required Jews to be instructed in the dogmas of the tradition. Increasingly in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, influenced by the Averroist tradition, Jewish philosophers began to distinguish between knowledge and true opinion. Only the former, according to the likes of Gersonides and Moses Narboni, are a sufficient condition for human

happiness and immortality. In the fifteenth centuries, Jewish philosophers such as Isaac Abravanel argued that beliefs, as principles that derive from a strong and certain conviction as opposed to demonstration, are in fact superior to rational knowledge.

## Conclusions

In sum, medieval Jewish philosophy is essentially a series of reading strategies provided by rationalist Jews to philosophize about Judaism. Influenced by Islamic legal speculation, Neoplatonism, Aristotelianism, and Humanism these individuals reflected upon the central tenets of Judaism (e.g., God, Torah, prophecy) and attempted to show how they were compatible with the teachings of philosophy. In all of their endeavors, Jewish philosophers sought to mediate the series of tensions – both real and perceived – between rationalism and religion. Although their intellectualist program did not go unchecked or uncriticized, they nevertheless succeeded in changing the contours of Judaism by redefining traditional terms and concepts.

## Cross-References

- ▶ [Abraham ibn Ezra](#)
- ▶ [Alexander of Aphrodisias and Arabic Aristotelianism](#)
- ▶ [Arabic Philosophical Texts, Jewish Translations of](#)
- ▶ [Aristotelianism in the Greek, Latin, Syriac, Arabic, and Hebrew Traditions](#)
- ▶ [Aristotle, Arabic](#)
- ▶ [Avicbron](#)
- ▶ [Ethics, Jewish](#)
- ▶ [al-Fārābī, Abū Naṣr](#)
- ▶ [al-Ġazālī, Abū Ḥāmid Muḥammad](#)
- ▶ [Gersonides](#)
- ▶ [Hasdai Crescas](#)
- ▶ [Ibn Bājja, Abū Bakr ibn al-Sā'ig \(Avenpace\)](#)
- ▶ [Ibn Rushd, Muḥammad ibn Aḥmad al-Ḥafīd \(Averroes\)](#)

- ▶ [Ibn Sabʿīn, ʿAbd al-Ḥaqq](#)
- ▶ [Ibn Sīnā, Abū ʿAlī \(Avicenna\)](#)
- ▶ [Ibn Ṭufayl, Abū Bakr \(Abubacer\)](#)
- ▶ [Ikhwān al-Ṣafāʾ, Encyclopedia of](#)
- ▶ [Isaac Israeli](#)
- ▶ [Ismāʿīlī Philosophical Tradition](#)
- ▶ [Judah Halevi](#)
- ▶ [Kalām](#)
- ▶ [al-Kindī, Abū Yūsuf Yaʿqūb ibn Ishāq](#)
- ▶ [Logic, Jewish](#)
- ▶ [Moses Maimonides](#)
- ▶ [Natural Philosophy, Jewish](#)
- ▶ [Philosophical Psychology, Jewish Tradition](#)
- ▶ [Philosophical Theology, Jewish](#)
- ▶ [Philosophy, Jewish](#)
- ▶ [Saadia Gaon](#)

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## Photios of Constantinople

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### Abstract

Photios, together with Arethas and Leo the Mathematician, is a representative of the “first Byzantine Renaissance” and a major figure in the transitional period of Byzantine intellectual history in the ninth and tenth centuries. He revived classical education in Byzantium, and through his activities humanism became a constitutive element of Byzantine thought.



Photios' *Amphilochia* (composed between 867 and 877) is one of the most important Byzantine philosophical documents, in which he deals with philosophical and theological topics. It contains the first known commentary on Aristotle's *Categories* of the ninth century (qu. 137–147), in which he discusses various topics of Aristotle's philosophy (theory of predication, the concept of substance, species and genera, categories).

## Biography

Photios (810/820–891/893), patriarch of Constantinople (858–867, 877–886), was one of the dominant figures in the Byzantine religious, social, and political life of the ninth century. He was also one of the most prominent members of the Court of Constantinople and a protagonist in the controversy over the *filioque* clause (Dvornik 1948). His religious career is related to theological disputes, the restoration of icons, and political activities connected with missions to the Slavs. He laid the foundations of education, which made him one of the most famous scholars of the Byzantine Empire. He was interested in theological issues, grammar, poetry, rhetoric, philosophy, medicine, and law. His works are significant as evidence of the philosophical activities of the first half of the ninth century (Tatakis 1949; Lemerle 1971).

Most important for the history of philosophy is Photios' *Bibliotheca* (sometimes called *Myriobiblon*), composed around 837/838, which is a collection of extracts of 280 volumes of classical authors, the originals of which are now to a great extent lost. In this work, he devoted several pages to preserve various ancient philosophical theories on free will and predestination (codices 214 and 251), skepticism (codex 212), and number symbolism (codex 187). He also compiled the *Lexikon*, a list of notable words, expressions, and references to facilitate the reading of sacred and secular authors, which was published later than the *Bibliotheca*. His most important work is the *Amphilochia*, a collection of some 300 questions

and answers on difficult points in the Scripture, addressed to Amphilochius, the archbishop of Cyzicus. *Amphilochia* supplements the picture of Photios' reading of classical philosophy, treating both theological problems and secular questions.

In *Mystagogy of the Holy Spirit*, Photios developed dialectical arguments against the Latin doctrine of the *filioque*. He remains faithful to the Orthodox dogma and always in agreement with traditional patristic and conciliar positions. He also wrote a treatise against the Paulicians, based on a similar work by Peter of Sicily, and his homilies contain abundant material for Byzantine political history and art. His many letters are addressed to popes, rulers, as well as military, civil, and church leaders.

## Thought

Photios did not write any comprehensive philosophical treatise, and he did not create an independent system of thought. As a philosopher, he cannot be separated from his theological thought, which has its origins in the Scripture, the Church Fathers, and Church Councils. His main interest in philosophy is logic and dialectic (Kustas 1973). He considered secular learning and logical methods to be a special preparation for theological matters. Philosophical thinking is, according to him, a process of understanding notions that are then compared to religious truths, and through this process they are denied or accepted.

Photios, versed in ancient literature, revived the interest in antiquity in Constantinople (Tatakis 1949; Lemerle 1971; Hägg 1975). An important place is given to Plato, Aristotle, the Stoics, the Neoplatonists (Proclus, Porphyry), and the commentators (Ammonius, Simplicius, Philoponus, Olympiodorus). In *Bibliotheca*, he quotes from the lost writings of the skeptic Aenesidemus, the Neoplatonist Hierocles, Aristides, and from an anonymous biography of Pythagoras.

Photios understands Plato and Aristotle as the successors of Pythagoras (codex 249), and both thinkers are, in his view, fundamentally in



agreement as far as the notions of providence and the immortality of the soul are concerned. He is familiar with Plato's works, though his knowledge seems to have come chiefly from intermediary sources. Photios often mentions Plato, but he nowhere undertakes an analysis of a Platonic dialogue (unless such an analysis is lost). Plato is a great stylist, but Photios faults him for his attack of rhetoric and poetry. He analyzes the concepts of genera and species and argues against the theory of Ideas (*Amphilochia*, q. 77). He finds the Platonic doctrine of Ideas unacceptable, because the Ideas cannot function as genuine predicates in the sensible world, which is God's creation, and God's creative power needs no assistance of them.

From all the ancient philosophers, Photios finds the greatest affiliation with Aristotle. He is interested in Aristotelian logic, and he comments on the *Categories*. Questions 137–147 of the *Amphilochia* form a small Aristotelian treatise, where he explains the ten categories. The main philosophical problems related to Aristotle's *Categories* are connected with the ontological status of species and genera. He seems to follow the interpretative approach of Porphyry, Ammonius, and John Damascene (Anton 1994a; Benakis 1978–9; Schamp 1996b). The intention of Photios' comments is to make corrections to Aristotle's theory before he can use them to clarify the doctrine of being, the concept of God, the Trinity, and the angels.

These comments on the *Categories* probably come from a full-length commentary on Aristotle's work. In contrast to Aristotle's text in the *Categories*, Photios stresses that his account of the last six categories is more detailed than Aristotle's and in better balance with the treatment of the first four (qu. 142–143). He suggests that the last six categories are not composite, because each one of them is the result of combining two categories, but in such a way that something new emerges. He uses the analogy of friendship and rulership to illustrate this theory. Friendship is constituted by the union of two friends but cannot be identified with either of them, nor can it be said to be composed of the two as parts. Similarly, in the case of the category

of "where," although we combine two categories, a new category emerges that cannot be identified either with substance or with quality, nor can it be said to be composed of them as parts (Ierodiakonou 2005).

The centerpiece of the *Amphilochia* is a theory of *substance* (*ousia*), which Photios claims to be his own (qu. 138). Photios uses Aristotle's *Categories* as a basis but he proceeds to examine substance independently of Aristotle. He disagrees with Aristotle that the distinction between first and second substance is limited to individual substance versus universal substance. The individual (first substance) and the universal (second substance) cannot be predicated synonymously either with regard to themselves or with regard to substance. The individual and the universal, although they share the name substance, each calls for a different determination, as what determines first substance is totally different from what determines second substance. According to Photios, substance has many meanings (*pollachos legomenon*) and refers to matter, form, the efficient agent that gives form to matter, or in a metaphorical sense it indicates possessions and money. The substance is the existence of each being, the opposite of which is nonbeing or substance as *hyperousia* and productive of all beings (Anton 1994a). He distinguishes between first substances consisting of form and matter, and self-subsisting beings consisting of what are only analogues of form and matter. The latter make up a distinct class, the realm of angels and of immaterial reason. His aim is to revise the understanding of substance – he added two meanings of it: divine substance as transcendent substance (*ousia hyperousios*) and the angels as bodiless substance (*asomatos ousia*).

Photios' interest in ancient philosophy derives from his interest in theological issues (*filioque*, apology of icons). His use of Aristotle's teachings (on substance, genera, and species) serves to underscore theological dogmas and prevent aberrations of religious discourse (Arianism). Photios' devotion to religious questions is thus connected with his attempt to combine ancient wisdom and revealed theology.

## Cross-References

- ▶ [Aristotelianism in the Greek, Latin, Syriac, Arabic, and Hebrew Traditions](#)
- ▶ [Natural Philosophy, Byzantine](#)
- ▶ [Platonism](#)

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## Pierre Ceffons

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### Abstract

Certain late medieval figures are atypical, challenging our conceptions of the mentalité of the period. Within the seemingly traditional context of scholasticism, the Cistercian Pierre Ceffons is one such figure. Born near Troyes, Ceffons became a monk at Clairvaux and eventually took his turn as his order's bachelor of the *Sentences* at the University of Paris in the academic year 1348–1349, the time of the Black Death. From these lectures we have his main work in philosophy, his lengthy but unfinished questions on the *Sentences* of Peter Lombard, put in written form around 1353, composed at the same time he authored his other known writings. Ceffons was a fascinating thinker, both as a bold philosopher in his own right and as an informative witness to the intellectual trends of his day. Ceffons certainly illustrates the critical attitude of the brightest minds of the era, variously described as fideistic, skeptical, destructive, or simply rigorous, depending on one's perspective.

Pierre Ceffons was the Cistercian bachelor of the *Sentences* at the University of Paris in the academic year 1348–1349, during which he experienced, lectured on, and tried to explain in naturalistic terms the Black Death. From Ceffons, a village just a few hours' walk from Troyes and Clairvaux, where he became a monk, Pierre was also called Pierre de Clairvaux, although, contrary to an old tradition, he was never abbot. According to a note in a Troyes manuscript (Médiathèque du Grand Troyes 1785, f. 285vb) containing Thomas of Ireland's *Manipulus florum*, a codex completed in Paris on 11 April 1313 (new style), Brother Pierre Ceffons had it copied while studying there. The original

name has been erased, however, and “Petri de Ceffons” written in its place in a different hand. Instead of being a student at Paris in 1313, therefore, Ceffons was probably born around then or slightly later, since bachelors of the *Sentences* were usually 30–35 years old. A possible reference to his own *Quodlibeta* and a remark that Ceffons “disputed” something in 1352 or early 1353 suggest that he may have become a Master of Theology, but he disappears from view after 1353.

One of Ceffons’ works was very widely disseminated, his brief and satirical *Letter from Lucifer to the Prelates*, extant in hundreds of manuscripts and printings. Two manuscripts in Troyes (859 and 930) and one each in Paris (Bibliothèque nationale de France, lat. 3315), London (British Library, Harley 2667), and Liège (Université, Bibliothèque Générale de Philosophie et Lettres 185) contain Ceffons’ *Opera Minora*, which are being critically edited. Ceffons’ lengthy *Centilogium* (i.e., the *Letter from Jesus Christ to the Prelates*) and the *Letter from Lucifer* are in all five, while the *Little Decretum on the Power of St. Peter* (against Marsilius of Padua, John of Jandun, and William of Ockham) is found in Troyes 859 and 930 and in Paris 3315. Troyes 930 also contains the *Sermon in the Chapter General*, *Pierre’s Confessional*, the *Flowers of Boethius’ De consolatione*, and the *Flowers of Diverse Authors and Philosophers*. Finally, along with abbreviated versions of the *Sermon in the Chapter General* and *Pierre’s Confessional*, Harley 2667 preserves some of Ceffons’ correspondence.

*Pierre’s Confessional* (also called the *Dream/Soliloquies/Meditations on a Certain Definition*), a long treatise related to the controversy over the mendicants’ right to hear confessions, attacks a ruling of the Cistercian chapter general from mid-September 1348 requiring monks to confess to their abbot annually even if they have already done so to another confessor. Completed on 6 February 1349, *Pierre’s Confessional* was quoted at length by the Cistercian Conrad of Ebrach and the Augustinian Dionigi de Modena. The *Letter from Lucifer* was written in early 1352, then the *Little Decretum* before 24 March 1353, while the

*Centilogium* was completed on 13 April 1353, and the *Sermon in the Chapter General*, dated 15 September, is from 1351, 1352, or 1353. The *Little Decretum* also constitutes distinction 18 of book IV of Ceffons’ questions on the *Sentences* in Troyes 62, but the bulk of Ceffons’ questions ultimately derives from his *Sentences* lectures in 1348–1349, from which we also have a couple of sermons in Troyes 930.

Once thought to be an autograph, Troyes 62 is by a professional scribe working from Ceffons’ notes. Ceffons admits that his handwriting is horrible and that he hurried to make his written version (*Scriptum* or *Ordinatio*), at the request of others, without even reading it all, let alone correcting it. A complicating matter is Ceffons’ proto-humanism, striving to be eloquent and quoting numerous classical authors. As a result, this beautiful manuscript, containing his main philosophical work, is often incomplete and frequently corrupt, as shown by the critical edition of the *Parvum Decretum*, the only section surviving in other witnesses. Thus, aside from the *Introductory Letter* and a fragment that Damasus Trapp printed in a pioneering article in 1957, nothing of Ceffons’ *Sentences* was published until after 2010. Recently, however, a number of scholars have undertaken to edit substantial portions, including forthcoming volumes with the *Principia*, the *Prologue*, and distinctions 35–48 of book I, a number of stray questions, and the *Final Sermon* ending Ceffons’ lectures. Although books III and IV are brief, Ceffons’ *Sentences* is in some ways the most complete of the Middle Ages and would require around 3000 modern pages to print.

What is emerging is a bold philosopher and defender of academic freedom, abreast of all the latest trends and works from both Paris and Oxford, who loved to impress his audience with classical references and to annoy them with constant demands for evidence. Ceffons caused trouble from the first letter of his text, literally. Rather than choose an entire biblical phrase for the theme of his first principal sermon opening his lectures on the *Sentences*, Ceffons opted for “O,” which expressed his awe before the task that lay ahead as well as his mischievous approach. Ceffons

remarks elsewhere that he was criticized for his thema, using a mere letter or syllable being unacceptable. Ceffons retained his “O” thema in all four principal sermons and in his *Sermo finalis* or *Final Sermon*, delivered on the last day of classes, introducing the next Cistercian bachelor of the *Sentences* – a rare survival of the approximately one thousand such final speeches delivered by *sententiarii* at Paris in the fourteenth century.

Bachelors of the *Sentences* in the fourteenth century inaugurated the academic year in late September and early October with *principia*. On each day a separate bachelor would deliver a sermon related to Peter Lombard’s *Sentences* and then defend a philosophical or theological thesis, attacking one or more theses of other bachelors. In January, March, and May, the bachelors would give their second, third, and fourth principal sermons and questions in an ongoing debate that concluded in the final lecture in late June. Ceffons defended the thesis that everything happens of absolute necessity, not, he said, because he actually believed that, but for the sake of debate, in order to see whether his fellow bachelors could prove logically that anything at all happens contingently. Ceffons himself thought that the existence of contingency could not be proven, that using reason alone the deterministic position appears more likely, and that merely on faith do we accept that things can happen otherwise. Throughout his four *principia*, occupying perhaps 300 modern pages in total, Ceffons defends absolute determinism on the basis of the truth value of propositions about the future, of the necessary chain of efficient causation in the natural world, of our will’s pursuing only what appears to be beneficial and our mind’s accepting only what appears to be true, and of divine foreknowledge and predestination. Ceffons’ arguments for logical, physical, psychological, and metaphysical or theological determinism provoked all nine of his fellow bachelors that year, his *socii*, to attack his thesis from one angle or another, usually failing because they made presuppositions that Ceffons considered unwarranted.

Ceffons’ lengthy verbatim quotations from his *socii* are valuable historically, since, with the exception of the Augustinian Hugolino of

Orvieto, nothing seems to have come down to us from their *Sentences* lectures. One of Ceffons’ colleagues tried to refute his thesis on the basis of Church authority, since the infallible Church holds that not everything happens of necessity. Rather than simply reply that this refutation is based on faith and not evidence, Ceffons instead argued at length that, no matter how one defines “the Church,” the Church is prone to error, unless one gives a tautological definition: “The Church is whoever cannot err.” Popes, cardinals, councils, and whole bodies of the faithful have made and do make mistakes.

Hugolino critiqued Ceffons using the newly imported Oxonian device of the *complexe significabile*, which Adam Wodeham employed to describe a state of affairs signified by a proposition. Ceffons rejected Hugolino’s rebuttal as beside the point, but the exchange highlights another aspect of Ceffons’ writing: his questions on the *Sentences* are a witness to the innovative ideas of the time, about which there was frequent disagreement over definitions and sometimes controversy. Related to this are Ceffons’ many complaints about recent censorship and condemnation at Paris. Unlike in Oxford, Ceffons often remarked sarcastically, one had to tread carefully in Paris. Most notably, Ceffons’ senior Cistercian confrère Jean de Mirecourt, later abbot of Royaumont, introduced “ill-sounding” English ideas and, Ceffons quipped, was censured by a commission of “three old witches” in 1347. Historians disagree about whether Gregory of Rimini was on this tribunal, with good arguments supporting either side.

Ceffons’ questions on the *Sentences* abound with lengthy passages on recent logical, mathematical, geometrical, physical, and metaphysical theories. Ceffons helped introduce into the Parisian milieu the philosophical writings of the likes of William of Heytesbury and the Oxford Calculators, quoting extensively from Thomas Bradwardine’s *De proportionibus*, for example. Ceffons was also one of the first Parisians to deal in depth with the archbishop of Canterbury’s recent *De causa Dei* of 1344. While admiring Bradwardine’s theological determinism, Ceffons argued that Bradwardine’s opposition to astrology

was overblown. The Parisian Nicole Oresme, more famous as an opponent of astrology, was another important source for Ceffons, as Konstanty Michalski noted decades before Trapp's fundamental article. Ceffons knew several of Oresme's writings, even ones that did not circulate widely. Ceffons defended astrology against the likes of Oresme, but Ceffons also borrowed Oresme's famous discussion of the possible rotation of the Earth, perhaps being even more sympathetic to the idea than Oresme himself was.

Always careful to distinguish between demonstration and opinion, knowledge and belief, Ceffons doubted as a philosopher what he believed as a theologian. As a philosopher, he utilized such concepts as instants of time, geometrical points, universals, or hylomorphism, while asserting that they could very well simply be devices of convenience. Ceffons was acutely aware of human epistemological limitations, remarking on the question of other possible worlds, for example, that we are like moles living underground, blind and confined, unable to assess our own ignorance. Nevertheless, Ceffons supported the scientific imagination and even our capacity to discover new knowledge. All told, Pierre Ceffons was one of the most interesting authors of the fourteenth century, one whose complete works deserve to be published, despite the complexity of the task.

## Cross-References

- ▶ [Adam Wodeham](#)
- ▶ [Gregory of Rimini](#)
- ▶ [Jean Regis](#)
- ▶ [Nicholas Oresme](#)
- ▶ [Thomas Bradwardine](#)

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## Plato, Arabic

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### Abstract

There is yet no comprehensive and systematic study of the Arabic transmission of Plato's works and the knowledge about Plato's philosophy in the medieval Islamic civilizations.

From the tenth to the thirteenth centuries, biographers and philosophers writing in Arabic composed various biographies and bibliographies on Plato, which trace back to different Greek sources such as Thrasyllus and Theon of Smyrna. The reception of Plato's works was primarily restricted to paraphrases and summaries, among which Galen's *Synopsis* of the Platonic corpus played a major role. None of Plato's works has been preserved in a complete Arabic translation, and it is a matter of doubt whether there were ever such translations. Apart from this rather fragmentary transmission, a number of Greek commentaries on at least four Platonic dialogues were known in the Arabic-speaking world. The major topics of Arabic Platonism are the temporal creation of the world, Plato's theory of the state, the concept of love (both in terms of its metaphysical as well as its medical implications), the theories of the intellect and the tripartite soul, and the concept of Platonic Forms and its ontological counterpart, the Two-World Theory. More influential than the authentic Plato was the vulgarized Plato of gnomological and doxographical anthologies and popular wisdom literature, and the pseudepigraphic Plato of gnostic, occult, and Neoplatonic writings. The conflation of these traditions during the twelfth and thirteenth centuries initiated a new Arabic Platonism without Plato.

## Introduction

The medieval Arabic-Islamic world speaks of Plato as a divine philosopher and sage. Yet his heritage is located largely outside the properly philosophical tradition in Arabic. The philosopher Plato and his dialogues exerted a less intense and lasting influence than the vulgarized Plato of late antique gnomological and doxographical anthologies, the invented Plato of gnostic, occult and neo-Pythagorean traditions, and the pseudepigraphic Plato of Neoplatonic writings and their Arabic transmission (cf. Rosenthal 1940, 1941a, b; Endress 1997:49–52; Walbridge 2000:83–103; Jeck 2004:59–142).



## Arabic *Vitae* of Plato

Details about the life of Plato, whose Arabicized name is Aflātūn, were known through translations of Greek sources based on the reports by Theon of Smyrna, Pseudo-Plutarch, Porphyry's *History of Philosophy*, and other, unidentified biographical sources (cf. Walzer 1960:235; Peters 1979:31). Most of these Arabic *vitae*, dating from the tenth to the thirteenth centuries, emphasize the (allegedly) symbolic-allegorical or even cryptic style of Plato's writings. Among the teachers of Plato, Socrates, Timaeus, the Athenian stranger of the *Laws* and the Eleatic stranger of the *Sophist* are mentioned. According to the philosopher al-ʿĀmirī, Plato excelled Socrates and Pythagoras in his knowledge of mathematics and natural science (cf. Rowson 1988:72–75, 203–213). In al-Mubashshir b. Fātik's *Mukhtār al-ḥikma wa-maḥāsīn al-kalim* and al-Shahrastānī's *Kitāb al-mīlāl wa-l-niḥāl*, Plato is portrayed as a descendant of the mythological Asclepius. Other prominent biographical topics are Plato's journeys to Sicily and Egypt, his foundation of the Platonic Academy, and his intellectual relationship with Pythagoras and Aristotle. Apart from the sources already mentioned, the most detailed accounts of Plato's life are found in (Pseudo-?)Ḥunayn b. Ishāq's *Nawādir al-falāsifa*, Ibn al-Nadīm's *Fihrist*, al-Shahrastānī's *Nuzhat al-arwāḥ wa-rawḍat al-afrāḥ*, Ibn al-Qifṭī's *Taʾrīkh al-ḥukamāʾ*, Ibn Abī Uṣaybiʿa's *ʿUyūn al-anbāʾ fī ṭabaqāt al-aṭibbāʾ*, and the anonymous *Muntakhab Šiwān al-ḥikma* (for translations and studies, cf. Gutas forthcoming).

## Arabic Bibliographies of Plato's Oeuvre

All works mentioned in the "classical" Greek reports on Plato's oeuvre, such as those by Thrasyllus, Albinus, and Galen, were known by title to the Arabic-writing bibliographers and historians. The earliest and most comprehensive Arabic discussion of the Platonic corpus is found in a treatise entitled *The Philosophy of Plato* (ed. Rosenthal and Walzer 1943). This treatise, which is usually ascribed to the philosopher

al-Fārābī, describes Plato's works in a non-tetralogical arrangement reflecting the supposed development of Plato's thought. It certainly draws on Greek sources, presumably Galen or other closely related Middle Platonic sources (cf. Tarrant 1993:32–38). Another *pinax*, preserved in Ibn al-Nadīm's *Fihrist*, is based on at least two other sources. The first source Ibn al-Nadīm is referring to is the tetralogical arrangement of Plato's dialogues provided by the mathematician Theon of Smyrna, while it is not quite clear whether Ibn al-Nadīm indeed follows strictly Theon's system of division (cf. Lippert 1894:39–50; Tarrant 1993:58–68). Second, Ibn al-Nadīm's account is at least partly indebted to the catalogue of philosophical and scientific books prepared by one of his contemporaries, the philosopher Yaḥyā ibn ʿAdī. This catalogue must have drawn on further sources, as the dialogue *Critias* is referred to under the title *Atlantius*, which corresponds with Thrasyllus (as reported by Diogenes Laertius), but not with Theon. While the bibliography in Ibn al-Qifṭī's *Taʾrīkh al-ḥukamāʾ* is heavily indebted to Ibn al-Nadīm's *Fihrist*, Ibn Abī Uṣaybiʿa must have had access to additional sources. He not only mentions dialogues omitted in the lists of Ibn al-Nadīm and Ibn al-Qifṭī (such as *Epinomis*, *Lysis*, and *Politicus*), but also refers by transliterations of the Greek titles to some dialogues mentioned in the earlier bibliographies by Arabicized titles or descriptions only (cf. Gutas forthcoming). With the exception of al-Fārābī, all bibliographers mention also *spuria* that cannot be related to any Greek *pinax* of Platonic works. They also sometimes include the same work twice which points to the fact that the bibliographers used more than one Graeco-Arabic source, without being able to identify different references to one and the same work.

## Translations, Summaries, and Commentaries

The Arabic transmission of Plato's works is sporadic, complicated, and as yet not systematically researched (for the history of research on the Arabic Plato, cf. Gutas forthcoming, first section;

a collection of authentic fragments and pseudo-*Platonica* in Arabic has been edited by Badawī (1974). None of the works has been preserved in a complete translation; indeed, it is a matter of doubt whether there were ever any complete translations into Arabic (cf. Rosenthal 1940:393; Reisman 2004:264). The medieval bibliographers report the following translations: (1) *Leges*, translated by Ḥunayn b. Ishāq and by Yaḥyā b. ʿAdī; (2) *Respublica*, translated or paraphrased by Ḥunayn b. Ishāq; (3) *Sophistes*, translated by Ishāq b. Ḥunayn together with the Commentary by Olympiodorus; and (4) *Timaeus*, translated by Yaḥyā b. al-Biṭrīq and corrected by Yaḥyā b. ʿAdī. Of the following dialogues, Arabic fragments of varying length and often of a paraphrastic nature have come down to us: *Crito*, *Leges*, *Meno*, *Phaedo*, *Respublica*, *Symposium*, *Timaeus* (for editions and studies cf. Daiber 1999, vol 2, 434–439; Gutas forthcoming).

From Ḥunayn b. Ishāq's own report, we know that he and his pupils translated Galen's Summaries (lost in Greek) of the following eight works: *Cratylus*, *Euthydemus*, *Leges*, *Politicus*, *Parmenides*, *Respublica*, *Sophistes*, and *Timaeus* (cf. Bergsträsser 1925; Boudon-Millet 2000: 455–460). Of these translations, only the Arabic version of Galen's *Synopsis* of the *Timaeus* is extant today (ed. Kraus and Walzer 1951; cf. Festugière and Tonneau 1952).

In addition to these translations and summaries, a number of Greek exegetical works were known to the Arabs: (1) Galen's Commentary on the medical contents of the *Timaeus* (cf. Schröder and Kahle 1934; Boudon-Millet 2000:459); (2) excerpts of Proclus' Commentaries on *Phaedo*, *Respublica*, bk. X, and *Timaeus* (cf. Schmutte and Pfaff 1941; Endress 1973, 28 f.; Rowson 1988); (3) a certain "Exposition" of the *Timaeus* by Plutarch (of Chaeronea?, cf. Pines 1936:90); and (4) Olympiodorus' Commentary on the *Sophistes* (cf. above).

Furthermore, philosophers writing in Arabic themselves composed works discussing, summarizing, or commenting on the Platonic sources available to them. For example, al-Kindī dealt with the theories of numbers, solids, and harmonic proportions provided in *Respublica* and *Timaeus*

(cf. Rescher 1967; Adamson 2007:160–180); al-Fārābī and Ibn al-Ṭayyib composed expositions of the *Leges*; Abū Bakr al-Rāzī commented upon Plutarch's Exposition of the *Timaeus*; Thābit b. Qurra dealt with geometrical problems of the *Meno* and the *Respublica*; and Ibn Rushd (Averroes) wrote a paraphrase of the *Respublica* (cf. Gutas forthcoming).

## Elements of Arabic Platonism

Future research is still required to determine the relation between the fragmentary transmission of Platonic works and the doctrines ascribed to Plato in the Arabic tradition. However, there can be little doubt that even the most fundamental doctrines were taken into consideration not as coherent elements of a comprehensive systematic philosophy, but rather as disiecta membra which could be fitted together only by means of Aristotelian, Neoplatonic, or genuinely Islamic conceptions. From the very beginning of the Arabic reception up to the seventeenth-century philosophical schools of Shiraz and Isfahan, the topos of the harmony between the doctrines of Plato and Aristotle formed a major motif of the varying forms of Arabic Platonism (cf. Endress 1991; D'Ancona 2006).

Al-Kindī, the first philosopher of the Arabic tradition, tried to reconcile various theories propounded by Plato and Aristotle, in particular their doctrines of the first cause as well as of the intellect and the soul (Endress 1991; Adamson 2007). Plato's theory of the state, or what was known about it, heavily influenced the political theories of Abū Bakr al-Rāzī, al-Fārābī, the Ikhwān al-Ṣafāʾ, and others (cf. Walzer 1985:8–18, 424–490; Baffioni 1994, 2004; Daiber 1996). The *Timaeus* could be used to support the doctrines of the creation of the world in time and of divine providence, which appealed to many philosophers writing in Arabic (cf. D'Ancona 2003). Al-Kindī, al-Daylamī, Miskawayh, and others adopted and modified (by means of Neoplatonic concepts) Plato's thoughts on love (cf. Rosenthal 1940; Walzer 1957). The theory of the tripartite soul expounded in *Respublica* and *Timaeus*, as

well as the separation of body and soul in the *Phaedo* exerted an enormous influence on Islamic theories of the soul, its immortality, and its virtues (cf. Rosenthal 1940; Peeters 1979; for the *Phaedo* see especially Bürgel 1971; Bielawski 1974; Biesterfeldt 1991). The philosophy of Shihāb al-Dīn al-Suhrawardī initiated a long-lasting debate about Platonic Forms and Paradigms that were discussed in connection with various Two- or Three-World Theories (cf. Arnzen 2009a, 442 f.).

## Gnomologies and Doxographies

Plato is one of the most prominent figures in medieval Arabic gnomologies, doxographies, and anthologies of (alleged) quotations (cf. Rosenthal 1940, 1941a). Most gnomological collections, which ultimately depend on a Greek corpus dating from late antiquity, transmit wise sayings from various authorities, but there are also collections focusing solely on Plato (cf. Gutas 1975; Arnzen 2009b). While the early Arabic doxographies include mostly authentic materials, those of the later period by and large tend to incorporate materials taken from pseudepigrapha and inauthentic gnomologies. Furthermore, we know works of a hybrid genre, which include authentic quotations from Platonic works and Galen's *Summaries* together with pseudepigraphic doxographical and gnomological materials (cf. Arnzen 2009b).

## Pseudepigrapha

The vast genre of Arabic pseudo-*Platonica* comprises three main corpora. The first and most remote group in terms of authenticity is formed by treatises on occult and hermetic sciences. Prominent examples of alchemical works are the so-called *Summa Platonis*, the *Book of Tetrologies* (*Kitāb al-Rawābī*<sup>6</sup>) in dialogue form, and the *Kitāb Muṣaḥḥahāt Aflāṭūn*, which forms part of the *Corpus Jabirianum* and introduces a certain Timaeus into the secrets of alchemy (cf. Singer 1946; Ullmann 1972, 155 f.; Thillet 2005). Other

works of this corpus deal with astrology, occult practices performed on living and dead animals, or magic art based on symbolisms of numbers and letters or spells (cf. Ullmann 1972:287, 365, 452; Pingree 1993). Many of these treatises were translated into Latin during the Middle Ages (cf. Hasse 2002).

A second group of pseudo-*Platonica* is constituted by works aiming at moral refinement and political education, for example, a number of *Platonic Testaments*, various epistles, and the so-called *Exhortation Concerning the Education of Young Men*, which adopts neo-Pythagorean concepts of economics, pedagogy, and politics (cf. Rosenthal 1941b). Another influential work of this group is the *Book of the Laws* (*Kitāb al-Nawāmīs*, obviously alluding to Plato's *Leges*) which treats the relationship between religion, philosophy, and sociopolitical issues (cf. Tamer 2005).

Finally, there is the rather disparate group of extracts from the Arabic *Plotiniana* and *Procliana*. Sections falsely attributed to Plato include excerpts of the *Liber de Causis*, an Arabic adaptation based primarily on Proclus' *Elementatio theologica*, as well as excerpts of the Arabic adaptations of Plotinus' *Enneads* IV–VI (cf. D'Ancona and Taylor 2003; D'Ancona 2004). This group of pseudo-*Platonica* forms the main source of inspiration for the post-Suhrawardian Arabic Platonism without Plato.

## Cross-References

- ▶ [Abū Bakr al-Rāzī, Muḥammad ibn Zakarīyā' \(Rhazes\)](#)
- ▶ [al-Bīrūnī, Abū Rayḥān](#)
- ▶ [Doxographies, Graeco-Arabic](#)
- ▶ [al-Fārābī, Abū Naṣr](#)
- ▶ [al-Kindī, Abū Yūsuf Ya'qūb ibn Ishāq](#)
- ▶ [al-Mubashshir ibn Fātik](#)
- ▶ [Political Philosophy, Arabic](#)
- ▶ [al-Shahrastānī, Muḥammad ibn 'Abd al-Karīm](#)
- ▶ [al-Suhrawardī, Shihāb al-Dīn Yaḥyā al-Maqtūl](#)
- ▶ [Translations from Greek into Arabic](#)
- ▶ [Yaḥyā ibn 'Adī](#)

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## Platonism

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### Abstract

This entry provides a survey of the medieval phase of the history of Platonism. Spanning the period from the ninth to the fourteenth century, the medieval phase represents a direct tradition of Platonism to the extent that it is based on the reading of Plato's *Timaeus* and an indirect tradition to the extent that it depends on non-Christian and Christian authors of late antiquity. Medieval Platonism is also characterized by its close relation to the medieval curriculum of the Trivium (verbal arts) and Quadrivium (numerical arts) and by its dependence on sources written originally in or translated into Latin. Moving in chronological sequence, the entry focuses on arguably the three most important groups of thinkers within the medieval Platonic tradition from the threefold angle of their use of textual authorities, their modes of reasoning, and their doctrinal positions. Thus, (1) John Scottus

Eriugena (early to middle ninth century) represents a Platonism, which might be termed “Patristic”; (2) Thierry of Chartres and Bernard Silvestris (early twelfth century) represent a Platonism exhibiting a blend of “Humanistic” and “Encyclopedic” tendencies; and (3) Dietrich of Freiberg and Berthold of Moosburg (late thirteenth to early fourteenth centuries) represent a Platonism that might be labeled “Scholastic.”

Medieval Platonism can be understood, to a large extent, as a complicated and evolving response to Plato’s *Timaeus*. The most important part of this dialogue (to 53c) was translated into Latin and equipped with a commentary by Calcidius during the early fourth century. Complete Latin translations of Plato’s *Meno* and *Phaedo* by Aristippus of Catania and a partial Latin translation of the *Parmenides* – attached to Proclus’ incomplete commentary on the dialogue – by William Moerbeke acquired a limited circulation from the thirteenth century onward. However, the translation and commentary of Calcidius represented not only the definitive presentation of Plato’s own doctrine during the Middle Ages but also the nucleus around which various further “Platonic” doctrines could be configured. These additional teachings were derived either from non-Christian authors of late antiquity or from the Church Fathers, in the latter case acquiring indirectly the superior doctrinal authority of their biblical source.

Two general features of this *Timaeus*-influenced tradition may be distinguished. First, medieval Platonism was elaborated on the basis of the Trivium and Quadrivium. In line with the philosophical preoccupations of the *Timaeus* itself, medieval thinkers tended to emphasize grammar and rhetoric over dialectic among the verbal arts and arithmetic, astronomy, and music over geometry among the numerical arts. Although the sevenfold curriculum was modified in the twelfth century with the introduction of further arts and again in the thirteenth century under the influence of the Aristotelian university curriculum, the general interpretation of Platonism in terms of the liberal arts remained

paramount. Secondly, medieval Platonism was developed in the context of the Latin language. Given that the study of Greek language and literature was never part of the medieval curriculum, the various non-Christian and Christian texts used to supplement the “Platonism” of the *Timaeus* and the other dialogues were exclusively those written by Latin authors.

In this entry, the period of “medieval Platonism” will be defined as beginning in the ninth century, where an intellectual phenomenon that is both authentically medieval and genuinely philosophical appears for the first time, and as ending in the fourteenth century, after which the “Platonic” philosophy is sufficiently influenced by humanistic approaches to be considered as postmedieval. Even when considered within these chronological limits, however, “medieval Platonism” emerges as a very complex historical and philosophical notion. In order to provide an adequate description within a brief compass, it will perhaps be most useful to proceed (a) by considering three historically distinguishable groups of thinkers in chronological order and (b) by examining separately the authoritative texts, the methods of reasoning, and the doctrinal assumptions of each group.

The literary activity of John Scottus Eriugena, a scholar of Irish origin working in northern France, can be placed in the early to middle ninth century. Although he can also be considered a typical representative of the powerful grammatical and logical tradition established by Alcuin of York in the previous century, Eriugena was absolutely unique in developing a comprehensive philosophical system from these and other elements and expounded it at length in his treatise entitled *On Natures*. He is the first writer of the medieval period whom it would be reasonable to describe as a Platonic philosopher, although he probably did not grasp the extent to which he was a follower of that tradition. In fact, he combines overt criticism of certain doctrines explicitly held by “the Platonists” with a less emphatic dependence on many other Platonic teachings, for example, by attacking the transmigration of souls in his early *Glosses on Martianus Capella* but introducing the world soul into the fourth book of *On Natures*.



This twofold approach to the Platonic tradition broadly follows a pattern established by certain writers of late antiquity in seeing the Platonists as the ancient thinkers who had a partial illumination of Christian truth.

From the textual viewpoint, the Platonism of Eriugena might best be characterized as “Patristic.” The writer’s dependence primarily upon Augustine among the Latin Church Fathers is apparent in his early treatise *On Predestination* – which starts from a dispute over the correct interpretation of Augustine on this topic – and continues in the later *On Natures*. His dependence on (Pseudo-)Dionysius the Areopagite among the Greek Church Fathers, a literary relation made possible by his own previous achievement of translating the complete works of this pseudonymous writer into Latin, is the most obvious hermeneutic feature of *On Natures* as a whole. Beginning in his earliest works, Eriugena further combines the textual authority of Boethius with that of Augustine and Dionysius. Boethius’ writings can be seen as having provided him with a unique paradigm for the conceptual assimilation of Platonic thought, since they presented simultaneously an explicit Platonism in *On the Consolation of Philosophy* and three kinds of implicit doctrine: the Platonism of Augustine’s scriptural exegesis in Boethius’ *On the Trinity*, a Neo-Pythagorean variant of the same tradition in his *On Arithmetic* and *On Music*, and the Platonism of Greek Aristotelian Commentary in Boethius’ two commentaries *On Porphyry’s Introduction*.

From the methodological viewpoint, Eriugena’s Platonism is grammatical and dialectical in character. It is “grammatical” to the extent that (1) its philosophical doctrines are developed from a movement between the linguistic signifier and a linguistic signified, especially in the form of etymologies, and from a movement between one linguistic signified and another, particularly in the form of the (pagan) allegory or the (Christian) spiritual sense, and also to the extent that (2) these developments of philosophical doctrine occur in the context of reading, the decoding of hidden meanings, rather than writing, the encoding of hidden meanings. Among examples of etymologies yielding Platonic meaning, one

might mention from the *Glosses on Martianus Capella*, the interpretation of Calcidius’ term *entelechia* applied to the world soul as “interior eternity” and also the interpretation of Martianus Capella’s *an(o)ia* applied to divination as “super-intelligence.” Among examples of allegories yielding Platonic meaning, one might mention from the third book of *On Natures* the interpretation of the first 3 days of creation as signifying the emanative power of God, the distinction between the higher and the lower worlds, and the Forms of the four elements, respectively. Eriugena’s Platonism is “dialectical” to the extent that its philosophical doctrines are developed from the movement among linguistic signifieds of such specific logical types as terms, propositions, and syllogisms.

In order to make its relations with the later tradition clear, we might summarize the content of Eriugena’s Platonism under the headings of theology, cosmology, and psychology, these terms not being applied in exactly this way by the original authors. In connection with the theological domain, several important doctrines may be distinguished. On the one hand, there is the teaching that affirmative language applied to God, for example, saying that “God is living,” actually signifies God’s immanence in the creature and represents a metaphorical usage with respect to God himself but that negative language, for example, saying that “God is not living,” actually refers to God’s transcendence of the creature and represents a literal usage with respect to God himself. This doctrine is adapted from Pseudo-Dionysius. Another important doctrine in connection with the theological domain is the notion that Aristotelian categories like substance, quality, and quantity can provide a framework for affirmative language applied to God, for example, in saying that “God is existent,” “God is good,” and “God is great,” but that the accidental categories must be converted into substantial form, for example, by understanding “God is good” to mean “God is goodness,” etc. Here, the source is Augustine together with Boethius. With respect to the cosmological sphere, several important doctrines may be distinguished. First, there is the notion – derived from the dialectical tradition – that God or

Nature comprises four species: the “Not-Created and Creating” or God as beginning, the “Created and Creating” or the causes of spatial and temporal effects, the “Created and Not-Creating” or the effects of the nonspatial and nontemporal causes, and the “Not-Created and Not-Creating” or God as end. Given that the relations between the first and fourth species, between the second and third, and between the two pairs are said to exhibit various degrees of mind-dependence with respect not only to the divine but also to the human mind, the articulation of this complex structure reveals the extent to which the emanative relation between cause and effect typical of ancient Platonism has been shifted from the realist into the idealist register. A second important doctrine with respect to the cosmological sphere – derived from the patristic tradition – is the notion that the 6 biblical days of creation represent not God’s separate acts of producing various things in a sequence of temporal phases but a set of relations between God and different things linking the non-temporal and temporal spheres themselves. In connection with the psychological domain, there is one doctrine that reflects the first doctrine mentioned in connection with the theological domain. Just as with respect to God an affirmative statement saying that “God is living” refers to God’s immanence in the creature in general and a negative statement saying that “God is not living” refers to his transcendence of the creature in general, so with respect to Man, an affirmative statement saying that “Man is animal” refers to his immanence in the lower creature and a negative statement saying that “Man is not animal” refers to his transcendence of the lower creature. This extrapolation from Pseudo-Dionysius is highly original.

Thierry of Chartres, whose more usual medieval name Thierry “the Breton” (Brito) shows his national origin, and Bernard of Tours, who acquired the nickname Bernard “Silvestris” from the prominent role of *silva* (“matter”) in his writing, were the two leading members of a proto-humanistic circle of scholars working in northern France during the first half of the twelfth century, which is usually albeit controversially labeled “The School of Chartres.” That these writers

thought of themselves as followers of the Platonic tradition is indicated by Bernard’s dedication of a work to his teacher Thierry in which – repeating a formula that Augustine once applied to Plotinus – the pupil describes the master as the reincarnation of Plato. The Platonism of Thierry emerges most clearly in his three commentaries on Boethius’ *On the Trinity* and in the summary of a lecture-course covering Boethius’ *On the Trinity*, *On the Hebdomads*, and *Against Eutyches and Nestorius*, and that of Bernard in his commentaries on Virgil’s *Aeneid*, books I–VI, and on Martianus Capella’s *On the Marriage of Philology and Mercury*, and in his poetical and philosophical work *Cosmography*.

From the textual viewpoint, the Platonism of Thierry of Chartres and Bernard Silvestris might best be characterized as a mixture of the “Humanistic” and the “Encyclopedic,” the former term indicating their preoccupation with ancient Latin writers and the latter term the compiling style of the ancient Latin writers with whom they were preoccupied. Among these ancient writers, Apuleius was the author of a treatise *On Plato and his Doctrine*, which supplied a biography of the philosopher and an account of some of his theories. Calcidius translated and commented on Plato’s *Timaeus*, demonstrating the possibility of combining “Middle Platonic” and “Neoplatonic” doctrines of first principles. The work entitled *Asclepius* and attributed to the quasi-mythical writer “Thrice-Great” Hermes – whose authority for Christian readers had been established by Lactantius – served as a kind of parallel witness to the Pseudo-Dionysian theology. Macrobius commented on Cicero’s *Dream of Scipio*, providing the only summary of the “Neoplatonic” doctrine of the three first principles or hypostases available to the medieval reader. Martianus Capella was the author of a treatise *On the Marriage of Philology and Mercury*, which explained the structural relation among the seven liberal arts in Platonic or Pythagorean terms.

From the methodological viewpoint, Thierry of Chartres’ and Bernard Silvestris’ Platonism is grammatical and dialectical in the manner defined earlier. However, Bernard’s philosophy – at least in the case of his *Cosmography* – is also rhetorical

in character. It is “rhetorical” to the extent that (1) its philosophical doctrines are developed from a movement between the linguistic signifier and a linguistic signified, especially in the form of etymologies, and from a movement between one linguistic signified and another, particularly in the form of the (pagan) allegory or the (Christian) spiritual sense, and also to the extent that (2) these developments of philosophical doctrine occur in the context of writing, the encoding of hidden meanings, rather than of reading, the decoding of hidden meanings. Bernard’s rhetorical practice adapts to Platonic purposes a number of semantic distinctions that have been explained in his commentaries. Within the sphere of allegory, Bernard distinguishes between single terms (nouns) having primary and secondary meanings, for example, the Sun signifying the heavenly body and the Form of the Good, and combined terms (nouns + verbs) having primary and secondary meanings, for example, the fabrication of the world soul signifying a mythical craftsman’s activity and the dynamic structure of nature. Within the allegorical sphere, Bernard also distinguishes between single terms having a plurality of (primary and secondary) meanings, for example, the goddess Juno signifying both the element of air and the practical life, and pluralities of terms having a single (or primary) meaning, for example, both the god Jupiter and the man Anchises signifying the Christian God.

The content of Thierry of Chartres’ and Bernard Silvestris’ Platonism might be summarized under the headings of cosmology and psychology, theology being somewhat absorbed into cosmology in this system. The cosmological doctrine includes at least four points of interest. First, there is what might be termed the theory of four considerations. According to Thierry, the universe can be considered in four ways: in “absolute necessity” or where the Forms of things exist in a transcendently enfolded state in God, in “necessity of complication” or where the Forms are unfolded above individual things, in “determinate possibility” or where the Forms are unfolded within individual things, and in “absolute possibility” or where the Forms of things exist in an immanently enfolded state in Matter. Although

the fourfold consideration of the universe was probably derived from Augustine and the creative process of enfolded and unfolding probably from Boethius’ *On the Consolation of Philosophy*, the combination of these ideas to produce an emphatically idealist sense of divine causality seems to be Thierry’s innovation. A second important feature of this twelfth-century cosmology is the preoccupation with arithmetic. In dependence upon the Pythagorean tradition represented in the Latin-speaking world by Boethius’ *On Arithmetic* and according to which the transcendent Forms are equivalent to numbers, Thierry can argue dialectically that equality and inequality are inseparable determinations of divine power, that the generation of persons within the Trinity involves equality whereas the production of the creature outside the Trinity involves inequality, that the generation of persons within the Trinity can be expressed by the formula  $1 \times 1 = 1$ , and that the production of the creature outside the Trinity represents the multiplication of  $1 \times 2$ ,  $1 \times 3$ ,  $1 \times 4$ , etc. Thirdly, there is what might be termed the theory of four causes. According to Thierry, there are four causes of the world’s substance: the efficient cause, which is the Being of God; the formal cause, which is the Wisdom of God; the final cause, which is the Goodness of God; and the material cause, which is the four elements; it being necessary to posit such an efficient cause because the world is mutable, such a formal cause because the world is orderly, such a final cause because the world is not self-sufficient, and such a material cause because the world must proceed from disorder. The originally Aristotelian theory of the four causes was probably derived from Macrobius’ *Commentary on the Dream of Scipio*, and the identification of God with the Platonic transcendent Form probably from Boethius, although the emphatically immanent sense of divine causality produced by the combination of the two doctrines seems to be Thierry’s innovation. A fourth important feature of this twelfth-century cosmology is the preoccupation with music. Following the Pythagorean doctrine made available to Latin readers through Calcidius’ *Commentary on the Timaeus* and according to which immanent forms are connected by proportions, Bernard can

describe allegorically the absence of proportions in Matter and the introduction of such proportions by Form; the separation of the elements according to their properties of hotness, coldness, dryness, and wetness; and the consequent perfecting of the world's body.

It is in connection with the psychological doctrine of Thierry of Chartres and Bernard Silvestris that the problems of assimilating Platonic philosophy become more evident. By the ninth century, the relation of derivation between the world soul and individual souls – suggested by the Artificer's production of soul in the *Timaeus* – was viewed as problematic because of the Christian emphasis on the autonomy of individual moral responsibility. Eriugena's response to the problem had been to separate the problematic horizons of the universal and individual souls entirely by identifying the universal soul with the form of Life in which individual living things participate and to treat individual souls – together with their idealized bodies – as constituents of something called the “plenitude of humanity.” In the twelfth century, the world soul had again become the focus of debate. Now the relation of identity between universal soul as third hypostasis and Holy Spirit as third person – suggested by combining the Christian Trinity with the Neoplatonic hypostases – was seen as problematic because of the Christian dogma of consubstantiality in the Trinity. Thierry of Chartres attempts to solve the problem by distinguishing between the “supreme Trinity” and the “trinity of perpetual things” and treating the latter as an external reflection of the former. Thus, the three persons of the supreme Trinity can have a non-subordinating relation among themselves, whereas the three members of the trinity of perpetual things may have a subordinating relation. Moreover, the third member of the latter trinity can be identified not only with the world soul of the *Timaeus* but also with the “Nature” mentioned in Cicero's dialogues and the “Spirit” mentioned in the Hermetic *Asclepius*. Bernard Silvestris seems to have followed this solution in identifying the relation of external reflection between the supreme Trinity and the trinity of perpetual things with a relation of allegorical expression. Concerning the problem of the

relation between the universal soul and the individual soul, it is worth noting that, whereas this problem had been solved in the early medieval period by considering the universal soul primarily in terms of its lower phase of life and then identifying the latter with God – as form of life – the same problem will be solved in the later medieval period by considering the universal soul primarily in terms of its higher phase of intellect and then identifying the latter with God, as agent intellect.

Dietrich of Freiberg and Berthold of Moosburg are two of the most distinguished members of the late thirteenth- and early fourteenth-century German philosophical tradition founded by Albert the Great. Dietrich held many of the most important academic and administrative positions of the Dominican order both in Paris and in Germany, while Berthold held more minor positions of the same order at least in Germany. Both can be considered Platonists to the extent that they start from Albert's position that Plato and Aristotle are fundamentally in agreement and that they specialize in the interpretation of intensely Platonic sources, although Berthold begins to emphasize certain differences between Plato and Aristotle, which indicate the superiority of the former. With respect to their exposition of Platonism, the most important of Dietrich's numerous works are perhaps *On the Beatific Vision*, *On the Intellect and the Intelligible*, and *On Being and Essence*, while Berthold is represented by his single enormous work entitled *Exposition of Proclus' Elements of Theology*.

From the textual viewpoint, the Platonism of Dietrich of Freiburg and Berthold of Moosburg might best be characterized as “Scholastic.” Within the largest repertoire of philosophical texts assembled during the Middle Ages, the earlier Greek writings most often studied by these Scholastic Platonists were undoubtedly the works of Aristotle and Proclus' *Elements of Theology*. The former represented an authority to be overtly challenged or subtly undermined, whereas the latter furnished a paradigm of the systematic organization of Platonic thought through dialectical exposition. Various works of a decidedly Platonic character were drawn from different cultural milieus: from the Arabic world, the anonymous

Book of Causes, which provided a summary of Neoplatonic emanation theory; from Jewish literature, the Fountain of Life by Avicbron, with its influential theory of the universal relation between form and matter; and from the Byzantine world, Eustratios' Commentary on Aristotle's Nicomachean Ethics, which provided a defense of the theory of Forms. The earlier Latin writings most often studied by the Scholastic Platonists were perhaps the works of Anselm of Canterbury and the Physical Key of "Theodorus." The former was celebrated for proving the existence of God through his definition, whereas the latter provided a summary of Eriugena's doctrine detached from its author's controversial name.

From the methodological viewpoint, the most decisive change in the medieval approach to Platonism occurs in the work of Dietrich of Freiburg and Berthold of Moosburg. Whereas between the ninth and twelfth centuries, the grammatical method of decoding hidden meanings in the form of etymologies and allegories or the rhetorical method of encoding hidden meanings in the form of etymologies and allegories had been as prominent as the dialectical methods of constructing propositions and syllogisms among thinkers with Platonic leanings; during the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, the dialectical methods come to the forefront. Berthold of Moosburg provides dramatic evidence of this shift in his voluminous Exposition of Proclus' Elements of Theology. The preface to this work includes some remarks about the history of philosophy in which the commentator explains that Plato had originally expressed his thought in concealed teachings, that Plotinus' contribution was to remove the coverings, and that Proclus finally organized the thought into propositional form. In the main body of the work, each of the 211 propositions that make up the Elements of Theology receives a separate treatment divided into (A) discussion of Proclus' proposition subdivided into (1) analysis of earlier propositions presupposed by the current proposition and (2) analysis of the proposition itself and (B) discussion of Proclus' proof.

The shift toward dialectic in these late medieval thinkers is reinforced by their shift toward

idealism. It had been a feature of Christian Platonism since Augustine's time to view the derivation of first principles less as an emanative process completed by intellection – that is, where the One is followed by intellect – than as an emanative process commenced by intellection, that is, where God is coextensive with intellect. This position was assumed in Eriugena's doctrine of the four species of Nature and Thierry of Chartres' doctrine of the four considerations, given that in both cases a dialectical process within the divine intellect underlay the corresponding dialectical process in the human intellect. Now toward the end of the thirteenth century, Dietrich of Freiburg continues this approach but also radicalizes it by introducing the ontological category of "conceptional being." This latter represents neither a self-thinking subject – as was generally the case with the earlier idealisms – nor a mere being of reason but rather the self-knowing, which knows itself in a subject's thinking of its object, the subject being the various created intellects and the object Being qua Being. Dietrich's doctrine of conceptional being is certainly a novelty in medieval thought although it is anticipated in certain respects by Plotinus' notion of authentic being in *Enneads* VI. 4–5.

In order to make its relations with the earlier tradition clear, we might again summarize the content of Dietrich of Freiburg's and Berthold of Moosburg's Platonism under the headings of theology, cosmology, and psychology. Among the more important doctrines within the theological domain, there is one in which the rejection of Aristotle in favor of Plato comes into focus. Berthold's Exposition of Proclus' Elements of Theology begins by noting that, although these philosophers agree that multiplicity is a distinction of things or reasons, they disagree about the basis for this distinction. For Aristotle, unity is a "transcendental," since the opposition of being and nonbeing – which is transcendental – is the basis of the distinction between unity and multiplicity. But Plato is more correct in saying that unity – that is, the "One" – is above being and nonbeing and that the basis of the distinction between unity and multiplicity is degree of power. This discussion is explicitly based on

Aristotle's *Metaphysics* and Eustratios' *Commentary on Aristotle's Nicomachean Ethics* but also assumes the teaching of Dietrich of Freiberg. Toward the end of his treatise *On Intellect and the Intelligible*, Dietrich turns to considering the highest objects of intellect – including terms like unity and being – and explains that these constitute “reasons” that are identical with God. Although one can distinguish within the cognitive process in each case a reason in God, in the agent intellect, and in the possible intellect, and also a determinate phantasm accompanying each intelligible object, there is ultimately no plurality of reasons in the activity of intellection. This decidedly Platonic conclusion to Dietrich's discussion of intellect and the intelligible closely follows Augustine's account of angelic knowledge. Among the doctrines utilized by Dietrich and Berthold within the domain of cosmology, the notion of “essential cause” is particularly important. As derived explicitly from Proclus' *Elements of Theology*, this idea replaces the notion of horizontal causal relations between two individual things on the same level of reality with vertical causal relations between a more universal thing on one level and a more particular thing on another. Strictly speaking, an essential cause is that which pre-contains its effect in a higher mode than that in which the latter itself exists and therefore causes the latter through its own essence as an intellectual principle. The cosmological structure of the four “manners” unfolds according to this principle of essential causality. Thus, Dietrich and Berthold also derive from Proclus' treatise a basic analysis of reality in terms of the four levels of body, soul, intellect, and unity – each level having special characteristics marking it off from other levels – although the medieval thinkers deviate from their ancient predecessor in emphasizing that body, soul, and intellect are simultaneously multiplicities of “real” beings and unities of “conceptual beings.” Another doctrine utilized by Dietrich and Berthold within the domain of cosmology and having particular importance is that of being and essence. With something of a departure from the *Elements of Theology*, this doctrine combines the notion of a cause pre-containing its effect in a higher mode than that in which the latter itself

exists with a new understanding of emanative causality. According to the latter, the sameness constituting one side of the relation between cause and effect is associated strictly with the essence, whereas the difference constituting the other side of that relation is associated strictly with being. Finally, among the more important doctrines in the psychological domain, there is one in which it is less a question of rejecting Aristotle in favor of Plato than of reading Aristotle through Plato. Dietrich's *On the Blessed Vision* provides a detailed account of both the agent intellect and possible intellect of Aristotle in order to show that the beatific vision must occur in the former. The relation between the agent intellect, which knows itself and its object internally and essentially, and the possible intellect, which knows itself and its object externally and accidentally, clearly involves essential causality and emanation. By identifying it with the relation between the hidden mind and exterior thought described in Augustine's *On the Trinity*, Dietrich can show that “the Philosopher” agrees with theology.

This entry has attempted to argue briefly that, behind the bewildering multiplicity of methodological and doctrinal forms, “medieval Platonism” has a conceptual unity and a definite structure. However, it has not been possible to discuss all the significant figures here. A complete list would have to include in the twelfth century Adelard of Bath who combined the study of Plato with an interest in Arabic science; Bernard of Chartres who is responsible for the earliest glosses on the *Timaeus*, which can be associated with a named author; and William of Conches who commented on Plato, Macrobius, and other Platonists. In the thirteenth century, the contributions of Ulrich of Strasbourg who codified the Albertist synthesis of Platonism and Aristotelianism and of Meister Eckhart who presented a powerful new rhetorical expression of Platonism in his vernacular *Sermons* would also have to be acknowledged.

## Cross-References

- ▶ [Albert the Great](#)
- ▶ [Augustine](#)



- ▶ [Berthold of Moosburg](#)
- ▶ [Boethius](#)
- ▶ [Dietrich of Freiberg](#)
- ▶ [John Scottus Eriugena](#)
- ▶ [Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite](#)

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## Platonism, Renaissance

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### Abstract

This entry provides a survey of the Renaissance phase in the history of Platonism and covers the period roughly 1440–1500. Renaissance Platonism is distinguished from medieval Platonism on account of its access to Greek texts and Latin translations of works by Plato himself and by his ancient commentators which had been unavailable earlier. The brief initial phase of Renaissance Platonism is represented by the work of humanist translators of Plato for whom the ethical aspects of Plato's early dialogues were the primary concern. A much longer second phase was initiated by Marsilio Ficino, for whom the cosmological and theological elements in the dialogues of Plato's middle and later periods and the "Platonism" (really Neoplatonism) of late antique thinkers became the main focus. With respect to the latter phase, this entry discusses (1) four main tendencies in Renaissance philosophy: a new understanding of human subjectivity, exploration of the relations between rhetoric and magic, a new understanding of the role of mathematics, and the elaborate historiography of philosophy and (2) three major Platonic philosophers in whom the interplay of these tendencies can be traced: Nicholas of Cusa, Marsilio Ficino, and Giovanni Pico della Mirandola.

The Platonism of the Renaissance is distinguished from the medieval phase of the same tradition by its increased access to serviceable Latin translations and in certain cases also to original Greek texts of Plato's and the ancient Platonists' writings. This new situation resulted primarily from the activity of collectors bringing Greek manuscripts from Byzantium to Italy in the decades before 1453 and of humanists wishing to promote a general pedagogy based on the study of ancient literature.

A first phase of Platonic translation and study can be associated for the most part with the humanists themselves. In the early 1400s, Uberto and Pier Candido Decembrio – with the assistance of a Byzantine *émigré* named Manuel Chrysoloras – produced a translation of Plato's *Republic*. In the 1440s another version of the *Republic* and versions of the pseudo-Platonic *Axiochus* and *Eryxias* were composed by Antonio Cassarino. Before 1427 Leonardo Bruni produced translations of the *Apology*, *Crito*, and *Phaedo*, of the first part of the *Phaedrus*, of the *Gorgias*, and of several *Letters*. Among humanists of later decades, Cencio de' Rustici translated the *Axiochus* and *De virtute*; Lorenzo Lippi the *Ion*; Rinuccio Aretino the *Crito*, *Axiochus*, and *Euthyphro*; Francesco Filelfo three *Letters*; and Angelo Poliziano a section of the *Charmides*. With this group may be associated the Aristotelian George of Trebizond – a Byzantine convert to Catholicism – who translated the *Laws*, *Epinomis*, and *Parmenides* in the 1450s.

Typical of the humanist approach to Plato is a preoccupation with the literary, pedagogic, and ethical issues raised by the early "Socratic" dialogues and especially with the analysis of different political institutions in the *Republic*. This interpretation does not make use of the ancient commentary tradition with respect to Plato. In stark contrast to this stands the work of Ficino. His approach to Plato may be characterized by its emphasis on the theological, cosmological, and eschatological doctrines of the middle and later dialogues, together with its specific agenda of reconciling philosophy and Christianity through Platonism. In this interpretation, the ancient commentary tradition with respect to Plato acquires an overwhelming importance.

Marsilio Ficino's public career as a Platonist commenced in earnest in 1463 when he was asked to translate Cosimo de' Medici's Greek codex of Plato, and within about 2 years, he had translated ten dialogues, two of which – the *Parmenides* and the *Philebus* – he read aloud to Cosimo on the latter's deathbed. The complete *Platonis Opera omnia* together with Ficino's important introductory notes – the *argumenta* – was printed in 1484, although provisional manuscript versions of many of the dialogues were obviously being used by Ficino and circulated among his associates before that date. Also in 1484, Ficino's commentary on the *Symposium*, also known as *De amore* and itself written in dialogue form, was printed for the first time. Ficino's extended commentaries on the *Phaedrus*, *Sophist*, *Philebus*, *Timaeus*, *Parmenides*, and an extract of *Republic VIII* (dealing with the so-called nuptial number) were published in the collected volume *Commentarium in Platonem* in 1496, although some of the commentaries were still unfinished at that point.

The Renaissance interpretation of Platonism depends, in the first instance, on sources not exploited within the medieval philosophical curriculum. Among the late ancient Greek works beginning to have an impact at this time were the *Hermetic Corpus*, Plotinus' *Enneads*, and Iamblichus' *On the Mysteries of the Egyptians*, of which Ficino's translations were published in 1471, 1492, and 1497, respectively. Together with this group may be considered Proclus' *Platonic Theology*, of which the translation by Pietro Balbi was circulating in manuscript from 1462. The Greek text of Syrianus' *Commentary on Aristotle's Metaphysics* was studied during the last decades of the fifteenth century and that of Damascius' *On First Principles* after the middle of the sixteenth, although neither work had been translated. Ancient Greek sources were occasionally supplemented by Byzantine works, for example, Michael Psellus' *On the Operation of Demons*, Nicholas of Methone's *Refutation of Proclus' Elements of Theology*, and George Gemistos Plethon's *Commentary on the Zoroastrian Oracles*, and on at least one occasion by an Arabic work, the so-called *Theology of Aristotle* of which a translation appeared in 1519.

The Renaissance interpretation of Platonism also depends on sources which had been utilized within the medieval philosophical curriculum, although it expands the reading of those sources by presenting them in new combinations with one another and with Greek writings. For the writers of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries as for their medieval predecessors, Augustine and Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite provide the fundamental rationale for the study of Platonism within a Christian context. Medieval translations of ancient Greek works such as Proclus' *Elements of Theology*, *Three Minor Treatises*, and *Commentary on the Parmenides* – completed by William of Moerbeke in 1268, 1280, and 1286, respectively – continue to be used and indeed become more widely known. Arabic works in medieval translations, including the treatise known as *On Causes*, which was ultimately derived from Proclus' *Elements of Theology*, remain in circulation. Medieval writers such as Anselm of Canterbury, William of Conches, Thierry of Chartres, Thomas Aquinas, Henry of Ghent, and Giles of Rome provide further useful models for theorizing in the Christian Platonic manner. Among medieval writers, Ramon Llull exercised more influence over philosophers of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries than he did over any nearer his own time.

That Platonic philosophy was not universally welcomed during the Renaissance is shown by the outbreak of two controversies which were deliberately linked for polemical reasons. The first concerned the compatibility between Platonic doctrine and Christian morality and was raised by the theory of the community of wives in the *Republic*, the frequent homosexual suggestions in dialogues like the *Charmides* and *Symposium*, and the references to Socrates' daemon in the *Apology*. The second concerned the relative merits of Plato and Aristotle and was material to the encounter between Byzantine theologians and Latin scholastics at the Councils of Ferrara and Florence (1438–1439), called to debate union between the Orthodox and Catholic churches. The development of both controversies is perhaps best documented by the extensive treatise *Against the Calumniator of Plato* of Cardinal Bessarion

(1469), directed at George of Trebizond. That Platonic philosophy was not universally welcomed during the Renaissance is also indicated by the fact that university education in Italy continued to be dominated by Aristotelian studies. Although the important Platonic philosophers of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries had all studied in major European universities – for example, Nicholas of Cusa, Marsilio Ficino, and Giovanni Pico della Mirandola – it is a notable fact that they pursued their professional careers almost exclusively outside such an environment.

The use of a term like “Renaissance Platonism” as suggesting a unitary intellectual phenomenon is perhaps somewhat questionable in a situation, such as that obtaining during the fifteenth century, where the works of various independent thinkers rather than the collective activity of an institution are at issue. Nevertheless, since there are certain common features bringing the fifteenth-century thinkers into a group and distinguishing their Platonism from medieval Platonic or Aristotelian philosophy, we will retain the term “Renaissance Platonism” at least as a convenient shorthand expression.

In comparison to its medieval forerunner, the Platonism of the fifteenth century is characterized especially by its greater emphasis on the problems of practical philosophy. This emerges in the sphere of ethics with the debate over homosexual and heterosexual love occasioned by the reading of Plato's dialogues in Bessarion and Ficino and in the sphere of politics with the attempts of Nicholas of Cusa to apply Platonism to the agenda of religious concord. In fact, the Platonism of the fifteenth century is characterized by a tendency to elevate practical philosophy to the level of theoretical philosophy and sometimes even to undermine the distinction between the two types of philosophy. These developments can be studied in the context of several related phenomena: a new understanding of human subjectivity, exploration of the hidden relations between magic and rhetoric, a new approach to mathematical thinking, and a greater awareness of the historical foundation of philosophy itself.

The new understanding of human subjectivity is revealed in certain tendencies toward

individualism and relativism. Whereas the human subject of medieval thinking was assimilated to a framework of generic and absolute qualities – except to the extent that the Christian doctrine of salvation depended on the notion of individuality in the moral domain – the human subject of fifteenth-century speculation played a more practical role in the constitution of itself and its world. This new approach can be seen in Nicholas of Cusa's epistemology, where the human being is in a certain sense liberated by its own limitation. For Nicholas, since the relations existing between a finite human being and another finite human being and between all finite human beings and the infinite divine truth are incommensurable, the human subject is forced to define itself epistemologically with respect to these two spheres through a creative process of "conjecture" (*coniectura*).

There is what might be called a magical element recalling the contrast between the manipulation of internal or mental images called "cabala" by Pico della Mirandola and the manipulation of external or sensory images called "magic" by the same author.

The new understanding of the role of mathematics takes the form of a shift from theologically orientated arithmetic to physically orientated geometry. Medieval thinking assumed a descending hierarchy of metaphysics, mathematics, and physics in which a mathematics rooted in metaphysics was applied to the physical sphere and in which that mathematics involved the semantic properties of number studied hermeneutically. In the fifteenth- and sixteenth-century speculation, we see the beginning of a shift to a similar descending hierarchy in which a mathematics rooted in physics is applied to the metaphysical sphere and in which that mathematics involves the spatial properties of number studied logically. Pico della Mirandola's deduction of the properties of metaphysical principles from the arithmetical equivalences of Hebrew names may be considered an example of speculation in the former mode.

Fifteenth-century Platonism is also distinguished from earlier Platonism by its conscious reference to a complicated historiography of

philosophy pioneered by Ficino. Here, we find separately or in combination:

- (1) A systematic interpretation of the development of philosophy before Plato – including the notion of a tradition of "ancient theology" (*prisca theologia*) stemming from Zoroaster or Hermes Trismegistus – an increasing emphasis on arithmetical and geometrical thinking allegedly derived from Pythagoras, a renewed interest in the cosmological thinking found in the fragmentary remains of Empedocles and Anaxagoras, and a systematic presentation of the different Platonisms of late antiquity – including the distinction between the six "Academies" (*Academiae*) and the contrast between the "Roman" and the "Lycian" schools.
- (2) Various attempts to reconcile the philosophies of Plato and Aristotle, for instance, Nicholas of Cusa's idea of a coincidence of opposites between the two.
- (3) A development of the thesis that Dionysius the Areopagite – the "pinnacle" (*culmen*) of Platonic discipline and the "column" (*columna*) of Christian theology – wrote during the apostolic period, that his writings were then deliberately concealed through the jealousy of the later non-Christian Platonists, that certain thinkers like Philo Judaeus, Origen, and Ammonius Saccas had intimations of their content, and that the philosophy of Plotinus and Augustine's reading of the *Books of the Platonists* (*libri Platoniorum*) amounted to the definitive rediscovery of the original Dionysian teachings.
- (4) The beginnings of a distinction between the doctrines of Plato himself and of later Platonists, for example, Pico della Mirandola's idea that it was the later followers of Plato who altered the master's doctrine in order to elevate the "good" or the "one" dogmatically as a first principle before being itself.

In order to understand the philosophical issues of Renaissance Platonism in greater depth, we must now turn to the contributions of its most important individual thinkers. In chronological

order, these are Nicholas of Cusa, Marsilio Ficino, and Giovanni Pico della Mirandola.

With Nicholas of Cusa (1401–1464), the question of human subjectivity is developed into a methodologically rigorous form of idealism. The notion typical of any idealistic system that real objects are to some extent mind-dependent is elaborated in Nicholas' *On Learned Ignorance* and *Apology for Learned Ignorance* specifically under the influence of two earlier doctrines. These are the reinterpretations of the separately subsisting Platonic Forms as either thoughts of God or attributes of the divine by Pseudo-Dionysius and the derivation of the plurality of the Platonic forms from the inherently multiple human mind's attempts to grasp the unity of the divine substance by a certain commentator on Boethius whose name is not known to Nicholas himself. We can identify this commentator as Thierry of Chartres.

Nicholas views ultimate reality, which must be understood philosophically as God reflected in the created universe or as the created universe reflecting God, in terms of a complicated structural harmony. When considered from the most exalted viewpoint, reality emerges as the "coincidence of opposites" (*coincidentia oppositorum*) seemingly advocated by Dionysius. This coincidence represents a dialectical relation between terms which are logically opposed sometimes on the same metaphysical level, for example, "rest" and "motion," sometimes on different levels, for example, "absolute" and "contracted" or "learned" and "ignorant," and sometimes in both these senses, for example, "maximum" and "minimum." Since these terms are predicated at the same time and in the same respect of a single subject, a suspension of the principle of non-contradiction fundamental to Aristotelian thinking is clearly intended. Nicholas can argue in *On the Beryl* that it was because of his mistaken belief in the universal applicability of this law that Aristotle was unable to resolve fundamental metaphysical problems concerning the nature of physical change and the nature of substance in a successful manner. When considered from a less elevated viewpoint, reality appears as a structure of mediation which exemplifies the principle of "everything in everything" (*quodlibet in*

*quodlibet*) probably derived from Proclus. This structure may consist of three terms – such as the "absolute maximum" or God, the "contracted maximum" or the universe, and the "absolute and contracted maximum" or Christ on which the structure of the treatise *On Learned Ignorance* is based – where there is a single mediation. Alternatively, it may consist of four terms – such as the first oneness or "God," the second oneness or "intellect," the third oneness or "soul," and the fourth oneness or "body" around which the main discussion of *On Conjectures*, Book I, is organized – where a double mediation is implied. For Nicholas, the coincidence of opposites is related to the mediated structure in the same manner as the nondiscursive enfolding of concepts is related to the discursive unfolding of those same concepts.

But real objects are only mind-dependent to some extent because such objects are ultimately unknowable. In Nicholas' philosophy, the disjunction between the mind and its object is expressed mathematically as a disproportion between the finite and the infinite, and a means of overcoming this disjunction is then provided by mathematical symbolism. Two kinds of argument are developed at length in *On Learned Ignorance*, Book I. First, a finite geometrical term such as a line, a triangle, or a circle can be rendered infinite conceptually and then applied symbolically to a corresponding object: here Maximum, Trinity, and Unity, respectively. Secondly, the line, when rendered infinite, can be equated with the triangle and the triangle, when rendered infinite, with the circle. Nicholas claims to derive this application of the coincidence of opposites from Pythagoras.

Augustine is perhaps the decisive influence on the philosophy of Marsilio Ficino (1433–1499). This fact can be shown by comparing Augustine's interpretation of the Mosaic account of creation – of which the applications of an alternation of revealing and concealing and of a structure based on the number six to angelic thinking are the salient features – with Ficino's account of the history of philosophy. Ficino here introduces a general historical schema. This envisages the secular and the sacred histories as two parallel sequences both of which are bisected by the

coming of Christ. The segment of the secular history corresponding chronologically to the Old Law contains a phase of revelation from the beginnings of philosophy until Plato and a phase of concealment after the time of Plato. The segment of secular history corresponding chronologically to the New Dispensation contains a phase of revelation in Pseudo-Dionysius' presentation of Platonism, a phase of concealment when the Dionysian writings were hidden, a further phase of revelation in Plotinus' and Augustine's rediscovery of the elements of Platonism compatible with Christianity, and a further phase of concealment when the Plotinian-Augustinian tradition was replaced by Scholasticism. Ficino also introduces several more specific historical schemata. According to one schema, philosophy is identified with certain ancient mysteries which were progressively revealed by Hermes Trismegistus, Orpheus, Aglaophamus, Pythagoras, Philolaus, and Plato. In sometimes removing Philolaus at the same time as adding Zoroaster to this list, Ficino seems to be intent on retaining exactly six phases of revelation. According to another schema, the true Platonic philosophy is understood to have been concealed by Xenocrates, Arcesilaus, and Carneades but then revealed by Ammonius Saccas, Plotinus, and Proclus. In explicitly contrasting three Greek and three non-Greek "Academies," Ficino seems again to be preoccupied with the association between revelation and the number 6.

Such original interpretations of Augustine's doctrine provide Ficino with the best context for assimilating various Plotinian ideas new to the Latin world. An example of such an assimilation is the fundamental doctrine of the "hypostases," which is subtly transformed in Ficino's *Platonic Theology*. According to Ficino, there are five primary levels of being – "God" (*deus*), "Angel" (*angelus*), "Soul" (*anima*), "Quality" (*qualitas*), and "Body" (*corpus*) – rather than three as in Plotinus. These hypostases are distinguished from one another according to the presence or absence of specific characteristics such as activity and passivity, motion and rest, and unity and multiplicity – a feature more Augustinian than

Plotinian. Ficino further deviates from Plotinus' theory of the hypostases by emphasizing the mediating position of self-moving Soul between the immobile Angel and the mobile Quality and also by interpreting each of the hypostases Angel, Soul, and Quality as a species "primal in a certain genus" (*primum in aliquo genere*) rather than as a genus. Also according to Ficino, the first hypostasis as well as the second hypostasis is fundamentally intellectual in nature – another feature more Augustinian than Plotinian. Finally, each of the five primary levels of being is interpreted as furnishing the speculative limit for a different earlier philosopher, that is, God for Plato, Angel for Anaxagoras, Soul for Heraclitus, Quality for the Stoics, and Body for Democritus.

Ficino employs his revised version of Plotinus' doctrine of hypostases in order to interpret Plato's thought in two important areas. When writing as theorist of the theological in his *Platonic Theology* and *Commentary on the Phaedrus*, Ficino identifies both the abstract categories of Plato's *Parmenides* and the Olympian deities of Plato's *Phaedrus* with hypostatic levels. In the former case, the "One" becomes God, the "One-Many" becomes Angel, and the "One and Many" becomes Soul, whereas in the latter, Jupiter and the other deities can become different intellects, different Ideas within Intellect, or intellectual modalities according to context. When writing as theorist of the erotic in his dialogue *De amore*, Ficino identifies the "heavenly Venus" and the "earthly Venus" of the *Symposium* with intellectual or psychic modalities. The former becomes an angel's ascending movement toward God or a soul's ascending movement toward an angel, the latter the soul's descending movement toward procreation.

Although the work of Giovanni Pico della Mirandola (1463–1494) has given rise to many divergent interpretations on the part of modern scholars, a sufficiently careful reading of his main texts makes his relation to the fifteenth-century Platonic tradition reasonably clear. We may start from the famous *Nine Hundred Conclusions* – which represent not a conventional written treatise on philosophy but a collection of



philosophical propositions to be debated orally – and from the *Oration* (later subtitled *On the Dignity of Man*) designed to introduce that disputation. Here, the importance of understanding reality as a coincidence of opposites is indicated by Pico’s labeling of a methodologically important section of the *Conclusions* “paradoxical conclusions according to my own opinion introducing new doctrines of philosophy” and that of understanding reality as a structure of mediation is indicated by Pico’s constant use of the verbal expression “just as...so also” (*sicut. . .ita*) within the formulation of the different propositions. Both the coincidence of opposites and the structure of mediation are connected to the notion that man – and an *individual* human being as well as the collectivity is clearly understood here – can bring all levels of reality into union because he uniquely has no properties of his own.

It is important to understand the novel treatment of the relation between practical and theoretical philosophy by Pico, in which the former is elevated to the level of the latter and indeed is combined with it in a subtle manner. For Pico, the mediating structure of reality is not only something to be discovered theoretically but also something to be manipulated in a practical sense, this same operation being called “cabala” (*cabala*) when it takes place within the soul itself but “magic” (*magia*) when it takes place in respect of bodily things. In the *Oration* and the *Nine Hundred Conclusions*, Pico describes the essential features of the cabala which he has been studying with the assistance of Jewish scholars such as Flavius Mithridates. He notes that it is an oral teaching revealed to Moses alongside the written law that was transmitted as an esoteric method of interpreting that written law through the manipulation of the numerical properties of the Hebrew alphabet; and he maintains that it confirms the doctrines of the greatest philosophy and, more importantly, the essential teachings of Christianity. For Pico, Cabalism is not simply another philosophical component within the syncretistic system of “ancient theology” but a general hermeneutical technique which can be practiced in relation to all other forms of

philosophy. To the extent that it depends on a manipulation of the mediating structure of reality both within the soul itself and with respect to bodily things, this process of “making marriage in the world” (*maritare mundum*) is also identified with the theurgy of such ancient thinkers as Iamblichus and Proclus.

Pico’s relation to the fifteenth-century Platonic tradition is indicated most clearly in his treatise *On Being and Unity* (*De ente et uno*). This essay seems to be the only completed section of a projected larger work in which he would explain, according to the *Oratio*, the “harmony of Plato and Aristotle” (*Platonis Aristotelisque concordia*) proposed by many earlier thinkers, but not demonstrated hitherto. In fact, *On Being and Unity* actually illuminates the relations both between Plato and Aristotle and between Plato and the “Platonists.” On the first question, Pico shows that the agreement between the two ancient thinkers is to be sought neither in asserting that Plato speaks the truth concerning divine things and Aristotle the truth regarding the natural world nor in distinguishing an exoteric Aristotle who rejects Plato from an esoteric Aristotle who agrees with him but in emphasizing the irreducible polysemy of the term “Being” which the two philosophers explore from different viewpoints. On the second question, Pico argues that the doctrine of certain “Platonists” that the One is to be placed unequivocally as a hypostasis above Being, which they believe to be the central teaching in Plato’s *Parmenides*, and opposed to the Aristotelian doctrine of the convertibility of Being and Unity fails to appreciate a text whose essential message is the necessity of hermeneutical suspension before the highest Truth.

## Cross-References

- ▶ [Augustine](#)
- ▶ [Giovanni Pico Della Mirandola](#)
- ▶ [Nicholas of Cusa](#)
- ▶ [Plethon, George Gemistos](#)
- ▶ [Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite](#)

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## Plethon, George Gemistos

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### Abstract

George Gemistos Plethon was a significant philosopher during the last years of Byzantium (c. 1360–1454). His adopted surname Plethon was deliberately chosen as an allusion to Plato. Born in Constantinople, Plethon later moved to Mystras in Peloponnese and took part in the Byzantine delegation to the council of Ferrara-Florence in 1438–1439, where the issue of the Church union was discussed. Plethon was a Platonist, inspired in his interpretation of Plato by several ancient Platonists including Neoplatonists. His most comprehensive philosophical work is the *Book of Laws*, modeled on Plato's homonymous work, which was condemned posthumously by the Orthodox Church on allegations of the paganism of its author. His most famous treatise *On the Differences Between Plato and Aristotle* launched a long debate among Byzantines and Italian Humanists regarding the merits of the two classical philosophers.

### Life

Little is known about the descent and the early years of Plethon, originally named George Gemistos, and almost nothing is certain of his life until 1407. Presumably, he was born sometime between 1355 and 1360, given the testimony of George Trapezountios (*Comparationes*

*philosophorum Aristotelis et Platonis*, Chap. 3) that at his death in 1454, Plethon was almost 100 years old (Woodhouse 1986, p. 5). References to members of the Gemistos family in documents of the church in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries suggest that he was Constantinopolitan with close ties to the church (Woodhouse 1986, pp. 17–18). The only testimony regarding the early education of Plethon comes from a possibly biased source, his later adversary, George Scholarios. He suggests that Plethon was educated by a certain Elissaeus, a Jew, otherwise unknown (Scholarios, *Letter to the Princess of Peloponnese*, *Opera* IV.152–153, *Letter to Exarch Joseph*, *Opera* IV.162; Woodhouse 1986, pp. 23–25). Scholarios' report, written after Plethon's death, raises suspicions, because it aims to substantiate the polemical claim that Plethon entertained heretical beliefs. The practice of associating alleged heretics with Jews was common among Byzantines.

Plethon must have taught at Constantinople from the late 1390s to 1409. One of his students from this period was Markos Eugenikos, the future bishop of Ephesus and later the main opponent to Church union at the council of Florence. While in Constantinople, Plethon must have been in contact with Demetrios Kydones, as can be inferred from a letter of Plethon to Bessarion (Mohler 1942:III.467.18). Gemistos left the capital of Byzantium for Mystras in 1409. Scholarios (*Letter to the Princess of Peloponnese*, *Opera* IV.152–3) suggests that Plethon was sent into exile to Mystras by the emperor Manuel II, but this is almost certainly false. Most probably Plethon was sent to Mystras out of imperial favor. This is testified by a document dated in 1433 written by Theodore II, despot of Mystras, according to which Plethon was loyal to the imperial family and came to Mystras at the request of his father Manuel II (Lambros, *Palaiologeia kai Peloponnisiaka*, 1930a, IV.106–109), presumably because the latter sent to Mystras trustworthy persons to support the regime of his son Theodore (Masai 1956, pp. 59–63). In Mystras, Plethon undertook considerable activity, educational and political. The circle of his students included the future Cardinal Bessarion and Isidore of

Monemvasia, probably the future bishop of Monemvasia, while at the same time he composed two political works, the *Address to the Emperor Manuel on Affairs in the Peloponnese* and the *Advisory Address to the Despot Theodore on the Peloponnese* (Lambros 1926a III.246–265, 1930a IV.113–135). In them, Plethon expresses deep dissatisfaction with the political situation and exhorts the imperial court to change the administrative, military, and economic policies in Peloponnese, while he argues for a social and political reformation inspired by Plato's *Republic* (see below, Philosophy). Similar contemporary political writings are Chrysoloras' exhortation to the emperor (1413/1414) and the anonymous Lucianic satire *Mazaris' Journey to Hades* (1415).

In 1426, Emperor John the VIII solicited Plethon's advice on the question of summoning a council for Church union (Woodhouse 1986, p. 111), a highly controversial issue in Byzantium, with the ultimate vision of mounting a joint military campaign against the Ottoman Turks. By autumn 1437, the emperor had accepted the Pope's invitation for a council at Ferrara. The Byzantine delegation included Plethon and two of his students, Markos Eugenikos and Bessarion. The onset of plague necessitated the change of venue to Florence, under the patronage of Cosimo de' Medici. Plethon's role in the council was not very active, although he reportedly defended Markos Eugenikos (Woodhouse 1986, p. 173), which means that he resisted the unionist position (Masai 1956, pp. 323–327). Plethon was more interested in debating with the Italian humanists, being particularly concerned with the question of how the philosophies of Plato and Aristotle compare. While in Florence, he wrote a short treatise *On the Differences Between Plato and Aristotle (De differentiis)* in which he advocates the view that the philosophy of Aristotle is fallacious on many counts and as such inferior to that of Plato; he claims further that this verdict was shared by ancient thinkers. He probably refers to ancient Platonists excerpted by Eusebius in his *Preparation for the Gospel*.

Plethon's work gave rise to a long controversy over the relative value of the philosophies of

Plato and Aristotle (Monfasani 1976; Karamanolis 2002). Four or 5 years after the publication of *De differentiis* in 1439, Scholarios published a long and carefully argued refutation, *Against Plethon's Objections to Aristotle*, to which Plethon replied 5 years later (i.e., 1448–1449) with a work (*Against Scholarios' Tenets*) more scholarly than the *De differentiis*. Scholarios did not reply, yet the scenery was set for a controversy which lasted after the death of Plethon. Theodore Gazes wrote against Plethon and in defense of Aristotle, to which Michael Apostoles replied, criticizing Aristotle's doctrine of substance. To this replied Gazes' cousin, Andronikos Kallistos, defending Aristotle against the criticisms of Plethon and Apostoles. The most powerful advocate of Aristotle was George Trapezountios, whose work *Comparationes philosophorum Aristotelis et Platonis*, being the first written on the subject in Latin, introduces the subject to Italian humanists. A scholarly reply to Trapezountios comes from Bessarion in his *In calumniatorem Platonis*, which highlights the merits of Plato without dismissing Aristotle, arguing that the ancients considered their philosophies as being largely in agreement, while he further argues against Plethon for the agreement between Platonic philosophy and Christianity.

Plethon was particularly active in the last 14 years of his life. The majority of the surviving autographs of his were written at this time (Diller 1956, pp. 28–29). Plethon must have been engaged especially with the writing of his magnum opus, the *Book of Laws*. The work survives in part, since Scholarios, after becoming the first Ottoman-era patriarch of Constantinople in 1454, ordered the burning of all copies posthumously, on the grounds that it propagates paganism (*Letter to Exarch Joseph*, Scholarios *Opera* IV.155–172; Woodhouse 1986, pp. 356–360; Monfasani 1992, pp. 49–50). Plethon died most probably in 1454 in Mystras (Monfasani 1976, pp. 206–214). In 1464, his admirer Sigismondo Malatesta transferred Plethon's remains and reburied them in his neo-pagan temple in Rimini (Woodhouse 1986, pp. 374–375).

## Philosophy

Plethon is a Platonist, inspired in his interpretation of Plato mainly by Plutarch (first-century CE), Numenius, Atticus (second century CE), Plotinus (third century), and Proclus (fifth-century). Plethon maintains the agreement of Zoroastrian, Pythagorean, and Platonic philosophy (*Book of Laws* III.43, 252–256), which is reminiscent of Numenius' claim about the diffusion of truth to ancient sages (fr. 1 *Des Places*; cf. *Laws* III.43, 253–256), and considers the Persian Magi to be disciples of Zoroaster and interpreters of his thought in the *Chaldean Oracles*, which explains his fascination with them (Athanassiadi 2002). Like Numenius and Plotinus, Plethon maintains the hierarchical structure of intelligible reality, while he also relates metaphysical principles with pagan gods and shows a tendency for religious prescriptions, which is characteristic of Proclus.

Plethon's most important philosophical works are the *De differentiis* and the *Book of Laws*. More comprehensive is the *Book of Laws*, which must have been written over a long period of Plethon's life. It is a loose and repetitive composition divided into three books, none of which focuses on a single theme; chapters on ethics and politics appear in books I and III and chapters on metaphysics occur in books I and II, while some chapters such as II and VI, on fate, were probably independent treatises (Hladky 2007: 198–209). In the first chapter, Plethon argues that his work aims to present the laws and the best constitution according to which intelligent people should live in order to achieve happiness (*Laws* III.43, 248). Plethon maintains that human happiness cannot be determined unless one inquires first into the nature of human beings and the nature of the universe, where man lives (*Book of Laws* I.1, 22), a view he also defends in his treatise *On Virtues* (A2, p. 3 Tambrun-Krasker). Accordingly, Plethon suggests that ethics depends on physics, and physics depends on theology.

Plethon maintains the Platonist division of reality into intelligible and sensible realms and argues for its hierarchical order. He adopts a

Pythagorean and Platonist distinction of three kinds of essences. The first is the father or originator of everything else (*Laws* III.15, 96), which Plethon identifies with Zeus (*Laws* III.15, 96) and apparently also with the Form of the Good (III.35, 222) which is beyond being (*Republic* 509b), as can be inferred from his description according to which the first god is supremely one and simple (*Laws* III.15, 100), pre-eternal (*propatôr*, *Book of Laws* III.35, 204), being itself (*autoôn*; III.34, 132), good itself (*autoagathos*; *Book of Laws* III.34, 132), and beyond being (*hyperousios*; I.5, 46). Noticeably, Plethon uses vocabulary found in Numenius (frs. 16, 17, 21 Des Places) and the *Chaldean Oracles* (XXXI-II). Like Numenius and Plotinus, Plethon maintains that the first god brings about a second entity, an image of himself (*Book of Laws* III.15, 96–98), through whom the first god creates the universe (*De differentiis* X.336.20–23). This is the realm of the intelligible Forms, which is characterized by multiplicity (*De differentiis* X.337.7–13; *Book of Laws* I.5, 56). The Forms are the immediate causes of the things in the sensible world (*De differentiis* X.341.39–342.1), yet God or Zeus is the ultimate cause of everything (*Book of Laws* III.15, 102). Plethon identifies the Forms with the supra-celestial gods, who are divided into two kinds, the Olympian and the Titans (*Book of Laws* I.5, 46–52). The final kind of essence is the soul, which is identified with the subcelestial gods (*Book of Laws* I.5, 52–54). Each kind of essence generates an ontologically inferior entity (*Book of Laws* III.15, 94–96, 102): the first god generates the intellect and the Forms, identifiable with a certain class of gods, they in turn generate lower gods until we reach the realm of demons and that of the mortal beings (*Book of Laws* I.5, 52).

Plethon is a determinist, maintaining two axioms that “whatever occurs must necessarily do so from some cause” and that “every cause must produce whatever effect it may have in both a necessary and a determinate way” (*De differentiis* VIII, 332.24–334.4). Plethon relates the effect of the causes with the activity of the gods, arguing that the gods are the causes of everything that happens (*Book of Laws* II.6,

64–66), with the first god, Zeus, in particular to be the source of necessity, as he is unchangeable (*Book of Laws* II.6, 67). Plethon claims that the rejection of determinism leads to atheism (*Book of Laws* II.6, 66), of which he accuses Aristotle (*De differentiis* VIII). Being confronted with the question of human freedom that his position entails, Plethon takes a view similar to that of the Stoics (Siniosoglou 2011, 316), arguing that man is free in his most rational part, yet this does not mean absence of necessity. This is imposed by the gods and the first god in particular, but it is always for the good since the first god is absolute goodness; man, being rational, can always decide to side with the divine necessity and live a good life, or not and be miserable (*Book of Laws* II.6, 67, 72–74; *Letter to Bessarion*, Mohler 1942:I.462; Bargeliotes 1975; Hladky 2007, pp. 117–120). Accused by Bessarion that this is a Stoic view (*Letter to Plethon II*, Mohler 1942:III.464), Plethon refers to the role of the soul in *Epinomis* (*Letter to Bessarion II*, Mohler 1942:III.466).

Regarding cognition, Plethon argues that reason is the best and most divine criterion by means of which we, humans, can attain truth and achieve happiness (*Book of Laws* I.2, 34). Also divine are the common notions by means of which we think, which Plethon apparently identified with the intelligible Forms, as can be inferred from the fact that in *De differentiis* X, he argues that the Forms solve the problem of how man cognizes the essences of things. These forms or common notions are sown into the souls by the divine intellect, and this is how each soul has acquired reasons of things (*Magian Oracles* XVI; Hladky 2007, p. 45).

As a Platonist, Plethon defends the immortality of the soul and criticizes Aristotle for rejecting the Platonist position (*De differentiis* IX–X). Plethon adopts the Platonic view that human soul consists in a mortal and in an immortal part, which correspond to our animal and divine nature (*Book of Laws* III.43, 246–8), and argues that man is the bond between the mortal and the immortal part of the universe (*Book of Laws* III.43, 246, *Summary of the Doctrines of Zoroaster and Plato*, Alexandre *Traité des Lois*, 1858, 267). He argues that the soul uses an ethereal body as a means for

moving into an actual body (*Reply to Scholarios* XXIX.474.25–30, *Magian Oracles* XV), a doctrine that he found in Neoplatonists. Plethon adds some new arguments in support of the Platonic thesis regarding the immortal nature of the soul in his two funeral orations on the empresses Cleope and Helen. He points out that this is an ancient belief widely accepted (*On Cleope* 171.7–172.8; Lambros 1930b) and also claims that the desire on the part of humans for immortality suggests that this can be satisfied. Plethon further argues that humans would not be prepared to kill themselves, unless the human soul would survive, because no animal seeks its own destruction (*On Cleope* 173.9–174.4; Lambros 1930b). Being the boundary (*methorion*) between the mortal and immortal world, man connects the two and contributes to the universal harmony (*Book of Laws* III.43, 258–60; Hladky 2007, p. 109).

Plethon's view that man is composite of a mortal and an immortal part shapes also his ethics. Assuming that man is a creature of god and akin to its creator by virtue of reason (*Book of Laws* III.34, 148), he claims that man can become like god, who is perfectly good (*On Virtues* A2:3), defending the view of the *Theaetetus* 176b that happiness consists in attaining assimilation to god (*On Virtues* A1, *Laws* II.6, 74, III.34, 144). Virtue is defined as "the disposition (*hexis*) according to which we are good" (*On Virtues* A1:1). Like Plotinus and later Neoplatonists, Plethon appears to distinguish between civic virtues, which benefit society (A11:12), and dianoetic virtues, pertaining to man's immortal part. In the first category, he distinguishes four cardinal virtues in hierarchical order, prudence, justice, courage, and temperance. In order to acquire virtue, we must have a perfect understanding of it as well as practice and training (A14:14). Yet in his view the most eminent activity by means of which man comes close to the divine is contemplation (*Book of Laws* III.43, 246–248).

Plethon's political views are outlined in the *Book of Laws* and in his advisory orations to the emperor Manuel and the Despot of Mystras, Theodore. In the political orations and in his two funeral orations on the empresses Cleope and Helen, Plethon uses historical and mythological

examples and talks about the Byzantines in a historical perspective, linking them with the Romans and the ancient Greeks. In his addresses to the imperial court, Plethon proposed economic, administrative, and military reforms in the organization of Peloponnese. Inspired by the *Republic*, Plethon argues for a three-tiered social structure, the ruling class (the imperial court), the service providers (e.g., merchants, retailers), and the laborers (e.g., farmers), while in his oration to Theodore, Plethon distinguishes three kinds of constitution, monarchy, oligarchy, and democracy, himself leaning toward an enlightened monarchy, that is, a ruler assisted with good counselors and relying on good laws (Siniosoglou 2011, 330–388). This appears to be at odds with the ideal constitution of the *Republic*, but perhaps Plethon considered the ruler and his advisors as the ruling class (Hladky 2007, pp. 10–12).

Plethon also had scientific, historical, and theological interests; he was the author of a geographical treatise (Diller 1937), of an astronomical manual (Tihon-Mercier), of a historical work on the aftermath of the battle of Mantinea (Maltese 1989), and of a theological treatise about the procession of the Holy Spirit, in which he defended the Byzantine position (Alexandre *Traité des Lois* 300–311). Scholarios' accusations of Plethon for attachment to Proclus (*Letter to the Exarch Joseph*, Scholarios, *Opera* IV.153.23–24) and commitment to and diffusion of paganism distort the profile of the complex thinker and should be resisted (Monfasani 1992, against Masai 1956; Woodhouse 1986). Plethon had an impact on Byzantines and Italian humanists. He probably introduced to Italy Strabo's *Geography*, studied also by Christopher Columbus (Woodhouse 1986, p. 183), and was responsible for the diffusion of the *Chaldean Oracles* to Ficino's circle (Wilson 1992, pp. 91–92; Tambrun-Krasker 2006, pp. 9–33), who mentions Plethon in the preface of his translation of Plotinus' *Enneads*.

## Cross-References

- ▶ Basil Bessarion
- ▶ Demetrios Kydones



- ▶ Epistemology, Byzantine
- ▶ Ethics, Byzantine
- ▶ George Scholarios (Gennadios II)
- ▶ Metaphysics, Byzantine
- ▶ Philosophical Theology, Byzantine
- ▶ Platonism, Renaissance
- ▶ Political Philosophy, Byzantine

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## Plotinus, Arabic

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### Abstract

One of the most influential among the works translated into Arabic, the *Enneads* IV–VI circulated in the Arabic-speaking world under Aristotle's name. The Arabic version belongs to the set of translations done by the scholars gathered around al-Kindī (Endress 1973, 1997). This early translation gave rise to three texts: the so-called *Theology of Aristotle*, an *Epistle on the Divine Science* falsely attributed to al-Fārābī, and a collection of sayings attributed to a “Greek Sage” (*al-Shaykh al-Yūnānī*). To the Plotinian doctrines assimilated and adapted within the Kindī's circle an extraordinary impact was granted by Aristotle's alleged authorship, and this in almost all the fields of Arabic philosophy outside logic and physics. No matter what solutions the *falāsifa* espoused, their agenda of problems was significantly influenced by the Arabic Plotinus in metaphysics and cosmology (the separatedness and absolute simplicity of the First Principle, its universal causality through the mediation of the first Intellect, the separate substances and cosmic Soul) as well as in psychology (the spirituality and immortality of the human soul, the union of soul with the separate Intellect).

## The *Enneads* and Their Arabic Translation

Even though his importance for Arabic philosophy equals only Aristotle's, the name of Plotinus is almost unknown in Arabic philosophical literature, as highlighted by Rosenthal's telling formula “Plotinus: the power of anonymity” (Rosenthal 1974). This anonymity was by no means a neutral one. It is not the case that Plotinus' writings in Arabic bear no name or a misspelled one; indeed, most of them circulated under Aristotle's own name, thereby generating one of the most decisive features of Arabic–Islamic philosophy: the intermingling of Aristotelian and Neoplatonic tenets, apparent not only in eastern Arabic–Islamic philosophy up to Avicenna and later, but also in the West of the Muslim world, including Averroes – at least in the sense that such an intermingling settled the agenda of the problems the latter had to solve. The main Plotinian text in Arabic is the so-called *Theology of Aristotle*, a treatise in ten chapters where the attribution to Aristotle of materials taken from *Enneads* IV–VI is explicit from the outset. At the beginning of the Arabic text, we are told that this book is the *Uthūlūjīyā* (a loan word for θεολογία) of the philosopher Aristotle, the meaning of the Greek term being *rūbūbiyya*, that is, divine sovereignty; Aristotle's *Uthūlūjīyā*, according to the Arabic text, is commented upon by Porphyry. In fact, what follows this premise is a series of extracts from *Enneads* IV–VI.

How did Plotinus' writings reach the Arabic-speaking world, and under what circumstances did they turn out to be “Aristotle's” work? While there is no scholarly consensus about the latter question, as for the former some conclusions are firmly established nowadays. The first and most important one is that the Arabic version was done on the basis of the *Enneads*, that is, Porphyry's edition of Plotinus' writings, and not – as maintained in past scholarship – on the basis of some alternative way of circulation of them. The hypothesis that the Arabic translation was issued from some form of circulation of Plotinus' teaching other than the *Enneads* was suggested by (1) the difference between the Greek text and the Arabic version, both in structure and contents, and

(2) the testimonies about the existence of non-Enneadic versions of Plotinus' writings. Conflating (1) and (2), some scholars – including no less a specialist than Paul Henry, the coeditor of the *Enneads* – advanced the idea that what was lying in the background of the Arabic Plotinus was one or another of these non-Enneadic versions of his writings. None of them has come down to us, but Porphyry's witness in the *Vita Plotini* about the early circulation of some treatises as well as about the existence of notes taken from Plotinus' lectures, plus some facts in the literary tradition both direct (a marginal scholium) and indirect (extensive quotations by other writers, e.g., Eusebius), suggested that some of Plotinus' writings were available even before the production of the *Enneads* by Porphyry, some 30 years after Plotinus' death. If one takes into account that the structure of the *Theology of Aristotle* is completely different from that of the *Enneads*, it comes as no surprise that in the eyes of the first generation of scholars who studied comparatively the Greek and Arabic texts the latter was likely to derive not from Porphyry's edition – the *Enneads* – but from one or another of these non-Enneadic versions (Henry 1937, 1938:xiv, followed by Cruz Hernández (1974, 1981:55). Since at the end of the *Vita Plotini*, which is put at the beginning of the *Enneads*, Porphyry informs us that he added some complements to Plotinus' writings ("commentaries," "headings," and "summaries"), and since the beginning of the Arabic text says that this book is the *Theology* of Aristotle commented by Porphyry, the prevailing opinion was that the work translated into Arabic was one of these Porphyrian complements, the favorite one being the "commentaries" (Dieterici 1883; Paret 1959–1960; Pines 1971; Thillet 1971); this opinion has been challenged by Zimmermann (1986). However, decisive proofs that the Arabic version was made out of an exemplar of the *Enneads* have been provided by Schwyzer (1941); later on, Henry changed his mind on this point (Henry 1982). So, the first question raised above – how did Arabic-speaking scholars get in touch with Plotinus' writings? – can safely be answered as follows: a manuscript of the *Enneads* reached

Baghdad within the first decennia of the ninth century, and was translated into Arabic there. This conclusion is grounded on the data given at the beginning of the Arabic *Theology*, where three names are mentioned that locate the translation in space and time: the Christian 'Abd al-Masīh ibn Nā'ima al-Ḥimsī (i.e., from Emesa, Syria), as the translator of the *Uthūlūjiyā* into Arabic; al-Kindī, as the revisor of the translation, and Aḥmad the son of the caliph al-Mu'taṣim, to whom al-Kindī was appointed as a tutor, as the addressee of the revision. Since al-Kindī is mentioned as the revisor, his circle and the Baghdad caliphal court are the milieu where the translation was done; since al-Mu'taṣim reigned between 833 and 842, this is the span of time in which it was produced. Although incomplete – since, as we have seen before, only treatises belonging to *Enneads* IV–VI feature in the Arabic corpus – the Arabic Plotinus provides important information on the lost Greek manuscript that served as the basis for the translation. A considerable part of treatise IV 7 [2] is lost in the Greek direct tradition (the lacuna was recognized and the loss was made good thanks to the extensive quotations of IV 7 [2] made by Eusebius); now, this part is extant in Arabic: the obvious implication is that the Greek MS out of which the translation was done was not affected by the lacuna. This licenses two conclusions: (1) the missing part did belong in the *Enneads* as they were edited by Porphyry, against the hypothesis that the complete text that features in Eusebius' quotation counts as the witness of a non-Enneadic version of Plotinus' writings (Kraus 1936); (2) the Greek manuscript that served as the basis for the Arabic translation, although lost, can be safely said to be independent of the entire Greek direct tradition, since it did not share in the conjunctive error common to all the Greek MSS, that is, the lacuna mentioned above (D'Ancona 2006). We have just seen that the translation was done within the forties of the ninth century; this means that the Greek MS out of which it was produced anteceded the archetype of the Greek tradition, because the latter can be traced back to the *end* of the ninth century (as a matter of fact, some features of the Greek MSS of the *Enneads* show that the archetype belonged in

the so-called *Collection philosophique*, a group of MSS produced in Byzantium in the last quarter of the ninth century). All in all, one can say that a Greek MS of the *Enneads* reached Baghdad, where it served as the basis of the Arabic version; later on, another MS of the *Enneads* affected by the lacuna gave rise in Byzantium to the entire direct tradition. The implication is that one can have recourse to the Arabic text as to the indirect witness of a MS of the *Enneads* that is not only independent of the archetype, but also earlier than it.

Another issue that seems to be settled is that of the so-called Syriac *Vorlage*. One of the most apparent doctrinal changes in the Arabic with respect to the Greek text consists in the transformation of Plotinus' One into God Almighty, and of its emanative power into creation out of nothing. Although fitting perfectly with Islam, this adaptation was traced back by past scholarship to the Christian Syriac milieu of the sixth century. The reason for this lies in that scholars were working with the assumption that a Greek text based on Plotinus' teaching was reworked in order to fit with a monotheistic and creationist context well before its translation into Arabic. Since there are some traces of Syriac in the *Theology* – the most evident example being the term for “chapter,” that is, “mīmar,” a term of Syriac origin – the conclusion was drawn that the monotheistic adaptations took place along with the translation into Syriac, so producing a text, already in a Semitic language, out of which the Arabic version was allegedly made (Baumstark 1902; Kraus 1940–1941; Anawati 1974). Doubts about the existence of this alleged Syriac adapted version of Plotinus have been raised by Zimmermann (1986), and a fresh reexamination of the available evidence has led Brock (2007) to conclude that it is highly improbable that such a text did exist. On the other hand, Brock points to the Neoplatonic influence on the Syriac Christian milieu in which Ibn Nā'ima al-Ḥimsī was educated.

### From the Arabic Plotinus to the *Theology of Aristotle*

Doubts about the Aristotelian authorship of the *Theology* are as early as the sixteenth century.

There was no medieval Latin translation of the *Theology of Aristotle*, but in 1519 a Latin version was published in Rome (the version was done by Pietro Nicola Castellani on the basis of the previous translation, now lost, done by Moses Rovas in Cyprus), and another version was published in 1571 by Jacques Charpentier (see Fenton 1986; Kraye 1986; Aouad 1989:565). The Latin text is based on the so-called Longer Version of the *Theology*, in 14 chapters, whose Arabic antecedent is only fragmentarily extant (on the “Longer Version” see Fenton 1986, the survey of previous literature in Aouad 1989:564–570, and Treiger 2007). Soon after, Francesco Patrizi, who published the Latin version as an appendix to his *Nova de universis philosophia*, was struck by the difference between Aristotle's usual position and the blatant Platonism of “his” *Theology*: the explanation he advanced was that the *Theology* contained the exoteric doctrine heard by Aristotle from Plato's lips, as shown not only from Patrizi's remarks, but also by the very title given to this appendix, *Mystica Aegyptiorum et Chaldaeorum a Platone voce tradita, ab Aristotele excepta et conscripta philosophia*. The solution devised by Patrizi clearly indicates his awareness that the *Theology* gave a non-Aristotelian ring – an awareness that increased during the seventeenth century in Europe (see Kraye 1986). In the *Bibliotheca Graeca* (1716, III:162–164) Fabricius remarks that the doctrines of the *Theology*, far from being Aristotelian, are akin to those of the Hermetic *Poimandres*, “*ut Platonicum potius aliquem quam Aristotelem auctorem esse res ipsa clamat.*” However, Fabricius did not identify the “Platonic” source: this move was done by Th. Taylor at the beginning of the nineteenth century (Taylor 1812, III:403–413; see also Taylor 1816). Later on, towards the end of the century, the Orientalist F. Dieterici provided the *editio princeps* of the Arabic text (Dieterici 1882) and its German translation (Dieterici 1883). On the basis of this translation, V. Rose, the specialist of the *Aristoteles pseudepigraphus*, identified more systematically than Taylor had done the Plotinian treatises that count as a source for the various chapters of the *Theology* (Rose 1883). The next decisive steps in the literary history of the Arabic Plotinus belong to the twentieth century. In 1940 another

Orientalist, P. Kraus, discovered in a Cairene MS an *Epistle on the Divine Science* attributed to al-Fārābī, which he identified as the Arabic abridged version of four treatises of the fifth *Ennead* (Kraus 1940–1941). These four treatises are different from those lying in the background of the *Theology*, but share with the latter several monotheistic adaptations: this gave a hint towards the existence of an original translation of materials drawn from the *Enneads*, lying in the background of the two complementary texts, the *Theology* and the *Epistle*. A third Orientalist, F. Rosenthal, discovered that the “sayings” attributed in various doxographies and in a MS of the Bodleian Library to the so-called *al-Shaykh al-Yūnānī* (“*The Greek Sage*”) were nothing if not other parts of the Arabic Plotinus (Rosenthal 1952–1955). The doxographies that include passages taken from Plotinus and attributed to the “*Greek Sage*” are, chronologically arranged, the following: (1) the *Muntakhab Šiwān al-ḥikma* derived from the lost *Šiwān al-ḥikma* attributed to al-Sijistānī, (2) al-Shahraṣṭānī’s *Kitāb al-milal wa-l-niḥal*, and (3) al-Shahrazūrī’s *Rawḍat al-afrāh* (see the relevant entries in this volume). In all likelihood, the three doxographies and the sayings of the Bodleian MS depend upon one and the same source, the lost *Šiwān al-ḥikma*, a compilation of earlier sources that can be traced back to the beginning of the eleventh century. At variance with what happens in the case of the *Theology* and the *Epistle*, the Plotinian passages attributed to the “*Greek Sage*” and the *Theology* do overlap here and there. The three texts – the *Theology*, the *Epistle on the Divine Science*, and the “*Sayings of the Greek Sage*” – share in the same linguistic features and doctrinal adaptations, so that Rosenthal’s conclusion imposes itself: they derive from one and the same “Arabic Plotinus Source.” When G. Endress published in 1973 his *Proclus Arabus* (see the entry on Proclus, Arabic in this volume), the systematic analysis of the syntax, terminology, and doctrinal adaptations that he extended also to the Arabic version of Proclus’ *Elements of Theology* and to the *Liber de causis* allowed him to conclude that the “Arabic Plotinus Source,” together with the *Elements of Theology*, with their offspring known as the *Liber de causis*, and with some Alexander of Aphrodisias, were

translated and adapted within one and the same circle of scholars: the “Kindī’s circle” (Endress 1973, 1997). On this ground, and on the basis of a reexamination of the entire dossier, Zimmermann (1986) has advanced the hypothesis that the works by Plotinus, Proclus, and Alexander of Aphrodisias were meant to fulfil the demand for a theological complement to Aristotle’s *Metaphysics*. In the eyes of the scholars of this circle, and mostly of its “spiritus rector” al-Kindī (Endress 1997), a more detailed account of the causality of the Immobile Mover sketched in Book *Lambda* was needed, in order to show that Greek philosophy reached the same truth as the Qur’ān about God and his creation. Such an account could be found in a set of post-Aristotelian authors – Alexander, Plotinus, Proclus – who stressed both the separatedness and the causality of a unique and transcendent First Principle.

There is no scholarly consensus about the details of the transformation of the “Arabic Plotinus source” into the *Theology of Aristotle* – in particular, about the two related issues of (1) the chaos versus intentional structure of the *Theology*, and (2) the purposiveness versus mistaken nature of the attribution to Aristotle – but the origins of the text within the Kindī’s circle and its role in building the Arabic Aristotle are established on firm grounds.

## Doctrine

Taken as a whole, the Arabic Plotinus contains a full account of the main tenets of Plotinian metaphysics and psychology: the spirituality and immortality of the human soul; the existence of a cosmic Soul; the existence and causality of the intelligible realm, that is, a level of reality that can be grasped only by intellect and escapes sense perception; its identity with the divine Intellect, that is, a separate intellectual principle that inherits both from Plato’s Demiurge and Aristotle’s “thinking of thinking”; the existence, beyond Intellect, of another principle higher than it and perfectly simple, the One, which in turn inherits from the Idea of Good “beyond Being” of Plato’s *Republic*. The three principles – the



One, Intellect, and Soul – that form the core of Plotinus’ metaphysics are omnipresent in the various texts derived from the “Arabic Plotinus Source.”

More in detail, the *Theology* begins with an account of the descent of the human soul into the world of coming-to-be and passing away (the source is the final part of Plotinus’ treatise *On the Immortality of the Soul*, IV 7[2]); to this, a famous passage is appended, taken from Plotinus’ treatise IV 8[6], where the ascent of the human soul to the intelligible realm is described. Quite emphatically introduced by the words “A speech by him, *kalām lahu*” – that is, by the author of the *Uthūlūjīyā* – the passage where Plotinus, speaking in the first person, describes his experience of contemplation of the intelligible realm has been put into Aristotle’s own mouth. In the Arabic version, “Aristotle’s” ascent culminates in an instant vision of the First Principle beyond the intelligible realm. But a human soul cannot stand such a vision, and in returning to its usual mode of cognition, that is, discursive reason, wonders about the reason why a spiritual entity capable of seeing the intelligible realm and the First Principle is linked to the body. Chapter I of the *Theology* ends with Plotinus’ response to this question: Plato has taught that a wise and good Creator has sent the souls to the world of coming-to-be and passing away. A wide passage with no correspondence in the Greek text adds to this Plotinian idea something new: an account of Plato’s philosophy, praised by the author of the *Theology* (i.e., “Aristotle”) for having taught the existence of the intelligible realm, of God Almighty beyond it, and his creation out of nothing both of the intelligible and the visible worlds (Dieterici p. 4.12–14.9 = Badawī p. 18.11–28.3). Chapter II, based on Plotinus’ IV 4[28] and IV 3[27], is devoted to the question of the memory that the soul can have of its stay in the intelligible realm, once descended in the world of coming-to-be and passing away (Dieterici p. 14.10–32.6 = Badawī p. 29.1–44.18). Chapter III contains the main part of Plotinus’ treatise *On the Immortality of the Soul*, IV 7[2], and deals with the proofs of the spirituality and immortality of our souls (Dieterici p. 32.8–43.19 = Badawī

p. 45.1–55.19). Chapter IV is taken from the beginning of Plotinus’ treatise V 8[31], *On the Intelligible Beauty*, and deals with the nobility of the intelligible realm and its superiority to the visible world (Dieterici p. 44.1–54.2 = Badawī p. 56.1–64.5). Chapter V is based on the beginning of treatise VI 7[38], where Plotinus explains how to account for the “reasoning” of the Demiurge in the *Timaeus*: the title of the Arabic chapter shows by itself the adaptations mentioned above, “Account of the Creator, his creation of what he has created and the status of the things in him” (Dieterici p. 54.3–63.16 = Badawī p. 65.1–73.16). Chapter VI depends upon the central part of Plotinus’ IV 4[28] and endorses its criticism of astrology and magic: stars do not produce events in the sublunar world, at the most they provide hints to the events to come (Dieterici p. 64.1–75.5 = Badawī p. 74.1–83.17). Chapter VII, issued from the final part of Plotinus’ IV 8[6], *On the Descent of Soul into the Bodies*, accounts for the reasons of the descent of the soul into the world of coming-to-be and passing away, and for the conditions for its return to the intelligible realm it comes from (Dieterici p. 75.16–85.6 = Badawī p. 84.1–91.21), so creating a long-lasting topic of Arabic–Islamic philosophy, that of the “*Provenance and Return*,” as runs the title of a treatise by Avicenna (*K. al-Mabda’ wa-l-ma’ād*, ed. Nūrānī 1984). Chapter VIII derives from a variety of sources, VI 7[38], IV 4[28], V 1[10], and V 8[31], and deals with the intelligible realm, the pure intellects and souls dwelling in it, the generation of Intellect from the One, and the union of the human soul with Intellect (Dieterici p. 85.7–125.3 = Badawī p. 92.1–120.18). Chapter IX, issued from the first two chapters of IV 7[2] and the last two of V 1 [10], is devoted to the presence in human souls of a part or faculty that remains constantly united with Intellect and the intelligible world (Dieterici p. 125.4–135.11 = Badawī p. 121.1–133.3). Finally, Chap. X, based on V 2[11], VI 7[38], and V 8[31], deals with the causality of the First Principle, the True One: this principle creates Intellect with no intermediary, be it the “thought” (or decision) of creating it. Indeed, the First Principle creates solely by its being, *bi-anniyatīhi*



*faqat*, with no instruments or movement whatsoever. This means that the *Theology* endorses Plotinus' model of the causality of intelligible principles that produce their effects with no alteration whatsoever, the example being the emanation of heat from fire or cold from snow: two effects that are given by the very fact that their principle exists. Another source of the topic of creation *bi-anniyati faqat* is Plotinus' exegesis of the Platonic Demiurge, whose "reasoning" (λογισμός) in the *Timaeus* is interpreted in treatise VI 7[38] – widely taken up in the *Theology* – as showing the intrinsic rationality of the visible world: Plotinus' exegesis is meant to exclude the literal interpretation of such a "reasoning" as a deliberation about what should be done. The immobile and spontaneous causality of the Plotinian divine Intellect becomes in the *Theology* the prominent feature of creation, that is, the production of being out of nothing, done by a principle that is said to be "pure Being" and creates "solely by its Being." In defining the First Principle as the highest and purest instance of "Being" the *Theology* parts company with Plotinus, who had located the One beyond Being. At variance with the Greek Plotinus, in the Arabic version the True One, also named "Pure Being," "First Agent," and "God Almighty," creates the Intellect. The latter is created directly, with no intermediary, whereas the lower levels of being (the cosmic Soul, the celestial spheres, and the sublunar world) are created by God through the mediation of Intellect. This recasting of the doctrine of the three principles One, Intellect, and Soul is the hallmark of the Arabic Plotinus and features also in the *Liber de causis*, even though the latter derives from Proclus' *Elements of Theology*, where Intellect does not play the prominent role it had in Plotinus. This fact, together with other elements of the Arabic Plotinus that feature in it, licenses the conclusion that the *Liber de causis* is the work of an author who has conflated the Arabic Proclus and the Arabic Plotinus, and it has been advanced that this author was al-Kindī himself. The *Theology of Aristotle* remained unknown to Latin Middle Ages, but the Latin translation of *Liber de causis* granted a considerable influence on Latin medieval philosophy to the most typical tenet of the

Arabic Plotinus, known through the axiom "Causa prima creavit esse animae mediante intelligentia" (*Liber de causis*, Prop. 3).

### The *Theology of Aristotle* and Arabic Philosophy

The influence of the Arabic Plotinus, conveyed in particular by the *Theology of Aristotle*, was considerable. After al-Kindī, whose pivotal role in the production of the Arabic Plotinian corpus has been mentioned above, and who made use himself of many topics of the Arabic Plotinus (see for instance *On First Philosophy*, p. 25.4–9 and 97.8–10 Rashed-Jolivet; *Epistle on the True Agent*, p. 169.5–8 Rashed-Jolivet; *Epistle Explaining What the Soul Remembers of What it had in the World of Intellect*, German transl. Endress 1994), the *Theology* was taken into account by al-Fārābī in his *Book on the Harmony of the Two Opinions of the Two Sages, the Divine Plato and Aristotle*, p. 64.7–65.10 Martini Bonadeo (commentary, p. 199–202) p. 65.14–18 (comm., p. 203–206); p. 69.15–70.7 (comm., p. 213–216); p. 72.8–16 (comm., p. 219–220); p. 72.16–73.10 (comm., p. 221–223); p. 74.1–16 (comm. p. 225–226). The latter passage is the most important, containing as it does the extensive quotation of the account of "Aristotle's" ascent into the intelligible world. After al-Fārābī, this passage will be quoted by several other *falāsifa*, both East and West (see below). The Farabian authorship of the *Harmony* has been challenged, but the main tenets of the *Theology* form the backbone also of Fārābī's *Principles of the Views of the Citizens of the Best State*, a work whose authenticity lies beyond doubt (one may compare for instance, on the key issue of creation outside time, p. 92.8–16 Walzer with *Theology*, p. 162.14–163.8; 174.22–175.3; 177.8–10; 187.8–10 Badawī).

The pupil of a pupil of al-Kindī, al-ʿĀmirī (see the relevant entry in this volume) is heavily if tacitly indebted to the *Theology* in his *K. al-Amad 'alā l-abad (Book on the Afterlife)*: compare for instance Chap. V, p. 88–95 Rowson, with *Theology* I, p. 3.13–17 Dieterici = p. 6.7–11

Badawī; III, p. 38.6–10 Dieterici = p. 50.9–12 Badawī; Chap. VII, Sect. 7, p. 102–103 Rowson with Chap. VI of the *Theology* (Dieterici, p. 64.1–75.5 = Badawī, p. 74.1–83.17); and Chap. XV, Sect. 7, p. 140–141 Rowson with Chap. VII of the *Theology* (Dieterici, p. 75.16–85.6 = Badawī, p. 84.1–91.21). Other parallel passages or doctrinal influences are indicated in D’Ancona et al. (2003:95, 293–294, 293, 300, 317, and 341).

The Arabic Plotinus lies in the background also of several doctrines expounded in the *Epistles* of the Ikhwān al-Ṣafā’ (see the relevant entry in this volume); in particular, *Epistle* I, p. 138 Ġālib contains a description of the ascent into the intelligible world, which is indebted to the passage of Chap. I of the *Theology* mentioned above (Diwald 1975:23). This passage is known also to Ibn Zur’a, one of the “Baghdad Aristotelians” (see Kraus 1940–1941:271 and Zimmermann 1986:183), and to Miskawayh (*al-Fawz al-aṣṣḡar*, p. 99.9–12 ‘Udayma): see the relevant entries in this volume. Other doctrines of the *Theology* echoed in the *Epistles* include the topics of creation outside time (*Epistle* III, 9: Diwald 1975:450–451); of creation “mediante Intelligentia” (*Epistle* III, 1: Diwald 1975:55; *Epistle* III, 4, Diwald 1975:179), and of the substantiality, and separability of the human soul from the body (*Epistle* III, 4: Diwald 1975:185).

Avicenna, who has commented upon the *Theology*, is heavily indebted to it as for several topics that structure his thought: the absolute simplicity of the First Principle, the generation of the First Intellect from the *nesesse esse* (“ex uno non nisi unum”), the “provenance” of soul from and its “destination” to the intelligible world. Echoes of the *Theology* are widespread in Avicenna’s works, from the earlier ones, like the *Compendium on the Soul* (see Gutas 1988:19) and the *Provenance and Destination* (see Gutas 1988:31) to the last ones, like the *Fair Judgment* (only fragmentarily extant). The *Fair Judgment* contained Avicenna’s *Notes on the Theology*, as he himself informs in a letter to his friend Abū Ja’far Kiyā’. The *Letter to Kiyā’*, where he accounts for the structure of the *Fair Judgment* (a work already lost when he wrote the letter), contains an opinion about the *Theology*

that has been interpreted in different ways, since the moment the letter was discovered (Kraus 1940–1941): some scholars saw in Avicenna’s remark a doubt about the Aristotelian authorship (as exemplified in the translation given by Gutas (1988:63–64): “despite the fact that the *Theologia* is somewhat suspect”); others see in it a note of caution about the doctrines held in it (as exemplified in the translation given by Zimmermann (1986:184): “for all one may find to object to in the *Uthūlūjīā*”): see the dossier in Aouad (1989:583–584). Both the *Letter to Kiyā’* and the *Notes* by Avicenna on the *Theology*, which survived in part the loss of the *Fair Judgment*, are edited (Badawī 1947:37–74, the *Notes*; p. 120–122, the *Letter*) and have been translated into French (Vajda 1951). (For a survey up to 1989, see Aouad 1989:583–586; after this date, see De Smet 2001, 2002; D’Ancona et al. 2003:102–111.)

After Avicenna, the *Theology* continued to be viewed as part and parcel of Aristotle’s metaphysics and “divine science.” In his *Book on the Science of the Metaphysics*, ‘Abd al-Laṭīf al-Baġdādī included a summary of the *Theology*: see the dossier in Aouad (1989:586–587) and Martini Bonadeo, *‘Abd al-Laṭīf al-Baġdādī On Metaphysics* (forthcoming). A survey on the influence of the *Theology* on the eastern post-Avicennian philosophers belonging in the so-called *Ishrāqī* (Illuminationist) tradition has been provided by Aouad (1989:587–599). This survey includes a list of extant commentaries up to the end of the seventeenth century; for an up-to-date account see also Rizvi (2007).

As for the circulation of the Arabic Plotinian corpus in the Muslim West, even though no systematic analysis has been done to the present day, it is fair to say that there are no evident proofs of a direct and extensive knowledge. However, some doctrines and typical features of the Arabic Plotinus reached al-Andalus indirectly, a possible way being the *Epistles* of the Ikhwān al-Ṣafā’ (known in al-Andalus), not to mention the works of the eastern *falāsifa* like al-Fārābī and Avicenna, who had already endorsed some typical tenets and wordings of the *Theology*. Also, at least two items of the Neoplatonic complements to

Aristotle's metaphysics produced within the circle of al-Kindī did circulate in al-Andalus: the *Liber de causis*, which was translated into Latin in Toledo by Gerard of Cremona, and the Arabic propositions of Proclus' *Elements of Theology* attributed to Alexander of Aphrodisias, which had a substantial influence on Ibn Bājja (see Altmann 1965; Endress 1973:53–54, and D'Ancona 2008). In his *Ḥayy ibn Yaqzān*, Ibn Ṭufayl reproduces, in all likelihood without any awareness of the source he is quoting from, the passage on the ascent of the soul into the intelligible world and to the First Principle beyond it (trans. Goodman p. 152). A balanced account of the Neoplatonic sources of Averroes is still to be made, but one can at least say that most problems he had to solve were settled by the tradition of the *falsafa* that he inherited, with its typical intermingling of Aristotelian and Neoplatonic doctrines. Among these, a point raised by Merlan (1963:20–21), and later on almost forgotten in the scholarship deserves attention: the ultimate source of the doctrine of the union of soul with the separate Intellect (*ittiṣāl*) is Plotinus, not Alexander of Aphrodisias. As a matter of fact, Alexander's Agent Intellect is the Immobile Mover itself, while it is in the Arabic Plotinus (*Theology*, Chaps. VIII and IX) that the soul, in ascending into the intelligible world, reaches the union with an Intellect that is a separate substance distinct from and subordinated to the First Principle. In his *Epistle On Intellect*, al-Fārābī insisted upon the fact that the Agent Intellect that the human soul strives for is by no means the First Cause (p. 32–33 Bouyges). This is the cluster of problems that forms the background of Averroes' solutions. On other crucial issues, like for instance God's knowledge of individuals, the influence of the Neoplatonism of the Kindian texts on Averroes can also be detected.

## Cross-References

- ▶ 'Abd al-Laṭīf al-Baġdādī
- ▶ Alexander of Aphrodisias and Arabic Aristotelianism
- ▶ al-'Āmirī, Abū l-Ḥasan

- ▶ Aristotle, Arabic
- ▶ Doxographies, Graeco-Arabic
- ▶ al-Fārābī, Abū Naṣr
- ▶ Ibn Bājja, Abū Bakr ibn al-Sā'ig (Avenpace)
- ▶ Ibn Rushd, Muḥammad ibn Aḥmad al-Ḥafīd (Averroes)
- ▶ Ibn Ṭufayl, Abū Bakr (Abubacer)
- ▶ Ibn Sīnā, Abū 'Alī (Avicenna)
- ▶ Ikhwān al-Ṣafā', Encyclopedia of
- ▶ Ismā'īlī Philosophical Tradition
- ▶ al-Kindī, Abū Yūsuf Ya'qūb ibn Ishāq
- ▶ Plato, Arabic
- ▶ Platonism
- ▶ Porphyry, Arabic
- ▶ Proclus, Arabic
- ▶ al-Shahrastānī, Muḥammad ibn 'Abd al-Karīm
- ▶ al-Shahrastūrī, Muḥammad ibn Maḥmūd Shams al-Dīn
- ▶ al-Ṭūsī, Naṣīr al-Dīn

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## Political Aristotelianism

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### Abstract

Aristotle’s *Politics* has had a long and enduring influence on political theory from the thirteenth century up to the present (Horn C and Neschke-Hentschke A, Politischer Aristotelismus. Die Rezeption der aristotelischen “Politik” von der Antike bis zum 19. Metzler, Jahrhundert,

Weimer, 2008). Medieval reception began in the sixth decade of the thirteenth century with the translation of the work from Greek into Latin by William of Moerbeke. In the period following this successful transmission of the Aristotelian text, extensive commentaries were written by well-known scholars such as Thomas Aquinas, Albert the Great, and Peter of Auvergne, demonstrating the interest of both religious schools and universities in developing political philosophy as an independent discipline and integrating it into their curricula.

Thus the discipline of political science, or political philosophy, came into existence in close conjunction with the reception of the eight books of the *Politics*. The *Politics* remained predominant in political theory in the Latin West until the fifteenth century, influencing numerous commentaries and other literary genres, notably mirrors for princes and tracts on the power of the pope, *De potestate papae* (Miethke J, *De potestate papae. Die päpstliche Amtskompetenz im Widerstreit der politischen Theorie von Thomas von Aquin bis Wilhelm von Ockham*. Mohr Siebeck, Tübingen, 2000). Political Aristotelianism, however, is not limited to the reception of Aristotle’s *Politics*, but involves a more complex understanding of the entire body of Aristotelian works. In addition to the foundation laid for practical philosophy by the *Nicomachean Ethics*, the *Rhetoric* as well as the *Metaphysics* and Aristotelian natural philosophy have influenced medieval Aristotelian political philosophy (Lambertini R, Politische Fragen und politische Terminologie in mittelalterlichen Kommentaren zur *Ethica Nicomachea*. In: Kaufhold M (ed) *Politische Reflexion in der Welt des späten Mittelalters/ Political thought in the age of scholasticism. Essays in Honour of Jürgen Miethke*. Brill, Leiden, pp 109–127, 2004).

### Reception

The reception of the *Politics* remains limited to the Latin West. The work has left barely detectable

traces in Byzantine, Arab, or Jewish philosophical works. The Byzantine philosopher Michael Ephesus (tenth century) left only some notes regarding this work, and the existence of an Aristotelian political philosophy naturally could not have remained hidden from Averroes (d. 1198), indicating that the work was not accessible in the Arab West. As a result, the Byzantines, Arabs, and Jews were more likely to base their arguments on Plato's political philosophy, especially the *Republic*, a work that was only available for direct study in the West beginning in the early Quattrocento, when it was translated by Italian humanists. William of Moerbeke tracked down the *Politics* in Greece about 1260, at the beginning of his translation efforts, and began by making an incomplete translation of Books 1 through 2.11 (1254a–1273a30). A few years later, he turned again to the *Politics* and was able to finish a complete translation of the work by about 1265. This Flemish or northern French translator used a word-for-word (*verbum de verbo*) translation method. Moerbeke markedly enriched the western vocabulary for political terminology through his introduction of numerous neologisms.

The first commentaries on this version of the *Politics* were written by the Dominican friars Thomas Aquinas and Albert the Great. In addition, the *Politics* was added to university curricula shortly after its translation. According to a statement by Pierre Dubois, Siger of Brabant is supposed to have disputed questions from Aristotle's *Politics*, including a defense of the primacy of the law above even the most virtuous of human beings in *Pol.* III.10 (1281b). The most influential commentaries at the University of Paris were the two written by Peter of Auvergne (d. 1304). His *Quaestiones super libros politicorum*, with its 126 questions on the first seven books, is without doubt a by-product of his teaching responsibilities at the Faculty of Arts. Not only did the questions prove exceptionally provocative of response over time, clearly influencing all later political commentaries in question form until the fifteenth century (Flüeler 1992), they also contain the first transmission of university debates on subjects in political science, as well as a methodological foundation for practicing the discipline. In

addition to his questions on the *Politics*, Peter wrote a literal commentary which, together with the incomplete commentary by Thomas Aquinas, shaped reception of the work through early modernity. Commentators of the fourteenth century include scholars such as Guido Vernani, Walter Burley, Nicholas Oresme, and Nicolas de Waldemonte (ps. John Buridan), among others. During the fifteenth century Donatus Acciaiolli, Guillelmus Becchius Florentinus, Henricus Toke, Henricus Toting de Oyta, Johannes Versoris, and Leonardus Bruni Aretini wrote commentaries on the *Politics*, and there are numerous anonymous works of this character. Although the *Politics* did not belong to the group of works, such as the *Nicomachean Ethics* for example, which were read year after year at arts faculties, it does appear to have been taught on a regular basis, as evidenced by the detailed lecture plans of the University of Vienna (Flüeler 2004: 135–138).

## Development

On the most important points of Aristotelian political philosophy (Horn and Neschke-Hentschke 2008: 1–19) medieval commentators and authors generally follow Aristotle, though they might set new accents or pose new questions that go beyond the scope of Aristotle's position. The question of the epistemological status of the study of political science is explicitly treated, in order to distinguish this field of study from others in terms of its subject matter, goal, and intended purpose. Issues of nature and the basis of lordship are more thoroughly examined than in Aristotle's own works, with the earliest receptions in the late thirteenth and early fourteenth centuries relying more on metaphysical models (e.g., Peter of Auvergne, Thomas Aquinas, Dante). These methodological questions are based mainly on the first book of the *Politics* and discuss the general nature of lordship and servitude in connection with Aristotle's arguments concerning slavery. Monarchy is considered the best form of rule by most authors, who therefore generally misunderstand Aristotle's carefully nuanced opinions on the subject (Lambertini 2001; Ubl, in Flüeler 2002).

Aristotle's *Politics* influenced political discourse and political language far beyond the scope of the commentaries, as demonstrated by Thomas Aquinas. Not only did Aquinas treat the *Politics* explicitly in his commentary on the work (1269–1271), but his mirror for princes, *De regno* (1271–1273), written at the same time as the commentary or slightly later, also could not have been written without a knowledge of the *Politics*. The strength of the link between the tradition of mirrors of princes and the reception of the *Politics* is also demonstrated by the *De regimine principum* by Giles of Rome, which was famous for presenting the fundamentals of Aristotelian political thought in an understandable way. Even Dante still considered political science a new field of study (Mon 1.1.5). However, Dante's main point of reference is not Aristotle's *Politics*, with which he was also familiar, but rather the radical Aristotelians' theory of the Intellect and Happiness, which he attempted to translate into political theory. Marsilius of Padua also utilized contemporary political Aristotelianism (*Defensor pacis* I.16) in order to address central questions of the time that could not have been addressed by Aristotle (*Defensor pacis* I.1.3). The question of the relationship between worldly and spiritual power was never discussed by Aristotle but could still be answered in a variety of ways using an Aristotelian model.

## Cross-References

- ▶ [Dante Alighieri](#)
- ▶ [Giles of Rome, Political Thought](#)
- ▶ [Marsilius of Padua](#)
- ▶ [Mirrors for Princes](#)
- ▶ [Peter of Auvergne](#)
- ▶ [Political Philosophy](#)
- ▶ [Thomas Aquinas, Political Thought](#)

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## Political Philosophy

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### Abstract

This survey will be concerned almost entirely with the Latin West. Other strands of medieval political thought are discussed elsewhere in the volume in articles on Political Philosophy, Byzantine; Political Philosophy, Arabic; and Political Philosophy, Jewish. Here I consider first the sources, historical contexts, and genres of medieval political philosophy, then some major topics discussed and positions taken on them.

## Sources

Medieval political philosophy continues classical reflections, with the additional influence of Christianity. (The relation of philosophy to religion here is the converse of that in Islam. Christianity entered a Graeco-Roman world that already had well-developed philosophical traditions, with the result that Christian authors often sought to justify or interpret their faith philosophically. In Islam, religion preceded philosophy, and the task of justification fell to the devotees of the latter.) A third major class of sources is law. Just as philosophy was in place when Christianity appeared, there was also a refined legal culture to be related to Christian ideas.

### Philosophical Texts

The chief philosophical sources for political thought were Plato and Neoplatonism; Stoicism

and Cicero; and Aristotle (only a few of whose works were accessible to medieval thinkers before the thirteenth century).

### Plato and Neoplatonism

Only one of Plato's dialogues was known in the Latin Middle Ages, but much of his thought had been assimilated by the church fathers, directly or through later Platonists. The realm of ideal being posited by Plato, more real than, and a model for, the natural world, was the background for all western philosophical thought through the twelfth century. The most important part of this position for politics was the vision of an ideal polity to which all human beings should belong. Plato's picture of the soul as a bundle of appetites, inherently unordered until constrained by a spirited element to obey reason, also exercised a pervasive influence.

### Stoicism and Cicero

The Stoic idea of a cosmic rational principle (logos) was also broadly influential. The most important aspect of this for political thought was the conception of a natural law valid independently of human legislation. On this basis, personal moral integrity and devotion to one's community were championed by Cicero.

### Aristotle

Although Aristotle's *Politics* arrived late in the West, its influence on political thought after 1250 was enormous. Major features of the work were its critical and comparative analysis of a wide range of political structures and its presentation of these as outcomes of deliberate human action. (It is unclear whether the *Politics* was translated in medieval Islam.)

### The Bible and Its Interpreters

It is difficult to exaggerate the extent to which western political thought during the Middle Ages and through the seventeenth century is informed by the Christian Bible.

### Politically Central Themes

The Scriptures are rich in social and political implications. The peculiar dynamic of political

thought in medieval Christendom is set up most directly by contrasts between scriptural passages of two kinds. On one hand are those depicting Jesus' love and humility; on the other are those proclaiming his majesty as Son of God ("the logos made flesh," Christianity's central addition to classical philosophy) and his position as judge of the world and all its inhabitants at the end of time.

#### The Church Fathers

The doctrine of the Incarnation was formally defined in fourth- and fifth-century councils. In particular, Jesus was held to unite in his person two natures, a divine and a human. The meek and sacrificially loving Jesus was available as a human model for living under virtually any political order. Jesus as God on earth could, however, serve as a basis for claims to divine mission and commanding authority by emperors, kings, or church leaders recognized as representing him.

#### Later Exegetes

When Christianity came to be embraced by lay rulers, their apologists could also appeal to Old Testament kings as a model for royal or imperial control of both religious and secular affairs. A biblically grounded contrary case was made (most vigorously from the eleventh century onward) for clerical – especially papal – jurisdiction over all of life. A controversial twelfth-century exegesis of the book of Revelation foretold a spiritual church not guided in legal fashion by popes and bishops. In a related thirteenth-century reading, also controversial, the gospels presented Christ and the apostles as legally completely poor, without any earthly rights or authority.

#### Legal Sources

Medieval political thinkers drew on a variety of legal sources.

##### Roman Law

The collections of laws promulgated in the early sixth century by the Emperor Justinian I comprised much of classical Roman law and also many laws for religion made after the Empire's official conversion to Christianity.

Medieval study and application of this body of civil law (*Corpus iuris civilis*) began in the twelfth century and was continuously refined thereafter, peaking with the civilian Commentators of the fourteenth century.

##### Feudal Law

The rules governing the personal relationships of fidelity and mutual obligation between superior and inferior central to feudalism were only put into writing in the twelfth century, when the institution itself was in decline. Given its principles of consent and accountability, one should be cautious about using the term "feudal" pejoratively.

##### Church Law

Besides defining doctrine, general (ecumenical) and regional church councils decided many disciplinary issues. After the patristic period, the most important councils in the West were those held under Charlemagne in the eighth and ninth centuries and general councils called by popes, such as the Third and Fourth Lateran Councils of 1179 and 1214. Beginning in the twelfth century, collections of conciliar rules (canons) and other authoritative texts were made. The most influential was Gratian of Bologna's *Decretum* (c. 1140). Later portions of the canon law (*Corpus iuris canonici*) consisted of papal doctrinal statements and decisions on practical matters. Each major portion of the canon law was subjected to learned commentary.

#### Contexts

Even the most all-embracing medieval political texts were oriented toward specific historical situations. In the course of a millennium, these contexts changed dramatically.

##### Imperial Disintegration (410–732)

The sack of Rome by the Visigoths in 410 was a milestone in the collapse of the western Roman Empire. The last western emperor died in 476, and although Germanic and Frankish tribal chiefs who exercised power in this period often sought formal acceptance from Byzantium, they recognized no

effective jurisdiction from the East after the early sixth century. Elsewhere, Islam arose in Arabia, came into enduring conflict with the eastern Empire, and spread across North Africa and into Spain.

During this unorganized period, two developments were significant for political thought. One was the growth of monasticism, especially in communities following the Rule of Benedict of Nursia (c. 480–550), communities which were sometimes inspiring examples of organization and endurance. The monastic program of seeking God through progress in humility also provided some counterweight to other values driving political life in medieval society.

A second development was the assertion of ecclesiastical independence from, or indeed superiority to, lay rulers. The key term in later debates about papal power, *plenitudo potestatis* (fullness of power), was used by Pope Leo I, although not with regard to clerical–lay relations. The most influential text was Pope Gelasius I's rebuke in 494 of a Byzantine emperor for intervening in current doctrinal conflicts:

There are two (*Duo sunt*) by which the world is chiefly governed: the sacred authority of bishops and the royal power. . . . Although you rule over the human race in dignity. . . you understand that, according to the order of religion, in what concerns the receiving and correct administering of the heavenly sacraments you must be subject rather than in command.

### **New Europe (732–1077)**

Further Muslim advance into Europe from Spain was halted by Charles Martel in 732 at the battle of Poitiers. Charles' grandson Charlemagne extended Frankish overlordship to much of present-day western Europe. Charlemagne was crowned Roman emperor by Pope Leo III in Rome on Christmas day 800. The political significance of this act came to be interpreted differently by popes and lay rulers. Carolingian and later rule during this period was theocratic, with the divinely favored emperor or king taking a leading part in church affairs. At the same time, clerical and, particularly, papal claims to superiority over the laity were elaborated.

### **Reformation and Renaissance (1077–1215)**

In 1077, the emperor Henry IV did brief penance for resisting Pope Gregory VII's measures for church reform. Papal authority grew in both theory and practice during the eleventh and twelfth centuries. In the version of Gelasius' *Duo sunt* that entered canon law, the clause making clear that the emperor's submission to bishops referred only to sacraments was deleted, as was the clause recognizing that the emperor ruled over the human race. Indeed, Gregory VII claimed that only the pope was entitled to the imperial insignia. The concept of positive law was clearly articulated in this period, primarily in application to papal legislation. The revival of Roman law studies provided some support for imperial authority, and an anonymous Norman author defended royal authority as sacred: the king is by nature a man but by grace a christus, a God-man (Williams 1951), and lay political structures became more complex on their own. All this took place in the midst of economic progress and cultural achievements properly termed a Renaissance, one sometimes credited with discovering the individual.

### **Enlightenment (1215–1302)**

The recovery of Aristotle's metaphysical, scientific, ethical, and political texts, along with further development of earlier medieval work in theology and legal studies, contributed to a thirteenth-century intellectual assurance evident in the brilliance of university masters and jurists and also in the educated individuals who advised or served the powerful in politics and religion. In politics, this century of enlightenment was a period of further development for the kingdoms of England and France and of conflict between powerful emperors and popes over the Italian peninsula (with city-republics and duchies negotiating their lives between them). In religion, Pope Innocent III convoked the Fourth Lateran Council (1215) to promote deeper Christianization of the laity. This program included required annual confession of sins to a priest, preaching and teaching by the clergy, and determined prosecution of heresy. The new mendicant orders, Dominicans and Franciscans, played key parts in these measures.



As examples of humble discipleship, the friars represented a reaction against the commercialization of traditional relationships and were accordingly preferred by many as confessors. They were also leading intellectual lights of the time and were heavily employed as agents of the papal Inquisition.

### **Power and Poverty, Real and Verbal (1302–1453)**

Major contexts for political philosophy in the late Middle Ages can be described in contrasts drawn between the real and the fictive or merely verbal. Civil lawyers, developing an idea of Pope Innocent IV's, distinguished the fictive legal personality of a political community (a kingdom, say) from its real members when they attempted to accommodate the *de facto* independence of kingdoms such as England and France from the theoretically universal dominion of the Empire. Reasoning employed here also found application to smaller communities, old and newly formed. For example, a city that actually ran its own affairs had a case for recognition as legitimately free, a ruler to itself, a *civitas sibi princeps*.

A harsher distinction between real and verbal was made by a henchman of the king of France, addressing Pope Boniface VIII regarding his claims to supreme authority in the bull *Unam sanctam* (1302): "Your power is verbal, ours is real." A little later, different assertions of papal unreality were made by rebel Franciscans (including William of Ockham) who accused John XXII of heresy (hence of being a pseudo-pope) for denying the total legal poverty of Christ and his apostles. John in turn accused the friars themselves of practicing a merely fictive poverty. Other disputes about papal reality occurred during the schism of 1378–1417, when as many as three individuals at once claimed to be pope. The conciliar movement managed to negotiate unity in the papacy, but even with the rich resources of medieval corporation theory it remained unclear by the time of John Torquemada's *Summa de ecclesia* (1453) what, if any, authority the body of the church had with respect to its papal head.

## **Genres**

### **Comprehensive Treatises**

A number of medieval treatises set out a general view of the political domain: Augustine of Hippo's *City of God*, John of Salisbury's *Policraticus*, Thomas Aquinas' *On Kingship to the King of Cyprus*, Giles of Rome's *On the Rule of Princes*, Dante Alighieri's *Monarchia*, Marsilius of Padua's *Defender of Peace*, the third part of William of Ockham's *Dialogus*, John Wyclif's *De civili dominio*, and several defenses of papal power.

### **Mirrors for Princes**

Advice books to rulers were popular in the ninth and twelfth to thirteenth centuries. Those of general significance include Bernard of Clairvaux's *On Consideration*, written to guide Bernard's former student Pope Eugenius III, and works by Aquinas and Giles of Rome mentioned above. John of Salisbury's *Policraticus* is a high-definition mirror for both rulers and courtiers.

### **Commentaries on Aristotle**

Commentaries on the *Politics* were of two types, literal phrase-by-phrase explications, of which Thomas Aquinas' is a good example for the portion of the work covered (to 1280a6), and commentaries in question form, of which Albert the Great's is a model of philosophical engagement, posing and resolving objections to the Philosopher's views at every step. Peter of Auvergne wrote influential commentaries of both types.

### **Sentence Commentaries and Other Theological Treatises**

Much important material for political philosophy is embedded in theological treatises, such as commentaries on Peter Lombard's *Sentences*. Discussions of the sacrament of penance could, for example, include material on business ethics. The core of Thomas Aquinas' political thought is contained in his discussion of law beginning at q. 90 of *ST IaIIae*, but his later treatments of charity, justice, prudence, and the vices opposed to them are also significant.

### Disputed and Quodlibetal Questions

The standard unit of scholastic discourse, the *quaestio*, organized around arguments for and against a single proposition, lent itself to discussion of political issues, including hereditary as against elective monarchy and the rule of law as against personal rule. A dialogue between masters can sometimes be traced in their respective questions (McGrade et al. 2001).

### Topics

The nature and aims of politics as recognized in medieval philosophical thought and the regimes proposed to achieve these aims are sketched below to provide guidance to fuller discussions elsewhere in this volume.

#### The Nature of Politics

The founding text of medieval political thought was Augustine of Hippo's *On the City of God Against the Pagans*, written to refute the charge that abandoning the old gods in favor of Christianity was responsible for the sack of Rome in 410. According to Augustine, no human being dominated any other in the state of innocence described in Genesis. The pervasive fact of such domination in later times is due to Adam's original sin of rebellion against the rightful dominance of God. On this account all politics is unnatural, for the essence of earthly empires, kingdoms, cities, and even families is the control of some by others. Relationships of dominance and subjection are a punishment but also a partial remedy for loving self more than God, since uncontrolled self-will would produce a world even worse than the one in which we find ourselves. Politics is a matter of damage control. Genuine happiness, including freedom from our own drive for domination, can come only by God's grace, through faith in Christ.

From this position, two approaches to political action were taken, both involving the church. The more familiar one, sometimes referred to as political Augustinism, was to promote the power and authority of the church, provider of the means of grace. The other approach was to minimize the

church's involvement in secular politics, relying on its ministry to individuals for whatever amelioration of civic life might be possible. Bernard of Clairvaux exemplifies both approaches and the tension between them by endorsing the principle that earthly powers should act at the pope's nod (*nutum*), while entreating the pope to avoid immersion in secular business.

Other approaches to politics, with less or in some cases no discernible emphasis on human corruption, were taken mainly in the later Middle Ages. Thomas Aquinas argued for the naturalness of politics and the possibility of nonexploitative forms of authority aimed at a genuine, albeit not ultimate, this-worldly happiness. Marsilius of Padua saw natural human desire for a "sufficient" life as the proper motive of political association and regarded contemporary papal exercise of power as an unwholesome disturbance of natural processes. For Marsilius, blessedness in the next life was indeed to be had only by following Christian teaching, but it was crucial that the clergy have no coercive power to enforce their teaching.

#### Natural Norms

Commitment to some form of natural law or natural rights was universal among medieval political thinkers, but conceptions varied. Natural law was seen by some as an instinct implanted by nature in humans and other animals for their own well-being. Other thinkers, including Thomas Aquinas and William of Ockham, connected natural law with the capacity to grasp what actions are intrinsically rational.

Two Latin expressions are ordinarily translated as "natural law": *lex naturalis* and *ius naturale*. *Ius* also had two other senses. As "what is right," *ius* was the object or objective of justice. In the sense of "a right," *ius* was a power of action or control inhering in a bearer or subject. The relation of this distinction to modern ideas of rights has been much discussed in recent scholarship (Tierney 1997; Brett 1997; McGrade 2006).

#### Justice

Many lines of thought influenced medieval discussions of justice, including Roman law,

Ciceronian civic virtue, and Aristotelian ethical and political analysis. Accepting the Roman law definition of justice as a constant and perpetual will to render each his due, Augustine of Hippo wondered how anyone could do this who did not render God his due. The conclusion was often drawn that true justice could exist only in a Christian society. Even when the legitimacy of non-Christian polities was conceded, the possibility of giving equal political recognition to Christians and non-Christians was rarely even implied, although William of Ockham suggested that since believers and unbelievers had sometimes in the past lived together in peaceful association (*societas pacifica*), a non-Christian world ruler might be acceptable in future. Francisco de Vitoria argued on scholastic grounds for the political rights of the native Americans in the context of Spanish conquests.

### Peace

For Augustinians, peace, like justice, was a matter of right order, ultimately in relation to God, a “tranquillity of order” in which body, soul, and mind were subordinate each to the next, and mind to God. Augustine also recognized a useful but spiritually inquiet earthly peace based on agreement about who was to rule and who obey. The peace defended by Marsilius of Padua, though earthly, was also defined by tranquillity, one arising from the temperate functioning of all parts of a community.

### Common Good

Since for Aristotle the aim of political association is not simply life but the good life, his conception of the common good could readily be used to give earthly politics a morally and culturally elevated dimension and to encourage civic virtue. The idea of the common good was carried further in the identification of God as the common good of the universe (Kempshall 1999).

### Property and Poverty

Some authors held that private property, like government, was a result of sin, while others argued that property was a reasonable and in that sense

natural institution and would have arisen even without sin. In either case, issues about the use of material things needed to be addressed, and in an increasingly complex society this led to significant economic thought. Controversy about the Franciscan ideal of poverty, a life free of legal rights, involved fundamental questions about natural rights.

### Coercion

Christians served in the Roman army as early as the second century, but serious discussion of the moral issues involved in warfare began with Augustine of Hippo, who was cited as an authority throughout numerous later discussions of just war. Spreading Christianity to non-Christian territories came not to be acceptable in itself as a justification for war. Defense of orthodoxy against heresy or schism was, however, especially from the twelfth century.

### Regimes

Medieval thinkers discussed a variety of governmental arrangements as means for achieving the aims just outlined.

#### Monarchy: Papal, Imperial, Royal

Of all medieval monarchies, that of the papacy was most elaborately defended, both in the canon law and commentaries thereon and in a series of more systematic works by fourteenth- and fifteenth-century authors: Giles of Rome, James of Viterbo, Augustine of Ancona, and John Torquemada. Papal apologists – hierocrats or curialists – did not seek to abolish lay structures of government in favor of direct papal administration, but the plenitudo potestatis claimed for the pope included superiority over all human law and ultimate jurisdiction over all other rulers, clerical or lay.

The critics of unrestricted papal power defended other regimes as complements to or replacements for papal authority. The favored candidate for Dante Alighieri, Marsilius of Padua (at times), and William of Ockham was the Roman Empire. The Empire’s legitimacy at the time of Christ was important to all three of these thinkers. For Dante, the final aim of imperial

rule was fulfillment of humanity's intellectual potential in a global civilization. Marsilius and Ockham assigned more modest aims to temporal government, but for Marsilius the achievement of communal tranquillity required that all coercive power be vested in a single civil government or principate. This entailed that in a Christian community the civil ruler's ecclesiastical authority would be as great as that exercised by emperors in any earlier century. As against Marsilius' monism, Ockham presented the argument that the best regime was compatible with the existence of jurisdictions independent of the supreme secular authority.

Other critics of curialism, such as John of Paris and John Wyclif, were oriented toward royal regimes. John of Paris, like Ockham, was a dualist. Wyclif gave the civil ruler an important negative religious function, that of compelling Christian clergy to live modestly, following the example of Christ and his apostles.

Kingship was also commended by authors who believed in at least the moral subordination of civil to spiritual authority. In John of Salisbury's organic model of society, the princely head is an earthly image of the divine majesty, while yet being a minister of the priestly soul of the community. In the treatise Thomas Aquinas wrote for the king of Cyprus, kings are responsible for the moral well-being of their subjects, but for salvation it is necessary that every individual be subject to the Roman pontiff. In Giles of Rome's treatise on kingship, the king is to be the source of law and an inspiring model of personal virtue for all his subjects, but Giles' *On Ecclesiastical Power* is an emphatic declaration of papal supremacy.

#### Republicanism

Ptolemy of Lucca considered a "political" or republican government the only one fit for a virtuous people. Marsilius of Padua proposed discussion involving the whole citizenry as the best way to produce satisfactory laws and viable government. Constitutionalist ideas were developed with regard to the church in the conciliar movement of the late fourteenth and fifteenth centuries.

#### The Mixed Constitution

Serious consideration was given by late medieval Aristotelians to the mixed constitution of Politics 1297a6 (Blythe 1992). Traditional emphasis on the rule of law made by a representative body gave England a government that could be expounded by John Fortescue as both royal and political.

#### The Variability of Legitimate Regimes

Many authors, including Thomas Aquinas, held that different secular regimes were appropriate for different peoples and circumstances. Ptolemy of Lucca strongly favored a republican regime for a freedom-loving people but thought monarchy, which he equated with despotism, necessary in most cases. Marsilius of Padua held that the broadly participatory deliberative process mentioned above could result in the citizenry's establishing any of a number of types of government. In the circumstances of his day, he was prepared to delegate even the community's own proper function as supreme human legislator to a single individual, the Roman emperor. William of Ockham developed the position that monarchy was ordinarily the best regime for both temporal affairs and the church, but that circumstances might occasionally require other forms of government – and that although the papal headship of the church had been instituted by Christ it was nevertheless beneficial (*expediens*) for the community of the faithful to have power to change the church's government from monarchic to aristocratic, at least temporarily.

#### Resistance

Tyranny was regularly deplored by medieval authors and tyrannicide occasionally deemed licit. In most secular contexts, power was sufficiently diffused to allow some party to claim authority on behalf of the community to correct a faulty ruler. William of Ockham used the biblical idea of "fraternal correction" as a basis for resistance to what he regarded as heresy on the part of John XXII. There was also, however, a tradition holding that bad rulers were divine punishment for the sins of the people.

## Conclusion

Past research in medieval political thought has revealed significant continuities with modern thought. Recent work on the idea of natural rights is a striking example. More such continuities will certainly be found through further study of major texts and exploration of the large body of quodlibetal and disputed questions. Much can also be learned from aspects of the Middle Ages that are less prominent today or until recently have seemed entirely archaic. For example, a study of medieval monastic rules from the perspective of political philosophy could be of scholarly and human interest. More urgently, today's "radical Islam" directs attention to issues of religion and politics that were central to the radical Christianity of twelfth- and thirteenth-century Europe – with its Crusades, popular religious movements, Inquisition, papal-imperial conflicts, and personal spirituality. A more nuanced appreciation of the struggles over such issues at that time might give a better sense of how they present themselves to many Muslims and others today. Study of medieval developments might help the search for a shared understanding of natural norms as a basis for cross-cultural peace.

## Cross-References

- ▶ [Albert the Great](#)
- ▶ [Augustine of Ancona](#)
- ▶ [Bernard of Clairvaux](#)
- ▶ [Canon Law](#)
- ▶ [Cicero in Political Philosophy](#)
- ▶ [Civil \(Roman\) Law](#)
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- ▶ [Universities and Philosophy](#)
- ▶ [War \(Just War, Holy War\)](#)
- ▶ [William of Ockham](#)

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## Political Philosophy, Arabic

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### Abstract

Political philosophy, the attempt to replace opinion about political affairs by knowledge, arises in the medieval Arabic–Islamic tradition of the Middle East with al-Fārābī (870–950) and ends with Averroes (1126–1198). Two important figures precede al-Fārābī – al-Kindī (Abū Yūsuf Ya‘qūb ibn Ishāq al-Kindī, died 866) and al-Razī (Abū Bakr Muḥammad ibn Zakariyyā al-Rāzī, 864–925), but neither engages in political philosophy. Al-Kindī, acclaimed “the philosopher of the Arabs,” was renowned for his excursions into Greek, Persian, and Indian wisdom and for his detailed knowledge of astronomy. Although some of his writings contain the germs of a political teaching, he is primarily interested in ethics and accepts the milieu in which we live as a fixed variable, something not worth trying to alter. Al-Razī sees the philosophic life as “making oneself similar to God. . . to the extent possible for a human being” and prescribes for human conduct with that goal in mind. He discerns that one who aspires to philosophy must focus on things such as gaining a livelihood, acquisition, expenditure, and seeking rulership, but goes no further. That is, he never investigates how ethics, household management, and political rule are related or even what they comprise and contents himself with speaking of political rule in ethical terms.



Moreover, as the following narrative reveals, Arabic political philosophy does not develop in a unilinear fashion. There is a dialogue of sorts between those who contribute to it, in that later philosophers refer to their predecessors explicitly as well as indirectly. And there is constant tension about the relationship between reason and revelation, with some thinkers almost blurring the two while others keep them firmly distinct. Finally, although there is a brief flicker of the philosophic flame coming back to life with Ibn Khaldūn (1332–1406), it is all too short-lived.

Abū Naṣr Muḥammad ibn Muḥammad ibn Ṭarkhān ibn Awzalagh al-Fārābī was born in about 870 either in Kazakhstan or Turkestan. He arrived in Baghdad after 890. Around 942, political upheavals forced him to Aleppo, then Egypt, and finally Damascus, where he died in 950. Widely acclaimed “the second teacher,” that is, second after Aristotle, al-Fārābī founded the Arabic–Islamic political philosophy insofar as the fact that he is the first to explore the challenge revealed religion presents to traditional philosophy in its claim that the creator provides for human well-being by means of an inspired prophet–legislator.

He does so by showing that the political science of Plato and Aristotle with its traditional separation between practical and theoretical knowledge no longer suffices for the radically new situation created by revealed religion. That older political science can identify the actions and ways of life needed for sound political rule to flourish, but is silent about opinions – especially the theoretical opinions set forth in religion – and thus unable to identify the kind of rulership needed now that religion holds sway. Nor can it speak about the opinions or actions addressed by the jurisprudence and theology of revealed religion. These tasks require a political science bringing theoretical and practical science together along with prudence and showing how to order them in the soul of the ruler.

Al-Fārābī’s new political science presents religious beliefs as opinions and acts of worship as actions. For him, both are prescribed for a community by a supreme ruler or prophet. His new political science views religion as centered in a political community whose supreme ruler appears

to be identical with the founder of a religion. Indeed, the goals and prescriptions of the supreme ruler are those of the prophet law-giver. Everything said or done by this supreme ruler finds justification in philosophy, and religion thus depends on theoretical as well as practical philosophy. Similarly, by presenting the art of jurisprudence as a means to identify particular details the supreme ruler failed to regulate before his death, al-Fārābī makes it depend upon practical philosophy and thus to be part of this broader political science.

His new political science offers a comprehensive view of the universe and identifies the practical acumen permitting the one who possesses this understanding, either the supreme ruler or a successor endowed with his qualities, to rule wisely. Able to explain the various ranks of all the beings, this political science also stresses the importance of religion for uniting the citizens and for helping them attain the virtues that prolong decent political life. Al-Fārābī thereby reaches to the core of revealed religion and presents it as consonant with the best understanding of the philosophy set forth by Plato and Aristotle. Politics is central to the proper human life because only in a well-ordered regime can people pursue their true end or purpose – ultimate happiness or perfection.

Abū ‘Alī al-Ḥusayn ibn Sīnā or Avicenna was born in Afshana in 980. His family soon moved to nearby Bukhārā where he began his studies. After the Qur’ān and related literature, he pursued mathematics, Islamic jurisprudence, and philosophy. Avicenna served as an administrator for the local ruler and as jurist for, and advisor to, other minor rulers. He also managed the affairs of the widows of rulers and served as physician to Shams al-Dawla, the Buyid prince of Hamadhān and Qirmisin – being named his chief minister or vizier on two occasions. Despite his engagement in politics, Avicenna composed no comprehensive treatise on the subject.

In the first chapter of the introductory volume to his famous *Healing*, Avicenna explains the general order of the whole work. After the part on logic is another part devoted to natural science. It is followed by a third part about mathematics, and the whole compendium concludes with

Avicenna's explanation of the divisions and aspects of metaphysics. He says nothing about practical philosophy or science until the very end of his discussion of metaphysics or divine science. As he puts it, his "summary of the science of ethics and of politics" is placed there "until I compose a separate, comprehensive book about them."

Avicenna's fuller teaching reveals, however, that ethical and political science belong after divine science intrinsically and not provisionally. The human manifestation of divine science and its practical proof, they testify to divine providence for humankind and thus to the truth of revelation more clearly than any of the other sciences investigated in the *Healing*. Because the correctness of what they teach can also be verified by Aristotelian or pagan reasoning processes, Avicenna elucidates the relationship he discerns between pagan philosophy and the revelation accorded the Prophet Muhammad. His description of Plato's *Laws* as a treatise on prophetic law-giving indicates how interrelated he deems philosophy and revelation. Moreover, in elucidating the political aspects of prophecy and divine law, he addresses the most fundamental political questions: the nature of law, purpose of political community, need for sound moral life, importance of providing for divorce as well as marriage, conditions for just war, considerations that lay behind penal laws, and the end of human life. Although he is silent about the origin of private property as well as how future successors to the prophet-lawgiver might be raised so that they will have moral habits and character traits suitable to such a position, he provides the basic principles for readers to pursue these issues on their own.

Differently stated, Avicenna's political teaching provides an introduction to the fundamentals of political science, but does not make political life central to human well-being. His prophet dwells on beliefs having no immediate political relevance. Indeed, some are antipolitical or ascetic, as though the highest goal toward which thoughtful humans should strive is to weaken the ties between the soul and their body thereby achieving separation from the body. Thus, the great turn toward political philosophy initiated by al-Fārābī is ignored and even obscured by Avicenna.

After Avicenna, philosophy moves West to Andalusia. The first to come to light there is Abū Bakr Muḥammad ibn Yaḥyā ibn al-Ṣā'ig or Ibn Bājjā. Born in Saragossa between 1085 and 1090, he escaped political turmoil first in Granada and then Seville, serving as chief minister or vizier to local governors loyal to the Almoravid dynasty in both cities. He died in Fez in 1139.

Ibn Bājjā is highly praised by his successors for his promise, but also blamed for having allowed diversions to distract him from his writing. Important as are his treatises on music, astronomy, logic, natural science, metaphysics, and even al-Fārābī's logical writings. Of greater interest here is his focus on the solitary – the individual whose intellectual and moral qualities put him at odds with the dominant opinions in imperfect regimes. Ibn Bājjā pursues the theme in his *Regimen of the Solitary*, comparing this exceptional individual to a weed in that he comes on his own to form correct opinions about the world and how to live as a human being that are in sharp contrast with the false, unsound opinions of his own city as well as of most other cities in existence at any time. He flourishes in spite of his surroundings, developing into a specimen distinct from those dominant in his own milieu.

Ibn Bājjā reaches back to Plato and the *Republic* to establish the importance of the subject. He grounds his account in what al-Fārābī has said about the tensions arising for those possessed of sound opinions and character as they interact with the dominant opinions and role models. Precisely because the best solution – bringing into being a perfect city that provides education suitable for all the citizens – is not likely, perhaps not even possible, Ibn Bājjā focuses on the individual who manages to arrive at a proper understanding of the universe and the goal of human beings within it. That is, he indicates what that understanding should be and suggests obliquely how it differs from the opinions and actions all too evident in actual regimes. But Ibn Bājjā never indicates how the solitary individual is to be formed or governed. Suggestions about the way the universe is to be intellectually apprehended and the soul of one who arrives at such an apprehension notwithstanding, the account remains too imprecise and inconclusive to offer the

guidance for which Ibn Bājja so whets readers' appetites.

In this respect, he unwittingly contributes to the intellectual tension introduced by Avicenna. Rooted as his enterprise is in the educational task of Plato's *Republic* and of al-Fārābī's larger political teaching, Ibn Bajja's attention to the spiritual forms encourages those who would like to link philosophy – especially political philosophy – with religious and metaphysical themes. Indeed, Ibn Bājja contributes so to that nonrational perspective that his immediate successor, Ibn Ṭufayl, deems it necessary to restate the history of philosophy within Islam so as to redress the balance.

Abū Bakr Muḥammad ibn 'Abd al-Malik ibn Ṭufayl al-Qaysī was born in Guadix, not far from Granada, in 1110. Reputed for his learning in philosophy, jurisprudence, theology, and logic, as well as natural science, he gained the favor of the Almohade ruler, Abū Ya'qūb Yūsuf, whom he served for many years as a political advisor and physician. Only his philosophical novel, *Ḥayy ibn Yağzān (Alive, Son of Awake)*, has survived. He died in Marrakesh in 1185.

In the philosophical introduction to that work, Ibn Ṭufayl focuses on the relationship between the rational acquisition of knowledge and the path to it pursued by those who favor mysticism or Sufism. The work itself consists of three major parts. In the introduction, Ibn Ṭufayl explains his reasons for writing a book such as this and provides a general critique of philosophy, theology, and mysticism within the Arab world at his time. It is followed by the story of Ḥayy and by a formal conclusion in which Ibn Ṭufayl returns to the main theme of the work.

The tale is a response to a request that he unfold, what he knows "of the secrets of the Oriental wisdom mentioned by the master, the chief, Abū 'Alī ibn Sīnā." Ḥayy is either self-generated from a lump of clay or comes into being as do all humans but has been put into the sea in a basket because his mother, the sister of a very proud monarch, wedded beneath her status in secret, and feared for the fruit of this union should her brother learn of Ḥayy's existence. However generated, he grows up on a deserted island, nursed by a doe until he can fend for himself. During seven periods of 7 years each, he discovers

his natural surroundings and the way they interact, ascending by a series of basic inductive reasoning to an understanding of physics and its many divisions as well as mathematics and its parts. He also gains insight into the nature of the heavenly bodies and into the character of the creator as well as of his messenger and prophet, Muḥammad.

Not until he encounters Asāl, the inhabitant of a neighboring island who is discontent with the way his fellow citizens practice religion, does Ḥayy learn to speak. The two return to Asāl's island intent upon showing people the correct path, but fail miserably. Intelligent as each is, neither has any awareness of how to speak to human beings whose primary concerns are the securing of basic needs and then the enjoyment of pleasant respite. Only Salamān, a friend of Asāl's who discerns that most people cannot appreciate the truths Ḥayy wishes them to grasp but is content to let them flounder, understands the limits of human reason. His complacent disinterest in the well-being of his fellow citizens baffles Ḥayy and Asāl, to be sure. But it also deprives them of the possibility of learning about a law-giver's and prophet's greatest skill: being able to persuade others of his vision.

The tale ends with Ḥayy and Asāl deciding to return to their desert island in order to spend their remaining days meditating about divine matters. A reader who has followed the narration through to the end may discern how important it is for those who know or are somehow inspired to be able to communicate their insights to others. Unless those who understand the way things are also have a sound grasp of rhetoric, they will never be able to help others elevate their thoughts and achieve a better political order. Through this delightful tale, then, Ibn Ṭufayl reminds the reader of al-Fārābī's account of the first ruler as prophet as well as law-giver and philosopher.

Abū l-Walīd Muḥammad ibn Aḥmad ibn Muḥammad ibn Rushd or Averroes, as he is more commonly known in the West, is renowned for his intellectual excellence and profound accomplishments in jurisprudence, medicine, poetry, philosophy, natural science, theology, and, above all, for his commentaries on Aristotle. He was born in Cordoba in 1126. The most important event in Averroes' life must be his

presentation by Ibn Ṭufayl to Abū Ya‘qūb as the person most qualified to undertake the task of commenting on Aristotle’s works. While engaged in those commentaries, he served as a judge, was the personal physician to Abū Ya‘qūb, and composed treatises on topics of more immediate concern to fellow Muslims, most notably, the *Decisive Treatise*. Later, accused of being overly occupied with philosophy and “the sciences of the ancients,” he was banished for 2 years. Shortly after returning to favor at the court in Marrakesh, he died in 1198.

In the *Decisive Treatise*, he investigates the relationship between philosophy and divine law and, more pointedly, the important role of prophecy. Central to the argument set forth there is Averroes’ clear sense of the limits of reason and need to speak to people in language they understand – precisely what Ḥayy and Asāl lacked. Referring to a famous Qur’anic passage (16:125), he notes that most scholars agree upon the need to address people with different levels of learning in ways suitable to them just as the Qur’ān recommends. It is because religion, like politics, must take the whole citizen body into account that different kinds of speech and even different kinds of practices are justified. Moreover, those who would deny that the revealed law works in such a manner put the citizenry into danger. By explaining complicated matters of faith to those not able to follow the reasoning, these would-be teachers lead the less gifted into confusion and frequently into disbelief.

For Averroes, there is a major danger in using dialectic or demonstration to address those who can comprehend only preaching or rhetoric. On the grounds that the lawgiver, that is, the prophet, is similar to a physician – the lawgiver caring for souls and the physician for bodies – Averroes draws the practical consequences. First, such misguided teachers are doing little more than telling the populace not to heed the ministrations of the physician. Indeed, such teachers drive the people away from the one individual who can help them recover the health of their soul and preserve it from future sicknesses. The goal of the lawgiver or prophet is not to make the people physicians, but to teach them the basic fundamentals with respect to the all-important health of their soul.

For such an undertaking, there is no need to fret about the intricacies of the revealed book. The surface teaching suffices. That is what Averroes seeks to safeguard through his defense of rhetoric and the surface understanding of Scripture.

This is the core teaching of the *Decisive Treatise*, a writing for which Averroes apologizes but that he felt compelled to write in order to overcome the terrible strife between the proponents of religion and those of philosophy then prevalent. It is prompted by his own broad understanding of the complexity of the human soul tempered by a peculiar sense of what is needed for sound political life. In this manner, he brings philosophy and religion together even as he reinforces the central focus of al-Fārābī’s political teaching.

In sum, Arabic political philosophy is best characterized as political philosophy within the medieval Arabic–Islamic tradition. As such, its major concern is the relationship between reason and revelation – especially as it is manifested in the act of law-giving. That in turn leads to inquiry into the larger question of prophecy and of what qualifies a human being to become a law-giving prophet.

## Cross-References

- ▶ [Abū Bakr al-Rāzī, Muḥammad ibn Zakarīyā’ \(Rhazes\)](#)
- ▶ [al-Fārābī, Abū Naṣr](#)
- ▶ [al-Kindī, Abū Yūsuf Ya‘qūb ibn Ishāq](#)
- ▶ [Ibn Bājja, Abū Bakr ibn al-Sā’ig \(Avempace\)](#)
- ▶ [Ibn Khaldūn, Abū Zayd ‘Abdarrahmān](#)
- ▶ [Ibn Rushd, Muḥammad ibn Aḥmad al-Ḥafīd \(Averroes\)](#)
- ▶ [Ibn Sīnā, Abū ‘Alī \(Avicenna\)](#)
- ▶ [Ibn Ṭufayl, Abū Bakr \(Abubacer\)](#)
- ▶ [Moses Maimonides](#)
- ▶ [Political Philosophy](#)

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## Political Philosophy, Byzantine

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### Abstract

Byzantine political philosophy (BPP), in general, is a reflection on the political practices and the nature of the Empire, on the divine origin of emperorship, on the hierarchical order of imperial government, civil ranks and the community of Christian states, under the guidance of the Byzantine Emperor. In a more particular sense, it is a reflection that goes further and

comments on its own foundations in Christian metaphysics, epistemology, and axiology. This second approach to the BPP is rather problematic because of the scarce textual evidence. The Byzantines felt not much need to theorize, taking for granted that their Empire is a gift from God. It was also usual in that time to impose the general theological and philosophical modes of thought on political thought, not taking into account their sophisticated interaction with facts. Thus, the BPP tended to be just a part of the imperial ideology.

The founder of BPP was admittedly Eusebius of Cesarea (c. 263–339). He adapted in Christian terms the Roman and Hellenistic idea of emperorship as an image of the kingship of Zeus and originated the Byzantine conception of the divine origin of imperial government. Eusebius' reflections laid the intellectual basis of Byzantine theocracy and due to their influence on the church fathers and historians, they gained immense importance both in the East and in the West. The later BPP was rather fragmentary and consisted mainly of advice to the emperors. It took the literary form of "Mirrors for Princes," providing samples of rhetorical speech, diplomacy, and court flattery, far from originality. The main sources we have about the BPP within this genre are the works by the deacon Agapetos; Patriarch Photios; Theophylact, Archbishop of Ochrid; Kekaumenos; Nikephoros Blemmydes; and John Apokaukos, Bishop of Naupact.

### The Empire

According to the BPP, the Byzantine Empire was considered a terrestrial image of the kingdom of God, and the emperor was seen as God's vicegerent or viceroy on earth. This put the reflections on the Empire in an eschatological context and made them an essential part of a Christian Philosophy of history. The Byzantine Empire was "a chosen vessel" for the salvation of the human race and a realization of Divine Providence. It conveyed the plan of salvation, bringing to completion the highest achievements of mankind, providentially

granted to Jews, Hellenes, and Romans. Among the most important of them were *the universal form of state* and *the universal language*. It was the Roman Empire that for the first time brought the whole human race together in one unity and agreement, imposing legislation and a state constitution of more than a regional or national importance. Due to its might, it participated in the Majesty of the Kingdom of God, for it transcends, as far as an earthly realm could, every other power on earth. According to the conception of *translatio imperii*, the Byzantine Empire was considered a successor of the Roman Empire, its capital Constantinople was titled “New Rome,” and the Byzantines called themselves “Romans” (*rhōmaioi*). The Greek language of the Byzantine Empire was another gift by the Divine Providence to complete its universal nature. Greek not only expresses the spiritual and cultural heritage of Hellenes, but what is more important – this is the language of the Christian *kērugma*, the language conveying the way to salvation. Therefore, the Byzantine Empire has embodied the two great powers that came forth to civilize and unite the whole world – the monarchy of the Roman Empire and the teaching of Christ. The capital Constantinople was also called the “Queen of Cities” and the “New Jerusalem.” It was considered as both a political and religious center of the Christian world. Constantinople was hailed in hymns and stimulated the emergence of a particular literary genre of the *Laudes Constantinopolitanae*.

### The Emperor

Being a reflection of the Kingdom of God on earth, the Empire should mirror the hierarchical order of heaven, stemming from one Supreme Being. It could only have one sovereign, as there is only one God. It is on these grounds that the *monarchy* was considered the best form of government. Presided by the emperor, it should ensure universal peace, justice, and unity of faith, binding in the entire human race in hierarchical order. United by the Byzantine Empire, humankind should become “one flock with one

Shepherd.” The BPP took the pagan concept of the god-emperor and transformed it into Christian terms as a “Vicar of Christ” and “Chosen of God,” both granting the divine origin of his sovereignty and opposing pagan pantheism. This is the reason behind the ambiguous stance of the emperor. On the one hand he had absolute power insofar as he was bound to be a proper image of the Almighty God, but on the other he was granted his powers not *by nature* but *by grace*. This gave a Christian nuance to the ancient conception on the chosen nature of monarchy, moderating its absolutist claims. The Byzantine Emperor could be dethroned by the persons who had formally elected him (this actually happened to 43 of the emperors) and the people of Byzantium were granted the right of mutiny against their sovereign.

### The Political Practices

According to the BPP, the emperor was chosen and guided by the Logos of God. That is why he was considered the only source of order and stability in Byzantine society. The Byzantine Emperor was the source human and the mediator of divine legislation. His privileged position was expressed by the formula of the “animated law” (*nomos empsychos*). The law was personified in the institution of the emperor. It was through him that God ensured direct control over the human legislation. This on the one hand led BPP to interpretations on behalf of the thesis that he (like the Roman emperor) is above law, but on the other hand it was taken to mean that his prerogatives are just to make corrections in the otherwise inflexible law, with a view to greater humanity. The first stance put stress on the theocratic tendencies in the institution of the emperor. He was called to represent Christ in the political as well as in the mystical life of the Byzantines. There was a hierarchical order of ranks according to their proximity to the sacred person of the emperor and all of them were subjected to the custom of prostration. The Byzantine court was famous for its ceremonies, aimed at his mystical glorification. The emperor also represented Christ at many church



celebrations and customs such as to invite twelve guests to a meal on Christmas Day and to wash the feet of 12 poor men from the street. He was considered the upholder of the church law and order. Without his signature the decrees of church councils were not valid. Being the defender of the church and the canons the emperor regulated the hierarchy of the Church and defended the decrees of the councils. Yet the sacred position of the emperor did not endow him with an absolute power over the Church and society. The theological distinction of *grace* and *nature* reflected on the distinction the Byzantines made between the institution of the emperor and the emperor as a person. The divine origin of the institution remained unquestioned, while the emperor himself had to meet some spiritual, moral, and political requirements to be elected for this position. The legal right of mutiny against the emperor (admitted in western political thought much later in c. 13–14), the practice of dethroning an emperor, excommunication and even of anathemizing the emperor by the patriarch served as a warranty against the claims of the person on throne to interpret the prerogatives of his institution, given by the grace of God, in terms of natural law. That is why there was a kind of a social contract in Byzantine society as well as implicit harmony and cooperation between emperor and patriarch, between state and church.

## The Community of Christian States

The conception of the universal nature of Byzantine Empire and its divine origin led to the idea that it is the sole legitimate empire on earth. The Byzantines believed that their state was chosen to fulfill Divine Providence and they never admitted the existence of another. Insofar as this contradicted the political reality, they could only recognize other states, developing the ideology of the granting of privileges and royal insignia by the Byzantine Emperor. “The Byzantine hierarchy of states” according to this theory was a hierarchically dependent community, based on the level of their kings’ kindred relation

to the Byzantine Emperor. Even the pragmatism of the late Byzantine emperors could not help them in their quest of western help against the Ottoman Turks to properly surpass the limitations of this ideology. This finally led to the fall of Byzantium and destroyed the theoretical illusions, cherished by the BPP about the empire as an almighty reflection of the majesty of the Kingdom of Christ that will remain unconquered until the final consummation.

## Cross-References

- ▶ [Mirrors for Princes](#)
- ▶ [Nikephoros Blemmydes](#)
- ▶ [Philosophical Theology, Byzantine](#)
- ▶ [Photios of Constantinople](#)

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## Porphyry, Arabic

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### Abstract

The author of the *Isagoge*, Porphyry was first and foremost seen as an authoritative commentator of Aristotle by his Arab readers. Following in the footsteps of Ammonius and his school in Alexandria, also in the Arabic-speaking world the *Isagoge* was placed at the beginning of the *Organon*, and has been incessantly commented upon in medieval Arabic philosophy. The Alexandrian tradition also disseminated the topic, ultimately derived from Porphyry, of the harmony between Plato and Aristotle. Some works other than the *Isagoge* were known to some extent in the Arabic-speaking world but Porphyry’s name is linked first and foremost to the logical corpus of Aristotle, and only secondarily to other parts of the corpus (*Physics*, *Nicomachean Ethics*). Porphyry was also known as the “commentator” of the spurious *Theology* (in fact, Plotinus’ *Enneads*).

## Biobibliographical Information in the Arabic Sources

The *K. al-Fihrist* by Ibn al-Nadīm has an entry on Porphyry and refers to the entry on Aristotle for

additional information on his works; the subsequent biobibliographies depend upon the *Fihrist*, even though on one specific issue two of them include further data. The biobibliographical accounts on Porphyry in the Arabic sources have been translated into various languages by Bidez (1913: 54\*–60\*), (all the main sources), Smith (1993: 8–11), and Adamson (2007) (the account in the *K. al-Fihrist*), and have been analyzed time and again (Müller 1882: 24–30; Steinschneider 1889: 97–99; Gätje 1971: 76–79; Segonds 1982: 169–176), but a synopsis of the overlaps and differences among the Arabic surveys will be useful here. The main Arabic sources are the following (in chronological order): *K. al-Fihrist*, p. 253.12–18 Flügel [=F] to which the information given in the entry on Aristotle should also be added (see below); Ibn al-Qiftī's *Tarikh al-ḥukamā'*, p. 256.13–257.9 Lippert [=Q]; Ibn Abī Usaybi'a's *'Uyūn al-anbā' fī ṭabaqāt al-aṭibbā'*, p. 24 Müller [=IAU]; Barhebraeus' *Ta'rīkh mukhtaṣar al-duwal*, I, p. 84 (Latin); II, p. 133 (Arabic) [=B]; Ḥajjī Khalīfa's *Kashf al-Zunūn*, vol VII, n 7331 [=K]; to them, Casiri's *Bibliotheca*, I, pp. 185–186 [=C] can be added (on these sources, see the bibliography below; in particular on the *K. al-Fihrist*, see the entry on Translations from Greek into Arabic in this volume). It will appear from the synopsis below that the *K. al-Fihrist* forms the basis of all the subsequent accounts, even though Q and B seem to have had access to additional information, partly reflected in the much later bibliographical survey by K. As for C, he relies on Q and B, as the author himself says.

### Porphyry's Life and Philosophical Affiliation

According to the Arabic sources, Porphyry came from Tyre, Syria (F, Q, IAU, B, K, C); his lifetime was after Alexander (F) and Galen (F, Q) but before Ammonius (F, C). He lived under the emperor Diocletianus (B) and was a renowned and subtle commentator of Aristotle's works (F, Q, B, C). Indeed, Q (followed by K and C) expands this bit of information, describing how, in Porphyry's time, people baffled by the difficulty of Aristotle's books addressed to him the request

of commenting upon them; Porphyry replied that Aristotle's system of science was too difficult to be understood without an introduction, and he wrote the *Isagoge* in order to comply with the request; the *Isagoge* was then placed before Aristotle's writings (p. 257.3–4 Lippert), a story which is clearly reminiscent of Ammonius' commentary on the *Isagoge* (p. 22.12–23 Busse), and is repeated also in other Alexandrian commentaries (e.g., Elias; on the Neoplatonic exegesis of Aristotle's logical corpus in Alexandria, see Hadot 1987, 1991, 1992; on the influence of this tradition in the Arab world, see Hein 1985). B mentions also the name of Chrysaorius – the addressee of the *Isagoge* – as the friend who asked Porphyry to explain Aristotle's doctrines, an information coming ultimately from Ammonius, that does not appear in Q. Thus, the Arabic Porphyry is unanimously presented as a thinker of Aristotelian allegiance, indeed as a leading commentator on Aristotle, a profile which features also in the *Theology of Aristotle* (see the entry on Plotinus, Arabic in this volume), where “Porphyry from Tyre” is presented twice as the commentator of Aristotle's book on “Theology” (p. 3.6 and 8.4 Badawī), and in other sources (see below “Other Works”).

### Works

As we have just seen, in the *K. al-Fihrist* Porphyry is first and foremost a commentator on Aristotle. Obviously, Ibn al-Nadīm did not create this image, but simply recorded it: Porphyry “expounded the books of Aristotle, as we have mentioned in the place where we have given an account of Aristotle” (p. 253.13–14 Flügel, trans. Dodge, p. 610); after this sentence, Porphyry's original works are listed. In what follows, the order is basically that of the entry in the *K. al-Fihrist*; also, the titles of the works are given in the form they have there.

*Isagoge* (*Kitāb Ḫisāḡūjī fī l-madkhal ilā l-kutub al-manṭiqiyya*): F, Q, B, C.

*Introduction to the Categorical Syllogisms* (*Kitāb al-madkhal ilā al-qiyāsāt al-ḥamliyya*): F, Q, B, C.

*On Intellect and the Intelligible* (*Kitāb al-'aql wa-l-ma'qūl*): F.

*Two Books to Anebo (Kitābāni ilā Anābūn)*: F, Q, B, C.

*Refutation of Longinus (?) On the Intellect and the Intelligible (Kitāb al-radd ‘alā?)* [see below on the spellings of this name] *fī l-‘aql wa-l-ma‘qūl*: F, Q, B, C.

*Book of the Elements (Kitāb al-uṣṭuqṣāt)*: F, Q, B, C.

*Accounts of the Philosophers (Kitāb Akhbār al-falāsifa)*: F, Q, B, K, C.

*Book on Sleep and Awakening (Kitāb al-nawm wa-l-yaqṭa)*: F.

With the exception of *On Intellect and the Intelligible* (whose relationship with the *Refutation of Longinus* [?] on the same topic will be discussed below) and *On Sleep and Awakening* (mentioned only by Ibn al-Nadīm in the section on oneirocritics, p. 316.24 Flügel), the list of Porphyry's original works is the same in all the bibliographical surveys; the obvious implication is that Q and K are derivative (as usual, IAU skips the bibliographical information, and C, as we have seen before, explicitly relies on Q and B). The same is true for the commentaries: F mentions, in relationship with the various items of the entry on Aristotle, Porphyry's commentaries on the *Categories*, *De interpretatione*, *Physics* and *Ethics*, and the same titles feature in Q and K (C omits the commentary on the *Physics*); for more details on these commentaries, see below.

## Porphyry's Works in Arabic

Among the works by Porphyry known to the Arab bibliographical sources only the *Isagoge* is extant, but others have left some traces: the commentaries on the *Physics* and *Nicomachean Ethics*, the *Letter to Anebo* and the *History of Philosophy*, all of them lost or only fragmentarily extant in Greek. To this, a short Arabic writing on the soul should be added, that has been attributed to Porphyry but is unknown in Greek. Some hypotheses have been advanced in scholarship about the works whose titles were known to Ibn al-Nadīm and his followers, but did not circulate in Arabic. Finally, it has been argued that further works by Porphyry,

although unknown to bibliographical sources and not mentioned by any Arab writers, have influenced Arabic philosophy.

## Extant or Attested Works

### Works on Aristotle

**Isagoge** The Arabic version is extant and edited (al-Ahwānī et al. 1952; Badawī 1952): it was the work of Abū ‘Uthmān al-Dimashqī, one of the collaborators of Ḥunayn ibn Ishāq (see the entry on Translations from Greek into Arabic in this volume), and it was done on the basis of one of the numerous Syriac versions of the *Isagoge* (see the entry on Translations from Greek into Syriac in this volume), i.e., that of Athanasius of Balad (see Gyekye 1979: 16–17; Hugonnard-Roche 1994). However, the knowledge of Porphyry's *Isagoge* antedates this translation: among the works of al-Kindī, an epistle on it is recorded (*Risāla al-aṣwāt al-khamisa*, lost to us, but mentioned in the *K. al-Fihrist*, p. 256.16 Flügel). Al-Kindī might have been acquainted with the contents of the *Isagoge* through the compendium of Aristotle's logic translated or compiled by Ibn al-Muqaffā‘, a work which, following in the footsteps of the Alexandrian tradition, places the *Isagoge* before the *Organon* (on the date and authorship of this work, see the entry on Translations from Greek into Arabic in this volume). Also, Ibn al-Nadīm records a certain Ayyūb ibn al-Qāsim al-Raqqī as the translator of the *Isagoge* from Syriac into Arabic (p. 244.16 Flügel). The *Isagoge* was widespread, not to say omnipresent in Arabic philosophy: according to Gyekye (1979: 17), between 850 and 1550 no less than 50 commentaries were written on it. Among them, the most important are Ibn al-Ṭayyib's commentary (ed. Gyekye 1975), Avicenna's paraphrasis (the *K. al-Madkhal* of the *K. al-Shifā‘*, ed. al-Ahwānī et al. 1952), and two writings by Averroes: the abridgment contained in the *Ḍarūrī fī l-mantiq*, entitled *al-Qawl fī l-ma‘ānī l-fā‘ila li-l-taṣawwūr* (see Endress 1999: 343) and the *Middle Commentary (Talkhīs kitāb Isāgūjī*, ed. and trans. Davidson 1969a, b).

**Commentary on the Physics** In the *K. al-Fihrist*, p. 250.21–22 Flügel, Ibn al-Nadīm mentions in his account on Aristotle’s *Physics* the commentary by Porphyry on books I–IV, translated by Basīl, in all likelihood the same translator of the *Sayings* of the Pseudo-Menander, and the father of two other translators of the school of Ḥunayn, Tadhārī (Theodore) and Iṣṭifān. This commentary is lost in Greek, even though it has left several traces in later authors, chiefly Simplicius. The *Treatise on the Metaphysics* attributed to Abū Bakr Zakariyā’ al-Rāzī (ed. Kraus 1939) records an opinion uttered by Porphyry in the “second treatise of the *Physics*.” Hence, this passage has been included as fr. 463F in Smith’s collection of Porphyry’s fragments (see Smith 1993). Containing as it does several opinions on nature and its action (Alexander, Philoponus, Porphyry), this passage has attracted much attention in scholarship since then (see Brown 1972; Genequand 1984; Adamson 2007).

**Commentary on the Nicomachean Ethics** In the *K. al-Fihrist*, p. 252.2 Flügel, a commentary by Porphyry (lost in Greek) is mentioned in relationship to Aristotle’s *Ethics* (“*K. al-akhlāq, fassarahu Furfūriyyūs*, Book of Ethics, Porphyry commented upon it”), and al-Farābī refers to it in his *K. al-jam’*, p. 56.13 Martini Bonadeo (see Martini Bonadeo 2008: 170). In the *K. al-Fihrist*, the translation of both Aristotle’s work and Porphyry’s commentary is attributed to Iṣḥāq ibn Ḥunayn. Several hypotheses have been advanced to explain the oddity that Aristotle’s *Ethics* is said to fall into 12 books, instead of the 10 of the Greek *Nicomachean Ethics*, and some of these hypotheses include a discussion also of Porphyry’s commentary: see the survey by Zonta (2003: 193–194) as for the idea that an additional book inserted in the Arabic version between books VI and VII was a Neoplatonic compilation that can be traced back to Porphyry. Citations from this commentary have been discovered by Ghorab (1972) in the *K. al-sa’āda wa-l-is’ād* attributed to al-‘Āmirī, and the influence of Porphyry’s commentary on Miskawayh’s *K. Tahdhīb al-akhlāq* has been argued for by Walzer (1956).

## Other Works

**Two Books to Anebo** “Anebo,” the pseudonym of Iamblichus who was the real addressee of the lost “Letter” by Porphyry, is recorded in Arab bibliographies: the *K. al-Fihrist*, followed by Ibn al-Qifṭī, mentions two books “to Anābū.” Also, the *K. al-Fihrist* lists among the works of Abū Zakariyā’ al-Rāzī a *Refutation of the Book to Anebo by Porphyry* (p. 300.18–19 Flügel), which contained an explanation of “the Aristotelian doctrines on theology”: see the discussion in Gädje (1971: 77). In the *K. al-Milal wa-l-niḥal* by al-Shahrastānī, p. 345–347 Cureton, a passage from this writing *To Anebo* is quoted, where Porphyry’s metaphysical and cosmological doctrines are expounded (see Gabrieli 1946). It is worth noting that this account begins with Shahrastānī’s statement that Porphyry is a follower of Aristotle and is in complete agreement with him. As a proof, the *Letter to Anebo* is quoted, where Porphyry contends that Plato did not maintain the generation of the cosmos in time, but only argued that it is dependent on a principle other than it and anterior to it.

**Accounts of the Philosophers** Of this work, the Φιλόσοφος ἱστορία only fragmentarily extant in Greek, Ibn al-Nadīm says he saw the fourth chapter in Syriac, an information repeated by Ibn al-Qifṭī. Up-to-date analysis of the Arabic testimonies, including a survey of the main problems, by Cottrell (2008). Rosenthal (1937) had detected in Mubashshir ibn Fātik’s *Choicest Maxims and best Sayings* an account of the “Life of Zeno of Elea” which he tentatively traced back to the *Accounts of the Philosophers* (Rosenthal 1937: 39), even though Porphyry is not mentioned as the source of the account on Zeno; this is considered as fr. XXX in Sodano’s edition of the fragments of Porphyry’s Φιλόσοφος ἱστορία (see Sodano 1997: 144–153). Rosenthal traced back tentatively to the same source also the “Life of Solon” recorded in al-Mubashshir (=fr. 203 A Smith = fr. I of Book I Sodano; see Segonds 1982: 170–171; Sodano 1997: 38–40). Rosenthal also provided a detailed comparison between the



“Life of Pythagoras” recorded in Ibn Abī Uṣaybi‘a, p. 38–41 Müller and the *Life of Pythagoras* by Porphyry, admittedly a part of the Φιλόσοφος ἱστορία (see Rosenthal 1937: 43–56); an account on Pythagoras’ doctrine of the spheres is attributed to Porphyry also in Bīrūnī’s *India* (I, p. 43 Sachau: see Segonds 1982: 171). Also the *K. al-Milal wa-l-niḥal* by al-Shahrastānī refers to Porphyry as for Anaxagoras’ doctrines: this account is included as fr. 205F in Smith and as fr. VI of Book I in Sodano. There is no scholarly agreement about another account in Shahrastānī’s *K. al-Milal wa-l-niḥal*, that on Empedocles. Even though Porphyry is not mentioned, Altheim-Stiehl (1954) argued that Empedocles’ doctrines as recorded by al-Shahrastānī should be traced back to the Φιλόσοφος ἱστορία, a conclusion challenged by De Smet (1998), who has shown that the account in the *K. al-Milal wa-l-niḥal* depends on the Arabic doxography of the Pseudo-Ammonius edited by Rudolph (1989), a Neoplatonic reworking of a doxographical survey by Hippolytus of Rome, adapted to the Muslim theological controversies of the ninth century (on this dossier, see also Brague-Freudenthal 2005). Finally, Ibn al-Nadīm records in the section on the first philosophers Porphyry’s account about Thales as the first philosopher: this, Ibn al-Nadīm says, comes from Porphyry’s *History* (*Ta’rīkh*), a work extant in Syriac, two chapters of which have been translated into Arabic (p. 245.13–14 Flügel). According to Dunlop (1957), this translation was the work of Ibn Suwār, one of the scholars of the Aristotelian circle of Baghdad (see the entry on Ibn Suwār in this volume), and also Abū Sulaymān al-Sijistānī (another leading Aristotelian scholar of the time) was acquainted with Porphyry’s *Accounts of the Philosophers*. However, the title given in the *K. al-Fihrist* does not point to the Φιλόσοφος ἱστορία, but to the *Chronicle* (so Altheim-Stiehl 1954: 14; Segonds 1982: 169; see also Cottrell 2008, p. 528 n. 23, correcting several mistakes in previous scholarship). According to Sodano (1997: 48), nothing prevented Porphyry from speaking about Thales in the *Chronicle* and also in the Φιλόσοφος ἱστορία. A passage by Shahrastānī’s *K. al-Milal*

*wa-l-niḥal* where Porphyry deals with Thales (=fr. 204F Smith) is then considered by Sodano (1997: 42–43), as fr. V from Book I of the Φιλόσοφος ἱστορία. On all this, see Cottrell (2008: 546–555).

#### *Dubia seu spuria*

Kutsch (1954) discovered in the MS Istanbul, Aya Sofya 2457 a short writing on the soul which is attributed to Porphyry (*Maqāla li-Furfūriyyūs fī l-naḥs*). Not mentioned in bibliographies, this writing has been connected by Kutsch (1954: 267) with the pseudo-*Theology of Aristotle*. The literal correspondences between the *Maqāla li-Furfūriyyūs fī l-naḥs* and the *Theology* made Kutsch surmise, also on the basis of the fact that Porphyry features as the commentator of the *Theology* (see above), that the entire *Theology* was nothing if not an account of Aristotle’s theological doctrines as expounded by Porphyry. In Kutsch’s eyes, Porphyry made use by and large of his Plotinian readings to present Aristotle’s theology, and this work lay in the background of the Arabic *Theology*.

### Hypotheses About Porphyry’s Works Mentioned in the Bibliographical Sources

#### Introduction to the Categorical Syllogisms

This work, lost in Greek but known to Boethius, who made use of it (Bodéüs 2008: 10), was translated into Arabic by Abū ‘Uthmān al-Dimashqī, according to the *K. al-Fihrist*, p. 253.15 Flügel (followed by Ibn al-Qifṭī).

#### On Intellect and the Intelligible

Only the *K. al-Fihrist* (p. 253.16 Flügel) lists this title, which may hint at the treatise that Porphyry himself mentions in the *Vita Plotini* 18.10–11, *That the Intelligibles Subsist Outside the Intellect* (lost in Greek). Ibn al-Nadīm mentions an “old translation” of this work, with no further details. It has been surmised that this title should be read together with the subsequent item, the *Refutation Against Longinus* (?) *On the Intellect and the Intelligible*; see the discussion in Gätje (1971: 77–78).



### Refutation Against Longinus (?) On the Intellect and the Intelligible

This title features in the *K. al-Fihrist* (p. 253.16 Flügel) where the skeleton of the name is meaningless; the spelling of the name is different but not particularly helpful in other bibliographies (“Bāhyiūs,” “Pammachius,” and others); see again the discussion in Gätje (1971: 77–78). One may surmise that this title echoes two writings mentioned in the *Vita Plotini*: (a) the treatise *Against Those Who Keep the Intellect Apart from the Intelligible*, i.e., the “retractatio” that Porphyry wrote after having read the response of Plotinus’ pupil Amelius to his writing *That the Intelligibles Subsist Outside the Intellect*; and (b) a letter that he wrote to his former teacher Longinus, who had criticized Plotinus (see Gätje 1971: 78). On the circulation of the *Vita Plotini* in Arabic, see Thillet (2007); one may add that, even though there are no traces of an Arabic translation of it, the *Vita Plotini* did surely reach Baghdad in the ninth century, since this writing did not circulate separated from the *Enneads*, of which it serves as a preface (on the translation of the *Enneads*, see the entry on Plotinus, Arabic in this volume).

### Book of the Elements

The *K. al-Fihrist* (p. 253.17 Flügel) lists among Porphyry’s works a *K. al-ustuqsāt* which has been tentatively translated by Dodge (1970: 610) as “Seeking an Explanation,” on the basis of the variant reading *K. al-istafsār* in one of the MSS of the *Fihrist*. However, the other bibliographies, (Ibn al-Qifī and Barhebraeus), read *K. al-ustuqsāt* (Casiri renders it as *Liber elementorum*); this work, says Ibn al-Nadīm, was in Syriac. Beutler (1953: 300) lists this work dubitatively as n. 65 in his survey of Porphyry’s writings, and suggests a writing on mathematics. However, taking into account that *ustuqsāt* is the transliteration of *στοιχεῖα* (compare, in the entry on Proclus, Arabic in this volume the so-called *Uṣṭukhūsiyya al-suḡrā*, the “minor *Elementatio*,” p. 252.22 Flügel), one may tentatively surmise that this title points to Porphyry’s *Sentences*, which, like Proclus’ *Elements of Theology*, is subdivided into propositions. On the possible echoes

of one of Porphyry’s *Sentences* in Arabic, see Thillet (1971: 299).

### Hypotheses About Works Other Than Those Mentioned in the Bibliographical Sources

Walzer (1965) strongly argued in favor of the influence on Arabic philosophy of Greek works whose Arabic translation has not been found. This was especially true, in Walzer’s eyes, for Porphyry. He did point to the Commentary to the Myth of Er included in Porphyry’s lost commentary to Plato’s *Republic*, to the lost commentary on the *De interpretatione* – which he thought was known to al-Fārābī – and mostly to the lost writing on the “Harmony between Plato and Aristotle.” This writing is unknown in Arabic and to bibliographers, but counted for Walzer as one of the main sources of inspiration for several Arab philosophers: not only and predictably al-Fārābī, whose *K. al-jam’* echoed Porphyry even in the title, but also al-‘Āmirī (to whom Walzer attributed the *K. al-sa’āda wa-l-is’ad*) and Miskawayh, whose *Tahdhīb al-akhlāq* could be used to “get a fuller picture of what this book may have been like” (Walzer 1965: 286). Walzer was confident that the *K. al-sa’āda wa-l-is’ad* did make it “almost certain” that the Arabs knew Porphyry’s lost *Harmony*, which could be reconstructed as being a collection of quotations, mainly from Plato and Aristotle, about ethical and political topics. Also, Walzer thought that in Miskawayh this harmony was reached, following Porphyry’s lead, in the sense that Aristotle counted as the appropriate guide for this world, and Plato for the world-to-come. For an up-to date discussion, see Martini Bonadeo (2008: 1–14).

Finally, Porphyry’s role in the pseudo-*Theology of Aristotle* should be mentioned. A survey of the past scholarship that saw in the *Theology of Aristotle* a reworking by Porphyry of Plotinus’ writings “which an unknown late Greek or Syriac writer came to attribute to Aristotle” (Walzer 1965: 283) has been provided by Aouad (1989: 553–555). This reconstruction implies, to say it in Walzer’s words, that “the essential features of Porphyry’s paraphrase of a number of Plotinus’ essays may be recovered through a thorough analysis of the Arabic *Theology of Aristotle*,

rearranged in its original order and freed from later additions” (Walzer 1965: 285). Pines (1971) and Thillet (1971) side with Walzer; this reconstruction has been challenged by Zimmermann (1986).

## Cross-References

- ▶ Aristotle, Arabic
- ▶ al-Bīrūnī, Abū Rayḥān
- ▶ Doxographies, Graeco-Arabic
- ▶ al-Fārābī, Abū Naṣr
- ▶ Miskawayh, Abū ‘Alī
- ▶ al-Mubashshir ibn Fātīh
- ▶ Philosophy, Arabic
- ▶ Plotinus, Arabic
- ▶ Presocratics in the Arab World
- ▶ al-Shahrastānī, Muḥammad ibn ‘Abd al-Karīm
- ▶ Translations from Greek into Arabic
- ▶ Translations from Greek into Syriac

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## Posterior Analytics, Commentaries on Aristotle's

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### Abstract

Beginning with the translation of Aristotle's *Posterior Analytics* into Latin in the course of the twelfth century, the Latin authors of the Middle Ages presented a theory of demonstration – an argument that produces scientific knowledge by presenting the cause of the truth of the conclusion – based on that work, and largely explicated in connection with commentaries on it. Different versions of the theory were developed with different metaphysical commitments. Robert Grosseteste wrote the first widely circulated commentary, developing an Augustinian version of the theory. Then two different versions were developed by the Aristotelians, Albert the Great and Thomas Aquinas. William of Ockham developed a fourth version within his nominalist

metaphysics. In all these versions, demonstration of natural causal knowledge was accommodated as well as demonstrations in mathematics. It was supposed by all that demonstrative knowledge is produced by the operation of human faculties within the environment of the natural world, but Augustinian thinkers presupposed the illumination of natural essences by the divine light in some way, consistent with their supposition that natural things enjoyed their essences through participation in forms in the mind of God, so that their functioning could only be understood through those forms. Thomists assumed that the natural essences of particulars had a causal force of their own, considered as universals, that was reflected in demonstrations in natural science, since it was responsible for the causal propensities of particulars. Following an Averroist line, Albert the Great (and his follower, Giles of Rome) and Ockham assumed that the causal connections underlying demonstrative knowledge are entirely between natural particulars.

In the Middle Ages, the theory of demonstration expounded in Aristotle's *Posterior Analytics* was considered the culmination of logical studies. Elaborated in commentaries, logical treatises, and opuscula on specific problems, it corresponds to modern Philosophy of Science exploring how we come to know necessary causal regularities, how scientific knowledge differs from other sorts of cognition, how mathematics differs from the other sciences, and why it is more certain.

An Aristotelian demonstration is a syllogism that produces scientific knowledge, knowledge not simply that something is the case, but why it is the case. One may have cognition that is quite certain without scientific knowledge (including our understanding of the first principles of demonstration, which are not themselves demonstrated), and Aristotle's *Posterior Analytics* is not a treatise on general epistemology. To produce and transmit scientific understanding, Aristotle thought we had to duplicate, in the deductive order of the science, the order of causes found in reality, though the causes need not be efficient

causes. He takes mathematics to be the paradigmatic science.

A demonstrative science requires that we know the meaning of the terms entering into it; have knowledge of certain axioms applicable to many sciences; knowledge of its own immediate, indemonstrable first principles; and knowledge of real definitions of the subject of the science and its various species and attributes. The principles of a demonstration must be true, provide the reason for the truth of the conclusion, be necessary and per se. Aristotle lays down no rules for discovering the first principles from which a science begins, though he points out that one needs experience of the subject, and that the first principles will explain why the subject has the attributes it does. Statements are per se in two ways: if the subject term includes the predicate explicitly within its definition, so that "A human being is rational" is per se, and if the predicate includes the subject implicitly in its definition as the proper subject for that sort of accident, so that "A human being is able to laugh" is per se. The middle term of a demonstration expresses the cause why the predicate of the conclusion belongs to its subject. The predicate of the conclusion, the "attribute," does not follow logically from the essence of the subject.

Aristotle allowed that less ideal demonstrations might not give a full explanation of the cause why the fact is true. These are demonstrations that it is the case (quia) as opposed to demonstrations why it is the case (propter quid). So one might argue from effect to cause rather than cause to effect, as does the demonstration that stars, unlike the planets, are far away because they twinkle. Or, principles might be imported from another science. If one proves that circular wounds heal more slowly because they have a large ratio of area to circumference, one must borrow, in medicine, a principle provable only in geometry. Since the physician relies on the authority of the geometer here, the demonstration (but not the whole science of medicine) is said by medieval authors to be "subalternate" to geometry.

The *Posterior Analytics* entered the West through the translation of James of Venice



between 1125 and 1150. The commentarial tradition of the Arabs and Greeks became known chiefly due to Albert the Great, who reported in his commentary the content of Themistius, and a lost work by al-Farabi on demonstration, or perhaps Averroes's critical remarks on that work, as well as the work on demonstration of Averroes himself, which was not otherwise widely known until the fifteenth century. James of Venice also translated the commentary of Alexander of Aphrodisias, or possibly that of Philoponus, which is close to that of Alexander, and though it quickly dropped from circulation, much survived in marginal glosses.

Despite James's twelfth-century translation, and earlier discussions such as that of Richard Rufus (See Wood 1996), the founding commentary in the Western tradition is that of Robert Grosseteste, written around 1230. Grosseteste presents a demonstrative science of demonstration. He argues that Aristotle first gives a definition of demonstration as a syllogism producing scientific knowledge, then a definition of scientific knowledge, and then, in a series of syllogisms, deduces the properties that a demonstration must have, considered in itself as a free-standing syllogism, in relation to other demonstrations and as part of a science. The second book, he claims, discusses the art of definition as the way to discover demonstrations, and how it is that definition occurs as middle term causing the truth of the conclusion.

Grosseteste reconciled Aristotle's work with Platonism by treating demonstration as the means by which a fallen humanity must come to knowledge of the world. The mind unaffected by the fall would see in God the exemplary forms of all things. But as it is, such knowledge is impossible, though the light of God illumines the forms of the natural things we encounter, so we come to know them. Such forms are universal and unchanging, and ground necessary truths. But knowledge of a real definition of a substance does not impart knowledge of its causal powers. This requires experience of its causal activity.

Such experience gives us knowledge as to what a given agent will do by nature if unimpeded, but it may not do it most of the time, or even very

often, because it is usually prevented. Such knowledge occurs through the knowledge of "material definitions" that depend on prior, "formal definitions." The formal definition of a thing specifies the exemplary form as a final cause, while its material definition specifies how it must be realized in matter to perform that function, that is, to be an efficient cause of certain effects. (The distinction between formal and material definition relies on an interpolation from Alexander/Philoponus's commentary in the text of James's translation. From Aquinas on, people were aware of this error.) Efficient and final causes do not occur in mathematics, and we can see triangles as they really are in themselves by direct mental view. Thus mathematical demonstrations are higher (*potior*) than natural demonstrations, since what they show is always the case, and more easily known. These two sorts of demonstration Grosseteste identifies as demonstrations of the highest sort (*potissimae*).

One science can be subalternate to another, according to Grosseteste, in several ways. So music, the science of audible proportion, falls under the science of proportion "univocally," he says, but is not a part of it, since audibility is an accident of proportion, not a difference that establishes some species of it. Music, like all natural things, is an accidental unity held together only by its relation to its higher form or purpose, and proportion is a necessary part of the real nature of music, given its defining end, which is to present proportions to the hearing. Grosseteste does not consider the case of the circular wound as subalternation at all, for circularity in no way constitutes the function of a wound.

In a second sort of subalternation, Grosseteste holds, the science of the parts of a thing, which realize its functioning, must be brought into play. So the science of harmony is subalternate to the science of numbers, "almost univocally," since numbers are essential parts of proportions, and must be known if proportions are to be known.

This account was intimately connected with Grosseteste metaphysics. He thought the material world arose from light, in itself a simple form without parts, the whole form present at each point in space. Matter can only be understood as



arising from light in accord with geometrical laws as light propagates itself through space. Thus all of natural science is subalternate to mathematics, for though mathematics does not bear on light considered in itself, it governs the way in which light realizes itself in space.

The next important commentary after Grosseteste's was Albert the Great's, written between 1245 and 1260. The Aristotelian Albert objected to Grosseteste's metaphysical views, and so rejected his account of subalternation and the role of mathematics in the natural sciences. Albert neither treated a substantial form as an exemplar to preexisting matter nor accepted the development of lower forms of individuals from higher forms in the mind of God. For Albert the unity of a particular thing does not arise as an expression of a higher unity, nor can knowledge of particular natures in themselves be obtained through reflection on higher forms. Each science must stand on its own.

Consider the science of harmony. Sounds do have mathematically expressible accidents, but the science of proportions does not establish the nature of sounds. The subject of harmony is a certain kind of sound, not a certain kind of proportion. Nature operates by its own principles, and it accomplishes the aims of a higher form only because God created it from nothing so that it would accomplish those aims of itself. It did not evolve from a higher form striving to realize itself in matter.

Thomas Aquinas agrees with this in his literal commentary on the *Posterior Analytics* (1269–1272). But he disagrees on other things. Albert does not allow that the nature of a thing can cause it to have properties not part of its essence. He thinks every accident in a thing is to be traced to another accident, in the thing or outside it, which brings it about that the first accident inheres in it. No accident, not even an attribute, a proper accident necessarily belonging to that sort of thing, is caused in it by its essence, for this would mean that the nature of a thing, considered in itself, not insofar as it is a particular in particular circumstances, efficiently causes something, and that universals as such are realities playing a causal role in the world. On the contrary, Thomas argues

that a thing's nature efficiently causes its primary attribute necessarily and without exception.

Thomas takes it that first principles in the highest sort of demonstration must be strictly necessary, universally true in every case at every time. Albert thinks the necessity involved is of another sort, a conditional necessity, so that the attribute belongs to its subject necessarily, if nothing prevents it. Aquinas argued that the middle term of the highest sort of demonstration is the real definition of the subject. This led him to claim that the minor premise is per se in the fourth way listed in *Posterior Analytics* I 4, since the fourth way indicates an efficient causal connection, and the minor premise will be true because of the efficient causal connection between the essence of the subject and the attribute proven of it. (Aristotle had allowed only the first two ways of being per se to be relevant to demonstration, introducing the third and fourth ways only to complete the list.)

Albert argued that a demonstration of the highest sort has the "causal definition" of the attribute as its middle term. An attribute is an accident, and so has no proper real definition, indicating what it is entirely in itself, since what it involves its belonging to an appropriate subject really distinct from it, and it actually belongs to such a subject only under favorable conditions. So a "real" definition for the attribute expresses things extrinsic to the attribute, its subject and that which brings it to actuality in the subject. For this reason, Ockham insists that the definition of an attribute is a nominal definition, identifying an accidental unity, not a real one. Albert's preference for the definition of the attribute as the middle term follows Averroës's opinion that the highest sort of demonstration should demonstrate not a mere potentiality, but an actual state of affairs. Aquinas granted that on his view, a demonstrable attribute in a natural thing would have to be a potentiality, though an actuality could be demonstrated in a mathematical demonstration.

Giles of Rome later defended Albert's position. Thomas had argued that Albert's candidate for the highest sort of demonstration assumed as its major premise that the definition of the attribute belongs

to the subject. But this is demonstrable, and not a first principle, for the definition of the attribute belongs to the subject only because of the subject's essential nature, and the highest sort of demonstration is from demonstrative first principles. Giles objected that the major premise in Thomas's demonstration is trivial, there being no real distinction between the subject and its essence, and so the purported demonstration begs the question. The argument had been made against Albert that the definition of the attribute and the attribute itself were identical, so that his candidate for demonstration of the highest sort begged the question, but Giles (and Ockham after him) pointed out that the definition of the attribute, being a causal definition of something whose existence depends on other things, refers obliquely to things other than the attribute itself, and so is not in fact really identical with it. The same point cannot be made in defense of the affirmation of the real definition of the subject, and so Giles turned the tables on his opponents.

In reply, John of Cornwall and Walter Burley claimed there are two sorts of concepts of a substance, quidditative concepts, captured in real definition, and concepts that express the quiddity only confusedly. Someone who does not know what the quiddity of a lion is may nonetheless have a non-quidditative concept of the lion if he has encountered lions. To avoid begging the question in a demonstration of the highest sort, one must assert the quidditative concept of the non-quidditative concept, for instance, one must assert the essence of lions of the kind exemplified by these creatures from Africa that one has seen in the zoo. Giles replies that the non-quidditative concept refers to the same reality the real definition describes, even if it does so confusedly, so that asserting the real definition of the confused concept simply asserts that the reality is itself, and is a triviality after all.

Ockham agreed with Scotus and Aquinas that the definition of the subject is the middle term in a demonstration of the highest sort, but he denies that the subject efficiently causes an attribute in itself. He insists that what follows demonstratively follows on some real structure of really

distinct parts within the subject. A genus-difference definition of a thing that does not identify really distinct parts in it cannot serve as a demonstrative middle term. Moreover, since God is perfectly simple, no demonstration concerning God can be constructed. But some definitions do identify real parts of the defined. This happens, most notably, in mathematics, where the definition of a subject obliquely conveys parts of the subject, for instance, as in the definition of a triangle, which is something composed from lines. This, clearly related to Grosseteste's demonstration in a sub-alternate science that is "almost univocal," is the only possibility for the highest sort of demonstration. It alone meets Thomas's criterion for such a demonstration, showing the attribute to belong actually to the subject necessarily and in every case, Albert's demand that the attribute be occurrent and not merely a capacity, and Giles' requirement that the attribute be really distinct from the subject.

For Ockham, a demonstration arising from natural efficient causes takes the following pattern: "When nothing opaque is between the moon and the sun, the moon is illuminated by the sun, when the moon is in such a place, there is nothing opaque between, therefore the moon is then illuminated." Hence, the attribute "illuminable," predicated of its subject without further determination, is indemonstrable, but the attribute "illuminated when in such a place," predicated of its subject with a further determination, can be demonstrated. This agrees closely with the highest form of demonstration in Albert and Giles of Rome, but Ockham does not regard it as demonstration of the highest sort, since its conclusion is hypothetical rather than categorical.

In the sixteenth century, controversy arose over the application of the "Science of Demonstration" to mathematics, and how we discover a demonstration through "analysis and synthesis." In the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, with the new Platonisms and the anti-Aristotelian bias of the new science, the theory of demonstration came to be ignored in mainstream philosophy, though the strong empiricist tendencies in the tradition

outside Thomism may have influenced the later development of Empiricism.

## Cross-References

- ▶ [Albert the Great](#)
- ▶ [Arabic Texts: Philosophy, Latin Translations of](#)
- ▶ [Aristotelianism in the Greek, Latin, Syriac, Arabic, and Hebrew Traditions](#)
- ▶ [Causality](#)
- ▶ [Giles of Rome, Political Thought](#)
- ▶ [Ibn Rushd, Muḥammad ibn Aḥmad al-Ḥafīd \(Averroës\)](#)
- ▶ [John Philoponus](#)
- ▶ [Logic, Arabic, in the Latin Middle Ages](#)
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- ▶ [Thomas Aquinas](#)
- ▶ [Thomism](#)
- ▶ [Walter Burley](#)
- ▶ [William of Ockham](#)

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## Poverty

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### Abstract

Poverty was a relative matter in the Middle Ages, as it is nowadays. There were different modes of poverty: voluntary poverty for the religious, the simulated poverty of hypocrites, and the involuntary poverty of mendicants forced to beg in order to survive. Since mendicancy was a serious problem throughout the Middle Ages, church and, later on, society were forced to create and develop forms of poor relief. The church recommended benevolence toward the poor, who did not have means of sustenance, mainly encouraging people to give alms. The common opinion was that one should give alms from one's surplus and take care of oneself and those closest to one first. The recipient should be in need. However, two natural law principles, the maxims of *necessitas non habet legem* and of *communis omnium possessio* founded on canon law, ordered the almsgiving. From the thirteenth century onward, scholastics emphasized that property was necessary for functioning in the public sphere, both in the state and in the church. They promoted the idea of limited wealth needed to support life and that a person's moral responsibility involved having property. The Franciscan ideal of poverty as the renunciation of all modes of rights was criticized as being against the natural duty of subsistence. There was also an important discussion on individual rights and actions, which led to the doctrine of natural rights in the late Middle Ages. Poverty was also seen as one central theme in late medieval political theory concerning the relationship between ownership and political rule. Various concepts marked a contrast between the inferiority of the pauper and the superiority of the person who possessed

power (*potestas*) or civic liberty (*civis, burgensis*), or wealth (*dives*).

In the Middle Ages, as nowadays, since poverty (*paupertas*) was a relative matter, it was quite broadly defined. A pauper (*pauper*) was "a person who permanently or temporarily found her- or himself in a situation of weakness, dependence, or humiliation, characterized by privation of the means to achieve power and social esteem (which means varied with period and place): these included money, relations, influence, power, knowledge, skill, nobility of birth, physical strength, intellectual capacity, and personal freedom, rights, and dignity" (Mollat 1978). Absolute poverty was deemed a miserable state, lacking the necessities of daily life (food, clothing, housing, and health), which might lead to the state of extreme necessity.

Etymologically the words "poverty" and "poor" came from the Latin *pauper*, "poor," which originally came from *pau* and the root of *pario*, "giving birth to not much" and referred to unproductive farmland or livestock. The words used to denote poverty in the Middle Ages also describe the causes and effects of poverty, as well as the attitudes toward the poor. There were words referring to impecuniousness and destitution in general, such as *egens*, *egenus*, *indigens*, *inops*, *insufficiens*, *mendicus*, and *miser*; shortage of food (*esuriens*, *famelicus*) or clothing (*nudus*), physical defects (*caecus*, *claudus*, *contractus*); infirmity in general (*infirmus*), mental deficiency (*isiotus*, *imbellicis*, *simplex*); situations of adversity such as those involving the loss of one's nearest relations (*orphanus*, *vidua*) or loss of liberty (*captivus*), and finally, punishment and exile (*bannus*, *exiliatus*). There were also some words which referred to a feeling of compassion (*miserabilis*, *miserabilis persona*). In medieval canon law, the concept of *miserabiles personae* including widows, orphans, the sick, and the old referred to the poor (see Mollat 1978).

Individual thinkers used different words when writing about poverty. A Cistercian monk and theologian, Bernard of Clairvaux (1090–1153), for example, used at least three different words

with specific and different meanings when speaking about poverty. *Pauperes* referred to a group of the wretched for whom material assistance was required as a matter of justice. *Egenus* referred to a category composed of needy individuals, orphans, widows, and pilgrims. *Indigentes* referred to a deficiency of an accidental nature.

Certain word associations and contrasts shed further light on the condition of the poor in the Middle Ages. The frequent association of *pauper* with *agricola* or *laborator* tells us a great deal about the origins of poverty, many of the poor being drawn from the ranks of men who worked the earth with their hands to eke out a meager subsistence. Prior to the eleventh century, people lived in precarious conditions, and the number of peasants was large. Words illuminating the struggle for daily bread and suggesting uncertainty about the future and susceptibility to disaster, evoking anxiety and distress (*anxietas*, *angustia*) as well as lack of necessary resources (*caerentia*, *penuria*), were used.

Mendicancy was a serious problem throughout the Middle Ages. Several studies deal with the difficult question of estimating the amount of poverty or pauperism in the Middle Ages. Some economic historians have argued that between the thirteenth and the fifteenth centuries there was no such grinding and hopeless poverty, no such chronic semi-starvation in any class as exists today among large classes in the great cities. The proportion of medieval people who lived without adequate food and clothing for long periods of time was probably smaller than nowadays.

The reduction of poverty was not regarded as a social goal in medieval society or even in the church, as both the lack of systematic poor relief and of legislation proved. Poverty was mainly taken as a matter of course and no efficient efforts were made to discover the reasons for it.

The church, however, recommended benevolence toward the poor who did not have means of sustenance, encouraging people mainly to give alms. The influential canon law collection, Gratian's *Decretum* (c. 1140), contained the patristic citations, which maintained duty-oriented charity toward neighbors, stating, for

example, "Feed the poor. If you do not feed them you kill them" (D. 86 c. 21) or "The one who keeps more for oneself than he or she needs is guilty of theft" (D. 42 c. 1). Two important natural law principles governed benevolence toward the poor founded on the *Ordinary Gloss* to the *Decretum*. First, the maxim *necessitas non habet legem* (D. 5 c. 26), which meant that a person in extreme need had a duty, or even a right, to subsistence and might, therefore, rightfully take the property of others to sustain their own life. An Italian canonist, Hostiensis (d.c. 1287), for example, wrote that "One who suffers the need of hunger seems to use his right (*ius suum*) rather than to plan a theft." Second, the natural law maxim *communis omnium possessio* (D. 1 c. 7) held that everything created by God for mankind was held and used in common to take what is needed to sustain life. The Italian canonist Huguccio (c. 1140–1210), for example, stated that by natural law we should keep what is necessary and distribute what is left to the needy. Rufinus wrote referring to Ambrose that "No one may call his own what is common, of which if he takes more than he needs, it is taken with violence." In that both maxims were a commonplace of medieval moral theology and church law, human law cannot altogether eliminate the original commonness of things under natural law. Thus property owners must help the poor from their surplus or a person in extreme need could even take another's property in order to save his life.

The responsibility for organizing poor relief belonged to dioceses, which collected money, especially in the form of tithes. Taxes were requested to be given to the poor. The first declaration of the church's responsibility to give legal aid to the poor (including widows and orphans) was made at the Council of Chalcedon in 451. Monasteries and other religious institutions took care of the poor; the Franciscan Order, which was established in the 1220s, took as its main task the care of urban poor living outside the city walls. The confraternity, one of the most popular forms of lay association throughout late medieval Europe, made a significant contribution to the relief of the poor in the medieval city.

Beginning from the fourteenth century, the relationship between religion, society, and charity both in private and public life found new forms.

The large number of mendicants necessitated criteria for determining who were poor enough to receive alms. For Pope Innocent III (1198–1216), almsgiving required “heart, mouth and act”: from the heart arises sympathy for the poor, from the mouth arises a request and encouragement, and from the acts generosity. Augustine (354–430) already had distinguished between two kinds of almsgivers: those who give from their heart and those who give from their property. According to Innocent, four regulations had to be taken into account in the poor relief: reasons, consequences, means, and order. The sudden need had to be met with love of one’s neighbor. The consequences of helping the poor should be blessed for every party, the means of helping being alms. The order of helping meant that almsgiving should be regular, the most important aspect being *benevolentia*, the helper’s intention. If a giver did what was in accordance with his obligation, he performed a good act, since where an act was connected with loving one’s neighbor and right intention, *benevolentia*, it was meritorious. Helping the poor regardless of one’s own penury was a meritorious act but no one was obliged to help anybody in such circumstances. Thomas Aquinas (1224–1274), for example, defined alms as being “a deed whereby something is given to the needy, out of compassion and for God’s sake,” which motive belonged to mercy, so that almsgiving was an act of mercy. The Greek word for almsgiving, *elemosyne*, was derived from having mercy, *eleein*, as well as the Latin *miseratio*. Since mercy was an effect of charity, it follows that almsgiving was an act of charity through the medium of mercy (*Summa theologiae*, 2a 2ae, q. 32, a. 1).

A French secular theologian, William of Saint-Amour (c. 1200–1272) maintained that the measure of mercy was to be proportional to the human condition. Those having only one tunic should not be compelled to divide it with others, for then both would remain unclothed. Zacheus, who gave half of his possessions to the poor while retaining enough for his own sustenance,

was for William an example of proper almsgiving. William also used Zacheus to argue that private property should not be denied, but limited so that no one should appropriate more than suffices for one’s own needs (*De periculo*, 58).

Thomas Aquinas also dealt with the various requirements of helping the poor, which he distinguished as time, place, and matter. The order of love (*ordo caritatis*) required that one should preferably help those who were more closely associated with the giver. However, when someone was in extreme necessity one should “succor a stranger. . . rather than one’s own father, if he is not in such urgent need” (a. 3). Almsgiving was therefore never limited regarding its recipient since one had to give alms without limitation both to good and bad, pious and unbelievers, friends and enemies if they were in need. The giver should give of his surplus, because one must first of all look after oneself and then after those over whom one has charge, and then relieve the needs of others with what remains. On the part of the recipient, it is requisite that one should be in need. However, since it is not possible for one individual to relieve the needs of all, one was not bound to relieve all who are in need, but only those who could not be succored if someone did not help them (*Sth* q. 32, a. 5). Scholars also discussed the amount of alms. The common opinion was that to relieve someone’s need more than sufficiently was not praiseworthy, it being better to give to several who are in need. Thomas Aquinas, for instance, stated that one should give alms so that the recipient may have relief, not an easy life, that is, not to have dainties, finer food, and clothing (*Sth*, 2a 2ae, q. 31, a. 1) and referred to Ambrose (338–397): “When you give alms to a man, you should take into consideration his age and his weakness; and sometimes the shame which proclaims his good birth; and again that perhaps he has fallen from riches to indigence through no fault of his own” (*De officiis* I, 30).

The ideas of charity toward the poor of the most influential medieval Jewish philosopher, Moses Maimonides (1135–1204) differed from those of the Christian philosophers. Maimonides pointed out that charity in which the donor did not know the recipient or the recipient the donor



was more meritorious than types of giving in which the donor could take satisfaction from the appreciation of the recipient. Giving before being asked was also preferable to giving after being asked.

However, the scholastics added that if someone omits to give alms, it is a mortal sin; on the part of the recipient, when one sees that his need is evident and urgent, and that he is not likely to be succored otherwise, and on the part of the giver, when he has superfluous goods which he does not need for the time being as far as he can judge with probability. Nor need he consider every case that may possibly occur in the future, for this would be to think about the morrow, which our Lord forbade us to do (Matt. 6:34), but he should judge what is superfluous and what is necessary accordingly, as things probably and generally occur.

Theologians also made several interesting comments on probability regarding the future, which was connected with wealth. For instance, when one is attempting to resolve the question of whether it is lawful to beg or not, one has to proceed on the grounds of probable predictions such as whether it is more likely that one can provide the necessities of life by begging or by doing something else. A notable scholastic theologian and philosopher, Henry of Ghent (c. 1217–1293), for instance, ended the reflection by stating that begging is more likely to assure the sustenance of one's life and cause less solicitude if one is able to give something in return, for example, by teaching, by praying, or by offering some other spiritual remuneration. Such calculations of probability concerning the future on the ground of our quasi-statistical knowledge of regularities in the world were quite common in the thirteenth century.

These kinds of theological and moral philosophical statements regarding almsgiving implied the idea that the poor were somehow "a useful object" for salvation by good works. Despite the main purpose of medieval scholars being to encourage people to give alms, such implications also hindered the development of poor relief.

In medieval Christianity, poverty was also a religious ideal for those living in monasteries

and other religious orders. There were various words referring to religious poverty: voluntary poverty (*paupertas spontanea*), evangelical poverty (*paupertas evangelica*), and spiritual poverty (*paupertas spiritus*). Poverty was one of the monastic vows or evangelical counsels (with chastity and obedience) from the very beginning of monastic life. Religious poverty involved a twofold obligation: first, self-denial in order to place oneself at the service of God and others. In this sense, poverty concerned purification of one's own soul (especially the will) from all worldly matters (*concupiscentia*) to aid in imitating Christ in his material poverty (*imitatio Christi*). Second, religious poverty involved giving up all personal property to live with common possessions (Matt. 19:21–31 and Acts 4:32). The monastery itself may possess both goods and money.

Voluntary poverty was understood as a benefit to the individual, a form of self-discipline. Since spiritual life was highly valued in the medieval church, a poor monk or nun was seen as the image of Christ himself, an ideal manifested in Christian mysticism. The medieval church sanctioned poverty and this was also included in the interpretation of the real poor, not only those who were dedicated to it for spiritual reasons. The figure of poor Christ as reflected in the poor can also be seen in the extended use of the expression *pauper Christi*, not only limited to a religious life of voluntary poverty for love of God.

The Franciscan Order has traditionally forgone all individual and common forms of ownership and even of using money. The Franciscan rule of poverty in the *Regula Bullata* of 1223 ("Let the Friars appropriate nothing for themselves, neither a house, nor a place, nor anything else") was interpreted in the thirteenth century in terms of the concept of use of fact (*usus facti*) as opposed to all property rights (*dominium, ius*). The notion of *factum* as opposed to *ius* indicates the nonlegal status of the Franciscans, since their activity was legally indifferent. The use of fact concerned only things necessary for sustenance without any rights over them. The Franciscan doctrine of absolute poverty responded to the

challenge presented by the early thirteenth-century economic and social changes. The “poor friars” were willing to combat “the ills of the new society,” but they were themselves inevitably its product as well.

The Franciscan ideal of poverty already had its opponents in the mid-thirteenth century. Since some rigorous Franciscans had given all their property as alms to the poor at once and lived in extreme poverty, some theologians raised the question of the moral justification of voluntary poverty. William of Saint-Amour, who led the opposition to the mendicants at the University of Paris in the mid-thirteenth century, stated that the act of relinquishing all temporal possessions without caring for the future exposes one to the danger of several sins, such as flattery, lying, stealing, perjury, and homicide, since one is required to beg for sustenance. If one gives all one’s possessions to the poor at once, it only lessens their misery for a short period, because one can no longer provide sustenance for oneself and continue to give alms. Thus, the suffering of the poor continues and perhaps leads to death. Furthermore, extensive almsgiving and poverty subject one to the danger of starvation. One who risks starvation attempts suicide, which was contrary to the precepts of the Decalogue. William observed that one could easily avoid such dangers and sins if one retained some temporal possessions (*De periculis*, 55–57).

Secular theologians also criticized the absolute poverty of the Franciscans as being opposed to Aristotelian virtue ethics. Aristotle’s *Nicomachean Ethics* influenced the notions of social and political benefits provided by wealth. Another source used along with Aristotle was the *Consolation of Philosophy* of Boethius (480–524/525), a Christian philosopher who stated that the good life depends on external goods acquired in a proper way. A French secular theologian at the University of Paris, Gerard of Abbeville (d. 1272), maintained that living either in absolute poverty or in luxury were both vices, since according to Aristotle, perfect virtue was a medium between two extremes. However, he also pointed out that wasting one’s possessions is in some way self-destructive, because life

always involves some amount of possessions. Temporal goods were not only a necessary condition for the good life, but also contributed to it. Citing Aristotle’s *Politics* (translated into Latin c. 1260), the French philosopher and theologian Godfrey of Fontaines (c. 1250–1309) declared that the amount of wealth is not important for human perfection; more important is the attitude one has toward property – the idea of moderation, which was a descendant of Aristotle’s doctrine. Another danger in voluntary poverty, in which a person gave up all property rights and lived in absolute poverty, was, according to Gerard of Abbeville, that such a situation involves one’s own life depending on another’s will (*ex alterius voluntate dependeat*). This also seems to hark back to Aristotle’s doctrine of self-sufficiency (*autarchia*).

William of Saint-Amour’s and Gerard of Abbeville’s polemical works provoked responses from the other side. The Dominican Thomas Aquinas composed a direct challenge to William’s *De periculis*. The title of Aquinas’ work is *Contra impugnantes Dei cultum et religionem* (“Against Those Who Attack the Religious Profession,” 1256/1257). In his response, Aquinas stated that voluntary poverty belongs to Christian perfection itself. Therefore, it was impossible to be perfect without being poor. However, in his later work, *Summa theologiae*, Aquinas’ opinion has changed and he saw poverty as only an instrument of perfection, which one is free to use or not.

As a Franciscan reply to the attack of Gerard’s *Contra adversarium*, Bonaventure wrote his *Apologia pauperum contra calumniatorem* (“Defence of Poverty Against the Slanderer”) at the end of 1269. For Bonaventure, the meaning of poverty in its Franciscan mode consisted in the imitation of poor Christ, which was characterized by a prohibition of the use of money, the right to live by begging, and the renunciation of all property rights both individually and collectively. The most remarkable idea in Bonaventure’s defense was that he introduced a juridical discussion into the interpretation of poverty. The friars’ poverty included only a simple use (*simplex usus*) of utensils

without any kind of *dominium*, understood in the meaning of *iura in re*.

The Franciscan ideal of the renunciation of all property rights and of all rights whatsoever posed another kind of question concerning the natural rights of human beings. In the late thirteenth and early fourteenth century, there was a turn to the moral subject and his capacity for right action, that is, to subjective capacity and individual rights; the emphasis on the active individual who had control over the moral and physical environment. Godfrey of Fontaines, for example, asked whether it was licit to give up all modes of rights maintaining that each person has a God-given natural obligation of self-preservation and, following from this duty, one had certain rights that were inalienable and could not lawfully be renounced, the most important being the fundamental right to subsistence, that is, the right to life. For Godfrey, the right to subsistence not being a universal, natural right obliged each person only in the situation of extreme necessity. However, such ideas were later developed as individual natural rights in the early modern period.

William of Saint-Amour also pointed out the “merits of wealth” in contrast to religious poverty. In his *De periculis novissimorum temporum* (1255), written against the mendicant orders, he maintained that Scripture emphasizes the duty of taking care of others and ourselves. Christians, therefore, needed a certain number of possessions to fulfill this duty of charity. William’s way of connecting wealth with morality was common to theologians from the thirteenth century onward and shows changing attitudes toward poverty. His ideas of the certain merits of wealth implied a notion of social and even individual benefit provided by wealth – a point that the humanists later maintained in their support of secular values against ascetic monks and begging friars.

Most medieval scholars assumed that the institution of private property was normal and right and that property should thus be respected. Despite the institution of private property being understood as the consequence of the fall, it was taken as a necessary condition to protect

a peaceful community in accordance with the Aristotelian idea of common good. A Franciscan theologian, Alexander of Hales (c. 1200–1245), argued that natural law prescribes community for the state of innocence and respect for property for the fallen state. For another Franciscan philosopher and theologian, William of Ockham (c. 1288–1347), “common possession of all things” belonged to the natural law in the state of innocence, but the “acquisition of what is taken from air, land, and sea, the restitution of a thing or money left for safekeeping” belonged to natural law “on supposition,” supposing Adam’s sin and, supposing that because human law has since made a division of property, it is a requirement of natural law to respect another’s property.

Whereas earlier scholastics had condemned riches both as hindering the soul’s progress toward sanctity and for the purpose of obtaining a higher social position for oneself, the late fourteenth- and fifteenth-century scholastics began to point out that affluence also confers certain social and political benefits upon communities. They also saw a connection between wealth and morality, in that riches may contribute to human being’s moral growth. The late thirteenth-century theologians had noted the social and political benefits of property and the importance of a working and thrifty population in obtaining it. Thomas Aquinas, for example, accepted trade, which maintains the family, relieves the needy, and contributes to the public benefit. Common opinion also held that one should save in anticipation of accidents to oneself and for the needs of the poor.

In the fourteenth-century Florence, it was already a generally accepted notion that the relief of the poor and other caring and helping systems should be under the support and control of the city. A Renaissance humanist, Leonardo Bruni (c. 1370–1444), for example, stated that the “upper class is protected by property, the lower class by the state.” From the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries onward, almsgiving moved from individual alms and mercy to more institutionalized public assistance. At the same time, negative attitudes toward the poor intensified and

drive toward separation in society. Begging came to be seen as shameful and dishonorable. The term *pauper* retained its religious connotation, and words associated with begging began to assume idleness on the beggar's part. Poverty was considered a form of social parasitism or even (as in the case of beggary) a crime. A Dutch humanist and theologian, Erasmus of Rotterdam (1466–1536), for instance, wrote about the poor: "perhaps nature made those people vagabonds."

Already in the late Middle Ages, labor came to correspond to a person's social status, but also determined the pauper's character, as worthiness to receive aid from others depended on whether one was unfit for work, unable to find work, or unwilling to engage in work. Distinctions were thus drawn between the "true pauper" (deserving poor) and the "sturdy beggar" (undeserving poor). The attitudes toward mendicant orders also came to change. New types of the poor were those who worked hard but still did not earn enough to support their families. Economic crisis recruited new people into the ranks of the paupers as well.

The tendency of policing the poor in cities also started by the late Middle Ages. The idea of police was, however, to regulate the community's life, not to organize poor relief. The regulations concerned mendicancy, security, criminality, health, and cleanliness. Mendicancy came to be punishable. This tendency was seen in the *De subventionem pauperum sive de humanis necessitatibus* (1526) of a Spanish humanist, Juan Luis Vivès (1492–1540), who criticized individual alms and praised institutional public relief. Vivès' tract has been called the first systematic work of social thinking and institutional reform that focused on the public exercise of compassion through a government-organized, means-tested scheme directed to the poor. The tract has also been described as pioneering the welfare state in maintaining that municipal government should be given the responsibility of securing a subsistence minimum for all its residents, not on the grounds of justice but for the sake of more effective exercise of a morally required charity. According to Vivès, the assistance scheme would be closely targeted to the

poor. He also asserted a general obligation to be willing to work: "If the poor cannot be parasites, why could the rich?" Despite the difficulties and doubts aroused by policing the poor, public assistance came to be an essential function of government from the sixteenth century onward.

Poverty was also seen as a central theme in late medieval political theory, concerning the relationship between ownership and political rule. Various antonyms established a contrast between the inferiority of the pauper and the superiority of the person who possessed power (*potestas*) or civic liberty (*civis, burgensis*), or wealth (*dives*), which corresponds to a different stage in the evolution of the notion of medieval poverty. Traditionally, a ruler adjudicates on property as supreme owner. According to *De potestate regali et papali* (1332) by John of Paris (d. 1306), a Dominican theologian and controversialist, a community (i.e., a state, church, or particular communities) acquired property only from individuals, and the head of the community is only an administrator of the community's property, not its owner. For John, this also applied the pope, who does not have unrestricted power over church property, still less over the properties of lay people. John's assumption that original appropriation is by individuals and his remark that individuals acquire property by "labor and industry" have led to suggestions that he anticipated Locke's theory of property. John, however, indicated that individuals acquire property under human law, which was the traditional view among medieval theologians following Augustine. Property was acquired under human law, but it was acquired by individuals, not directly by rulers.

An Italian physician and theologian, Marsilius of Padua (c. 1270–1342), opposed Pope John XXII (1316–1330) in his *Defensor pacis* (1324). The pope rejected the Franciscan doctrine that the highest form of religious poverty was to reject all kinds of property rights, both individual and common. According to the pope, no one can justly use consumables (such as food or clothes) without owning what they use – one had to have at least the right to use them. Concerning the question of property, Marsilius represented the

Franciscan ideal as being that it was not only legitimate for the religious to live without ownership of property, but it was what Christ intended for all the clergy. Therefore, Marsilius pointed out, the pope and clergy should have no lordship (*dominium*) at all, either in the sense of coercive jurisdiction or in the sense of ownership of property. Marsilius defined the poor as powerless – and demanded that the pope should be poor.

## Cross-References

- ▶ [Canon Law](#)
- ▶ [Civil \(Roman\) Law](#)
- ▶ [Economic Thought in the Middle Ages](#)
- ▶ [Natural Law](#)
- ▶ [Natural Rights](#)

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## Presocratics in the Arab World

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### Abstract

Aristotle is the main source for the so-called Presocratics in the Arab world; other important references can be found in biographers and bibliographers. In general, only the Presocratics whose doctrines can be reconciled with Muslim theology are considered by the Arabs. The names of the Presocratics are variously transcribed in Arabic; their chronologies are uncertain, and sources say nothing about their education, philosophical activity or disciples, their physical appearance or the titles of their writings. The Presocratics approach nature from an eternalistic perspective; in spite of this, the Muslims chose some of these thinkers with a view to seeing in their doctrines a prefiguration of their own philosophical views: for example, the water of Thales becomes the water on which the throne of God is placed. Pythagoras is said to be “a monotheist from Ḥarrān.” Heraclitus is mainly

known as the author of a cyclical ontological system beginning and ending with God. Anaxagoras' doctrine of *panta homou* is developed into the theory of *kumūn* and *zuhūr* – of “latency and appearance,” which proposes a creation of all things together that are destined to evolve from one form to another. Atomism is a view shared in Islam in a strictly scientific perspective, for example, by Abū Bakr al-Rāzī (d. c. 925) and by orthodox theologians, to assert the absolute freedom and will of God against the Aristotelian theory of secondary causality.

## Biographical Information

Aristotle is the main source for the so-called Presocratics in the Arab world. Other than Aristotle, sources for them include biographers, bibliographers, and doxographers, as well as works on history, literature, heresiography, and philosophers. The former are the most reliable because of their antiquity, while Muslim historians and philosophers usually adapt the data on ancient thought to their own purposes or place ancient thinkers in theoretical frameworks. The amount of data at our disposal is less than what might appear, however, because the sources rely on one another.

Only Presocratics whose doctrines can be reconciled with Muslim theology are considered: Parmenides, for example, is seldom quoted, probably because his conception of “being” (*to on*) as an absolute but impersonal entity was at odds with the Qur'ānic idea of God. This entry deals with Thales, Anaximander, Anaximenes, Heraclitus, Empedocles, Pythagoras, Anaxagoras, and Democritus. The eleventh century heresiographer al-Shahrastānī selected “the seven wise men” of antiquity that had been “illuminated from the lamp of prophecy.” Šā'id al-Andalusī (d. 1070) in his *Genealogy of Nations* names Thales, Empedocles, Pythagoras, Anaxagoras, and Democritus as the “five philosophers par excellence.”

The names of the Presocratics are variously transcribed in Arabic; their chronologies are uncertain, often as a result of confusion: Zeno of



Elea is confused with Zeno of Cyzicus for example, and sometimes anecdotes refer to persons with the same name.

Sources say little about their education, philosophical activity, disciples, physical appearance, or the titles of their writings. Al-Shahrastānī introduces Empedocles as a contemporary of the prophets David and Luqmān. Anaxagoras is among the most quoted Presocratic thinkers, though the dates and places of origin proposed for him are diverse: some sources place him immediately after Anaximenes – hence al-Shahrastānī links him with the Milesian school, not the town of Clazomenes – but others consider him a contemporary of Zeno of Elea, of Democritus, or of Aristotle; sometimes he is quoted together with Pythagoras, Democritus, and Diogenes the Cynic. According to the eleventh century Egyptian historian and savant Mubashshir b. Fātik and to the thirteenth century Illuminationist philosopher al-Shahrastānī, his works were burnt at the time of Galen. Democritus is often introduced as a contemporary of the Persian king Artaxerxes I. He is by far the most quoted Presocratic, though not always with reference to atomism or to his moral statements (cf. the Greek *Democrates*). Ibn al-Nadīm, the tenth century author of the famous *al-Fihrist* (“*The Index*”) of names of authors and works in different fields of knowledge, places Democritus among the “makers of gold and silver,” perhaps because of confusion between Democritus of Abdera and Bolos of Mendes, the Hellenistic author of *Geoponika* in the fourth century to third century BCE, also called Bolos Democritus. Unlike the other Greek supporters of atomism – Leucippus, Epicurus, and Metrodoros of Chios – Democritus is associated with various names; some generic titles are attributed to him, as is a book on animals showing what they have in common with humans.

## Doctrine

The name “Presocratics” comes from the object of their speculations – nature – rather than from their chronology, whereas Socrates and the Sophists were interested in the human being and the

formation of thought and morals. The Presocratics approach nature from an eternalistic perspective according to the principle that “nothing comes out from nothing,” considered by Muslims to be a negation of the existence of God and of creation, their basic theological tenet. This may explain the scarcity of data on these thinkers and why not all of them are addressed in Muslim sources.

Different views on issues such as astronomy, meteorology, cosmology, psychology, physics, anatomy, physiology, and zoology are ascribed to Anaximander, Anaximenes, and Anaxagoras; various gnomic sayings are attributed to Anaximenes, Anaxagoras, and Democritus. Views on metaphysics and on the theory of vision are related to Democritus.

The Muslims chose some of these thinkers with a view to presenting their doctrines as precursors of their own philosophical views. The Arabic sources therefore tend to ascribe to most of these thinkers the embryonic idea of an eternal and unique God, the principle of all things; but they are also reproached for ignoring or expressing badly the related function of an active cause. This last charge may have been inspired by the perplexities expressed regarding the Anaxagorean doctrine of the *nous* in Plato’s *Phaedo*, a work that was well known to the Arabs.

The “principle” – or “principles” – the various authors place at the basis of their thought are in general exactly indicated (water for Thales, the infinite for Anaximander, air for Anaximenes, numbers for Pythagoras, homeomerics for Anaxagoras, the four “roots” for Empedocles, atoms for Democritus), but their doctrines are adapted to the new theological perspective, just as when the Christian Church Fathers quoted the same doctrines; when some tenets contradict this perspective, the authors are strongly criticized. Thus, the water of Thales becomes the water on which the throne of God is placed; the “matter” in Anaximenes is equated with the divine Pen that wrote the heavenly Qur’ān, and his “air” coincides with the Tablet on which this Qur’ān was written, because air is seen as capable of receiving forms.

Pythagoras, according to some sources a pupil of Anaximander, is said to be “a monotheist from Harrān.” The Ikhwān al-Ṣafā’ adopted a

numerological approach to reality on the basis of the Pythagorean tenet that “existing beings correspond to the nature of number.” So the Pythagorean idea of the number 1 as the principle of numbers, and not as a number itself, explains that God is the origin of beings and not a being Himself. If God is like the number 1, the Active Intellect is compared to the number 2, the Universal Soul to the number 3, and Nature or Matter to the number 4. Number is considered the best way to clarify the nature of God and His relationship with created beings, emphasizing His absolute distinction from other beings and presenting Him as the sole cause of everything else. The doctrine that considered soul as a fallen divinity imprisoned in the body as in a “tomb” can play no role in Islam, but Pythagoras is considered one of the greatest representatives of the theory of the immortality of soul, from a reinterpretation of one of his *Golden Sayings*. Pythagoras is the main source for mathematical and musical theories in Islam, often associated with Nicomachus of Gerasa, who is sometimes confused with Aristotle’s father.

Tradition attributed to Heraclitus strong links with the East; skeptical doctrines were inspired by him, even though attributed to the Sophists. However, the Arabs knew him mainly as the author of a cyclical ontological system, beginning with God (conceived in terms of light and unknowable to humans). From him, Love is produced, as a pure light that rules a multiplicity of intelligible worlds, inhabited by spiritual substances. Then, without any explanation, Struggle appears, that produces the sublunar world in continuous opposition, whose natural condition is then war. The souls crave to return to the realm of Love and, in order to help them, God sends a Messiah in every era. Complete salvation will be achieved only when the Saviour will come at the end of times (Rudolph 1989: 67–69).

Al-Shahrastānī links a vision of God similar to that of Qur’ān with Empedocles, and hints at an ontological succession of Neoplatonic inspiration. The theories of the Arab Empedocles about the soul and the hierarchy of beings have recently been connected with the thought of a controversial eleventh century Spanish author, Ibn Masarra (De Smet 1998). In Empedocles, we meet one of

the typical cases of transformation of an ancient doctrine for philological rather than ideological reasons. *Neikos* – Hatred – one of the two opposite powers that combine the four roots and give rise to the generation and corruption of all existing beings, becomes in Arabic *ḡalaba*, “Victory,” as a result of iotacization – the tendency in Byzantine Greek to use iota (ι) rather than the diphthong epsilon/iota (ει), thus reading *nikos* rather than *neikos*.

In the Muslim accounts, the homeomerics of Anaxagoras are moved by the Intellect, which is assimilated in a God who disposes or even creates them, hence determining generation according to fixed proportions. Anaxagoras’ doctrine of *panta homou* is developed into the theory of *kumūn* and *zuhūr* – of “latency and appearance.” This theory, which is mixed with the Aristotelian doctrine of potential and actual being, proposes a sort of creation of all things together that are destined to evolve from one form into another, as a spike develops from a grain, a bird from an egg, and a man from the sperm. The only difference with Aristotle would be that for Anaxagoras infinite homeomerics exist in actuality.

Doctrines influenced by the *kalām* vision of divine attributes were also referred to Anaxagoras. According to these, the will of the Creator differs neither from that which is willed nor from Him who wills; and an act is not different from Him who acts or from the object of the action; in fact, will and action have no essential form: they subsist either in the actor or in the object acted upon.

In spite of the uncertainties and misunderstandings about the founder of the doctrine, atomism is a view shared in Islam by thinkers of different persuasions. Arabic sources speak of infinite atoms of various forms, indivisible, and in necessary and casual movement. This led to a strict scientific Islamic atomism affirmed by the physician and philosopher Abū Bakr al-Rāzī (d. c. 925), who denied prophethood and admitted five eternal principles: God, soul, space, time, and matter conceived as a composition of atoms and void. Accounts of his atomism by his Ismāʿīlī adversaries show clear similarities with the original doctrines. On the other hand, atomism was supported by orthodox theologians, who adopted an

atomistic occasionalism to enhance the absolute freedom and will of God and his constant power over and link with creation. In their opposition to the Aristotelian theory of causality, these theologians subsumed into their beliefs the doctrines of the author, who was sharply criticized by Aristotle.

## Cross-References

- ▶ [Abū Bakr al-Rāzī, Muḥammad ibn Zakariyāʾ \(Rhazes\)](#)
- ▶ [Atomism](#)
- ▶ [Doxographies, Graeco-Arabic](#)
- ▶ [Ibn Masarra, Muḥammad ibn ʿAbdallāh](#)
- ▶ [Ikhwān al-Ṣafāʾ, Encyclopedia of](#)
- ▶ [al-Mubashshir ibn Fātīk](#)
- ▶ [Natural Philosophy, Arabic](#)
- ▶ [al-Shahrastānī, Muḥammad ibn ʿAbd al-Karīm](#)

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## Prochoros Kydones

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### Abstract

Prochoros Kydones (c. 1333 Thessaloniki to c. 1370 Constantinople) (also spelled Prochorus Cydones), is a key figure in the spiritual and intellectual history of Byzantium in the

fourteenth century. It was to a great extent due to him and his brother Demetrios Kydones that Thomism spread to the Christian East. Translating main works of Thomas Aquinas and becoming proponents of his ideas, the two brothers stimulated intense theological controversy, in the course of which Byzantine thought contended its identity against western Scholasticism. Prochoros is by no means an original thinker. His significance lies in the fact that he applies the concepts and principles of Thomistic philosophy to the context of the Palamite controversy. He opposed the Christian Aristotelianism of Thomas Aquinas and the Scholastic method of distinctions to the Neoplatonic aspects of Palamas' thought. Following Thomas Aquinas, Prochoros identifies Being, Essence, and Energies in God. Thus, the Divine energies do not constitute anything different from the Divine essence. From this point of view Palamas is ambiguous claiming both the nonhypostatic nature of the energies and their particular ontological status between God and creation; emanating from the essence, they constitute the Divine Wisdom (Intellect), which is Divine but not God, and is also non-created. Opposing these trends of thought, Prochoros formulated a conception of logic and rational discourse, which was unacceptable for Palamite theology.

## Life

The biographical information we have about Prochoros is scarce and mainly based on the letters of his brother Demetrios Kydones, defending him against the attacks of his opponents.

Born into a noble family in Thessaloniki, which after the death of his father suffered misery, Prochoros chose the monastic life and entered the brotherhood of Megisti Lavra monastery on Mount Athos (c. 1333). In c. 1363, he was ordained a priest-monk and originally held in high respect by the abbot Jacob Trikanas because of his theological erudition and literary skills. Under the influence of his brother Demetrios during the 1360s Prochoros translated from Latin

about 20 theological and philosophical texts, among them are the following: *De differentiis topicis*, lib. 1–2 by Boethius; *De vera religion* (lib. II), *De beata vita*, *De libero arbitrio*, and *Enchiridion and Eight Epistulae* by Augustine; *De mundi aeternitate*, *In Metaphysicam* (proemium), *Summa theologiae*, III (82 articuli), *Quaestio de potentia*, and *Quaestio de spiritualibus creaturis* by Thomas Aquinas; and parts of *In quattuor libros Sententiarum commentaria* by Hervaeus Natalis. His interest in the Latin tradition came along with a rising dissatisfaction with Palamite Theology. This urged him to expound his position in treatises he never finished because of his premature death. His main work *On Essence and Energies of God* (*De essentia et operatione Dei*), wrongly attributed to Gregory Akyndinos, is largely based on Scholastic theology and most of all on Thomistic texts to refute the Palamite distinction of Divine essence and energies.

Prochoros' anti-Palamite stance gradually brought him into conflict with the brotherhood in the monastery and Philotheos Kokkinos, who regained his position as a patriarch in 1364. It was in his defense that Prochoros wrote *An Answer to the Atonic Palamites*, supporting the doctrines of his inclination that had been anathematized in the Tomos of 1351. Shortly afterward (in the middle of 1367 or the beginning of 1368) he wrote *On Cataphatic and Apophatic Method of Proof in Theology and Contemplation of God by Sight* as well as a text defending the theological significance of syllogism. A series of letters, pleading his cause with the patriarch and the abbot of the monastery, date back from this period. After June 1367, Prochoros left for Constantinople where a Church Council, chaired by the patriarch, led to his condemnation in April 1368. Soon afterward, in 1370/1371, he died in Constantinople.

## Thought

Prochoros could hardly be regarded as an original thinker. What he actually did was to apply the Thomistic doctrine to the Palamite debates. The

teaching of transcendentals played a particular role in his anti-Palamite views. A series of identifications that Prochoros did have followed from it: of essence and being, essence and energies, essence and potency, essence and wisdom, and essence and truth. These identifications led to his condemnation and were included in the Tomos of 1368. Provided that the transcendental of being is associated with essence, it follows that the concepts which unfold being in Aristotelian metaphysics are also identified with it – potency, act, and truth. Following the Scholastic method of distinctions, the identification of essence with being is reached in the way of distinguishing the various kinds of potency and act, and consequentially excluding those of them, which presuppose complete or partial nonidentity of the being of God with his essence. The Christian nuances of this view do not conceal the Aristotelian background. The teaching of Palamas, against which these arguments are aimed, is articulated in the language of Neoplatonic philosophy, connecting potency and act with the concept of emanation. This led him to a certain ambiguity as to the status of the Divine energies. In his doctrine, they are both nonhypostatic and nonseparated from the essence of God and on the other hand are Divine but not God Himself.

The Aristotelian basis of Kydones' views (opposed to the Neoplatonism of Palamitic doctrine) was the reason for his views about the use of syllogism to be condemned, though at first glance they concurred with that of Palamas'. Unlike the other anti-Palamites, Prochoros allows for the application of syllogism in Theology. In the Tomos of 1368, four of his arguments, in favor of the use of syllogisms and proofs, are quoted: (1) truth is inseparable from syllogism being either its principle or identical with it; (2) (connected with the first) all true discourse is in syllogistic form; (3) rational knowledge is in harmony with Revelation; (4) in the present human state syllogism is the only available instrument for finding the truth. The Tomos does not analyze these statements, taking their heterodoxy for granted. This refers at least to 1, 2, and 4. Firstly, the principle of syllogism is according to Palamas not truth itself, but its manifestation –

the energies that constitute the Divine intellect or Wisdom. On the contrary, according to Thomas the basis of syllogism and of any knowledge are transcendental attributes that constitute the Divine essence and truth is one of them. Secondly, the discourse in syllogistic form does not surpass the metaphor and the symbol. These are different ways to articulate in speech the experience of Divine energies; in the first case – their presence in nature and natural intellect, in the second – the touch of their transcendence. However the highest achievement of truth, according to Palamas (like in Neoplatonism), is not in the speech but rather in silence. This was an essential point in his theological substantiation of the monastic practice of *hesychia*.

The condemnation of Prochoros involved his brother Demetrios Kydones in the Palamite controversy and was among the factors of even more radical differentiation of conceptual patterns of eastern and western theology.

## Cross-References

- ▶ [Demetrios Kydones](#)
- ▶ [Gregory Palamas](#)
- ▶ [Thomism, Byzantine](#)

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often changed beyond recognition. Fourteen Proclean works were allegedly translated into Arabic and Syriac, but today none of these translations are known to be extant in its entirety. Among them, his *Proofs that the World is Eternal* and his *Elements of Theology* were the most influential ones. The latter was reworked in several recensions and became a main source for Neoplatonic thought in Arabic: the One identified with pure Being was established as the first principle and the cause of everything else; the concept of emanation and *creatio mediante intelligentia* was expounded; the hierarchy of being was arranged in the scheme One – Intellect – Soul – Nature, and the dichotomy between spiritual and corporeal world was stressed.

## Biographical and Bibliographical Information

The name of the late antique Neoplatonist Proclus (rendered into Arabic mostly as Buruqlus but also by variations like Ubruqlus, Ubruqlīs, and Furuqlīs) was well known in the Arabic–Islamic world since the early days of the transmission of Greek philosophy into Arabic. However, while philosophical doctrines presented in his name, often in doxographical sources, are not always genuine, some of his original teaching was attributed to Aristotle. The question of the eternity of the world was frequently linked to Proclus, although he was not always pictured correctly as an eternalist whose arguments were refuted by Philoponus (the correct depiction occurs, e.g., in the most famous Arabic biobibliography of the tenth century composed by Ibn al-Nadīm, the *Fihrist*, and in Ibn al-Qifī’s *History of Learned Men*, as well as in al-‘Āmirī’s *On the Afterlife*). Sometimes he was also said to have been opposed to the doctrine of the world’s eternity (in al-Kaskarī’s treatise *On the Unity and Trinity of God*) but purposefully misinterpreted by his adversaries (according to the doxography of the Ps.-Ammonius; see also al-Shahrastānī, who seems to have had access to Ps.-Ammonius when composing his *Book of Religions and Sects*).

## Proclus, Arabic

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### Abstract

The name of the Greek philosopher Proclus figures quite prominently in the Arabic philosophical literature. However, his doctrines are



Arabic sources preserve hardly any information about Proclus' life or his school. His birthplace and lifetime are given erroneously in the *Fihrist* and by Ibn al-Qiftī.

The *Fihrist* lists 14 Proclean writings, which were translated into Arabic and/or Syriac (three of them are said to have been extant only in Syriac, two of them are unidentifiable, and different titles may actually refer to one and the same work). So far, none of these translations are known to have survived in its entirety.

The title *Eighteen Issues Which John the Grammarian Refuted* refers to Proclus' *Proofs that the World Is Eternal*, lost in Greek but translated into Arabic twice. None of these translations are known to have been preserved completely. The older one of them may go back to the very early days of translating Greek philosophical works into Arabic. It survives in at least two rather recent Turkish manuscripts that contain only the first eight arguments. The second and better translation was done by Ishāq b. Ḥunayn (presumably in the second half of the ninth century), but only the first nine arguments are known to be extant today.

One or the other of these translations of Proclus' work and/or John Philoponus' refutation of it (not known to be extant in Arabic but attested in al-Isfīzārī and Ibn al-Faḍl al-Anṭākī) was known to and used by, for example, Abū Bakr al-Rāzī, Ibn Sīnā, al-Bīrūnī, al-Ġazālī, and al-Shahrastānī. The latter refers to the Proclean proofs 1, 3–6, 8, 10, and 13 with possible traces of 12 and 16 in his *Book of Religions and Sects*.

Another quite influential Proclean text in Arabic is the *Elements of Theology*. Up to now it is not clear whether a complete Arabic translation ever existed or whether only parts of the work, maybe in the form of some late antique reworking, were rendered into Arabic. The *Fihrist* lists two titles, which may refer to an Arabic version of the *Elements of Theology*, a "Theology" (which could also indicate a translation or partial translation of the *Platonic Theology*, although that does not seem highly probable) and a *Book on the First Good*. What has been preserved are, however, relatively short treatises containing each a number of Proclean propositions and thus providing in

their entirety evidence for at least one third of the Greek text of the *Elements of Theology* in Arabic. The treatise that renders the Proclean propositions in Arabic most closely is an alleged excerpt by Alexander of Aphrodisias from Aristotle's "Theology" (which also includes five genuine texts by Alexander). It must have been translated in the circle of translators and thinkers around the ninth-century Arabic philosopher al-Kindī, most probably by Ibn al-Bīṭrīq. In the same milieu, maybe by al-Kindī himself, the *Exposition of the Pure Good* was composed. Also based on the *Elements of Theology*, it is characterized by a more severe reworking of the Proclean material with regard to language as well as to doctrine and is often attributed to Aristotle. So far two recensions of the *Exposition of the Pure Good*, apparently independent of each other and containing not exactly the same propositions, have surfaced. There is also evidence for yet another recension or for the common source of the other two recensions in al-ʿĀmirī's paraphrase of some Proclean propositions, namely, his *Chapters on the Metaphysical Topics*. One of the recensions of the *Exposition of the Pure Good* was translated into Latin under the title *Book on the Causes* (*Liber de causis*) and had a deep impact on western philosophy in the Middle Ages. An Arabic text entitled the *Book on Motion* and attributed to Aristotle also contains some propositions of the *Elements of Theology* reworked in a similar way as in the recensions of the *Exposition of the Pure Good*. However, in this *Book on Motion*, the Proclean propositions are combined with Aristotelian material and most interestingly with renderings of some propositions taken from Proclus' *Elements of Physics*.

Thus, the *Book on Motion* is so far the main textual evidence for an Arabic translation of the *Elements of Physics*. One of the two titles ascribed to Proclus in the *Fihrist* – namely, either the *Definitions of the Natural Principles* or the *Book on the Indivisible Part* – could refer to a translation of this particular Proclean work. Additionally, in his treatise *On the Continuous Bodies Being Infinitely Divisible*, Yaḥyā b. ʿAdī presents the first five propositions of the *Elements of Physics*, for which he may, however, have relied on a Syriac translation.

In his answers to the philosophical questions addressed to him by a Mosul Jew, Yaḥyā also quotes Proclus, this time by name and most probably using the latter's *Ten Doubts Concerning Providence*, whose Arabic translation seems to be mentioned in the *Fihrist* under the title *Ten Problematic Questions*.

In the Greek–Latin tradition, the *Ten Doubts Concerning Providence* is transmitted with two other treatises as the *Tria opuscula*. In the Arabic, there is some evidence for a possible translation of at least one of the remaining two treatises, namely, *On the Existence of Evils*. Miskawayh may refer to it in his *Minor Triumph*, and Abū l-Ḥasan al-Ṭabarī seems to quote from it in his *Hippocratic Treatments*.

Ibn al-Nadīm also lists a Proclean work called *Explanation of Plato's Statement that the Soul Is Immortal in Three Chapters*, which is generally taken to be a translation of the lost Greek monograph of Proclus on Plato's three proofs of immortality of the soul. Textual evidence of this writing is preserved in three short Arabic texts that are independent of each other but seem all to derive ultimately from an Arabic version of this Proclean work. These three texts are *Plato's Proofs of the Soul's Immortality*, which is preserved at the end of Ibn Sīnā's *Commentary on the Theology of Aristotle*; *Delicate Result of Plato's Syllogisms that the Soul Does Not Decay*, which is preserved as marginal gloss to a pseudo-Platonic treatise; and the sixth chapter of the second part of Miskawayh's *Minor Triumph*.

At the end of the summary of Ḥunayn's translation of Galen's *On Dispositions*, an excerpt of Proclus' *Commentary on the Timaeus* is attached. It covers a passage (89e–90c), which is dealt with in Galen's treatise. However, it is not clear whether this Proclean excerpt was already part of the Greek text containing the Galenic work or whether it has been added to the Arabic translation taken either from an Arabic version of Proclus' commentary or translated directly from the Greek by Ḥunayn. Some traces of the Proclean work may also be detected in al-Bīrūnī's *India*. However, Ibn al-Nadīm does not mention an Arabic translation of it.

What he lists in his *Fihrist* instead are the following three treatises ascribed to Proclus, for which no Greek correspondences could have been established so far:

Firstly, the *Minor Elements*, of which only an excerpt survives in the *Philosophy Reader* preserved in the Oxford Manuscript, Marsh 539.

Secondly, Proclus' *Commentary on the Pythagorean Golden Verses*, the first part of which is preserved in a recension by Ibn al-Ṭayyib. This commentary is, most probably, the work of a certain Proclus Procleius mentioned in the *Suda* and mistaken in Arabic sources for the more famous Proclus Diadochus. The last part of the abovementioned excerpt from the *Minor Elements* is very close in content to a passage in Ibn al-Ṭayyib, which may suggest that *Minor Elements* is an alternative title by which the commentary on the *Golden Verses* was also known.

Thirdly, *Ten Questions on Physical Problems*, of which only the first eight seem to have been preserved. The text is written in the tradition of the *Problemata Physica* and deals with topics such as the four elements, sleep, tickling, and hair. There is strong evidence that this text was used by Job of Edessa when composing his Syriac *Book of Treasures*. However, Job does not mention Proclus.

## Doctrinal Development

Whereas most of what is preserved of the Arabic translations of Proclus' works other than the *Elements of Theology* seems to be reasonably faithful to the Greek original, all the extant textual evidence of the *Elements of Theology* has undergone considerable reworking. The 20 propositions contained in the alleged excerpt of Alexander of Aphrodisias from Aristotle's "Theology" (edited under the title *Proclus Arabus* by Gerhard Endress and enhanced by two further propositions found, by Fritz Zimmermann, in two manuscripts which contain also some of the other 20 propositions and are similar with regard to terminology and doctrinal reworking) and the propositions contained in the *Book on Motion* focus on the One as the first principle and the cause of all being. The One itself is said to be a pure Being, not beyond being as Proclus himself would claim. It is also pictured as generating the unchangeable first matter, although the Proclean concept of emanation is still present

in the text. The same holds true for the hierarchy of hypostases (henads, intellects, souls, natures), but the main distinction on the level of being with which the corpus *Proclus Arabus* operates is only threefold: One – forms – bodies.

The *Exposition of the Pure Good* in its various extant recensions, which probably all stem from what may tentatively be termed “Ur-” or “Proto-Liber de causis,” shares some of these characteristics but emphasizes the idea of creation far more than the propositions in the *Proclus Arabus*. It even implies the concept of a *creatio mediante intelligentia*. Likewise the Proclean hierarchy of being with its complicated details is in general suppressed and replaced by the Plotinian scheme of One – Intellect – Soul – Nature. In both cases, that is, in the case of the *Proclus Arabus* as well as in the case of the *Exposition of the Pure Good*, the textual reworking is taken to have been exerted under late antique Christian influence.

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- ▶ al-Kindī, Abū Yūsuf Ya‘qūb ibn Ishāq
- ▶ Philoponus, Arabic
- ▶ Plotinus, Arabic
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## Proofs of the Existence of God

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### Abstract

The question whether God exists, although not in itself an issue for a faithful Muslim, Christian, or Jew, continually attracted the interest of

religious thinkers throughout the Middle Ages. Fueled by metaphysical, epistemological, and logical considerations inspired by Ancient Greek philosophy, the discussions brought to the forefront questions about being and existence, time and causal dependence, the limits of human knowledge, and the strengths and limitations of reasoning and demonstration.

## Introduction

Medieval philosophical discussions of the existence of God would not, in general, concern the question whether God exists as such so much as whether God's existence can be established indubitably by an argument, and if so, how. The problems discussed were therefore intimately connected to the question of the relative significance of faith and understanding in the life of the religious person. In dealing with the subject, thinkers from the three great monotheistic religions could find ample sources of inspiration outside their own cultural spheres. Doctrines such as the trinity of God, for instance, particular to Christianity, was by most maintained to be a matter of faith, and was as a rule treated as a separate issue. By contrast, we find in all three traditions arguments to the existence of God based on the notion that God is the first cause of our universe of causes and effects.

Early attempts at proving God's existence drew inspiration primarily from Platonist philosophy. Later Aristotle came to dominate as an influence, both indirectly as a target for attacks from Christian and Islamic theologians and as a direct source among Arabic philosophers and Christian scholastics. Aristotelian philosophy enriched the discussion about how to deal philosophically with the question of God's existence in at least four important ways: (1) by confronting philosophers with a certain metaphysical framework against the background of which the concept of existence could be assessed, (2) by supplying a theory of human cognition, (3) by providing methodological discussions about the validity of arguments and what is required of scientific demonstration, and, finally, (4) by supplying, in the *Physics* and in

the *Metaphysics*, actual examples of proofs for God's existence in the form of arguments for a first mover.

The arguments for the existence of God may be seen as loosely arranging themselves around three basic ideas: first, that of the world consisting in a hierarchy of beings with respect to intrinsic value, secondly, that of God as a primary creative cause, and, thirdly, that of the universe being manifestly orderly and purposeful. These patterns of thought gave rise to arguments that are in the philosophical literature after Kant considered as falling into three classes of proof: the ontological, the cosmological, and the teleological. While this classification may serve as a rough guide, one should note that some medieval arguments draw on more than one of the three basic ideas.

## Goodness and Being

The first type of arguments, those from hierarchy, took their departure from a metaphysical framework with roots in Neoplatonism. A point on which most medieval philosophers would distance themselves from the important Neoplatonic heritage, however, was the question of the existence of the Supreme Being. According to Plotinus, the One is so high on the scale of beings that the One is beyond being, and therefore, properly speaking, the One is not at all. While retaining the Platonic notion of a hierarchy of being, the medievals would hold that God occupies the top level of the order of the things there are. Proving the existence of God within this framework is essentially a matter of establishing that there is indeed a single highest entity in the hierarchy, and that this entity is identical to the monotheistic God.

Augustine puts forward an argument for God's existence in *De libero arbitrio*, book 2. The argument focuses on the supposed divine properties of eternity and immutability. If it can be shown that there exists some one thing eternal and immutable which is also superior to human reason, then God exists. Such a thing does indeed exist, Augustine argues, and this thing is truth. Some things are eternally and immutably true, namely, necessary truths such as those of mathematics. What makes

the true things true is truth itself, and since the truths made true by truth are eternally and unchangeably true, truth itself must be eternal and unchangeable. Furthermore, truth is superior to human reason. According to Augustine, truth imposes a norm on human reason by which human reason must abide, and so, metaphorically speaking, truth is the judge of reason; therefore it is better, and so higher on the hierarchy of being. There is an interesting twist to the last stage of the argument. Where one would perhaps expect Augustine simply to identify God with truth itself, Augustine hedges the question and argues that either God is truth, or if there is something higher still, then this higher thing is God.

The first argument for the existence of God in the Middle Ages proper can be found in Candidus Wizo, a student of Alcuin. In a short work titled *Dicta candidi de imagine dei*, Candidus argues, following Augustine, that all things can be divided into what exists, what lives, and what understands. The three classes of things constitute an order in terms of both power and goodness. An animal, which both lives and exists, is more powerful and also better than a stone, which merely exists. A human being, who has understanding, is better and more powerful than both. When the human being realizes that his own power has limits, he must admit there is a being who has the power to rule over the very existence of what lives and understands, and this being, Candidus adds, is God.

In the *Monologion* 1–3 Anselm of Canterbury argues from the existence of good things to the existence of a being Supreme with respect to goodness, greatness, and being. All good things are good through, or by virtue of, some one thing. There is one thing, which makes all good things good (reification of property). Moreover, this thing is itself good, indeed good to the highest degree (self-predication). Since it is the best thing it is also the greatest thing, in the sense that no other thing is equal or surpasses it in goodness. Further, all things that exist exist through something, and it cannot be the case that they exist through many separate things and there cannot be any existential cross-dependencies. Thus, there is some one thing on which all things,

including itself, depend for their existence. Dependent existence is according to Anselm a lesser form of existence than self-dependent existence, so the thing on which all other things depend, is itself existent to the highest degree.

In the *Proslogion*, Anselm puts forward his most famous and influential argument – perhaps one of the most discussed pieces of reasoning of all time. If one understands God to be that than which a greater cannot be thought, one must, according to Anselm, also accept that God is. To think that that than which a greater cannot be thought is only in the understanding (in intellectu) is to think incoherently, since it is greater for it to be both in reality (in re) and in thought.

Anselm's first critic was the contemporary Gaunilo of Marmoutiers, whose response *On Behalf of the Fool* was circulated as an appendix to the *Proslogion*, together with replies to Gaunilo by Anselm. Gaunilo raises several questions, focusing particularly on what follows from claiming that something is understood, or, as Anselm puts it, that something is in the understanding. The gist of his critique is that the existence of a thing can never be adduced from thought or concept alone. He illustrates his point by arguing that if Anselm were right, one should be able to argue from the mere thought of an island most excellent of all to the existence of that same island.

The rediscovery and dissipation of the full canon of Aristotle's *organon* and his *Metaphysics* in the mid-twelfth century onward was accompanied by an increased focus on problems of epistemology, against the background of which Anselm's argument would be viewed in new ways. Two major epistemological approaches dominated: Augustinian theories of Divine illumination, and Aristotelian theories of abstraction. According to the former, human concept formation depends at least partly on direct supernatural assistance; according to the latter, concepts (intelligible species) are the result of a cognitive process of abstraction, which depends on data supplied by the senses. On neither theory is there suggested a way for human beings to gain a concept of God by natural means alone. Most often,



scholastics following either approach would hold that it is possible for humans to know that God is, but not what He is, that is, his quiddity or essence. It seems therefore Anselm's formula "that than which a greater cannot be thought" is either not a proper concept of God, or, if it is, must have been supernaturally implanted. Defenders of Anselm's argument such as the authors of the *Summa fratris Alexandri Halensis* and Bonaventure would indeed claim that Anselm's argument is valid, but they also argue that our knowledge of God's existence is a naturally impressed disposition, or that the claim that God exists is self-evident, and thus the point of putting forward an Anselmian argument starts to look questionable. Nevertheless, Bonaventure took serious interest in Anselm's argument, and put forward several versions of it, formulated against the background of the doctrine of the transcendentals. For instance he argues, in his *Commentary on the Sentences*, that truth is a property of God, and therefore God's being (or God's "to be": his *esse*) is so true that God cannot be thought not to be (bk. 1 dist. 8, art. 1, q. 1). He also put forward a rejoinder to Gaunilo's beautiful-island argument, arguing that the notion of an island is the notion of an inherently imperfect, inherently limited, categorical being while God must be described through the transcendentals, which do not imply imperfection. The concept of a perfect island is therefore incoherent and so cannot rationally be thought of as a thing than which no greater thing can be thought. (*De mysterio trinitatis* q. 1, art. 1, ad 6).

Thomas Aquinas suggests in the *Summa theologiae* that there are five ways to prove God's existence, none of which follow Anselm's *Proslogion* argument. Aquinas' fourth way is, however, in the tradition of Anselm's strategy in the *Monologion*, starting from the observation that different things exhibit goodness, truth and being to different degrees, to the conclusion that there must be some one thing, itself the most accomplished with respect to goodness, truth, and being, which is the cause of all other, and this is God. While sympathetic to proofs based on the notion of a hierarchy, Aquinas appears to explicitly reject the *Proslogion* argument in both SCG and ST, although the exact target is perhaps not so much

Anselm as Anselm's thirteenth century advocates. According to Aquinas, God's existence is not self-evident (*per se notum*) to human beings, neither in the form of an implanted piece of knowledge nor as a conclusion drawn from self-evident premises. The latter would require knowledge about God's essence, to which man lacks access. Instead God's existence must be proved by appeal to God's effects, that is, observable facts of the sensible realm of creation.

Scotus, on the other hand, considered a "touched-up" version of Anselm's argument a valid proof for the existence of a first (i.e., highest) being in the order of eminence. According to Scotus, that than which nothing greater can be thought "without contradiction" can be readily proved to exist (e.g., *De primo principio* 4.65). However, proving the existence of such a best being is merely a part of Scotus' proof for the existence of God as an infinite being (see below).

## Creation and Causation

The second family of arguments originally grew out of heated debates about whether the world has a beginning (and an end) in time. Many medievals accepted Aristotle's causal apparatus, but considered the view that the world is eternal, prevalent in ancient Greek thought, as at least problematic, and would find the related idea that matter is eternal at odds with the doctrine of creation *ex nihilo*. A key role in the history of arguments for creation is played by Alexandrian Christian John Philoponus (c. 490–570s) and his works *Contra Proclum* and *Contra Aristotelem*. In the latter work, now extant only in fragments, Philoponus argues against the eternity of the world (including the supralunar realm) by attacking Aristotle's *Physics* arguments for the eternity of time and motion.

In *Physics* 8, Aristotle had argued that it is impossible that there was ever a first motion, since every motion is the actualization of a pre-existing potentiality. On the assumption of a first motion, one must admit the existence of a thing, which, prior to the first motion, has the potentiality of being in motion. The thing in question must either have been there always, in a state of rest, or

it must have come into existence at some prior point. Now if it was at rest, there must according to Aristotle have been a cause for its state of rest, and if it came to be, there must have been a cause for its becoming. In any case, there is motion before the first motion; hence, the initial assumption of the existence of a first motion must be abandoned, and the series of motions must be eternal. Since time, moreover, is either a motion itself or a measure of motion, time too is eternal.

In his *Contra Aristotelem*, Philoponus argues that Aristotle's argument, if valid, would be a refutation not only of creation *ex nihilo*, but also of that eternal motion which Aristotle himself thought the heavens were engaged in. Since in eternal motion there is no preceding potentiality for motion, Aristotle's definition of motion as the actualization of the movable *qua* movable cannot be valid.

Philoponus puts forward a series of further counter-arguments, which trade on the theoretical unmanageability of infinities. Exploring the Aristotelian notion of the transmutation of the four (sublunar) elements of one into another, Philoponus argues that any given now existing element must be the outcome of a finite number of transformations, since an infinite series cannot be traversed. A second argument appeals to the impossibility of adding to an infinite: if current motions increase the total number of motions completed, then the past number of motions cannot be infinite, since an infinity cannot be increased. A third, similar, argument rests on the premise that an infinite cannot be multiplied. If the sphere of Saturn has completed an infinite number of revolutions, and the sphere of the planet Jupiter, for example, rotates roughly three times faster, then the number of Jupiter's revolutions should be three times infinity, which is absurd.

Similar arguments, appealing to the impossibility of adding to and multiplying infinities, can be found among the Islamic scholastics of the *kalām* tradition, and it has been argued that Philoponus was the ultimate source of these (Davidson 1969, 1987). Unlike Philoponus himself, and unlike later Arabic philosophers and Christian scholastics, who espoused various forms of hylomorphism, the majority of writers of the Mu'tazilite and Ash'arite schools advocated

a form of atomism, the so-called doctrine of accidents. The universe consists of featureless atoms, arranged into bodies or beings, the characteristics of which, such as composition and movement, are all mere accidents as opposed to being somehow dependent on internal structure, nature, or essence. According to what became the standard *kalām* proof of creation, the accidents, which are present in bodies, are subject to destruction and must, therefore, have been generated. Further, bodies cannot be free of accidents, and in particular not precede them. Now since the accidents are generated, so too must the very bodies be, and since the universe consists of only bodies and accidents, the world as a whole must have been generated.

Al-Fārābī and Avicenna rejected the *kalām* arguments for creation in time and maintained that the universe is eternal. Al-Fārābī also read Philoponus firsthand, and attacked him in at least four of his works. Instead of arguments for God based on arguments for creation, al-Fārābī appropriated the Aristotelian arguments in the *Physics* and the *Metaphysics* for a first mover (Hammond 1947: 18–22). In these arguments, Aristotle appeals to the impossibility of an infinite regress of movers, and so these latter arguments appear *prima facie* at odds with Aristotle's argument for there not being any first motion. According to Averroes and Maimonides, al-Fārābī set out to answer this problem in his work *On Changeable Beings*, now lost. In it al-Fārābī reportedly argued that although there is no first motion, and the series of motions is infinite, the motions or objects involved do not exist together, or simultaneously, and so do not taken together constitute an actual infinite. Moreover, while time is in a sense an infinite magnitude, it is neither a spatial, nor an "actual" magnitude.

Avicenna put forward an argument for the existence of God based on the distinction between what is possible of existence and what is necessary of existence. The distinction itself constitutes a challenge to the Aristotelian statistical (temporal-frequency) interpretation of possibility and necessity. While in the Aristotelian picture eternal things tend to be viewed as necessary since they exist at all times, Avicenna operated with a causal interpretation of modalities where a

possible is a thing that requires a cause for its existence (be the thing eternal or not) and a necessary is that which is uncaused. Through an *a priori* examination of the concept of existence, Avicenna aims to prove the existence of a being necessary in the sense of uncaused, a being he identifies with God. Each existing thing is either possible or necessary, and since what is sought is the necessary, the most important step in the proof is showing that the existence of an arbitrary possible entails the existence of the necessary. Any chain of causes and effects made up solely of possibles, regardless of whether it is finite or infinite, must terminate in a cause which is not itself an effect, that is, in a necessary. The total aggregate of possibles as a whole cannot be otherwise than itself a possible, and so per definition it requires a cause. In his Third Way, Aquinas argues in a similar way from the existence of contingent things. While Aquinas presents his argument as relying on sensory experience, however, Avicenna explicitly claims his proof does not rely on experience, but solely on the nature of existence (Marmura 1980: 339).

Both Ġazālī and Maimonides took a more complex stance vis-a-vis the question whether the world had a beginning in time. In his *Incoherence of the Philosophers*, Ġazālī puts forward Philoponus' arguments against eternity from the impossibility to multiply and add to infinities with the aim of showing that the *kalām* arguments for creation, although these too associated with serious problems, are at least as rationally defensible as the arguments of Avicenna and Aristotle. Maimonides thinks the claim of the world's eternity has neither been proved by Aristotle nor disproved by the *kalām*, and argues in the second book of his *Guide of the Perplexed* that the existence of God as a first mover can be shown to follow from 26 premises, 25 of which he considers self-evident or easily provable. The 26th premise, stating the world is eternal, Maimonides claims to be "possible," and grants for the sake of argument.

While Bonaventure considered [1] Philoponus' arguments valid, and [2] as established the claim that the world had a beginning in time (*Sentences* 2, dist. 1, p. 1, art. 1, q. 2), Aquinas held, at the time of writing ST, that the world's eternity can be

neither proved nor disproved. Aquinas' arguments for a first mover and a first efficient cause, the first and second of his "ways," should therefore be seen as neutral with respect to this issue. By employing the distinction between causes essentially and merely accidentally required for a given effect, he argues, following Avicenna and Averroes, that only series of accidental efficient causes can proceed back to infinity (ST I, 46, art 2, ad 7). Consequently, Aquinas' first and second ways concern essential, or *per se* causes.

Like Aquinas, Scotus thinks very carefully about the status of his arguments, but unlike Aquinas, he presents his argument for the existence of God as a proof proper, as an Aristotelian demonstration, as a series of deductions from premises necessary, certain and self-evident. In his view, a demonstration *propter quid* (of the "reasoned" fact) of God's existence is not possible to construct, but a demonstration *quia* (of the bare fact) is.

In his very complex proof, Scotus begins by establishing that there exists in actuality a first entity in three different orders of things: the order of efficient causes, the order of ends or final causes, and the order of eminence or excellence. A key role in the arguments is played by the notion of an essentially ordered series of beings with respect to causality. In such a series, at each element pair, (1) the causes involved are contemporaneous, (2) a cause depends on the prior cause in the series for its own causality, and (3) the prior cause is more perfect, more eminent, than the posterior. Such a series cannot be infinite, according to Scotus, since without a first cause, the series as a whole would be uncaused. Scotus then argues that three primacies — that of being a first cause, an ultimate end, and the most excellent being — are properties of one and the same being, and that this first being is intelligent and endowed with will. Finally, he argues the first being is infinite.

## Order and Finality

The medievals partly adopted the Aristotelian conception of nature or essence. But whereas Aristotle would consider order and purpose

immanent with respect to the natures, medieval thinkers thought order and purpose had a transcendent source: as being due to God the creator of the natural world. Rather than Aristotle, they would thus side with Plato, who in his *Timaeus* appears to put the ordering of the universe in the hands of an external craftsman or demiurge. In the third type of argument, proving the existence of God is a matter of proving that the layout of the universe as we find it requires that it be the result of purposeful fashioning, and thus that it be the product of an intelligent and benevolent Creator.

In the Christian tradition, an early proponent of arguments from perceived order and finality is Athanasius (c. 296–373). In book 3 of his *Contra gentes*, he argues that the orderly movement of the sun, the moon, and the stars should be enough for making us grant that there is God, and if we consider that the things we find around us are often composed of elements with mutually conflicting natures – something hot combined with something cold, something dry with something wet – resulting in things that line up with the purposes and needs of human beings, we should even more be thus convinced.

Although Boethius too, in the *Consolation* (book 1, prose 6), gives voice to a pattern of thought similar to Athanasius', arguments from perceived order and orderliness play no major role in medieval Christian philosophical thinking about the existence of God until the thirteenth century, when the influence of Aristotelian empiricism, and the new focus on epistemology, moves thinkers away from arguments *a priori* drawing on conceptual and metaphysical concerns toward arguments based on premises considered verifiable by experience. Aquinas argues in his Fifth Way that the near exceptionless regularity by which natural changes terminate in an optimal state can only be explained by there being an end which governs each change as such. Now since acting for an end (or acting with an end in view) can only be done by things capable of thought, there must be an entity with intelligence, namely God, who directs natural things that lack intelligence toward their ends.

## Cross-References

- ▶ [Anselm of Canterbury](#)
- ▶ [Bonaventure](#)
- ▶ [Causality](#)
- ▶ [Epistemology](#)
- ▶ [Essence and Existence](#)
- ▶ [Form and Matter](#)
- ▶ [al-Fārābī, Abū Naṣr](#)
- ▶ [al-Ġazālī, Abū Ḥāmid Muḥammad](#)
- ▶ [Ibn Rushd, Muḥammad ibn Aḥmad al-Ḥafīd \(Averroes\)](#)
- ▶ [Ibn Sīnā, Abū 'Alī \(Avicenna\)](#)
- ▶ [Intuitive and Abstractive Cognition](#)
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- ▶ [Moses Maimonides](#)
- ▶ [Saadia Gaon](#)
- ▶ [Thomas Aquinas](#)

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## Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite

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### Abstract

Pseudo-Dionysius (active c. 500 CE) is a Greek-writing Christian theologian whose identity remains an unsolved mystery. Under the pseudonym of Dionysius the Areopagite, St. Paul's Athenian convert (Acts 17:34), he composed four treatises (*The Celestial Hierarchy*, *The Ecclesiastical Hierarchy*, *The Divine Names*, and *The Mystical Theology*) and ten epistles. He may have authored additional treatises, referenced in his extant works, but no traces of these survive, with the possible exception of *The Symbolic Theology* (Mali, *Hat es die Schrift De symbolica theologia von Dionysius Ps.-Areopagita gegeben? Anmerkungen zu den Nachrichten des Sergius von Reš'aina über Dionysius Ps.-Areopagita*. In: M Tamcke (Ed) *Syriaca: Zur Geschichte, Theologie, Liturgie und Gegenwartslage der syrischen Kirchen*, 2. Deutsches Syrologensymposium (Juli 2000, Wittenberg). Lit, Münster, pp 213–224, 2002). Taken together, Dionysius' extant writings present a coherent theological system, deeply indebted to



Athenian Neoplatonism, in particular to the philosophy of Proclus (Perl, *Theophany: The neoplatonic philosophy of Dionysius the Areopagite*. State University of New York Press, Albany, 2007; Klitenic Wear and Dillon, *Dionysius the Areopagite and the Neoplatonist tradition: Despoiling the Hellenes*. Ashgate, Aldershot/Burlington, 2007).

## Identity

Much effort has been expended in the attempt to uncover Dionysius' identity, yet none of the proposed solutions (Severus of Antioch, Peter the Fuller, Peter the Iberian, Sergius of Resh'aynā, and others) is satisfactory. A more fruitful approach may be to identify the milieu in which his writings were produced and to analyze their earliest reception. Internal evidence, including Dionysius' description of liturgical practices, indicates that he may have been active in Syria (Louth 1989). This is corroborated by his strong emphasis on the church hierarchy, likely directed against antinomian Messalian tendencies, prevalent in that region (Golitzin 2003). The possible link to Origenist circles in Palestine has also been explored (Perzel 1999, 2000, 2001). Dionysius' debt to Athenian Neoplatonism is undeniable, and it has been suggested that he could have received his philosophical education in Athens, as his pseudonym perhaps implies, and have been a student of Proclus or Damascius (Lilla 1994), though this is uncertain. The Dionysian writings were first used by the Miaphysites (Severus of Antioch and others) against the Chalcedonians in support of their Christological position but were later eagerly adopted by the Chalcedonians as well. This is largely due to the impact of the Chalcedonian bishop John of Scythopolis' scholia on the Dionysian corpus (mid-sixth century), written with a view to defending its orthodoxy (Rorem and Lamoreaux 1998).

## Doctrine

In accordance with the Neoplatonic tradition, going back to Plato's description of the Idea of

the Good as "beyond being" (*epekeina tēs ousias*, *Rep.*, VI, 509b), Dionysius sees God as the creative cause of all being, which itself transcends the realm of being (*hyperousios*). Insofar as God is the cause of all the created beings, He is known through each and every one of them, and at the same time, insofar as He transcends the realm of being, He is not known through any of them: "He is all things in everything and nothing in anything, known to all from all things and to no one from anything" (*DN*, VII.3, 872A). This is the foundation of the two ways of speaking about God: cataphatic or affirmative theology, in which positive statements about God, based on His self-manifestation in the created realm, are made, and apophatic or negative theology, in which such statements are denied. Though negative statements about God are superior to affirmative ones, ultimately all statements about God, both affirmative and negative, are to be left behind and one is to enter the "truly mystical darkness of unknowing" (*MT*, I, 1000B–1001A), paralleling the darkness penetrated by Moses on Mount Sinai (Ex. 20:21 LXX). It is through unknowing that, according to Dionysius, God is most appropriately known and through silence that He is most fittingly praised (*MT*, I, 1001A; *Ep. 1*, 1065A–B; *DN*, VII.3, 872A–B).

God's self-manifestation in the created realm, which forms the basis of cataphatic theology, takes various shapes, from the Incarnation to scriptural and liturgical symbolism. Hence, much of the Dionysian corpus is concerned with such symbolism, in particular with the interpretation of divine names (Rorem 1984). This is done in three stages. The lost or fictitious work *Theological Representations* (summarized in *DN*, I–II and *MT*, III, 1032D–1033A) dealt with names associated with the doctrines of the Trinity and the Incarnation. *The Divine Names* dealt with scriptural descriptions of God derived from the intelligible realm (e.g., being, life, and wisdom). Finally, the lost or fictitious *Symbolic Theology* (summarized in *Ep. 9*; cf. *CH*, XV) dealt with scriptural descriptions of God drawn from the sensible realm, including such seemingly inappropriate imagery as God's falling asleep and being drunk. In the powerful apophatic finale of *The Mystical Theology*, Dionysius takes up these



descriptions again, but this time, he systematically denies their applicability to God (*MT*, IV–V).

The purpose of God's symbolic procession into the created realm is to purify, illumine, and unite all beings back to Himself (this triad – purification, illumination, and union – is adopted by Dionysius from Proclus). Purification, illumination, and union are effected through the two “hierarchies” (a term coined by Dionysius himself): the celestial hierarchy and the ecclesiastical hierarchy. The celestial hierarchy comprises nine orders of angelic beings, arranged in triads (the seraphim, cherubim, and thrones; dominions, powers, and authorities; principalities, archangels, and angels). The ecclesiastical hierarchy, also arranged in triads, comprises three sacraments (baptism, Eucharist, and consecration of the oil), three ranks of the clergy (hierarchs, priests, and deacons), and three ranks of laity (monks, lay people, and three minor groups: catechumens, penitents, and demon-possessed). Both hierarchies enable their members to imitate God and to be united to Him as far as possible (*CH*, III, 165A–B).

## Influence

Dionysius' writings were influential in the original Greek, as well as in Latin, Syriac, Arabic, Georgian, Armenian, and Slavonic translations. There were as many as six translations of the Dionysian corpus into Latin between the ninth and the fifteenth centuries (by Hilduin, Eriugena, John the Saracen, Robert Grosseteste, Ambrogio Traversari, and Marsilio Ficino, in addition to an influential paraphrase by Thomas Gallus). Athanasius the Librarian (ninth century) translated John of Scythopolis' scholia into Latin. The scholia were subsequently integrated into a comprehensive textbook of Dionysian philosophy, which also included Eriugena's and John the Saracen's translations of the corpus and three Latin commentaries on *The Celestial Hierarchy*: by Eriugena, John the Saracen, and Hugh of Saint-Victor. This textbook was used at the University of Paris and other universities and schools from the thirteenth century onwards (Harrington 2004).

Dionysius' writings were widely read and commented upon in the Latin West (de Andia

1997; Boiadjiev et al. 2000; Coakley and Stang 2008). The false belief that Dionysius was identical with the Gallic martyr Saint Denis, the patron saint of France, contributed to the popularity of his works. Eriugena adopted such Dionysian ideas as the distinction between affirmative and negative theology, the understanding of God as “super-essential” (echoing Dionysius' *hyperousios*), and the understanding of the world as God's self-manifestation. The Victorines (Hugh of St. Victor and Thomas Gallus), followed by Bonaventure, Hugh of Balma, and the anonymous author of the fourteenth century English treatise *The Cloud of Unknowing*, adopted the Dionysian theme of mystical unknowing, yet combined it with Bernard of Clairvaux's emphasis on love that transcends knowledge. Contrary to Dionysius' original intention, they interpreted mystical unknowing as involving affective union with God in love. This interpretation was rejected by the Dominicans Albert the Great and Thomas Aquinas, both of whom composed commentaries on Dionysius' works (Albert on the entire corpus, and Aquinas on *The Divine Names*). Aquinas rejected the Neoplatonic understanding of God as transcending the realm of being and reinterpreted the Dionysian notion that God is *hyperousios* as meaning that He is not any particular being but the very act of being, expressed by the infinitive “to be”.

The Dionysian corpus was held in highest esteem also in Rhineland mysticism, particularly by Meister Eckhart and Johannes Tauler. Nicholas of Cusa's *On Learned Ignorance* owes a debt to the Dionysian notion of mystical unknowing. A comprehensive commentary on the Dionysian corpus, based on Eriugena's translation and drawing on the entire scholastic tradition, was written by Denis the Carthusian. With the Renaissance and especially the Reformation, Dionysius' credentials as a purported disciple of St. Paul and even his orthodoxy started being questioned. Luther regarded him as more of a Platonist than a Christian and warned his readers to “stay away from that Dionysius, whoever he was.” Lorenzo Valla, and following him Erasmus, expressed doubts about the subapostolic dating of the Dionysian writings, though the question was not settled until the end of the nineteenth century, when

these writings' dependence on Proclus (d. 485) was conclusively demonstrated by Hugo Koch and Joseph Stiglmayr.

Despite the undeniable importance of Dionysius for western Christianity, the commonly cited assessment that his writings were more influential in the West than in the East is in need of qualification. In the original Greek, Dionysius' writings were foundational for later Greek theologians, such as Maximus the Confessor, John of Damascus, Simeon the New Theologian, and Gregory Palamas (de Andia 1997; Boiadjev et al. 2000; Coakley and Stang 2008). Sergius of Resh'aynā's Syriac translation and a revision of that translation by Phocas (late seventh century) were used by numerous Syriac authors, including Jacob of Edessa, John of Dara, Moses bar Kepha, Simeon de-Taybutheh, John of Dalyatha, and Bar-Hebraeus (Beulay 1987; Strothmann 1977–1978). Stephen bar Sudhaili's (?) *Book of the Holy Hierotheos*, a document of sixth-century Syriac Origenism, is ascribed to Dionysius' putative teacher Hierotheos.

In the early eleventh century, Dionysius' works were also translated into Arabic and circulated in the Arabic-speaking Christian circles in Syria and Egypt (Treiger 2005). Even prior to that, some Dionysian influence is discernible in the ninth-century Arabic Neoplatonic treatises: the *Liber de causis* and the *Theology of Aristotle* (D'Ancona Costa 1995; Adamson 2002). Through these treatises, Dionysius may have exerted certain influence on Islamic philosophy as well.

## Cross-References

- ▶ Albert the Great
- ▶ Being
- ▶ Church Fathers
- ▶ Denys the Carthusian
- ▶ Gregory Palamas
- ▶ Hugh of St. Victor
- ▶ John Scottus Eriugena
- ▶ Maximus the Confessor
- ▶ Meister Eckhart
- ▶ Nicholas of Cusa
- ▶ Platonism, Renaissance

- ▶ Platonism
- ▶ Sergius of Resh'aynā
- ▶ Thomas Aquinas

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## Ptolemy of Lucca

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### Abstract

Ptolemy of Lucca (Tolomeo Fiadoni) (c. 1236–1327) was a student of Thomas Aquinas, Dominican prior in Lucca and

Florence, and bishop of Torcello. He is chiefly known for his contributions to political thought. His most important book is *De regimine principum*, a continuation of Thomas' *De regno*, but he also wrote historical works, treatises defending hierocratic papal authority and limiting the powers of the Roman Empire, a commentary on the days of creation, and a history of the church. Ptolemy provided a previously lacking theoretical grounding for the realities and aspirations of Guelph republican city-states and thereby anticipated many of the tenets of Renaissance civic humanism. He presented republican government as the only suitable alternative for a virtuous people and identified monarchy with tyranny or despotism. He was perhaps the first writer to use the word "republic" as an antonym of "monarchy," instead of as a generic term for government. He was one of the first medieval writers to praise the Roman Republic in comparison with the Empire. His analysis of Rome complemented his original treatment of ancient Greek governments often praised as mixed constitutions and of the ancient Hebrew government, all of which he compared to certain medieval republics. He extended the common Four World Monarchy theory by denoting the church as a final fifth world monarchy, thereby reducing the Roman Empire to a time-bound state.

Ptolemy of Lucca, born Tolomeo Fiadoni to a Luccan merchant family, entered the Dominican Order at San Romano in Lucca and studied under Thomas Aquinas, probably in Rome (1264–1268). In 1272, he accompanied Thomas to Naples and studied with him there until his teacher's death in 1274, serving at times as his confessor. Around 1278, he wrote *De iurisdictione imperii*, incorrectly known as *Determinatio compendiosa*, defending papal authority in confirmation of the Roman emperor.

After returning to Lucca (date unknown), he was elected prior of San Romano several times between 1289 and 1299 and likely wrote *De operibus sex dierum*, incorrectly known as *Exameron*, a treatise on the 6 days of creation. In

1294, he was in Naples for the brief pontificate of Celestine V. In Lucca, he befriended Countess Capoana, widow of Count Ugolino of Pisa, after the latter's murder in 1289. She lived at San Romano and named Ptolemy one of her executors. He served as executor for other important figures, including Labro Vulpelli – a top official of the Ricciardi Bank, whose wife Agnese became a *conversa* at San Romano – and Cardinal Leonardo Patrasso. From 1300 to 1302, Ptolemy served as prior of Santa Maria Novella in Florence, returning in 1302 to Lucca as prior of San Romano. There he wrote *De regimine principum*, a continuation of Thomas' incomplete treatise on government (sometimes called *De regno*), *Annales*, a historical chronicle, and two short treatises on the Roman Empire.

In 1309, Ptolemy moved to Avignon, as Cardinal Leonardo's chaplain, moving to the house of Cardinal William of Bayonne after his patron's death in 1311. In Avignon, he wrote his church history, *Historia ecclesiastica nova*, dedicated to William. In 1318, Pope John XXII appointed him bishop of Torcello in the Venetian lagoon, and in 1320, he became entangled in a dispute with his superior, the patriarch of Grado (essentially archbishop of Venice) over the appointment of an abbess, leading to his excommunication in 1321 for disobedience, contempt, perjury, and mismanagement of episcopal property. John resolved the conflict, and Ptolemy, reportedly senile and accused of nepotism for allowing his avaricious nephews free reign, died in office.

Ptolemy traveled more than most contemporaries: throughout Italy and France, to Germany, and probably to Spain. Most of these trips were on behalf of his order: first as student and later as abbot, provincial preacher general, representative to provincial and general chapters, and elector of the master general. As he tells us, while traveling, he consulted local archives and libraries.

Ptolemy is primarily known as a political thinker. He provided a previously lacking theoretical grounding for the realities and aspirations of Guelph republican city-states and thereby anticipated many of the tenets of Renaissance civic humanism. He divided secular government

into political and regal forms, strongly preferring the former as the only suitable alternative for a virtuous and freedom-loving people. Unlike most scholastic writers, he loathed monarchy, identifying it with tyranny or despotism, while conceding that most peoples lacked the virtue needed for republican self-governance. Crucially, however, he considered secular monarchy, rooted in the corruption of human nature through sin, as a qualitatively different species of rule than the "sacerdotal and regal" rule of the pope, which stemmed from Christ and preserved the original, uncorrupted nature of monarchy. He was perhaps the first writer to use, although inconsistently, the word "republic" as an antonym of "monarchy," instead of as a generic term for government.

He was one of the first medieval writers to praise the Roman Republic in comparison to the empire, describing as ideal the former's government, which in his view evolved to incorporate democratic and aristocratic elements. In an original version of the common organic metaphor of society, Ptolemy raised the possibility of a government constructed with such harmony among its components that it achieves perfect stability, another idea usually associated with the Renaissance. His analysis of Rome complemented his original treatment of ancient Greek governments often praised as mixed constitutions (Ptolemy did not use this term) and the ancient Hebrew government, all of which he compared to certain medieval republics. His work is especially rich with specific examples, something lacking in much scholastic writing, and even contains some personal anecdotes. He tells us, for example, of his joy in reading and writing and of historical events he witnessed.

Ptolemy was unusual in supporting both republican government and papal hierarchy, although this was a reasonable position for one with his Guelph background, and he never envisioned routine papal interference with the internal government of a republic. In his expositions of imperial power, he maintained that the pope's authority over the Empire, although ratified by the Donation of Constantine, stems ultimately from his God-given authority as vicar

of Christ. Ptolemy extended the common Four World Monarchy theory, in which (usually) the Assyrian, Persian, Greek, and Roman Empires succeed each other, with the Roman lasting until the end of time, by denoting the church as a final, Fifth Monarchy, thereby reducing the Roman Empire to a time-bound state, but one with a special protective relationship to the church so long as it lasted.

Several scholars have questioned Ptolemy's republicanism. Miethke and Yun argue that he was neutral with respect to governmental forms, and that any apparent republicanism was in service to his primary concern of promoting papal hierocracy. Carron carefully parses the many concepts of republicanism and concludes that although Ptolemy was influential in future republican thought, he could better be described as a Guelphist using ideas from classical republican thought. Nederman and Sullivan, while accepting his republicanism, have argued that Roman sources were more central to his thought than Aristotle.

Ptolemy's historical works are flawed, but they sometimes depict events that he himself witnessed and serve as especially important sources for the history of Lucca and Tuscany in the eleventh through thirteenth centuries. The same goes for the history of the papacy from the early Middle Ages until 1294, and – if Ptolemy is responsible for the book's first continuation – to 1316, despite it being one of the early sources of the myth of a female Pope John (not yet Joan) and other apocryphal stories. It was also significant for its early catalog of the work of Aquinas and information on his life.

New learning and the political developments of Ptolemy's time called previous assumptions into question. Consequently, he engaged in a struggle, never quite successful, in almost everything he wrote, to reconcile conflicting outlooks, such as natural and supernatural causation, Augustinian and Aristotelian concepts of government, hierocratic and republican rule, and the active and the contemplative life. He also never found a satisfactory balance between his love of detail and his concern with pattern and meaning. One conflict, conditioned by his relationship with

several important women, is that between the Aristotelian view of women as defective men and his conviction that women were different from men, but had an equally important role. For example, he discussed at length whether women should be soldiers, concluding that they should not, but only because they had a more important role in the household. At the end of *De regimine principum*, Ptolemy proposed to write a separate treatise on household government and another on the virtues required for rulers and subjects, but he probably never wrote them.

Several other works Ptolemy mentioned are in the same category. He possibly intended for all or most of his works to form parts of an unfinished grand history of the world, comprising a secularly oriented *Historia quadripartita* and a spiritually oriented *Historia tripartita*. He also referred to a proposed treatise on moral philosophy, a catalog of the emperors, and a catalog of the Frankish kings.

Since Ptolemy's most original work was a continuation of a treatise of Thomas Aquinas and usually ascribed to Thomas, it achieved considerable circulation and was treated as authoritative. Although it is difficult to trace direct influence, it emerges clearly in the writings of several later writers, such as John Fortescue (c. 1395–c. 1477), Girolamo Savonarola (1452–1498), Niccolò Machiavelli (1469–1527), and Claude de Seyssel (died 1520), and was likely a factor in much of the political thought of the fourteenth through sixteenth centuries. His ecclesiological work also attracted interest at least through the fourteenth- and fifteenth-century conciliar debates. *De iurisdictione imperii* appeared in a revised edition after Ptolemy's death and was used in the work of Alvarus Pelagius (c. 1280–1352) and William of Ockham (c. 1288–c. 1347), among others, and it was included in a fifteenth century compilation of writings on church and state.

## Cross-References

- ▶ [John Fortescue](#)
- ▶ [Marsilius of Padua](#)



- ▶ [Remigio dei Girolami](#)
- ▶ [Thomas Aquinas, Political Thought](#)
- ▶ [William of Ockham](#)

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## Quantification

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### Abstract

Medieval authors approached the semantic phenomenon now known as quantification essentially by means of the concept of supposition, more specifically the different modes of personal supposition. The modes of personal supposition were meant to codify the quantificational behavior of what we now refer to as quantifier expressions, and what the medievals referred to as syncategorematic terms. Perhaps the best way to understand the medieval approach to these quantifier expressions by means of the notion of supposition is as a two-step procedure that explicates their meaning and semantic behavior. First, the syntactical structure of the proposition, that is, the presence and order of its syncategorematic terms, determines the kind of personal supposition that each categorematic term has. Then, the semantic definitions of each mode of personal supposition determine the effect of quantifying syncategoremata over the quantity of objects involved in the assertion of a proposition. This entry discusses both groups of rules, and the contrasting thirteenth and fourteenth century approaches. The former is based on

the verification of propositions and focuses on the semantics of quantifier expressions taken individually; the latter focuses on the inferential relations of ascent and descent between propositions with quantifying syncategorematic terms and singular propositions of the form “This a is b,” and on the study of the global quantificational effect of syncategorematic terms in wider propositional contexts.

The phrase “medieval theories of quantification” is, properly speaking, an anachronism; medieval authors never used the term “quantification” in this sense, and even though they did treat semantic phenomena similar to what we now refer to as quantification, their theories differ from modern theories of quantification in significant aspects – to the point that this approximation may even be unwarranted (Matthews 1973). Nevertheless, their treatments of such phenomena are often insightful and sophisticated, justifying thus that we consider them from the viewpoint of modern theories of quantification, but provided that the term “quantification” be understood very broadly.

Broadly understood, quantification can be defined as a construct or procedure by means of which one specifies the quantity of individuals of the domain of discourse that apply to or verify a given statement. Typical quantifier expressions are “Some,” “All,” “None,” and they usually determine the quantity of individuals involved in an assertion. Medieval authors approached

quantification and quantifier expressions essentially by means of the concept of supposition, more specifically the different modes of personal supposition.

Besides supposition, they also treated quantificational phenomena from the vantage point of their theories of syllogisms, following the traditional Aristotelian approach. However, it is widely acknowledged that medieval authors did not contribute much to the development of Aristotle's theory of syllogisms for assertoric propositions, and that their main contributions concern modal syllogisms. Therefore, the innovations proposed by medieval authors with respect to quantification are not to be found in their theories of syllogisms, but rather in this typical medieval development, theories of supposition.

The different modes of personal supposition are indeed the closest medieval counterpart of our theories of quantification. The modes of personal supposition were meant to codify the quantificational behavior of what we now refer to as quantifier expressions, and what the medievals referred to as syncategorematic terms. Such analyses can be found in virtually every later medieval textbook in logic, but for reasons of space I shall focus on three representative texts: William of Sherwood's *Introduction to Logic*, William of Ockham's *Sum of Logic* (part I), and Buridan's *Treatise on Supposition*.

Perhaps the best way to understand the medieval approach to these quantifier expressions by means of the notion of supposition is as a two-step procedure that explicates their meaning and semantic behavior. First, the syntactic structure of the proposition, that is, the presence and order of its syncategorematic terms, determines the kind of personal supposition that each categorematic term has. Then, the semantic definitions of each mode of personal supposition determine the effect of quantifying syncategoremata over the quantity of objects involved in the assertion of a proposition.

In other words, the various theories of supposition presented by medieval authors typically have two groups of rules for the modes of personal supposition: the syntactic rules mapping terms in the propositional contexts created by quantifier expressions into modes of personal supposition;

and the semantic rules mapping modes of personal supposition into specific semantic behaviors (see Ashworth 1978). To illustrate this, let us first discuss the four Aristotelian classes of categorical propositions: universal affirmative (A), particular affirmative (I), universal negative (E), and particular negative (O); and provide the two kinds of rules for these propositional forms. (Notice that, even at early stages of its development, supposition theory already recognized a wide variety of quantifier expressions – unlike modern quantification theory, which started out with the existential and universal quantifiers and only later developed into a theory of generalized quantifiers. Notice also that, for medieval logicians, following Aristotle, all affirmative propositions have existential import, existential and universal propositions alike.)

- (A) Every  $a$  is  $b$ .
- (B) No  $a$  is  $b$ .
- (C) Some  $a$  is  $b$ .
- (D) Some  $a$  is not  $b$ .

### Syntactical Rules

The syntactical rules for these four propositional forms are easily enumerable, but in practice the enumeration of rules becomes very long when authors attempt to cover a wider range of propositional forms. The rules below can be found in all of our authors (Sherwood, *Introduction to Logic*, §5.13.1; Ockham, *Summa logicae* I, Chaps. 71–74; Buridan, *Summulae de suppositionibus*, Chaps. 4.3.7 and 4.3.8.):

- The positive universal syncategorema “Every” (*omnis*) causes the term immediately following it to have confused and distributive supposition ( $a$  in (A)), and the term mediately following it to have merely confused supposition ( $b$  in (A)).
- A negative term, “No” (*nullus*) or “not” (*non*), causes all terms to its right to have confused and distributive supposition ( $a$  and  $b$  in (E) and  $b$  in (O)).
- The particular universal syncategorema “Some” (*aliquid*) causes the term immediately

following it to have determinate supposition ( $a$  in (I) and (O)).

- In the absence of syncategorematic terms immediately preceding a term, and of universal terms affecting a term mediately, a term has determinate supposition ( $b$  in (I)).

## Semantic Rules

Authors account for the semantic behavior of the various modes of personal supposition in different ways, in particular with a clear cleavage between thirteenth and fourteenth century approaches. In the thirteenth century, with Peter of Spain, William of Sherwood, and Lambert of Auxerre, there was a tendency toward defining the modes of personal supposition in terms of the verification of the proposition or the supposition of its terms:

- Supposition is determinate when the locution can be expounded by means of some single thing, which is the case when the word suppositis for some single thing. (Sherwood, *Introduction to Logic*, §5.2.)
- Supposition is distributive when [the word] suppositis for many in such a way as to supposit for any. (Sherwood, *Introduction to Logic*, §5.2.)
- A term has merely confused supposition in a categorical proposition when it can be taken there for several of its supposita, not necessarily for all. (For want of a satisfactory formulation of merely confused personal supposition in our authors, this is Parsons' (1997, p. 45) "generic" version.)

By contrast, in the fourteenth century with Walter Burley, William of Ockham, and John Buridan, it became customary to define the modes of personal supposition in terms of "ascent and descent," that is, in terms of the inferential relations that do or do not obtain between a proposition and the singular propositions falling under it, of the form "This  $a$  is  $b$ " (see Priest and Read 1977; Spade 1996: Chap. 9).

Let (S) and (Q) stand for any syncategorematic terms, and the general form of a proposition P be

"(Q)  $a$  is (S)  $b$ ." The generic definitions of the modes of personal supposition in terms of ascent and descent can be formulated as (see Ockham *Summa logicae* I, Chap. 70; Buridan, *Summulae de suppositionibus*, Chaps. 4.3.5 and 4.3.6.):

- A term  $a$  has determinate supposition in P  $\Rightarrow$  A disjunction of propositions of the form "This  $a$  is (S)  $b$ " can be inferred from P but a conjunction of propositions of the form "This  $a$  is (S)  $b$ " cannot be inferred from P.
- A term  $a$  has confused and distributive supposition in P  $\Rightarrow$  A conjunction of propositions of the form "This  $a$  is (S)  $b$ " can be inferred from P.
- A term  $a$  has merely confused supposition in P  $\Rightarrow$  A proposition with a disjunctive term of the form "This  $a$ , or that  $a$  etc. . . is (S)  $b$ " can be inferred from P, but neither a disjunction nor a conjunction of propositions of the form "This  $a$  is (S)  $b$ " can be inferred from P.

The same applies *mutatis mutandis* to the predicate term. Notice that among the (A), (E), (I), and (O) propositional forms, merely confused supposition occurs only in predicate position (in (A) propositions). But more generally, it can also occur in subject position, such as in exceptive propositions of the form "Only  $a$  is  $b$ ."

By applying the two groups of rules successively (first the syntactical rules and then the semantic rules), one obtains the desired result, that is, an account of the quantity of individuals involved in a given assertion, and thus of the semantics of quantifier expressions. For example, in "Every man is an animal," "man" has confused and distributive supposition and "animal" has merely confused supposition, according to the syntactical rules for "every." According to the semantic rules, this proposition asserts that "man" suppositis for all of the individuals falling under it (men) and that "animal" suppositis for several individuals, but not (necessarily) for all of those falling under it.

Terrence Parsons (1997) has made the compelling suggestion that the differences between the thirteenth and fourteenth century approaches can also be explained on the basis of the distinction

between the study of the semantics of quantifier expressions taken individually versus the study of global quantificational effect in wider propositional contexts. Indeed, fourteenth century authors had a keen interest in the effect of nested quantifier expressions, such as the effect of a negation over an affirmative universal quantifier. Take “Not every man is an animal”: according to the thirteenth century authors, “man” would have distributive and confused supposition, since it is preceded by “every.” But for fourteenth century authors, the negation preceding “every” would have the effect of suppressing its distributive effect, so that “man” would no longer have distributive and confused supposition but rather determinate supposition (see Karger 1993; Dutilh Novaes 2008). In sum, “[w]hat distinguishes the earlier theory from the later one is whether the mode of supposition of a term in a proposition is something that that term retains when its proposition is embedded in further contexts” (Parsons 1997, p. 43).

## Further Developments

For reasons of space, I can only present the rough lines of the approach to quantification based on supposition. But medieval authors developed it further in several different directions, such as: the definition of valid inferences among different categorical propositions (see Karger 1993; Dutilh Novaes 2004); an analysis of multiple quantification (of subject and predicate) and of other quantifier expressions (see Ashworth 1978); discussions on what are now known as anaphoric pronouns (see Parsons 1994). Here I have discussed thirteenth and fourteenth century authors only, but fifteenth and sixteenth century authors refined the framework even further, dealing in particular with the difficulties that emerged from the earlier theories (see Ashworth 1974, 1978; Karger 1997; Dutilh Novaes 2008).

The modes of personal supposition have been a topic of heated debate in the literature, but a consensus as to their purpose and some of the technical details involved has not yet been reached. It is clear that they can be said to be a

general theory of quantification, but one must bear in mind that the overall approach is fundamentally different from modern post-Fregean theories of quantification.

## Cross-References

- ▶ [John Buridan](#)
- ▶ [Peter of Spain](#)
- ▶ [Supposition Theory](#)
- ▶ [Syncategoremata](#)
- ▶ [Terms, Properties of](#)
- ▶ [William of Ockham](#)
- ▶ [William of Sherwood](#)

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## Qusṭa ibn Lūqā

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### Abstract

Qusṭa ibn Lūqā was a Melkite Christian translator of Greek origin who took part in the Graeco-Arabic translation movement in the ninth century Baghdad.

Qusṭa ibn Lūqā, called *al-Tarjuman*, “the Translator,” was born in Ba‘albak in contemporary Lebanon in 860. Ibn al-Nadīm in the *Fihrist* reports that he traveled to parts of the Byzantine Empire and brought back to Baghdad – where he spent most of his life – several Greek scientific manuscripts. Qusṭa ibn Lūqā was patronized by the ‘Abbāsīd court; he was also in contact with al-Kindī for medical–philosophical questions, as well as with other scholars of the time: he had an epistolary exchange with Ḥunayn b. Iṣḥāq and the

Muslim astronomer Abū ‘Isā ibn al-Munajjim, who had invited him to embrace Islam. Qusṭa ibn Lūqā’s refutation of Ibn Munajjim’s proof of Muḥammad’s prophecy is extant. He retired in Armenia, where he died in 912.

Qusṭa ibn Lūqā was a native Greek speaker and had of course an excellent knowledge of Greek, but also of Syriac and Arabic. He translated into Arabic many Greek texts on natural science, mathematics, medicine, mechanics, and astronomy. In particular, he translated some treatises that in Late Antiquity were studied after Euclid’s geometry as an introduction to Ptolemaic astronomy, and which formed together the so-called *Little Astronomy* or *Intermediate Books* (*Kutub al-mutawassiṭāt*). Among these are extant the versions of the *Spherics* (*Kitāb al-Ukar*) by Theodosius of Bithynia, the *Rising and Setting of the Fixed Stars* (*Kitāb al-Ṭulū‘ wa-l-ḡurūb*) by Autolycos, and the *Lifting-Screw* (*Kitāb Raf‘ al-athqāl*) by Hero of Alexandria.

As for philosophy, Qusṭa ibn Lūqā probably took in Baghdad and translated into Arabic a copy of Pseudo-Plutarch’s *Placita philosophorum*. This doxography, edited and translated by Daiber (1980) as the *Aetius Arabus*, was the main source in the Arab world of the time for the knowledge of the Presocratics and of Stoic philosophy. Qusṭa ibn Lūqā is also recorded as the translator of Aristotle’s *Physics* and Alexander of Aphrodisias’ and Philoponus’ commentaries on it.

According to the lists of the biographers, Qusṭa ibn Lūqā wrote more than 60 original works: commentaries on Euclid; treatises on astronomy, like the extant *Book on the Use of the Celestial Globe* (*Kitāb fī l-‘amal bi-l-kura al-nujūmiyya*) and the treatise *On the Configuration of Celestial Bodies* (*Hay‘at al-aflāk*); works on medicine, as the *Medical Regime for the Pilgrims to Mecca* (*Fī tadbīr al-badan fī l-safar*) and the *Book on the Reasons Why People Differ in Their Character Traits, Their Way of Life, Their Desires, and Their Preferences* (*Kitāb fī ‘ilal ikhtilāf al-nās fī akhlāqihim wa-siyarihim wa-shahawātihim wa-khtiyārātihim*); a treatise on the division of sciences, and writings on natural science. In this field, his treatise *On the Difference Between the Spirit and the Soul* (*Risāla fī l-farq bayn al-rūḥ*



*wa-l-nafs*), in Latin translation (*De differentia spiritus et animae*), was one of the books to be read within the program on Natural Philosophy at the Faculty of Arts in Paris in 1254.

## Cross-References

- ▶ [al-Kindī, Abū Yūsuf Ya‘qūb ibn Ishāq](#)
- ▶ [Aristotle, Arabic](#)
- ▶ [Mathematics and Philosophy in the Arab World](#)
- ▶ [Medicine in the Arab World](#)
- ▶ [Presocratics in the Arab World](#)
- ▶ [Translations from Greek into Arabic](#)

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## Quṭb al-Dīn al-Shīrāzī

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### Abstract

Quṭb al-Dīn al-Shīrāzī was a thirteenth-century Persian polymath, physician, mathematician, astronomer, philosopher, and Sufi.

Quṭb al-Dīn Maḥmūd ibn Mas‘ūd al-Shīrāzī was born in Shirāz in October 1236 in a family of Sufi tradition. He began studying medicine under his father, who practiced and taught medicine at the Moẓaffari hospital in Shīrāz. After his father’s death, his uncle and other physicians of his time trained him in medicine: Quṭb al-Dīn studied Ibn Sīnā’s *Qānūn* (the *Canon*) and its commentaries including that of Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī. Still young, he served at the Moẓaffari hospital as an ophthalmologist.

Some time after 1260, Quṭb al-Dīn left Shiraz for Maragha, where Naṣīr al-Dīn al-Ṭūsī had established the famous observatory, a point of attraction for many scholars from all over the country. In Maragha, Quṭb al-Dīn studied astronomy as well as Ibn Sīnā’s philosophy and medicine. He read under Naṣīr al-Dīn al-Ṭūsī Ibn Sīnā’s *Ishārāt wa-l-tanbīhāt* (*Pointers and Reminders*) and the *Kulliyāt* of the *Qānūn*. He

moved then to Khorasan, and decided to study and work in Juwayn with Najm al-Dīn ‘Alī ibn ‘Umar al-Qazwīnī al-Kātibī, a cofounder of the observatory in Maragha.

Quṭb al-Dīn traveled a lot, and some time after 1268 he went to Qazwīn, Iṣfahān, and Baghdad; later on, he traveled to Konya in Anatolia, where he probably met the famous Persian poet Jalāl al-Dīn Muḥammad Balkhī (al-Rūmī). Then, Quṭb al-Dīn was named by the governor of Konya judge of Sivas and Malatya.

In 1282, the Mongol Il-khān Aḥmad Takudār sent Quṭb al-Dīn to the Mamluk ruler of Egypt. Quṭb al-Dīn spent the rest of his life teaching Ibn Sīnā’s philosophy and medicine. He died in Tabriz in 1311 and was buried in the Ārandāb cemetery.

The encyclopedic knowledge of Quṭb al-Dīn is well documented by his Persian and Arabic writings: he wrote on philosophy following the illuminationist tradition, as well as on medicine, mathematics, geometry, astronomy, geography, Sufism, theology, law, linguistics, and rhetoric. Among his works are the *Durrat al-tāj* (*The Pearly Crown*), an encyclopedic work on philosophy, natural science, theology, logic, astronomy, mathematics, and music written in Persian around 1306 for the ruler of the Iranian land of Gilan; the *Sharḥ Ḥikmat al-Ishrāqī Shaykh Shihāb al-Dīn al-Suhrawardī* (*Commentary on al-Suhrawardī’s Philosophy of Illumination*) written in Arabic; the *Nuzhāt al-ḥukamā’ wa-rawḍat al-aṭibbā’*, a comprehensive commentary in five volumes on Ibn Sīnā’s *Kulliyāt* written in Arabic; the *Eḳtiārāt-e moẓaffari*, a treatise on astronomy in Persian; the *Nihāyat al-idrāk fī dirāyat al-aflāk*

(*The Limit of Accomplishment Concerning Knowledge of the Heavens*), where Quṭb al-Dīn describes the planetary motions, improving Ptolemy’s model and advancing the possibility for heliocentrism.

## Cross-References

- ▶ [Ibn Sīnā, Abū ‘Alī \(Avicenna\)](#)
- ▶ [Medicine and Philosophy](#)
- ▶ [al-Rāzī, Fakhr al-Dīn](#)
- ▶ [al-Suhrawardī, Shihāb al-Dīn Yaḥyā al-Maqtūl](#)
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# R

## Radulphus Brito

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### Abstract

Radulphus Brito (c. 1270–c. 1320) was a famous arts master in Paris, and is considered to be the most important proponent of a particular position in semantics, whose adherents are now called *Modistae*. He is best known, in his own times and ours, for his views on the semantic and ontological status of second intentions. Brito distinguishes these intentions in first and second as well as in abstract and concrete, and locates the resulting fourfold division in each of the three operations of the intellect (concept formation, judgment, and reasoning). He defended the uncommon thesis that at least some of the second intentions can be located in the Aristotelian categories, because they are caused by the external things themselves rather than by the intellect reflecting upon its acquired first intentions.

### Lemma

Radulphus Brito (also called Raoul le Breton or Raoul Renaud), was a famous master of arts, born

c. 1270 in the northwest of Brittany in the town of Ploudiry, which lies in the diocese of St-Pol-de-Léon. In the past, Brito has often been identified with the Parisian master of theology Radulphus de Hotot, but this conflation has now convincingly been proven to be mistaken. Brito studied at the faculty of arts in Paris and became a master of arts there no later than 1296. He began studying theology, also at Paris and probably around 1299, while continuing to teach in the arts faculty. Brito read Peter Lombard's *Sententiae*, in the academic year 1308–1309 (at least book II and III) and his inception as a master of theology most likely took place in 1314 (although 1311/12 has also been suggested). Brito also held an administrative post at the university; he became the provisor – the administrative head – of the Sorbonne somewhere between 1312 and 1315 and held this post until at least 1319. He died c. 1320.

Brito commented extensively on Aristotle, but, unfortunately, most of his works remain either unedited or merely partially edited. Although he wrote commentaries on natural philosophy (*Physics*, *On the Soul*, *Meteorology*), on the first two books of the *Metaphysics*, and on the *Ethics*, the bulk of his commentaries concern logic and grammar: on the *Ars vetus* (*Isagoge*, *Categories*, and *On Interpretation*), including Boethius' *De differentiis topicis* (*On Topical Differences*) and the anonymous *De sex principiis* (*On Six Principles*), as well as on the *Prior and Posterior Analytics*, the *Topics*, and the *Sophistical Refutations*. He also wrote a large commentary on *Priscianus*

*Minor* en left a collection of mathematical works called *Super parva mathematicalia*. Probably best known now are his *Sophismata*. In theology Brito seems to have written far less; all we have are his commentary on Peter Lombard's *Sententiae I-III*, a *Quodlibet*, and his so-called *Quaestiones in vespertiis* (*Evening Questions*).

Bruto's logical works in particular were very influential, and they remained so, at least in Italy, well into the fifteenth century. For example, Gennadius Scholarios' commentary on the *Ars vetus*, composed c. 1432–1435, is for a large part merely a translation and adaptation of several *quaestiones* written by Brito. After the fifteenth century, however, Brito fell into obscurity, and only his commentaries on the *Ars vetus* were ever printed.

Bruto is considered to be the most important proponent of a particular position in semantics which is found in the later thirteenth and early fourteenth century, and to which, for example, also Simon of Faversham and Boethius of Dacia adhered. These philosophers are now known as the *Modistae*. What they had in common is that they paid great attention to the manner in which terms have different signification according to their grammatical function in a proposition; hence the name *Modistae*, after *modus significandi*, one of their central concepts. These *Modistae* were also convinced that there is a close symmetry between language, thought, and reality.

One of the topics Brito is quite famous for concerns precisely this relation between thought, language, and reality, namely, his extensive discussions on the ontological and semantic status of first and second intentions. These discussions are quite detailed, but for a large part they rely on three basic distinctions. (1) First intentions – second intentions: when we grasp a thing in its proper being (*secundum modum essendi proprium rei*), for example, if we understand a man as a rational animal, we form a first intention (humanity). A second intention, in contrast, is formed when we understand the same thing in its common features (*secundum modum essendi communem rei*). For example, once we understand that humanity is found in many individuals (*ut est in pluribus*), we form the second intentions of

universality, genus, species, etc. Brito shares the common view in his time that these second intentions are the proper objects of the science of logic and he emphasizes that we always need to grasp the first intention of a thing prior to being able to grasp a second intention. However, he also emphasizes that this is not a causal priority (*causaliter et effective*). (2) Abstract intentions – concrete intentions: an abstract intention is defined by Brito as the “being informed” of the intellect, which enables it to tend toward something. This simply means that the abstract intention is a particular abstract concept in the mind of the knowing subject. A concrete intention, on the other hand, is something more than just the concept; it is composed of both the thing understood and the particular manner (*ratio*) of its being understood. More precisely, it is the object that is understood, exactly as being understood, and the concrete intention thus constitutes a firm connection between concepts and things. Both first and second intentions can be either abstract or concrete. (3) The three operations of the intellect: Brito takes over the common distinction between the first operation of the intellect which is forming concepts, the second operation of the intellect which is making a judgement, and its third operation which is reasoning. All three operations have their own sets of intentions. An example of a first intention of the second operation would be “Socrates is sitting,” whereas an example of a second intention would be “‘Socrates is sitting’ is a proposition.”

One of the questions that is of special interest to Brito is whether second intentions fall under one of the Aristotelian categories, which means roughly: whether they refer to some mind-independent reality. He attempts to answer this question by looking at the causes of the various intentions. According to Brito, both the first and the second intentions of the first operation of the intellect are primarily caused by the thing understood (although, of course, the agent intellect also plays a causal role, as it does in any concept formation, since it abstracts our concepts from our phantasms). All intentions of the second and third operation of the intellect, on the other hand, are solely caused by the intellect. Brito's view on

the causal connection of second intentions with the things themselves is distinctive, for many philosophers before him had instead argued that these second intentions are caused by the intellect when it reflects upon its own acquired first intentions. Since the main cause in forming a second intention is the external thing, Brito consequently concludes that these second intentions of the first act of the intellect must fall under the categories and have just as much reality (*entitas*) in this respect as the first intentions.

As for the intentions of the other operations of the intellect, we can either claim that they do not fall under the categories because they are caused by the intellect alone and not by the thing understood, or we can claim that they also fall under the categories because they are caused by something – the intellect – that is just as real a thing as the causes of the intentions of the first operation. If we choose the latter option, however, we have to at least concede that the second intentions of the second and third operations have less being than those of the first operation. Otherwise logic would turn into a science that studies things that are just as real as, for example, the objects of physics, which seems absurd. Brito was heavily criticized for his views on intentions by, among others, Hervaeus Natalis, Peter Auriol, and John of Jandun.

Bruto's natural philosophy and metaphysics have still not been studied closely. His commentary on Aristotle's *On the Soul* is quite interesting and seems to anticipate some important discussions in the fourteenth century on, for example, the particular difficulty that pertains to the science of the soul. Just like Thomas Aquinas, Brito holds that there is but one substantial form in man, which is the intellect. However, Aquinas' emphasis on the consequence of this position that the separated soul must be essentially incomplete without the body seems to be lacking in Brito.

## Cross-References

- ▶ [Boethius of Dacia](#)
- ▶ [Hervaeus Natalis](#)

- ▶ [Intention, Primary and Secondary](#)
- ▶ [John of Jandun](#)
- ▶ [Peter Auriol](#)
- ▶ [Simon of Faversham](#)
- ▶ [Thomas Aquinas](#)

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## Ralph Strode

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### Abstract

Ralph Strode was an English logician (fl. second half of the fourteenth century), a Master of Arts (Oxon.), and an author of a *Logica* in six treatises, whose manuscripts were soon dispersed, surviving with varying degrees of success. The treatise on *Consequentie* became a textbook at Padua University in the late fifteenth century and was published various times, sometimes with the one on *Obligationes*, and often with some commentaries by Italian logicians.

The logical doctrines dealt with in the *Logica* (the title is in manuscript Canon. misc. 219, which presents the complete six-part series: Maierù 1982, p. 100) can be introduced by presenting the first two treatises. The first, opening with a hymn to the seven arts, is a *summula* that supplies an introduction to terminist semantics with a synthesis of the doctrine of the proposition, followed by short syntheses of predicables, categories, and syllogism.

The second, *De principiis logicalibus*, devised as an introduction to the later more difficult treatises, starts from the Aristotelian distinction between reality, thought, and language (*res, intellectus, vox*) and insists on signification (natural, *ad placitum*), on the distinction between signification and supposition, and on the various types of propositions. There follows the doctrine of the *probatio propositionis*: after distinguishing the terms, making up the proposition into immediate and mediate, the proposition consisting of mediate terms is proved by *expositio*, given by a conjunction of propositions equivalent to the original proposition, illustrated mainly with reference to the universal affirmative proposition (while the negative is proved by the disjunction of



propositions, a procedure known as *probatio per causas veritatis*); in turn, the proof of a particular proposition is given by *resolutio*, that is, replacing the common term with the corresponding immediate term (the demonstrative pronoun) in the premises of an expository syllogism, which has singular premises and the original proposition as conclusion; the procedure known as *officiatio*, used for modal terms and verbs involving mental acts that condition the rest of the proposition, is also mentioned in this context (see the entry on “► [Richard Billingham](#)” in this volume). The treatise concludes with two series of rules, on consequences or logical inferences, on syllogism, and a first account of the doctrine of obligations.

The four most important treatises are *Suppositiones*, *Consequentie*, *Obligaciones*, and *Insolubilia*, dealing with topics concerning logical discussion of the time.

## Biographical Information

Fellow of Merton College, Oxford (documented in 1359 and 1360), he has been identified with the “philosophical Strode” to whom (along with “moral Gower”) Chaucer dedicated his *Troilus* (but two manuscripts of the poem have “sophistical” instead of “philosophical”: Reichl 1989, p. 134) and with Ralph Strode, Common Serjeant or Pleador of the city of London from 1374 and Standing Counsel for the city from 1386. Sir I. Gollancz, who suggested and defended this identification, tells us that the London Strode died in 1387, when his (lost) will was proved in the archdeaconry court of London and duly indexed in the archives of the archdeaconry. Furthermore, the logician of Merton has been identified with the Strode subject to a friendly challenge in two doctrinal responses by John Wyclif (fellow of Merton in 1356). Strode has also been suggested as the author of the poem *Pearl*. If this last attribution now seems unlikely, the other identifications proposed, and accepted by scholars such as Emden and Bennett, require further confirmation: recent historiography tends to separate and distinguish rather than accumulate multiple activities and expertise in one individual.

## Doctrines

The most important part of Ralph’s legacy is to be found in the four major treatises. The treatise on supposition actually deals with two doctrines, set out at the start: supposition and exponible terms. Supposition, or the reference of a term, is the function of representation that the term performs in a proposition: when it stands for itself or for another similar term, Ralph says that it has material or simple supposition (like Buridan before him, discarding the traditional distinction of the two functions; there may be a reference to Ralph in the “Rudolfus Anglicus” who is associated with Buridan in identifying a simple with a material supposition, as indicated in an unpublished text quoted in Maierù 1982, p. 97n.); when the term stands for something other than itself, Ralph attributes personal supposition to it. Then, he illustrates how to distinguish the various forms of personal supposition and how they function. He goes on to treat the various exponible terms (exclusive and exceptive, *incipit* and *desinit*; *differt*; positive and comparative degree, superlative, with *maximum et minimum*, and reduplicative) and the propositions they give rise to, including the universal proposition. The use of exponible terms is particularly important in dealing with themes of natural philosophy: since the medieval masters made little effort to seek tools for measuring and evaluating natural phenomena, but concentrated rather on seeking adequate linguistic formulae, with the result of creating a highly technical language, governed by precise rules.

The treatise on consequences undertakes the distinction between formal and material consequence. For Ralph, any valid material consequence is an inference from the antecedent to the consequent, while a formal consequence also implies a connection of signification between antecedent and consequent: anyone who understands that you are a man, understands that you are an animal, because animal follows from the formal intellection (*de formali intellectu*) of man (Kneale and Kneale 1962, p. 292, refer to Abelard in this connection). It hence follows that any formal consequence is material, but not vice versa.

An example of a material consequence is a man is a donkey, so the stick is in the corner. Ralph supplies an extensive review of general and special rules, with a list of the various rules introduced into mediaeval tradition on the basis of *Prior Analytics* and *Topics*.

The treatise on *Obligationes* concerns the procedures for developing a scholastic dispute for two actors: the *arguens* or *opponens* is the one who starts the dispute and proposes the difficulties, and the *respondens* is the one who sustains the dispute, trying to avoid the difficulties, compared by Ralph to two combatants; according to Ralph, the aim of the exercise is mainly that of sharpening the novice's ability and testing his competence in not falling into contradiction with the premises accepted. In fact, the dispute starts from the position of a case and the corresponding utterance, which the respondent accepts and which he must not contradict, accepting (conceding) or denying the steps, later proposed by the other speaker, as he sees fit. The time of obligation lasts from when the case is admitted until the challenger gives the signal to interrupt the game (but everything concerning the dispute is regarded in relation to the initial moment of it): in the time of obligation, the respondent has to concede everything possible that is not contrary to what has already been admitted and conceded; but outside that time, he must reply truthfully. As the dispute unfolds between two speakers, Ralph claims that one needs to consider only what has been explicitly admitted vocally and not what emerges mentally, which has not come into play as such. Ralph's position seems to be in line with the tradition that regards this exercise as a test for the novice. But there is another use recognized for this activity, that of exploring what follows a hypothesis made in any discipline, so as to know what to do when a situation arises corresponding to the case examined. This aspect does not seem to be considered by Ralph (Ashworth 1993).

The final lengthy treatise on *Insolubilia* is divided in three parts: the first discusses the various positions, the second proposes to bring out the true opinion from them, while the third illustrates

various kinds of insolubles (insoluble, the author explains, has sense of a logical difficulty that is difficult to solve, but not absolutely insoluble). Ralph starts by presenting the opinions of the ancients and then goes on to examine those of the moderns, starting from Thomas Bradwardine's treatise, which he discusses in detail; he then examines the position of Roger Swyneshed and then two other modern positions (those of Dumbleton and Kilmington, not attributed, but identified by Spade 1975, to whom we also owe the discovery of the Erfurt MS, 4°255, conserving much of the authentic text; for the Oxford MS, Maierù 1982, pp. 103–110). The fifth opinion is Heytesbury's and the last that of Robert Fland, again not attributed. In the second part, Ralph evaluates the positions of Bradwardine, Swyneshed, and Heytesbury: he regards Bradwardine's conclusions as probable, presents nine conclusions, most of them drawn from Fland, against Swyneshed, and agrees with Heytesbury that an insoluble cannot signify as the terms in which it is formulated precisely demand, but that one should identify a further signification of the insoluble. In the third part, Ralph applies the results so far to the various types of insoluble (those that arise from our external and internal acts; those based on properties of the voice; and those that occur as simple, or composite and molecular proposition and in one of the various propositional forms).

In conclusion, faced with the situation of logic in his time, Strode sought to provide a doctrinal synthesis, paying particular attention to the teaching tradition of the discipline.

## Cross-References

- ▶ [Consequences, Theory of](#)
- ▶ [Insolubles](#)
- ▶ [John Buridan](#)
- ▶ [John Dumbleton](#)
- ▶ [John Wyclif](#)
- ▶ [Obligations Logic](#)
- ▶ [Peter Abelard](#)

- ▶ [Richard Billingham](#)
- ▶ [Richard Kilvington](#)
- ▶ [Richard Swineshead](#)
- ▶ [Supposition Theory](#)
- ▶ [Thomas Bradwardine](#)
- ▶ [William Heytesbury](#)

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## Ramon Llull

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### Abstract

This entry explores the relationship of the thought of Ramon Llull (Majorca, ca. 1232–1316), and of his Art in particular, to the traditional scholastic philosophy of his time. Central topics addressed are metaphysics and ontology, logic, rhetoric, and Llull's rationalist polemic against the Parisian Averroists.

## Biographical Information

Ramon Llull was born ca. 1232 in the city of Majorca to a wealthy Barcelonese merchant who had settled on the island after aiding King James I of Aragon in its conquest in 1229. The principal sources of information about Llull's life, which leave many significant lacunae, are the "quasi-hagiographical" *Vita coetanea*, dictated to monks at the Carthusian house of Vauvert, near Paris, in 1311; scattered autobiographical references in Llull's own works; and a small corpus of documents, including Llull's will (Johnston, "Ramon Llull" 3–4; Jocelyn N. Hillgarth published Llull's will in his *Diplomatari lul·lià*). Little is known about the first decades of Llull's life, except that he married Blanca Picany, with whom he would have two children, in 1257, and that he served as a courtier to the future King James II of Majorca. Llull was convinced to devote his life to divine service when, around the age of 30, he was visited by a vision of Christ crucified over the course of several nights while composing a love song to an unnamed lady. Such service, he decided, would consist primarily in efforts to convert Muslims and other "infidels," involving his own personal evangelizing

missions; the writing of a book, “the best in the world,” against the errors of the unbelievers; and the foundation, sponsored by the pope and Christian rulers, of monasteries where preachers might be taught the languages of those they sought to convert (this last prong would come to fruition with the founding of such a monastery at Miramar, on Majorca, confirmed by papal bull in 1276).

At this point, Llull began a 9-year period of study which included the purchase of an enslaved Muslim from whom Llull learned Arabic. Having been imprisoned after attacking Llull, who had rebuked him for blaspheming the name of Christ, this Muslim would eventually hang himself (much to the relief of Llull, who could not bear to execute a man he regarded as his teacher). Llull also studied Latin during this period, and it is evident from his first two works, a Latin compendium of the *Logic of Algazel* (ca. 1271–1272) and his own monumental *Llibre de contemplació en Déu* (*Book of Contemplation of God*, ca. 1273–1274) that he acquired substantial, if idiosyncratic, knowledge of theology and philosophy as well. Yet such knowledge was not sufficient, in Llull’s account, to produce the Art which would be the center of his intellectual and evangelizing project for the rest of his life. Rather, Llull recounts here another mystical experience: after the Muslim’s death, Llull spent 8 days on Mount Randa contemplating the divine, until God suddenly illuminated him, revealing the elements from which to construct his Great Art. This was the point at which Llull began to compose the *Ars compendiosa inveniendi veritatem* (ca. 1274), the first redaction of his total “onto-theo-logical” system (Colomer, *De la Edad Media* 57), which would undergo periodic, substantial revisions until approximately 1308 (Badia and Bonner 71–73; see below).

Little is known about the years immediately following this illumination, when Llull seems to have divided his time between Majorca and Montpellier, although Llull produced some of his best known vernacular works, such as the *Llibre de l’orde de cavalleria* and the *Llibre del gentil e dels tres savis* (*Book of the Order of Chivalry and Book of the Gentile and Three Wise Men*, both ca. 1274–76), during this period. In

Montpellier, he gave lectures on a new version of his Art, the *Art demostrativa* (ca. 1283). From 1287 on, Llull undertook a ceaseless series of peregrinations – including sporadic returns to Majorca – in which he sought the support of popes and kings, attempted to gain acceptance for his Art at the University of Paris (among others), and made missions to the North African cities of Tunis (1293 and 1315) and Bajaia (1307). Llull’s first stay in Paris (1288–1289) was marked by the Parisian masters’ rejection of his Art (leading to one of its major revisions), but it is also likely where he encountered Thomas Le Myésier, one of his most important early disciples, and the Latin Averroists, against whom he would later write several philosophical and theological polemics (see below). While the precise date of Llull’s death is unknown, he is likely to have died by the first months of 1316 on Majorca, where he was buried at the Franciscan church.

Llull is known to have produced some 260 works in Latin and Catalan (none of the Arabic texts alluded to in his writings survives), including, along with the various redactions of his Art, treatises on countless areas of medieval knowledge, encyclopedic works such as the monumental *Tree of Science* (1295–1296), and literary works ranging from devotional and autobiographical verse to his celebrated vernacular romances, the *Romanç d’Evast i Blaquerna* (ca. 1276–1283), which includes the Sufi-inspired *Llibre d’amic e amat* (*Book of the Lover and the Beloved*) and the *Llibre de meravelles* (*Felix or the Book of Wonders*, 1287–1289). In the sections that follow, I will focus on key philosophical-theological aspects of his thought, but it is important to keep in mind that Llull viewed all of his works, across languages and genres, as expressions of his Art and, thus, as serving the ultimate purpose of conversion to, and closing the schisms within, Christianity.

## Llull’s Art: Development and Function

Llull’s illumination on Mount Randa revealed to him a set of essential characteristics of the divine, such as goodness, truth, and eternity, that Llull

calls “dignities.” These dignities were the starting point for Llull’s Art, which underwent several important changes over the course of Llull’s life. Lola Badia and Anthony Bonner have identified 4 fundamental stages in the development of Llull’s thought: a “pre-Art” stage in the early 1270s; the “quaternary” stage, in which, as its name indicates, the Art is governed by fourfold structures, based on 16 dignities; the “ternary” stage, in which these fourfold structures are reduced to 3 and the dignities themselves reduced to 9 (perhaps as a result of the quaternary Art’s rejection by the Parisian masters in 1289); and a “post-Art” stage, from 1308 to Llull’s death in 1316 (71–73). Alongside the several iterations of the Art itself, Llull produced many treatises either applying the Art to particular philosophical-theological problems (such as the Trinity and Incarnation) or showing how other scholarly disciplines, such as medicine and law, find a surer footing in the Art. As Bonner has noted, the Art “forms the backbone of all [Llull’s] other works” (*Art and Logic* 10).

Despite the Art’s structural development, the principles of its functioning remained relatively stable: taking the dignities as a starting point, the artist constructs demonstrations and answers questions through combinations determined by concepts such as contrariety, concordance, affirmation, and negation. In what is almost certainly the best known aspect of the Art, Llull created a series of figures – especially, but not exclusively, combinatory wheels and tables – which could be put to use by “artists” in disputation and composition. The following two figures, A and T from the ternary phase, can serve as examples (Fig. 1).

Figure A contains the nine dignities of the ternary phase; note that each is assigned a single, non-varying letter (i.e., the letters are non-algebraic; e.g., C always equals “greatness”). Fig. T contains the principles of relation among the dignities, which have the same ontological status as the dignities themselves (Bonner, *Art and Logic* 130–34), as well as the three species of these principles. Thus, Figure T’s EFG triangle deals with beginning, middle, and end; beginning subdivides into the species of cause, quantity, and time; middle into conjunction, mensuration,

and extremes; and end into privation, termination, and perfection. Two further tables show the binary and ternary combinations of these principles, allowing for the formulation of definitions and questions such as “goodness is great,” “concordance is good,” “whether goodness is concordant?” and “what is concordant goodness?” In this way, the Art, a “theological vision of the world that allowed [Llull] to account for everything,” provided an innovative method for divine contemplation (Batalla 48); yet it was the ability of this system to transcend metaphysical distinctions that made it ideal for Llull’s missionary purposes. The workings of the Art are extremely intricate and do change in some ways over time; Bonner’s *Art and Logic* is the best detailed presentation of the Art in all of its phases of development.

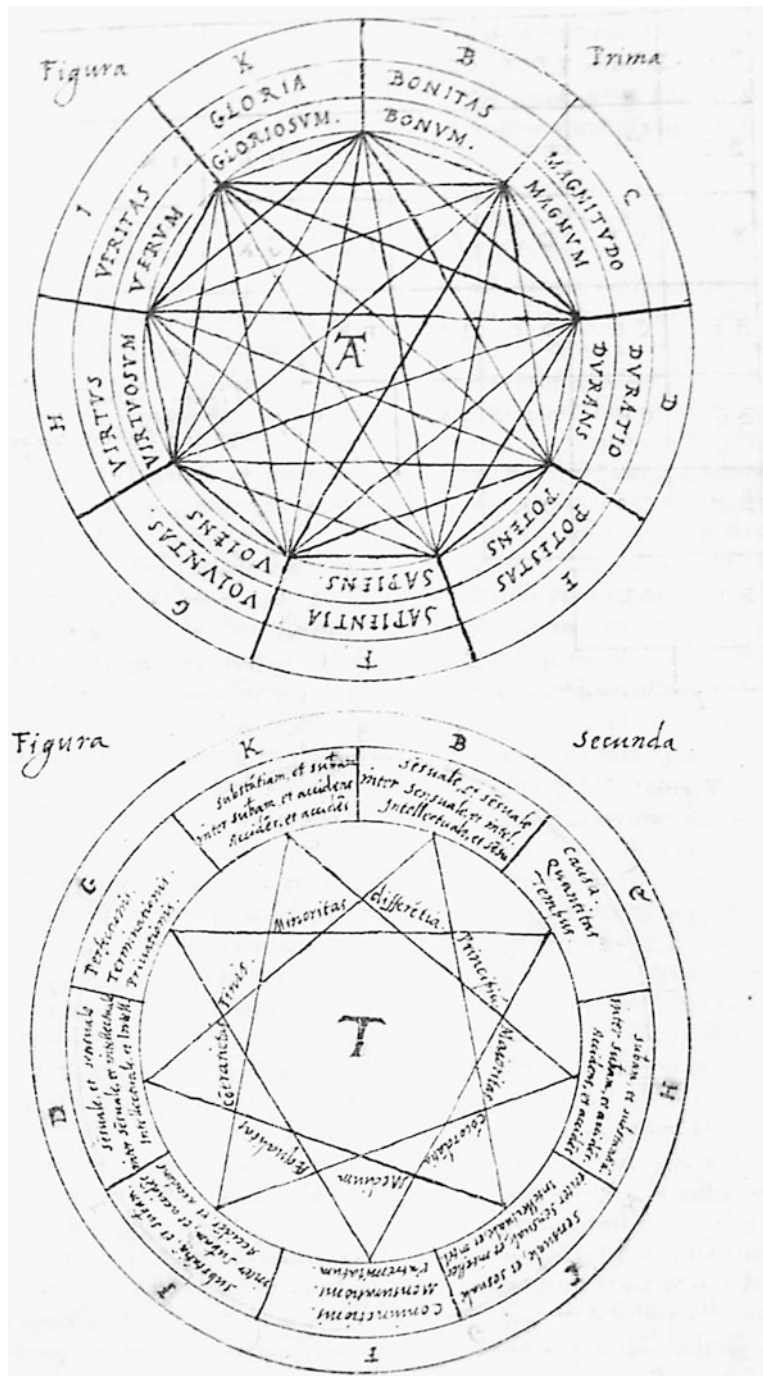
### Superrealism, Rationalism, and Evangelism

Scholars have argued convincingly that Llull’s dignities drew inspiration not only from the Christian tradition of the divine names (Llull composed a poem in this tradition, the *Cent noms de Dieu*) but also from the Kabbalah’s *sefirot* (Hames 118–89) and the Islamic *ḥadras* (Pring-Mill 124–25, expressing skepticism). What is undeniable is that he expected the dignities to be unobjectionable to Jewish and Muslim audiences as elements of the divine nature and thus to be the basis for a renewed interreligious disputation eschewing arguments from revealed authority. The need for such a renewal is explained by the Jewish wise man in the *Book of the Gentile and Three Wise Men*:

Christians and Saracens indeed believe that God gave the Law to Moses, and each believes that our Law is true. But because they believe other things that are contrary to our Law, therefore, and insofar as they believe these things contrary to our Law, they disbelieve our Law. Moreover, we and the Christians agree on the text of the Law, but we disagree in interpretation and commentaries, where we reach contrary conclusions. Therefore, we cannot reach agreement based on authorities and must seek necessary arguments by which we can agree. (Bonner, *SWRL* 1: 170)



Ramon Llull, Fig. 1 Llull, *Ars generalis ultima* (BNF, Ms. lat. 6443C [fourteenth century], f. 113r; [https://lullus.ub.uni-freiburg.de/files/lullus/DocPortal\\_derivate\\_00010177/schriften.html](https://lullus.ub.uni-freiburg.de/files/lullus/DocPortal_derivate_00010177/schriften.html))



Llull was not alone in his skepticism toward arguments based on revealed authority; similar concerns can be found, for example, in the prologue of Anselm of Canterbury’s *Monologion* (5) and, with the caveat that “in divine matters the natural

reason has its failings,” in Aquinas’s *Summa contra gentiles* (1.2.3). He was certain that the dignities could provide a basis for the “necessary arguments” described above because, for Llull, they are all at once the principles of epistemology,



metaphysics, and rhetoric. The Art is *inventive* (as in the title of its first iteration, the *Ars compendiosa inveniendi veritatem*) in that it allows the artist to formulate all possible true statements about existence, and it is *demonstrative* (as in the title of the *Art demonstrativa*) in that these statements are not just probable, as scholastic commentators on Aristotle's *Topics* would characterize the "inventive" arguments of dialectic, but necessary, "scientific" demonstrations based on self-evident principles (on the relationship of Llull's Art to the scholastic theory of the sciences, see Ruiz Simon). To the "necessary" demonstrations *propter quid* and *quia* extracted by the scholastics from Aristotle, Llull added the (superior, in his account) demonstration *per aequiparantiam*, constructed from things that are equal, unlike the "unequal" things on which demonstrations *propter quid* (which demonstrates the effect on the basis of its greater cause) and *quia* (which demonstrates the cause on the basis of its lesser effects). The terms of a demonstration *per aequiparantiam* are "equal" in the sense that one can be substituted for the other without harming the truth of the given statement, and this substitutability is grounded in the nature of the divine dignities, all of which are *unum secundum esse*, such that no *distinctio realis* exists among them, whereas the limits of human reason impose a *distinctio rationis* which saves this kind of demonstration (in Llull's account) from accusations of circularity or *petitio principii*. As Ruiz Simon notes in his discussion of the demonstration *per aequiparantiam* (238–73; here, 263 n. 324), the distinction between a *distinctio realis* and *rationis* is also found, for example, in the *Summa theologiae*'s discussion of the divine names (I, q. 13, a. 4, sol.).

Arguments based on the dignities could be extended to creation because, for Llull, the principles instantiated absolutely by the dignities govern creation as well. His discursive understanding of the divine nature undergirds a "superrealist" metaphysics that:

Tends to conflate the content of understanding or expression with the actual concept or word itself. Since for Llull that understanding or expression includes the perception of so many spiritual truths,

this superrealist metaphysics is already a virtual *allegoria in rebus*. Applied globally to things, concepts, and words, it is in fact a universal allegory, a kind of metaphysics of meaning. (Johnston, *Evangelical Rhetoric* 34)

By the ternary phase of the Art, this metaphysics was overwhelmingly trinitarian in structure and included Llull's theory of three "correlative" principles that exist in all beings (on the complicated development of the correlatives throughout Llull's career, see Gayà Estelrich, *La teoria luliana de los correlativos*). According to this theory, in the divine essence, each of the dignities is divided into three "subordinate principles – active, passive, and the act itself," making the divine essence itself constantly active (Pring-Mill 38–9). For example, divine goodness subdivides into the active *bonificativus*, passive *bonificabilis*, and the act of *bonificare*. As Robert Pring-Mill notes, these three principles are analogous to the "trinity" of matter, form, and their concordance (140), and indeed, the active nature of the divine was crucial to Llull's proofs of the Trinity:

In truth, God could not be one without being three. For if He were one and not three, his unity would be empty and imperfect, because without deifying it would be idle, just as his intellect without the understanding, the understood, and [the act of] understanding, and his will without the willing, the willed, and [the act of] willing [. . .] and so on with all of his dignities. (Llull, *Liber Praedicationis contra Ivdaeos* 19; my translation)

Llull's belief that even purely spiritual entities consist of form and matter is a species of universal hyломorphism (Badia and Bonner 90 n. 16), and it is fundamental to his arguments for the Incarnation. The correlative structure extends to creation; for example, in Llull's 1303 *Logica nova*, man is defined as a "manifying" animal, composed of a "manifying" form, "manifiable" matter, and the act of "manifying" (cited in Pring-Mill 151). Indeed, Llull argues that there must be some trinitarian resemblance in men, because God would otherwise be "alien" to humanity (*Liber Praedicationis contra Ivdaeos* 22; especially later in his career, Llull did not eschew entirely the use of authorities, and here, his argument depends on Ex. 34:14, "Non habes Deum

alienum”). The linchpin of this argument is the Incarnation: on the one hand, God’s activity (as first cause of creation) is proof of the Incarnation (*Liber de Trinitate et Incarnatione* 2.19); on the other, the Incarnation serves as the “mirror” of the Trinity (*Disputació de cinc savis* 3.1), establishing a “middle” between the divine and the human “through high and sublime participation” (*Liber Praedicationis contra Iudaeos* 22; for a detailed discussion of the role of the Incarnation in Llull’s theory of signification, see Hughes). Participated resemblance also plays a crucial role in Llull’s rhetorical theory, as when he argues in the *Rhetorica nova*: “Someone who says ‘The queen is beautiful,’ speaks beautifully by putting a substantive before an adjective in this speech. This is because a substantive has greater essence and nobility than the adjective predicated of it, which would lack a place to exist without it” (2.3.3). The ontological level of the signified determines the aesthetic quality and proper order of the signified. This participation is, of course, crucial for salvation, and it is therefore, and relatedly, the basis for knowledge of the divine: the Incarnation made possible the system of participated resemblance through which the divine essence can be contemplated in this world (*Liber de Trinitate et Incarnatione* 2.20).

The ability not only to contemplate the divine essence but to make demonstrative arguments based on it was key to Llull’s polemic against the Parisian Averroists. For Llull, there is no conflict between reason and faith because, as Intellect explains in the *Disputatio fidei et intellectus* (1303), the two are in fact inseparable, each depending on the other to function properly and both, in turn, depending on grace (1.2-3; on this point, see Johnston, *Spiritual Logic* 297 and Llinàs 75). The very idea that faith and reason should be opposed or separately delineated threatens to undo the unity of Christian thought and provoke a return to paganism (van Steenberghe 127). This anachronistic view, more proper to the eleventh century than to the end of the thirteenth, has been said to be the most truly distinctive feature of Llull’s thought (Colomer, *El pensament* 237). Yet Llull’s status as an extreme rationalist, which rests on his firm

belief in the demonstrability of Christian doctrine through necessary reasons, should not be overstated; the relationship of faith and understanding in his thought places him on a continuum with thinkers such as Augustine, Anselm, Richard of Saint-Victor, and Roger Bacon (Batalla 66–67). Furthermore, as Josep M. Ruiz Simon has noted (92), his attempt to reunite *inventio* and *demonstratio* anticipates the projects of later thinkers such as Descartes, Francis Bacon, and Leibniz. Llull is undoubtedly idiosyncratic as a thinker and writer, yet he had a rigorous understanding of the relationship of his Art, as both critique and development, to scholastic philosophy.

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## al-Rāzī, Fakhr al-Dīn

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### Abstract

One of the most influential exponents of Islamic philosophy and theology in the era after al-Ġazālī (d. 1111), Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī (1150–1210) rearranged the structure of the philosophical *summa* in the Islamic East and thus also the curriculum of philosophical studies. His work contributes to the reconfiguration

of philosophy as *ḥikma* in Islam's post-classical period. He also integrates many arguments from Aristotelian philosophy (*falsafa*) into Muslim rationalist theology (*kalām*), a process that started shortly before al-Ġazālī. Original in his own thinking, Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī was influenced by the systematic philosophy of Ibn Sīnā (Avicenna, d. 1037) and the response to it by Abū l-Barakāt al-Baġdādī (d. c. 1165). His works were widely studied, particularly during the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries. His commentaries on Ibn Sīnā's works, in which he often keeps a critical distance to *falsafa*, became the subject of super-commentaries that are among the most influential texts in Arabic philosophy and Islamic theology. Most influential, however, was his monumental Qur'ān commentary *Keys to the Unknown (Maḡātib al-ġayb)*, in which through a well-structured rationalist analysis he aims at resolving many questions that are brought up in the text of revelation.

## Biographical Information

Muḥammad ibn ʿUmar Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī was born 1150 in Rayy, a city in central Iran that is now incorporated into Tehran, into a family of Muslim religious scholars. His father was a well-educated theologian, known as the “preacher of Rayy” due to his popular sermons. Thus, Fakhr al-Dīn is also known as Ibn al-Khaṭīb, “the preacher's son.” After studying with his father, who died in 1163, Fakhr al-Dīn continued his education with famous teachers at Nishapur in northeastern Iran. In Nishapur, he is said to have come into contact with the works of Ibn Sīnā, which set him on a path to study philosophy. Back in Rayy, he became close to Majd al-Dīn ʿAbd al-Razzāq al-Jīlī, a philosophical scholar and the author of an epistle on logic. When al-Jīlī was invited to teach at the Mujāhidiyya *madrasa* in Maragha in northwestern Iran, Fakhr al-Dīn went with him. He studied with al-Jīlī at the same time that another influential philosopher in Islam, Shihab al-Dīn Yahyā al-Suhrawardī (d. 1191), is said to have learned from him.

After completing his studies in Maragha, Fakhr al-Dīn taught at *madrasas* in Marand (Azerbaijan) and Hamadan (central Iran), but would soon move to Khwārezm, the delta region where the Amu Darya (Oxus) river once flew into the Aral Sea. Khwārezm is today split between Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan. The first 20 years of his career, Fakhr al-Dīn benefitted from the patronage of members of the court of the increasingly powerful Khwārazmshāh Tekish (reg. 1172–1200). One of his earliest works is *The Instruction in the Science of kalām* (*al-Ishāra fī a fInstructāa*), a fairly traditional handbook of rationalist theology (*kalām*). Another early work is his influential *Utmost Limits of Rational Knowledge in Theology* (*Nihāyat al-‘uqūl*), a fully-fledged *summa* of *kalam* that established his fame as a rationalist theologian. Fakhr al-Dīn left Khwārazm around 1194 and entered into the service of the Ġürid dynasty, the most important rivals of the Khwārazmshāhs, who ruled over Afghanistan and northern India. Despite strong opposition from conservative and traditionalist scholars at their courts, both rival dynasties, the Khwārazmshāhs and the Ġürids, competed for Fakhr al-Dīn, a situation that greatly benefitted him and made him very rich. Under the Ġürids, Fakhr al-Dīn worked at various places in Afghanistan until one of their sultans, Ġiyāth al-Dīn Muḥammad (d. 1203), built a *madrasa* for him in Herat (western Afghanistan). In Ġürid service, Fakhr al-Dīn began work on his voluminous Qurʾān commentary and his last *magnum opus* in philosophical theology (*ilāhiyyāt*) *The Higher Issues* (*al-Maṭālib al-‘āliya*). Fakhr al-Dīn was occupied with these two works until his death, not finishing any of them and leaving that task to his students. In Herat, like in many places earlier, Fakhr al-Dīn was violently opposed by more traditionalist scholars and by the populace. He needed to rely on bodyguards for his safety.

When in 1208 Herat fell into the hands of the Khwārazmshāh ‘Alā l-Dīn Muḥammad (r. 1200–1220), the son of Tekish, who earlier had been a student of Fakhr al-Dīn, he was again honored and patronized by this dynasty. Although ailing and frail, he traveled with the Khwārezmshāh to his capital Gurganj and

continued to work on his Qurʾān commentary and the book on metaphysics. Returning to Herat, Fakhr al-Dīn fell ill in 1209 and died there on March 29, 1210, among his family and his students. He was buried at a cemetery outside of Herat where his grave is still present.

## Thought

Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī was the most important philosopher and theologian in Islam in the century after al-Ġazālī (d. 1111) and much of his work complements al-Ġazālī’s activity and consolidates the project started by him. With al-Ġazālī begins the integration of techniques and teachings developed by Muslim philosophers (*falāsifa*) such as Ibn Sīnā (d. 1038) and al-Fārābī (d. 950) into the discourse of Muslim rationalist theology (*kalām*). Al-Ġazālī approached this project from two sides: first, by criticizing attitudes and certain teachings held by the Muslim *falāsifa* most famously in his *Incoherence of the Philosophers* (*Tahāfut al-falāsifa*), and second, by adopting positions and teachings that were developed by *falāsifa* and that appeared to him the best solutions to the problems at hand. Thus, al-Ġazālī first identified elements in the tradition of *falsafa* that were unfit to be integrated into Muslim theology and, second, he integrated those elements that he saw fit, without, however, telling his readers in theology from where he had adopted them. In fact, in his most public statements, such as his widely read autobiography *The Deliverer from Error* (*al-Munqidh min al-ḍalāl*), al-Ġazālī takes a very critical stance toward the tradition of *falsafa* that gives his readers the wrong impression that he was an enemy thereof.

Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī wrote both works in philosophy (*ḥikma*) and theology (*kalām*) where he used slightly different methods. In theology he followed al-Ġazālī in his strategy of integrating techniques, arguments, and teachings which were developed in *falsafa* into Muslim theological literature. In contrast to al-Ġazālī, however, he saw no need to hide his appreciative attitude toward *falsafa* behind overtly critical comments and public rejections. Other than al-Ġazālī, who read the

books of Ibn Sīnā and al-Fārābī very closely but never quotes them appreciatively, Fakhr al-Dīn engaged in an active discussion with the works of the *falāsifa* quoting them wherever necessary. While al-Ġazālī aimed at introducing some teachings of the *falāsifa* to the Muslim theologians without encouraging religious scholars to study the books of the *falāsifa* themselves, Fakhr al-Dīn had no reservation to make Muslim theologians familiar with the teachings of the *falāsifa* and to encourage them to study these books.

The integration of philosophical arguments into Muslim theology happened in books like *The Utmost Limits of Rational Knowledge*, *The Book of Forty Points (Kitāb al-Arbaʿīn)*, or in *The Higher Issues* that were all written for students of *kalām*. Fakhr al-Dīn's second great accomplishment happened in works that he would characterize as "philosophical" (*hikmī*). Whereas works in *kalām* offer rational interpretations of information that humans have received from revelation, the field of philosophy (*ḥikma*) allows only arguments based on reason. Here, in his books on philosophy, Fakhr al-Dīn engaged actively in a dialogue with Ibn Sīnā. He composed a commentary to Ibn Sīnā's most theological book, his *Pointers and Reminders (al-Ishārāt wa-l-tanbīhāt)*, where he inquires whether Ibn Sīnā's arguments are indeed convincing. His openly critical attitude toward *falsafa* was later criticized and countered in a super-commentary by Naṣīr al-Dīn al-Ṭūsī (1201–1274). Together with this super-commentary, Fakhr al-Dīn's commentary on the *Pointers and Reminders* became part of the *madrasa* education up until the twentieth century.

In the decade before his commentary on *Pointers and Reminders*, Fakhr al-Dīn had already written two philosophical *summae* where he presents a philosophical system that covers logic, the natural science, as well as metaphysics and philosophical theology. One of his earliest works is his *Eastern Investigations (al-Mabāḥith al-mashriqiyya)*, where he lays the groundwork for all his later philosophical achievements. A few years later, in 1184 he wrote a shorter version, *The Summary in Philosophy and in Logic (al-Mulakhkhaṣ fī l-ḥikma wa-l-manṭiq)*, MS Berlin, Staatsbibliothek, Or. oct. 623). This would

become a highly influential textbook in philosophy and have also a profound influence on Muslim theology (Eichner 2009). After producing a novel division of the field of philosophy, the book isolates philosophical problems and offers a discussion of all available solutions. Fakhr al-Dīn established this technique based on earlier developments by Abū l-Barakāt al-Baġdādī (d. c. 1165), a Jewish-born physician active in Baghdad and western Iran, who had published his *Book of Well-Considered Teachings (Kitāb al-Muʿtabar)* around the middle of the twelfth century. Al-Baġdādī's work is a comprehensive philosophical *summa* in three parts (logic, natural science, and metaphysics) and follows in its structure the Aristotelian curriculum as it had been established in late antiquity and also been followed, for instance, by Ibn Sīnā. Unlike Ibn Sīnā and other *falāsifa*, who rarely discuss the pros and cons of their adversaries' positions but are mostly concerned with presenting their own teachings, Abū l-Barakāt includes in each chapter a detailed discussion of different arguments and solutions to a problem, without, however, associating them to certain individual thinkers of the past. Rather, his discussion aimed, at least at the outset, at a balanced and sober comparison of all available solutions to a philosophical problem that would eventually lead to the adaptation of a "well-considered position" (*muʿtabar*), which he thought to be superior to its alternatives. It is most remarkable that in this project Abū l-Barakāt admits the arguments and positions of *kalām* theologians – most notably that of Ashʿarite *kalām* presented in al-Ġazālī's *Incoherence of the Philosophers* – to the debate of philosophical problems, the catalogue of which is largely determined by an Aristotelian curriculum of studies. Abū l-Barakāt's work was thus the first book in the Muslim philosophical tradition, where arguments from Aristotelian *falsafa* stood side-by-side with that of theological *kalām*, and where the position eventually adopted could be one or the other, or a combination of elements from both traditions, or, what was also possible, even both positions, when these were regarded as cum-possible.

Fakhr al-Dīn's own technique of writing about philosophical problems owes much to Abū

l-Barakāt's *Book of Well-Considered Teachings* in that he attempted to look at any given problem from various angles and would openly discuss and consider points of views that were earlier not regarded worthy of serious consideration. This applies particularly to the teachings of Ibn Sīnā, which impressed Fakhr al-Dīn tremendously. Fakhr al-Dīn's style of philosophical writing also adopts the *kalām* technique of "exhaustive investigation and disjunction" (*al-sabr wa-l-taqṣīm*), where the consequences or implications of a given position are fully investigated, individually discussed, and often dismissed and refuted one by one. These two features, that is, the comparison of various view-points and an exhaustive discussion of all their implications, lead to very thorough, yet at the same time quite tiresome writing. The discussions in Fakhr al-Dīn's two philosophical *summae* are often divided into various aspects and subspects, which may reach the number of several dozens. His texts remind the modern reader of academic or legal dissertations that use a system of variously leveled cardinal numbers (such as 1.2.6.3.14) to illustrate their internal divisions and their structure. In the Arabic tradition, they revolutionized the way scholars wrote about philosophy.

Fakhr al-Dīn's two *summae* introduced a novel division of the philosophical sciences that replaced the traditional ones in Aristotelian philosophy, based on the curriculum of studies as it had been handed down from Andronicus' edition of the works of Aristotle in the first century BCE. Fakhr al-Dīn regarded this new structure as his own original contribution (al-Rāzī, *al-Mabāḥith*, 2:557). In his *Summary in Philosophy and in Logic*, he maintains the most basic division of philosophy into (1) logic as a tool of philosophical inquiry and (2) that part of philosophy that deals with proper subject matters. This latter part is divided into three "books" (singl. *kitāb*): (1) *On the Things that Are Common [to All Being]* (*fī l-umūr al-āmma*), (2) *On Substances and Accidents* (*fī l-jawāhir wa-l-a'rād*), and (3) *On Philosophical Theology* (*fī al-ilm al-ilāhī*). The most significant change in Fakhr al-Dīn's division is the dissolution of metaphysics into two different parts (Eichner 2007). The roots of this dissolution lie

in Avicenna, who had already argued that metaphysics is concerned with two different subject matters and can thus be divided into two parts, namely, into metaphysics proper, that is, the science that deals with "the existent insofar as it is existent" (*al-mawjūd bi-mā huwa mawjūd*), and into *ilāhiyyāt*, that is, philosophical theology that deals with knowledge about the Creator and the First Cause, that is, God. While Ibn Sīnā did not develop this distinction into a proper division of metaphysics, some of his students and followers, most importantly Bahmanyār ibn al-Marzubān (d. 1066) and al-Lawkarī (d. after 1109), divided their sections on metaphysics accordingly.

Unlike Bahmanyār and al-Lawkarī, Fakhr al-Dīn also develops a new division of what was earlier called "the natural sciences" (*al-ṭabī'īyyāt*). The celestial bodies, for instance, are no longer treated in a segment that would represent the equivalent of Aristotle's book *On the Heavens* (*De caelo/Fī l-samā*), but rather in a chapter "on uncomposed bodies" (*fī l-aḡsām al-basīṭa*). That chapter, in turn, is part of a broader discussion of bodies (*fī l-aḡsām*), which together with souls and intellects form the three subdivisions in the segment on substances (*fī l-jawāhir*). The divisions in Fakhr al-Dīn's *Summary in Philosophy and in Logic* follow an Avicennan–Aristotelian analysis of the subject matter of philosophy. This analysis is no longer determined by such criteria as the place where these things are found ("in the heavens"), for instance, or whether they belong to a certain class of being like minerals, but rather by more systematic analytic criteria, such as the difference between substance and accident, whether the substance has a body or is immaterial, whether the bodies are composed or uncomposed, lifeless or living, and animated or inanimated. Overall, this leads to a new perspective on philosophy that will have a lasting influence on later works on these subjects. Fakhr al-Dīn's *Summary in Philosophy and in Logic* constitutes the basis out of which the most influential works in the Islamic philosophical tradition evolve. Among them are al-Bayḡāwī's (d. c. 1286) *Risings Lights* (*Ṭawālī' al-anwār*) and 'Aḡud al-Dīn al-Ījī's (d. 1355) *Book of Stations* (*Kitāb al-Mawāqif*), works that



together with the commentaries on them stood at the center of philosophical and theological instruction in Islam between the fifteenth up until the twentieth centuries. Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī is the most important link in the evolution from Avicennan philosophy to Post-Avicennan *kalām* (Eichner 2007).

While admired for their precision, Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī's philosophical encyclopedias are not always easy to read, and next to none of these texts have been translated into European languages. The *Summary in Philosophy and in Logic* still waits to be edited. In many of his works, stating his own opinion to any given philosophical problem was secondary to Fakhr al-Dīn who mostly aimed to provide an exhaustive discussion of all aspects and implication involved. This technique of exhaustive discussion is also applied in his monumental Qur'ān commentary *Keys to the Unknown (Maḥātib al-ḡayb)*, which is highly regarded for its well-structured discussion and rationalist analysis of textual and theological problems (Jaffer 2015). Given that its ultimate goal is the interpretation of revelation, however, the book does not count among Fakhr al-Dīn's philosophical works. In his nonphilosophical books, Fakhr al-Dīn wrote as an Ash'arite theologian who, like al-Ġazālī before him, modified certain Ash'arite teachings or augmented certain Ash'arite explanations with teachings and elements taken from philosophical literature, most importantly Ibn Sīnā. Here, he went even further than al-Ġazālī, who condemned the philosophical teaching that the world is created from past eternity and has no beginning in time as unbelief and apostasy. Fakhr al-Dīn disagreed stating, first of all, that this should not be a matter of religious doctrine since there is no scriptural basis to al-Ġazālī's position (al-Rāzī, *al-Maḥālib*, 4: 29–32; Griffel 2009: 116–120). A discussion of the various arguments on this subject leads to the conclusion that the *falāsifa* are unable to prove the pre-eternity of the world but that their adversaries are equally unable to prove the opposite. True to his spirit as a thorough scientist and philosopher, Fakhr al-Dīn left this question open (İskenderoğlu 2002).

Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī accepted al-Ġazālī's earlier "Rule of Interpretation" (*qānūn al-ta'wīl*) that aimed at resolving conflicts between reason and the literal wording of revelation. That rule says that all passages in revelation should be accepted in their literal meaning unless they violate the results of a valid demonstration (*burhān*). In such cases, allegorical interpretation (*ta'wīl*) must be applied and the text should be understood as a metaphor (al-Rāzī, *Ta'sīs al-taqdīs*; Heer 1993). In his most mature thought in *The Higher Issues (al-Maḥālib al-āliya)*, Fakhr al-Dīn also followed al-Ġazālī in his cosmological views: God creates events in this world through chains of secondary causes of which He is the only efficient cause (*fā'il*; Shihadeh 2006: 39–44). Ash'arites teach that humans do not "create" their own acts; rather these acts are "acquired" when God creates them within us. Like al-Ġazālī, Fakhr al-Dīn interprets the human's "acquisition" (*kasb*) of his or her actions in terms of secondary causality: the human's actions are causally determined by his or her motives (singl. *dā'in*), while the motive has causes that are grounded in the human's knowledge, which again is caused by events in the outside world. Thus, God creates the human acts through chains of secondary causes just like He creates every other event in this world. These teachings combine classical Ash'arite views about the predestination of human acts and their creation through God with an Avicennan–Aristotelian view of secondary causality. While human actions are causally determined by their proximate and remote causes and thus not the result of free choice (*ikhtiyār*), the notion of "acquisition" (*kasb*) expresses the fact that humans are given the impression that they choose freely. In an adaptation of one of Ibn Sīnā's dictums, Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī taught that the human is "a compelled actor in the guise of a free agent" (al-Rāzī, *al-Maḥālib*, 9:25; 9:57; Gimaret 1980: 134–153; Shihadeh 2006).

In some matters, Fakhr al-Dīn sides openly with the *falāsifa* against earlier Ash'arite teachings, such as on the important issue of how prophecy is verified. The Ash'arite school, with its insistence on a divine command theory of ethics, had always maintained that prophecy cannot be

proven by rationalist criteria. Judgments about the soundness of a prophet's revelation have no bearing on whether or not that person is truly a prophet. Prophecy can only be verified through a criterion that lies outside of revelation. In the case of earlier Ash'arites, this is the prophetic miracle – a suspension of the laws that govern creation – that God performs in order to prove the claims of a prophet. Realizing that the existence of prophetic miracles poses numerous problems for a rationalist theologian who accepts secondary causality, al-Ġazālī had already abolished this element of Ash'arite thought and replaced it with a criterion based in the Sufi experience (Griffel 2009: 194–201). Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī aims at a more radical change of Ash'arite doctrine by arguing that prophethood can be verified if the prophet's revelation calls for those actions that we know from reason are good and if it forbids those that we know from reason are bad (al-Rāzī, *al-Maṭālib*, 8:103; Abrahamov 2000; Shihadeh 2006: 129–142). He thus shifts from a divine command ethics toward an Aristotelian position about the moral good where the focus lies on the development of virtuous character traits (*akhlāq*). This had significant repercussions for various elements of Fakhr al-Dīn's theology, including his work on Islamic law (*fiqh*). Among the jurists of Islam, for instance, Fakhr al-Dīn is the one who most forcefully argued to make the rational consideration of public benefit (*maṣlaḥa*) a vital part of the jurists' decisions (Shihadeh 2006: 69–73; Opwis 2010: 88–131).

## Cross-References

- ▶ [Abū l-Barakāt al-Baġdādī](#)
- ▶ [Abū l-Faraj ibn al-'Ibrī \(Barhebraeus\)](#)
- ▶ [al-Fārābī, Abū Naṣr](#)
- ▶ [al-Ġazālī, Abū Ḥāmid Muḥammad](#)
- ▶ [Aristotelianism in the Greek, Latin, Syriac, Arabic, and Hebrew Traditions](#)
- ▶ [Ethics, Arabic](#)
- ▶ [Ibn 'Arabī, Abū Bakr Muḥammad Muḥyiddīn](#)
- ▶ [Ibn Sīnā, Abū 'Alī \(Avicenna\)](#)
- ▶ [Kalām](#)
- ▶ [Logic in the Arabic and Islamic World](#)
- ▶ [Logic, Arabic, in the Latin Middle Ages](#)
- ▶ [Metaphysics](#)
- ▶ [Natural Philosophy, Arabic](#)
- ▶ [Philosophy, Arabic](#)
- ▶ [Theology Versus Philosophy in the Arab World](#)
- ▶ [al-Ṭūsī, Naṣīr al-Dīn](#)

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## Realism

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### Abstract

Realism is a philosophical position that attributes extramental existence to certain kinds of entities, for example, universals, categories, relations, or propositions.

In philosophical language, the word realism is polysemous. One can be a realist, as opposed to an idealist, if one defends the view that material objects exist externally to us and independently of our sense experience; one can be a direct realist in the theory of perception if one holds that perception is a direct awareness of external objects, a moral realist if one believes that there are objective moral values, a scientific realist if one holds that scientific knowledge is about theory-independent phenomena and that such knowledge is possible even about nonobservable entities, a modal realist if one believes that possible worlds are as real as the actual world. In the history of medieval philosophy, the term realism is used first and foremost in the field of ontology. In this context, it indicates the fact that one attributes – in ways that vary greatly from case to case – extramental existence to certain kinds of entities. In consequence, a philosopher cannot be said to be a realist in any absolute or general fashion, but only in reference to universals, categories, relations, propositions, etc. A realist about Aristotelian categories, such as Duns Scotus for example, holds that the extramental world is divided into ten kinds or categories among which none can be reduced to another. A realist about relations holds that something more than the terms of the relation corresponds in extramental reality to our relational concepts. A realist about propositions, such as

Walter Burley, holds that propositions exist in the world. However, realism about universals is the position that concentrated the most defenders, and also the most vocal critics. Realism about universals holds that universals – first and foremost the genera and species of the category of substance, such as animal, hedgehog, squirrel, or man – are things outside the mind. The question can be formulated in the following terms: is universality a mode of being or is it only a property of language? The realist holds that it is a mode of being; however, this is about the only thesis we can attribute to all realists, as there are a number of different realist theories that cannot be reduced to each other.

Let us begin by distinguishing the two main families of realist theories, Platonic realism and Aristotelian realism. The difference between these theories is that Aristotelian realism defends the existence of universals in individuals, whereas Platonic realism grants them a mode of existence as separate from individuals.

This distinction of different types of realism draws on an older distinction, which dates back to middle Platonism, between two types of entities, in Greek *idea* (idea) and *eidos* (form). As noted by HB Gottschalk (1987): “from the early first century AD, it seems, Platonists distinguished the Platonic Form, ‘eternal pattern of natural objects’ from a Form immanent in particulars. The second comes straight from Aristotle and was designated by the term *eidos*, which had been used both by Plato and Aristotle, while the purely Platonic word *idea* was reserved for the first” (36.2:1144–1145). This distinction was refined by Neoplatonic authors in the so-called theory of the three states of the universal. This theory is a doctrinal product of the Neoplatonic exegesis of Aristotle’s *Categories* and Porphyry’s *Isagoge* and was inspired by the Neoplatonic project of seeking harmony between the philosophies of Plato and Aristotle. This theory is present in Ammonius (*In Porphyrii Isagogen*, 41:10–20), Elias (*In Porphyrii Isagogen*, 49:20–25), and David (*In Porphyrii Isagogen*, 120:8–14); it is

also found in Simplicius (*In Aristotelis Categorias*, 82:35, 83:22). It distinguishes: (1) Universals that are before the multiple (*pro tôn pollôn*) – these are the ideal models or paradigms, which subsist in the Demiurge’s intellect; (2) Universals in the multitude (*en tois pollois*): the participated forms, which are inseparable from matter and immanent to particulars; (3) Universals that are after the multiple (*epi tois pollois*): concepts, which are abstracted from immanent forms. This theory was transmitted to the Latin world through the intermediary of the translations of Avicenna’s *Logic*, Eustratios of Nicaea’s commentary to the *Nicomachean Ethics*, and through Simplicius’ commentary to the *Categories*. The Latin version of this theory that distinguishes between *ante rem*, *in re*, and *post rem* universals was soon to become a commonplace of scholastic thought on universals. This theory also involved speaking of the theological universal, the metaphysical universal (whose characteristic is *esse in multis*), and the logical universal (whose characteristic is *dici de multis*). The nature of the *ante rem* universal may be considered in a strong and in a weaker version: in the strong version, “*ante rem* universal” refers to a real entity that is independent from both the human and divine minds, a pure Platonic form; in the weaker version – of which a specifically Christian form was widespread – “*ante rem* universal” refers to a divine idea (all these ideas put together are supposed to constitute the totality of God’s knowledge). This theory allows us to identify precisely which entities are those whose ontological status is discussed; more fundamentally, the relative importance given to one type of entity with respect to others provides three types of ontology. Before characterizing them, let us note that these types of universals are not mutually exclusive – philosophers are frequently found to defend several of them in parallel. Note also that two types of universals are accepted as really existing by almost all medieval philosophers: the *ante rem* universals in their weak version and the *post rem* universals. The idea of divine ideas was naturally linked to the Christian belief of the philosophers in question and was not questioned, even by strongly antirealist authors such as Peter Abelard.

However, the emphasis put on these moderate *ante rem* universals indicates the importance which a philosopher gives to exemplarism in his philosophy and shows the level of Platonism of his thought. Similarly, *post rem* universals were universally accepted. No one thought of doing without concepts. The mode in which we grasp them – theory of abstraction versus illumination – may, indeed, be debated, but not their existence.

So we have three possible combinations: (1) Platonic ontology: defense of strong *ante rem* universals (this form is hardly found at all until the end of the Middle Ages). (2) Aristotelian realist ontology: rejection of strong *ante rem* universals, defense of *in re* universals. This theory is frequently encountered: it reflects Aristotle's frame of mind, rejects separated universals, and states their existence as being only in individuals. (3) Aristotelian particularist or nominalist ontology: everything that exists is particular; both strong *ante rem* universals and *in re* universals are rejected. Universality is a property of terms only. This illustrates the fact that the main debate that took place in the framework of Aristotelianism was that of accepting or rejecting *in re* universals. Authorities that can be called upon in defense of the first solution include Augustine and Priscian; upholders of both (2) and (3) can call upon passages from Aristotle's texts.

A passage from Priscian's *Institutiones grammaticae* (XVII, 44; GL3, 135: 1–10) in which he speaks of the "generic and specific forms of things, which exist in an intelligible way in the divine mind before they come forth in bodies" played an important role in establishing this theory, just as did Augustine's question *De ideis* (*De diversis quaestionibus* 46), which transmitted the theory of Platonic universals as divine ideas. Augustine says that these ideas are in God's mind (*in ipsa mente Creatoris*) and nowhere else, thus confirming the Middle- and Neoplatonist understanding of ideas as the Demiurge's thoughts. Conversely, the rediscovery of Aristotle's *Metaphysics* played against strong *ante rem* universals. Aristotle's criticism of Platonic ideas clearly provoked scholastic mistrust of separate universals. The *Organon*, through three fundamental texts – Chap. 5 of the *Categories*,

Chap. 7 of the *Peri hermeneias*, and a passage from the *Posterior Analytics* – provides most of the arguments in favor of *in re* universals. Chapter 5 of the *Categories* is central on three theses: genera and species are substances, genera and species are beings (*onta* in Greek), and genera and species exist thanks to primary substances. Chapter 7 of the *Peri hermeneias* shows the same way by stating that among things (*tôn pragmatôn*), some are universal and others are particular. The third text, which was unknown to early medieval realists, is *Posterior Analytics* II, 19 which was interpreted as describing the universal to be both an abstract concept, "the one apart from the many" (*parà tà pollà, unum praeter multa*) and an immanent form which "is identically present in them all." On the other hand, a philosopher who only believed in the existence of *post rem* universals could refer to the well-known passage from the *De anima* in which Aristotle states that the universal animal is either nothing or is posterior (I, 1402 b720).

The medieval debate mainly focused on the admission or rejection of *in re* universals, and it did so within the framework of the exegesis of Porphyry's *Isagoge*. In the *Isagoge* (ed. Busse, 1:10–15), Porphyry states – without giving his own answer – three questions on the ontological status of universals: do genera and species exist or are they only concepts? Are they bodies or incorporeals? Are they separated from the sensibles [i.e., the individuals] or do they exist in them? In this passage, Porphyry codifies the alternatives and possible answers to the question of the ontological status of universals (it is with this passage in mind that the theory of the three states of the universal was elaborated).

The history of medieval realism had ups and downs, quiet periods during which realism was an implicitly accepted doctrine that ended in crisis when virulent criticism cast strong doubts on the soundness of the theory. Roughly, we can identify three stages in the medieval history of realism. A first phase began with John Scottus Eriugena and lasted until the beginning of the twelfth century and William of Champeaux; this period ended abruptly with the powerful criticism of immanent realism by Peter Abelard. The second

phase of development, that of the so-called moderate realism of the Doctors of Scholasticism, began at the University of Paris and included, in different ways, Robert Kilwardby, Thomas Aquinas, Duns Scotus, and the first Walter Burley; it was deeply shaken by William of Ockham's questioning of the soundness of realism in any form whatsoever (*Sent.* I, dist. II, q. 3–7, pp. 74–266). However, realists were not led by Ockham's criticism to abandon their theory, but proposed new versions of it – this is the third phase, illustrated by the late Burley, Wyclif, and their followers.

During the early Middle Ages, realism was mainly defended by four thinkers: John Scottus Eriugena, Odo of Cambrai, Anselm of Canterbury, and William of Champeaux, in his first theory of universals, the so-called material essence realism. There was no proper dispute about universals during the early Middle Ages until Peter Abelard; realism developed without being argued against a rival theory. However, early medieval realism does constitute a determinate metaphysical theory, which can be summarized in six theses. The theory states (1) the real existence of universals, that is, of the natural kinds to which particulars belong; (2) that universals do not exist separately from particulars; (3) that they constitute the substantial being of the particulars which are subordinate to them; (4) that a genus or species is entirely and simultaneously present in each of its subdivisions; (5) that the specific substance is common to all members of a species; and (6) that individuals of the same species are individuated by a unique bundle of accidents. In this theory, the universal man is taken to exist simultaneously in each of its particulars and to be fully realized in them. Socrates is composed of the universal man – which constitutes his essence, common to all the members of the species – and of a bundle of accidents, the *collectio proprietatum* in Anselm's words. There is no essential individuation of particulars. An individual does not have its own essence – essential being is provided by the specific universal. From the point of view of substance, Socrates is no different from man. The thesis of the complete realization of the universal in each individual follows Aristotle's statement

that substances do not admit of more or less. The theory also follows Aristotle's immanentism since universals have no existence separate from individuals. In the case of Eriugena (*Periphyseon* 463A; ed. Jeuneau, vol. I, 32:887–893) and in that of William, according to Abelard's testimony (*Logica ingredientibus*, ed. Geyer 12:27–32), this realism goes with realism about the categories that are described as being the ten highest genera of being, *decem genera rerum* in Eriugena's words.

In the thirteenth century, a different kind of realist theory appeared. The intellectual background of this period was very different from that of the early Middle Ages. The thirteenth century is characterized by the rediscovery of the entire corpus of Aristotle's writings and the beginning of the practice of *quaestio* in the recently founded universities. This in turn implies organizing arguments into *pro* and *contra*, and leads to an increased determination of positions, and through more explicit distinctions, to a higher degree of technicality of positions. The discovery of Avicenna's writings provided two central new doctrinal elements: the theory of the three states of the universal and Avicenna's distinction between a nature as such and the universality that a nature can have in the mind. Animal in itself is taken to be neither universal nor particular – to quote a famous saying: "Horseness (*equinitas*) is only horseness"; the nature is neutral to either extramental or intramental existence. However, if to this nature are added spatiotemporal accidents, one obtains an individual substance, but if the mind's universality is added to it, one obtains the universal notion. Also, developments in philosophy of language mean that realist doctrines from that time also involved a semantic theory (from the twelfth century and Peter Abelard onward, to give a theory of universals is also, perhaps even primarily, to answer the problem of the reference of common names). Besides some "generous" ontologies, such as that of Robert Grosseteste, who posits among universals creative ideas in his commentary to the *Posterior Analytics*, and Albert the Great who, in his commentary to the *Isagoge*, explored in detail the theoretical possibilities of the Avicennian doctrine of the three states of the universal, the constitution of



the so-called moderate realism can be observed. Although each philosopher who defends this type of theory does so through his own particular variation of it, a number of common points can be noted between the various representatives of what historians have taken the habit of calling the moderate realist view. This view has some features that can be found in various authors. First, the acceptance of the framework provided by the doctrine of the three states of the universal. Universals are clearly not self-subsistent entities, but exist only in particulars as their main metaphysical components. Disagreements persist as to their mode of being outside the mind. The most common opinion is that universals exist potentially (*in potentia*) outside the mind, and actually (*in actu*) within the mind.

Although it touches the borders of what may still be considered as a *realist* theory, Duns Scotus' theory of common natures (*Ordinatio* 2 d. 3 p. 1 qq. 1–6) deserves particular mention, partly in reason of the historical role it was to hold. His theory is based on two elements: the “common nature” (*natura communis*) and the principle of individuation, the “haecceity” (*haecceitas*) or individual differentia. Following Avicenna, Scotus holds that the common nature is “indifferent” to existing in any number of individuals, and in that way it is common; it is also prior to being universal or particular. But it has extramental existence only in the particular things in which it exists, and in them it is always “contracted” by the haecceity (the individual differentia, which is also called a “contracting differentia”). So the common nature humanity exists in both Socrates and Plato, although in Socrates it is made individual (or contracted) by Socrates haecceity and in Plato by Plato's haecceity. When the haecceity is combined with the common nature, the result is a concrete individual, like Socrates, that differs from everything else. The humanity of Socrates is particular and nonrepeatable, as is the humanity of Plato; yet, humanity itself is common and repeatable, and it is ontologically prior to any particular humanity. The mode of unity of the common uncontracted nature is a real unity that is “less than numerical unity.” However, common humanity does not exist in individuals. It has been

suggested that the reason for which we can state that Socrates' contracted nature is, in a way, “the same” as Plato's contracted nature, despite the fact that contracted natures are completely individualized by the individual differentiae, is the following: Socrates' contracted human nature retains a real potency to be the contracted nature of Plato, and vice versa, while this does not hold in the case of the contracted cat-nature of Felix.

The fourteenth century was a new golden age for realism, despite Ockham's criticism. Burley, whose first theories had been criticized by Ockham, gave a new version of his theory, and Wyclif defended a realism that later inspired the movement of the Oxford realists and, in the fifteenth century, of the Prague realists. Burley holds that a universal actually exists in an individual, not as a singular, but as a universal. The universal exists wholly as one and the same in each individual belonging to it. (Burley describes as follows the position he upholds: “*Alia est opinio, que ponit universale habere esse solum in suis singularibus et quod universale secundum se totum est in quolibet suo singulari.*” *Tractatus de universalibus*, ed. Wöhler, 20:16–17.) According to Burley, the universal is one, not in the way in which an individual is one, but in a way that is peculiar to it. He distinguishes “numerical identity in the strict sense” and “specific or generic identity” which denotes a genuine identity relation, the relation which a universal bears to itself. He states that universals exist outside the mind and that they are really distinct in the individual, but rejects the thesis according to which the universal has separate existence. Wyclif holds that the universal really exists in the particulars and that it is identical to them (*De ente in communi*, Chap. 5, p. 58). There is a real identity between the universal and the individual, since they share the same empirical reality (that of individuals). Only reason allows us to distinguish in an entity that which is universal from that which is particular; this distinction is only formal. Universals are really (*realiter*) identical to, but formally (*formaliter*) distinct from their individuals. Universals and individuals are the same identical things if conceived as first intentions, and differ from each other if conceived as second intentions (i.e., considered as universals and individuals, in this case

they have opposite constituent principles: *communicabilitas*, i.e., the disposition to be common, and *incommunicabilitas*, the impossibility of being common, respectively). Wyclif's theory involves a revised version of the three states of the universal: he states that a universal may be (1) universal by causality, (2) universal by community ("a thing shared by many suppositis [individuals understood as bearer of universals and of accidents] such as human nature"), or (3) universal by representation (*De univ.* i, 6–22). Wyclif's thought was continued by the "Oxford Realists" – the Englishmen Robert Alynngton, William Milverley, William Penbygull, Roger Whelpdale and John Tarteys, the German Johannes Sharpe, and the Italian Paul of Venice.

## Cross-References

- ▶ [Albert the Great](#)
- ▶ [Anselm of Canterbury](#)
- ▶ [Augustine](#)
- ▶ [Categories](#)
- ▶ [Eustratios of Nicaea](#)
- ▶ [Ibn Sīnā, Abū 'Alī \(Avicenna\)](#)
- ▶ [John Duns Scotus](#)
- ▶ [John Scottus Eriugena](#)
- ▶ [John Wyclif](#)
- ▶ [Peter Abelard](#)
- ▶ [Platonism](#)
- ▶ [Robert Grosseteste](#)
- ▶ [Schools in the Twelfth Century](#)
- ▶ [Universals](#)
- ▶ [Walter Burley](#)
- ▶ [William of Champeaux](#)
- ▶ [William of Ockham](#)

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## Reason of State

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### Abstract

A term of art, originally Italian, becoming common usage in other European vernaculars in the late sixteenth century. It meant practical reflection, albeit in writing and general in form, about all aspects of statecraft (reason = reasoning, discussing, considering, but also a ground or justification for acting; state = government, the prince's position, the institutional

order of a “commonwealth” or “principality”). It claimed practical usefulness in virtue of its grounding in experience and history, contrasting itself with “mirrors of princes,” which were supposedly ignorant of the realities of politics. More narrowly, reason of state meant a “Machiavellian” disregard for legal, moral, and religious considerations when the “interests of the state” or “necessity” required it. Particularly contentious were the justifiability of dishonesty, duplicity, breach of faith and even treaty obligations, violence against opponents and competitors, illegal taxation, disregard of the claims of traditional institutions and officeholders, and the practice of religious toleration. Opponents of “reason of state” attempted to demonstrate that, on the contrary, adherence to religion, morality, and legality was the best policy, in that it earned providential rewards, but also that in strictly pragmatic terms it was most likely to bring political success. However, these proponents of “true reason of state” acknowledged that strict adherence to these norms was sometimes impossible, and when it was, statesmen must attempt to avoid the greater evil. Having become the subject of a vast literature and even a standard university topic, reason of state faded as an issue in the later seventeenth century. *Realpolitik* from the nineteenth century onwards resembles it, with the state representing a morality superior to the norms of legality and private morality, a view in turn contested by advocates of human rights and international morality.

Reason of state is often identified with the contention that the state and its agents are not bound by some of the rules of ordinary morality; more theoretically, that the well-being of the state is the ultimate value, which overrides, or is autonomous of, the demands of morality or religion (e.g., Meinecke). But no early modern author explicitly endorsed the latter contention, whereas no one who acknowledged political authority as legitimate could deny the former (private persons were not, for example, morally entitled to

ennoble, expropriate, imprison, interrogate, execute, fight wars, etc). The distinctive identity of early modern reason of state is better understood in terms of its specific linguistic and historical context.

The adoption of the term presupposes that *stato*, state, *état*, etc. were already familiar in the sixteenth century, usually to designate princely regimes. Reason of state became common usage among political cognoscenti in Italian in the 1540s (it does not occur in Machiavelli), in other European languages from the 1580s, but in German only in the early seventeenth century; the Latinization “ratio status” is also relatively late. This was a time of unparalleled religio-political conflict and belligerence.

Botero’s *Della ragion di stato* (1589) was the first book to use the term in its title. Like most authors, both Catholics and Protestants, who articulated the concept, he explained it as meaning discussion of the “means for preserving stable rule over a people” to which his book was devoted, the *ars gubernandi* as it came to be called. Botero noted, however, that reason of state was used in a more restricted sense to refer to extraordinary actions required by emergencies, and also to the noxious attitudes and policies prescribed by Machiavelli, and all too commonly practiced. Machiavelli was already a byword for contempt for morality, legality, and religion. Gentillet (1576) had blamed the St Bartholomew’s Day Massacre of Huguenots on the “Machiavellian philosophy” of Catherine de’ Medici and her court. “Machiavellians,” “atheists,” and “politicians” (a word already acquiring pejorative connotations) were commonly linked. “True reason of state” (e.g., Ribadeneira), “prudence,” *civilis prudentia* or *civilis doctrina* (Lipsius, Mariana), or *arcana* (Clapmarius, Besold) was presented as in part a critique of Machiavelli’s “false and impious” reason of state. Its authors nevertheless made significant concessions to it, although their endorsement of Machiavellian propositions was equivocal and circumspect (e.g., Boccalini, Mariana). Most of them were fully conversant with *The Prince* and other works of Machiavelli, which became increasingly available in Italian and in translation

in the latter years of the century. His thought was often misrepresented (he did not, for example, actually say that “the end justifies the means,” the epitome of Machiavellianism). But he invited such misinterpretation by his delight in shocking, his incomplete trains of thought, extravagant generalizations, limited political experience and knowledge of history, which Bodin, Possevino, and Fitzherbert, for example, pointedly criticized, and what to Anti-Machiavellians seemed parodies of Christian religion and moral philosophy.

Reason of state thus presented itself as practical reflection about *politica*, intended for princes and their advisers, and based on the twin teachers of prudence: experience and history. These were summarized in maxims which, with the aid of new or newly fashionable concepts, served to express a cynical and pessimistic view of politics and human nature. The disorder of the time evidently made such a view particularly plausible. Fashionable concepts included “interest” as the summary term for motives, usually selfish ones, the terminological family politics, *police*, *policy*, *politica*, *politique(s)*, *Polizey*, etc., and new coinages like “statecraft.” Maxims passed from book to book included: a state cannot be governed with rosaries; a man who does not know how to dissemble does not know anything about ruling; *oderint dum metuant* (it does not matter if they [i.e., the subjects] hate, so long as they fear); “dead men don’t bite” etc. Tacitus became fashionable as an appropriately excoriating political commentator on *arcana imperii* (the secrets of ruling). Lipsius and Ammirato set out their reason of state in the form of commentaries on his work, and even Botero, who paired him with Machiavelli as authorities for those who preferred reason of state to conscience, evidently found him highly instructive.

Reason of state was premised on pessimistic “descriptions” of politics and human nature. These were, however, neither new nor heterodox: Aristotle and Augustine could be cited in support. But it also offered prescriptions premised on these descriptions. Mirrors for princes and moral philosophy instructed rulers to advance the well-being and safety of their subjects and also their virtue and their *pietas*, by defending and

upholding true religion. They moreover required princes to respect moral, legal, and religious norms and obligations, not least in order to set a good example to their subjects. The premise was that they could do all this without endangering themselves or their state. The reason of state literature could not base itself on this premise, because it envisaged princes whose positions and states were vulnerable to competing factions and allegiances, civil war, and foreign enemies, who often joined forces with domestic dissidents and rebels. In these conflicts religion, relied on by all known peoples as the principal social cement, was itself the foremost cause or justification of division and insubordination.

Reason of state thinkers, therefore, argued for the restoration of religious uniformity and the suppression of religious dissent (“heresy”), by whatever means might prove effective. Religious toleration of dissenting politically organized communities was decried as “false reason of state,” a subordination of the religious obligations of rulers to “policy” which was both impious and contrary to political prudence, since religion was the indispensable underpinning for political obedience, and “heretics” were by nature insubmissive. Bodin and the French *politiques* were counted atheists and Machiavellians for advocating it. However, where the enforcement of religious uniformity demonstrably endangered the prince, the state, or favored minorities, Catholic as well as Protestant reason of state was perfectly prepared to endorse religious toleration. The justifications were political “necessity,” which “has no law,” as another maxim said, and the orthodox moral principle of choosing the lesser evil (*ad maiora mala vitanda*), the greater evil being the weakening or even elimination of a prince or regime. “Necessity” thus licensed departures from strict rules of religion and morality. It was a concept with a respectable pedigree in moral philosophy and casuistry, which recognized that there can be no moral duty to do what is morally impossible.

Again, partly but not only in the same context of religio-political conflict, reason of state licensed extralegal, duplicitous, or possibly violent measures against domestic political competitors, conspirators, and factions, and in the

conduct of foreign affairs generally. With respect to “heretics,” especially Calvinists, Botero argued for divide and rule, depriving them of public office, arms, and resources (even by extra-legal taxation), destroying their morale by fomenting suspicions among them, eliminating ringleaders, and operating swiftly and in secrecy to stamp out rebellion and conspiracy at birth. Reason of state endorsed the expulsion or forcible conversion of the *moriscos* in Spain. In short, prudent and religious ends evidently licensed efficacious means, however morally suspect. Even assassination might be justifiable, as when the Emperor Ferdinand II authorized Wallenstein’s assassination in 1634. Overriding legal and moral duties was *a fortiori* permissible in diplomacy and in war, in which morality was always at a discount (*inter arma silent leges*), despite natural law and *ius gentium*. Reason of state could even justify alliances with heretics and Turks against coreligionists.

Not only adherence to legality, but all the traditional princely virtues must be tempered by “prudence.” Thus clemency might need to be overridden by the demands of exemplary justice. Liberality, again, must not be confused with profligacy, and husbanding and increasing public resources was the prince’s duty (Contzen). This meant increasing taxation. Political resistance to increased taxation was justified by appeals to traditional legal rights and “fundamental laws.” Bodin’s theory of sovereignty could be used to neutralize such “legal” justifications for political resistance (even if he himself had not done so in the case of taxation). But reason of state was not principally juridical in character: it was always (in its most favorite term) “political,” that is concerned with interests, ways, and means, and what worked, and it was the requirements of ruling, irrespective of legal “niceties” that counted.

Duties of veracity and keeping promises presented special difficulties, given the absolute theological prohibition of lying as in all circumstances evil; moreover treaties, contracts and promises were manifestly indispensable for civil and diplomatic relations, which depended on consistent adherence to the natural law principle *pacta sunt*

*servanda* (promises/treaties must be kept). Machiavelli had notoriously argued that princes might need to break their word, on the grounds that in a wicked world, inflexible fidelity merely made them vulnerable. Reason of state here maintained a strictly anti-Machiavellian position, even insisting on keeping faith with heretics. All the same, duplicity might be indispensable, and various distinctions needed to be made. Secretiveness was a positive virtue in princes and counsellors, and essential for successful implementation of policy. But it was morally unproblematic since it violated no other duty. Again, amphibology (ambiguous speech) relied on the gullibility of others, and was therefore their problem. Simulation and dissimulation (pretending not to know or want or be what one does know or want, or vice versa) seem to fall into the same category, even though Aquinas had condemned them as lying. The Jesuit theologian Lessius straightforwardly allowed even outright lies as the lesser evil in very serious matters, such as defending the innocent. His friend Lipsius more cautiously distinguished three degrees of duplicity: he allowed dissimulation and secrecy (distrust) as “slight” and morally inconsiderable, bribery (of counsellors of foreign princes) and deception more reluctantly as “moderate,” but condemned violations of faith, removal of privileges and open aggression against foreign countries as unjustifiable. The heading for his discussion was “mixed prudence”: that is, mixing *honestas*, prudence, and deception.

Reason of state in the narrower sense became a standard *topos* in German Protestant Universities in the seventeenth century, as well as in manuals of statecraft such as Contzen’s, and then fell out of fashion. Nineteenth-century proponents of *Realpolitik* may be regarded as continuators of the tradition.

## Cross-References

- ▶ [Mirrors for Princes](#)
- ▶ [Natural Law](#)
- ▶ [Natural Rights](#)
- ▶ [Political Philosophy](#)

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## Remigio dei Girolami

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### Abstract

Remigio dei Girolami, O.P. (c. 1245–1319) was a Florentine Dominican preacher, teacher, and theologian. He studied with Thomas Aquinas at the University of Paris. Remigio spent most of his career as lector of theology at Santa Maria Novella, the Dominican house in Florence. Dante may have been one of his students, but the evidence for this is inconclusive. Through his numerous sermons and treatises, he transmitted scholastic ideas to his fellow Dominicans and the people of Florence, as well as applying them to the local situation. *Contra falsos ecclesie professores* (before 1298), Remigio's treatise on the church, shows him to have been a moderate papal hierocrat. His political treatises, *De bono communi* (1302) and *De bono pacis* (1304), were written in response to the 1301–1302 factional crisis in Florence between black and white Guelfs. Often considered to be extreme examples of medieval anti-individualism, they are an interesting adaptation of the theory of wholes and parts and of the theological concept of the order of charity to a specific political situation. In *De bono communi*, Remigio argues that the common good (which he identifies with the good of the commune) ought to come before particular good by inserting the commune into the traditional order of charity (God, self, neighbor, body), either before or after the self, depending on whether the commune is considered to be an integral or a universal whole.



Remigio dei Girolami was a Florentine Dominican teacher, preacher, and theologian. His family, the Girolami, were wool merchants active in Florentine politics; his father, brother, and nephews served as priors, the executive body in the Florentine commune, multiple times in the second half of the thirteenth century. Remigio studied the liberal arts at the University of Paris, then joined the Dominican order there, probably in 1268, and studied with Thomas Aquinas (he refers to Thomas in one of his sermons as *magister meus*). He returned to Paris, probably in 1298–1300, as bachelor of the *Sentences*, receiving his magisterium in theology in 1304 from Pope Benedict XI. Remigio held several offices in the Dominican order; for example, he attended general chapters in 1292 and 1301 and he served as prior of the Roman province from 1309 to 1311. Remigio spent most of his career as lector of theology at Santa Maria Novella, the Dominican house in Florence. His prologues, or introductory lectures to his courses, show that he must have taught the Bible, the *Sentences*, and Aristotle's *Ethics*, which were the standard texts at Dominican theological *studia*. Remigio is significant as a transmitter of scholastic ideas through his teaching and preaching and for his application of those ideas to real-life situations in the commune.

Some scholars think Remigio's students may have included Dante. In the *Convivio*, Dante states that after the death of Beatrice in 1290, he sought consolation *ne le scuole de li religiosi e a le disputazioni de li filosofanti* ("in the schools of the religious and the disputations of the philosophers"; *Conv.* 2.12.7.). It has long been assumed that Dante was referring to the Franciscan school at Santa Croce and the Dominican school at Santa Maria Novella, whose lector in the 1290s and for much of Dante's lifetime was Remigio. There is no direct evidence for this connection, however, and neither figure ever mentions the other. Dominican statutes forbade outsiders from attending lectures in philosophy (which Santa Maria Novella, as a *studium* in theology, did not offer anyway), but disputations were more public. It is possible that Dante attended either Remigio's

theology lectures or his disputations, perhaps thereby learning his Aristotelianism, but the question remains open.

Dante may or may not have heard Remigio teach, but he definitely could have heard him preach. Remigio's sermons are collected into three manuscript volumes preserved in the Biblioteca Nazionale in Florence. They are arranged into Lenten sermons and sermons *De tempore*, *De sanctis*, and *De diversis materiis*. This last category includes several sermons preached on communal occasions, such as sermons on peacemaking, a group of sermons to the Florentine priors, and reception sermons for various visiting dignitaries. For example, Remigio preached at the official reception of Charles of Valois, brother of King Philip IV of France, who as "peacemaker" presided over the black Guef takeover of Florence and the exile of the whites, including Dante and Remigio's nephews, in 1301–1302.

Another codex in the Biblioteca Nazionale contains Remigio's treatises on a variety of subjects, such as *Contra falsos ecclesie professores*, *De bono communi*, *De bono pacis*, *De peccato usure*, *De subiecto theologie*, and *Divisio scientie*. Other works include quodlibets, a commentary on the Song of Songs, a set of biblical distinctions, and a theological encyclopedia, *Extractio ordinata per alphabetum*. Remigio spent his final years annotating and cross-referencing his works in his own hand to facilitate their use as preaching aids for his fellow Dominicans.

The thesis of Remigio's treatise on the church, the *Contra falsos ecclesie professores* (probably written before 1298), is "how the catholic church knows all things." In 99 chapters, Remigio proves how the church "knows" the liberal arts, the natural sciences, medicine, ethics, metaphysics, the mechanical arts, and theology. Chapters 6–37 of *Contra falsos*, on how the church "knows" geometry, are usually read as the equivalent of a treatise on ecclesiology. Geometry measures greatness, and the church is great in size, strength, and authority. Remigio's views on papal power place him as a moderate hierocrat who believes in the ultimate superiority of spiritual power but

grants considerable autonomy and value to temporal power.

In Remigio's political treatises *De bono communi* (1302) and *De bono pacis* (1304), written in response to events in Florence, he applied the theory he had learned at the university to the factional conflicts between the black and white parties, identifying the common good (*bonum commune*) with the good of the commune (*bonum communis*). *De bono communi* was probably composed to be a source for sermons; it demonstrates its thesis, that the common good ought to be preferred to particular good, with proofs by authority, examples, and reason (followed by a set of objections and replies), which were the three methods of developing a medieval sermon. *De bono pacis* has a narrower, more legalistic focus; it argues that property losses sustained in the factional conflicts ought to be forgiven for the good of peace.

Remigio's political philosophy is usually considered to be an extreme example of medieval anti-individualism. In an oft-quoted phrase, Ernst Kantorowicz termed him "that curious thomistic proto-Hegelian" (Kantorowicz 1957). Scholars cite such passages from *De bono communi* as *Qui non est civis non est homo* ("he who is not a citizen is not a man") and his supposed statement that a citizen ought to be willing to go to hell in place of his commune as evidence of Remigio's extreme exaltation of the common good at the expense of individual worth.

Remigio expresses his most extreme statements about the community's superiority over the individual in terms of the whole's priority over the part. These extreme statements, however, are reserved for when he considers the community as an integral whole – Florence – whose parts cannot even exist outside the whole. Usually ignored, however, is that Remigio is well aware that a city is also a universal whole – the Florentines – whose parts are simultaneously wholes in themselves and a part of a larger whole.

The double nature of the whole influences Remigio's use of the *ordo caritatis*, or order of charity, a key concept for understanding his political philosophy. Based on the Gospel commandment to love God and your neighbor as yourself,

the order of charity was developed in the context of commentary on Song of Songs 2:4, *Ordinavit in me caritatem*, "He ordered charity in me." The standard order, as given by Augustine in *De doctrina Christiana* (1.23) and quoted in Peter Lombard's *Sentences* (3.28.1), is God, self, neighbor, body. To argue that the common good takes preference over individual good, Remigio places the commune into the traditional order, as one of the objects of love required of a Christian. Where it goes in the sequence, however, depends on whether he is thinking of the commune as a universal whole or an integral whole.

When the commune is considered as an integral whole, then it is to be loved immediately after God and before the self. When it is thought of as a universal whole, then, as a collection of neighbors, it is placed after love of self. Faced with a situation in which parts (in Latin, *partes*, the same word as "parties") were destroying the whole, Remigio emphasized the city's integral unity and the obligations of the parts to love it more than themselves. But he did not forget the existence of individual citizens who must love both themselves and their neighbors. The view of Remigio as an extreme anti-individualist oversimplifies and obscures the distinctiveness of his political thought.

## Cross-References

- ▶ [Aristotelianism in the Greek, Latin, Syriac, Arabic, and Hebrew Traditions](#)
- ▶ [Corporation Theory](#)
- ▶ [Dante Alighieri](#)
- ▶ [Mereology](#)
- ▶ [Thomas Aquinas, Political Thought](#)
- ▶ [Thomism](#)

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## Richard Billingham

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## Abstract

Richard Billingham has become famous for his handbook *Speculum puerorum terminus est in quem resolvitur propositio* (*Mirror of Youngsters or a Term in Which a Proposition is Analyzed*). The book gained wide popularity in Europe, especially in eastern Europe and Italy, as can be gathered from the great number of manuscripts and commentaries handed down to us. The tract is on the analysis of a proposition with the help of an analysis of an analyzable term used in it. Once such an analysis has been completed, it is easier to assign the reference (*suppositio*) or another property of a term and to establish the truth of the proposition. The *probatio*-theory was especially used in natural science, for example, by William of Heytesbury (before 1313–1372/3).

## Life

We do not know much about Richard Billingham's life. He was a fellow of Merton College from 1344

to 1361; in 1357, he was a subwarden (still in 1361); and in 1349, a regent Master of Arts. He was also a bachelor in theology. In Merton the Oxford “Calculatores” were active, of whom Walter Burley, Thomas Bradwardine, William of Heytesbury, and Richard Kilvington are well known. These philosophers applied mathematical and semantical instruments to natural science.

## Thought

In his tract *De significato propositionis* (*On the Signification of the Proposition*) Billingham asks whether an affirmative or negative proposition is true on the condition that it signifies precisely as it is. In his solution of this question he says that he will reject any form of signification of a proposition that implies the existence of an entity signified by the complex whole; by this he probably means a *complexe significabile*, although this expression is not mentioned here. The theory of the *complexe significabile* was advocated by a.o. Adam of Wodeham (c. 1298–1358) and Gregory of Rimini (c. 1300–1358). According to Richard a proposition like “Socrates runs” means the contingent reality to which the subject term refers. One should not imagine, Billingham says, that, when “Socrates exists” is true, there should be some independent entities that can be labeled “that Socrates exists.”

In his *Speculum puerorum* Richard presents the theory of the proof (*probatio*) of propositions or analysis of propositions. *Probare* (“to prove,” or, in this context, better “to analyze”) refers to the analysis of a proposition with the help of the analysis of a complex term used in the proposition. Once such an analysis has been carried out, it is easier to assign the reference (*suppositio*), and the truth of the proposition can be determined. The analysis is the direct and immediate aim of the theory, whereas the ultimate, but indirect concern is to determine truth or falsity.

Richard divides terms into immediate and mediate ones. A term is called “immediate” with respect to cognition. In this case there is a relation between the human mind and the individual thing

known, he says. Examples of immediate terms are nouns such as “I,” “you,” “this,” and verbs such as “is.” A pronoun like “this” is immediate; a transcendent term such as “being” is immediate because it refers to an individual reality, because it is the first thing known by the intellect. As to the question whether *Hoc est* (“this is”) is immediate, Billingham answers in the affirmative. “This is” is directly immediate, he says, while “this was” (past tense) and “this will be” (future tense) are indirectly immediate.

Billingham does not explicitly define “mediate terms.” Mediate terms are those that are not immediate, and therefore they can be analyzed. In this analysis, one should pay attention to the first analyzable term, that is, the common, or mediate term, in contradistinction to an immediate term.

There are three kinds of mediate terms:

1. *Termini resolubiles* (“resoluble terms”) such as “man,” which is a common term and has inferior things under it. The analysis of “a man runs” (*homo currit*) is as follows: “this runs, this is a man, therefore a man runs.”  
In a joint article Ashworth and Spade note that “this is a man” should, according to Billingham’s theory, be a “mediate” proposition. This is hard to understand, they feel, for it seems to be a basic proposition.
2. *Termini exponibiles* (“exponible terms”), such as *incipit* (“begins”), which can be explained by two or more propositions; for instance “this begins to exist” is explained by “this exists now and not immediately before it was such that it existed.” Thus the exponible term is analyzed.
3. *Termini officiabiles* (“functionalizable terms”); these precede a proposition, such as “it is contingent”; for example, “it is contingent that you exist” is analyzed into the proposition “you exist is contingent which precisely signifies that you exist, therefore it is contingent that you exist.” Functionalizable verbs denote not only an act of knowledge (for instance “to know,” in “you know a man to exist” is analyzed into: “you know such a proposition ‘a man exists,’ which precisely signifies that a

man exists, therefore you know a man to exist”), but also modalities (for example, “potentiality,” “necessity”).

Richard pays special attention to the “expository syllogism,” that is, a syllogism with a middle term which twice is singular, referring to individual things. The notion of expository syllogism goes back to Aristotle. The example Richard gives is the one given above to illustrate the analysis by resolution: “this runs, this is a man, therefore a man runs.” Having established this analysis of a proposition by way of resolvable terms, he claims to have arrived at the basis of the so-called expository syllogism. One should realize that a proposition on account of its resolvable term could be proven on account of a lower term, hence the rule: *ab inferiori ad superius distributive et sine dictione habente vim distributionis vel negationis valet consequentia* (“the inference from an inferior to a superior in a distributive way and without a word having the power of distribution or negation is valid”). Billingham notes that it is upon this rule that the expository syllogism is built. This syllogism is the basis of all other syllogisms. According to Richard, the expository syllogism obtains in syllogisms of all figures. In the third figure it is most evident, however.

The tract in which we find Richard’s theory on inferences (*consequentiae*) is perhaps not the most important one on this subject in medieval logic; it seems to be a compilation. He defines *consequentia* as an aggregate made up of an antecedent and a consequent together with an inferential sign and interprets the inference with the help of the expression “it is understood in” (*intelligitur in*), saying, for instance, a formal inference is the case when a consequent is understood in the antecedent, like in “Peter is a man, therefore Peter is an animal.” Billingham understands it to be an act of knowledge, not a kind of objective understanding.

In natural theology, Billingham holds radical views, at least according to an anonymous contemporary author of a tract preserved in the Vatican. According to this author, Billingham says that it is not the task of a philosopher to state that there is only one infinite first being. For a

philosopher is limited to conclude that this first being is either a substance or an accident. One cannot say that the first being is a substance, for a man does not possess a concept of substance. Billingham argues that during the Eucharist one never knows whether or not under the accidental property a substance is present or not. Neither can the first being be an accident, for in that case God would be less perfect than a substance.

Secondly, according to the anonymous, Billingham said that it is not evident to us, mortals, that substances are different from accidents (here Billingham comes close to Nicholas of Autrecourt, Michalski notes).

Thirdly, all philosophical propositions are based on faith and things believed, which could be labeled – somewhat anachronistically – a fideist position.

In his commentary to the *De anima*, Nicholas Oresme notes (if one follows Michalski) that according to Billingham, man only perceives accidents and that a substance is as hidden as the first mover of the heavens.

## Cross-References

- ▶ [Oxford Calculators](#)
- ▶ [Peter of Spain](#)
- ▶ [Supposition Theory](#)
- ▶ [Syllogism, Theories of](#)
- ▶ [Terms, Properties of](#)
- ▶ [William Heytesbury](#)
- ▶ [William of Ockham](#)

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## Richard Brinkley

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### Abstract

Richard Brinkley, OFM (fl. c. 1350) was an English logician and theologian of the middle of the fourteenth century. Among his works, only a *Summa logicae* and some fragments of theological works are known to us. Brinkley is a realist philosopher (he acknowledges real universals and genuine propositional significates), although his position is much more moderate than that of Burley or Wyclif, for example. Most of his criticisms in the *Summa* are directed against Ockham, although he agrees with him on some doctrinal issues, like for example the thesis of semantic subordination of written and spoken language to mental language. Brinkley's philosophical orientation is characterized by the tension between the explicitly formulated methodological aim of segregating logic and

metaphysics, and the philosophical necessity of considering them both.

### Life, Works, and Philosophical Orientation

Richard Brinkley was a Franciscan friar active in Oxford in the middle of the fourteenth century (Gál and Wood 1980:73–77). His theological work was known in Paris from 1362 onward and influenced bachelor theologians like, for example, Denis de Montina, Henricus Totting de Oyta, and Petrus de Candia (Kaluza 1990:188–191). The only extant work among Brinkley's writings is an extensive, anti-nominalist logic handbook (*Summa logicae*). Fragments and abbreviations of his theological works (a commentary on the *Sentences* and three sets of theological questions respectively referred to as *Questiones super Sententias*, *Quaestiones breves*, and *Quaestiones magnae*, Kaluza 1990:172–174) have been edited. Furthermore, Brinkley is known to be the author of (lost) *Distinctiones scholasticae* and *Determinationes* (Ashworth and Spade 1992:49). In at least two places in the *Summa logicae* (part II, *De universalibus*:333 and at the beginning of part III, *De praedicamentis*, Gál and Wood 1980:69), Brinkley alludes to a planned work on metaphysics, but, if such a work was written at all, nothing more is known of such a tract. As for his philosophical orientation, Brinkley is a realist and is often engaged in polemics against Ockham. His theory of the significate of propositions bears affinities with the ones of Walter Burley and John Wyclif although Brinkley's position is much more moderate than that of his realist fellows (Cesalli 2007:301–309).

### The *Summa logicae*

Brinkley's *Summa* is conserved completely in two manuscripts (Prague, Státní knihovna ČSR, MS 396 8 (III. A. 11), f<sup>o</sup> 31<sup>ra</sup>–140<sup>ra</sup>; Leipzig, Universitätsbibliothek, Nr. 1360, f<sup>o</sup> 1<sup>ra</sup>–105<sup>vb</sup>)



and only partially (part VII, *De obligationibus*) in another manuscript (British Library, Harley 3243, f<sup>o</sup> 47<sup>ra</sup>–56<sup>rb</sup>). The work is divided into seven parts (an announced eighth part on sophisms is missing):

1. *De terminis*
2. *De universalibus*
3. *De praedicamentis*
4. *De suppositionibus*
5. *De propositione*
6. *De insolubilibus*
7. *De obligationibus*

There is no doubt about the authenticity of the work. Its date of composition is difficult to determine, but there are good reasons to think that it was composed as early as 1345–1350: Brinkley's theological work was influential in Paris in 1362 and the standard *cursus* of a theologian would require that he first writes on logic and only later on theology (Kaluza 1990:169). The *Summa* is also of some doxographic significance since it is the only text through which the opinions of William Birmingham and Richard Billingham about the significata of the proposition are known (M.J. Fitzgerald, introduction to Brinkley's *De significato propositionis*:3–4).

### Logic and Metaphysics in the *Summa logicae*

In the prologue of the *Summa*, Brinkley makes it clear that his main motivation for writing is the consideration of logic in itself and in contradistinction to metaphysics (*ut logica in se consideretur et a metaphysica distinguatur*, see Gál and Wood 1980:79). Such a segregation has to be, he goes on, because some of the moderns neglect logic for metaphysics and vice versa. This sheds some light on Brinkley's philosophical stance: both logic and metaphysics have to be considered, but the only way to achieve this consists in holding the two disciplines strictly apart. To some extent, Brinkley sticks to this

programmatic line (and he possibly wrote a metaphysical tract as well), but as we will see on the base of the three cases presented below, his logic is not always free of metaphysical considerations.

### Universals

The structure of Brinkley's *De universalibus* is symptomatic for the tension between the methodological aim of segregating logic and metaphysics, and the philosophical necessity of considering them both. Before commenting on the five porphyrian *praedicabilia* (*genus, species, differentia, proprium, accidens*), Brinkley begins by distinguishing different senses of the word *universale* according to logic, physics, and metaphysics (*De universalibus*:299–300): the logician conceives of it as a common term predicabile of several things; for the philosopher of nature, it is the indeterminate character of the first cause as far as its possible effects are concerned; according to the metaphysician, it is an essence (*quidditas*), which is “communicable” to many different individuals. Accordingly, when a logician says *homo est species* (= *S*), he is speaking of a term only, to the effect that *homo* (= *t*) in *S* is taken in material supposition (ibid.:306). If Brinkley's position is compared to the ones of Burley and Ockham, we obtain the following picture: on the one hand, he disagrees with Ockham and Burley who both think that *t* has simple supposition in *S*; on the other, he agrees with Ockham that *t* in *S* is taken non-significatively (because *homo* was not imposed to signify a term, but human beings) and disagrees with Burley who maintains that *t* in *S* is taken significatively. Since Brinkley acknowledges a kind of metaphysical universal, he clearly is a realist. But what exactly is the ontological status of such real universals? The discussion of the personal and simple supposition (see below, point 2) provides some hints: the essence of a given thing (e.g., the humanity of a human being) is a metaphysical part present in any member of the species: “Just as the line which is in Socrates can be understood without Socrates but

cannot exist without him, the humanity which is in Socrates can be understood without Socrates although it cannot exist without Socrates" (ibid.:303). This allows to qualify Brinkley's position as a medieval form of immanent realism.

## Signification and Supposition

Like most of the medieval logicians, Brinkley acknowledges three ontological types of terms: inscriptions, vocal sounds, and concepts (mental terms), and just like Ockham – the target of most of his criticisms otherwise – he defends the thesis of semantic subordination of the two conventional types of terms (written and spoken) to the natural signs constituting mental language: a sign *S 1* is semantically subordinated to a sign *S 2* if *S 1* and *S 2* signify the same thing *x* and *S 2* can signify *x* without *S 1* but not vice versa (Cesalli 2004:460). The *impositio nominum* relates a vocal sound to a thing and not to a concept, although the relation to a thing depends on a concept of that thing: the imposition presupposes the cognition of the thing to be named. As far as extra-mental terms are concerned, the difference between signification and supposition is twofold: on the one hand, the former is conventional whereas the latter "arises from the nature of the thing" ("*suppositio non oritur ex principio voluntatis, sed ex natura rei,*" *De suppositionibus*, 1): once a vocal sound has been imposed, its actual use within a proposition casts it into formal, objective relations, which do not depend on any convention: as Brinkley puts it, the validity of the inference "a man is running, therefore Socrates, or Plato, or . . . is running" is objectively secured. On the other hand, signification is a dyadic notion, and supposition is a triadic one: to signify, for a term, means to be related to an intellect (namely to the intellect of the hearer) and to a thing; to supposit, for a term, means to signify and to be related to another categorematic constituent (subject or predicate) of a proposition. Brinkley's idea that signification involves a relation to the intellect of the hearer ("*terminus autem significans necessario includit duos respectus: unum ad intellectum sui significat, et alium ad*

*rem quam significat,*" *De terminis*, 1, Gál and Wood 1980:80) is close to the one found in the first lines of Roger Bacon's *De signis* ("*signum est in praedicamento relationis et dicitur essentialiter ad illud cui significat*"). As for Brinkley's typology of supposition, the cases of material and simple supposition have to be briefly addressed. We saw in the previous section that in the *De universalibus*, Brinkley considers that *homo* in *homo est species* has material supposition, whereas this sentence is a classical example for simple supposition. In his tract on supposition, Brinkley says that simple supposition is the case when a "common term stands for a thing as non-restricted, i.e. for a thing really communicable to many" ("*suppositio simplex est quando terminus communis supponit pro re ut non contracta sive pro re pluribus communicabili ex parte rei,*" *De suppositionibus*, 3) and gives the example *homo est primo risibilis*. Therefore, Brinkley considers the term *species* as strictly metalinguistic although he acknowledges real universal things. Finally, Brinkley criticizes the notion of material supposition because if a term would really stand for himself, then supposition would not be relational anymore; but according to its definition, it has to be relational (*De suppositionibus*, 2; on Brinkley's theory of signification and supposition, see Cesalli 2013).

## Propositions and Truth

Richard Brinkley's theory of the proposition is a case of "propositional realism" in the sense that the author of the *Summa* acknowledges specific significates for propositions, which are not reducible to the significates of the constituent parts of the propositions (Cesalli 2007:241–309). Contrary to Burley and Wyclif who speak of propositions which are not signs but significates (*propositio in re* for the former, *propositio realis* for the latter), Brinkley only uses the term *propositio* for complexes of signs (written, spoken, and mental). The principle of semantic subordination (see above, point 2) holds for propositions as it does for their constituents: every nonmental proposition is a sign in virtue of a mental

proposition (*De propositione in genere*, §54). But this does not mean that a nonmental proposition signifies a mental proposition (rather, as we shall see, every proposition, mental or not, has a significate, which is not a proposition). In spite of subordination, the three types of propositions are functionally equivalent: any proposition, be it mental or not, is the vehicle of a complex cognitive content (*ibid.*, §49). When addressing the question of the formation of a mental proposition, Brinkley insists, that when the intellect produces a mental proposition, it does not combine concepts, but it exerts its combining and dividing activity on the very things of which concepts are natural signs (*ibid.*, §48). Brinkley answers the question of the nature of the propositional significates as follows: one has to know that one calls “significate of the proposition” this thing or these things which is or are signified through a proposition, so that the significate of this proposition “Socrates sees Plato” is this thing Socrates, and this thing Plato, and the vision through which Socrates sees. Therefore, from these, as combined and integrated with each other in a correct order results the whole, adequate and primary significate of this proposition (*Unde primo sciendum quod significatum propositionis vocantur illud vel illa, quod vel quae per propositionem significatur; ut significatum istius propositionis “Sortes videt Platonem” est haec res Sortes, et haec res Plato, et visio qua Sortes videt. Et hae res sunt omnia significata per istam propositionem. Et ideo, ex istis debite ad invicem ordinatis resultat et integratur totale, et adaequatum, et primum significatum illius propositionis, De significato propositionis:34*).

For Brinkley, then, the propositional significate is something like an ordained complex of things. In his tract on the significate of the proposition, Brinkley extensively criticizes the opinions of Richard Billingham (*modus rei*), William Birmingham (*compositio mentis*), and Richard Ferrybridge (the propositional significate is nothing be the significate of its subject term, *ibid.*:52–99). At the beginning of his tract on sentential reference, Brinkley announces that he will address the question whether the “truth of a proposition arises from its significates as from its

cause” (“*si ex illo <significato> tamquam ex causa in propositione veritas oriatur,*” *ibid.*:34). Although this point is not discussed as such in the *Summa*, the element of response that can be gathered converges toward a positive answer to that question: the ordained complex of things – one would want to say, the state of affairs – signified by a proposition is also its truth-maker (Cesalli 2007: 297–299).

## Cross-References

- ▶ [John Wyclif](#)
- ▶ [Obligations Logic](#)
- ▶ [Realism](#)
- ▶ [Supposition Theory](#)
- ▶ [Truth, Theories of](#)
- ▶ [Universals](#)
- ▶ [Walter Burley](#)
- ▶ [William of Ockham](#)

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Quaeritur utrum potentia volitiva hic in via eodem actu quo utitur creatura libere fruatur trinitate benedicta (= Commentum super Sententias, quaestio 3). (1990). Kaluza, Z. (Ed.), *L’œuvre théologique de Richard Brinkley, O.F.M. Archives d’Histoire Doctrinale et Littéraire du Moyen Age* 64:169–273, 214–222.

Utrum Deus praecise eodem modo principiet ad extra sicut principiat ad intra (= short version of the first of the so-called Quaestiones magnae). (1990). Kaluza, Z. (Ed.), *L’œuvre théologique de Richard Brinkley, O.F.M. Archives d’Histoire Doctrinale et Littéraire du Moyen Age* 64:169–273, 223–224; Two short versions (by Stephanus Galdetus) of that same question, as well as of two further Quaestiones magnae (namely: Utrum simpliciter primum productum ad extra sit alicuius creaturae actualis existentia and Utrum cum omni modo agendi dei ad extra stet quod voluntas creata sit

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## Richard Fishacre

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### Abstract

Richard Fishacre (c. 1208–1248), the author of the first Sentences-Commentary composed at Oxford, distinguishes in the prologue to that

work between moral (biblical) theology and speculative (philosophical) theology. Focusing in his Commentary on the latter, he famously viewed philosophy as propaedeutic to theology much like Abraham's relations with Hagar was a necessary prelude to Sarah's fruitfulness. One of the earliest members of the Grosseteste school, he influenced a generation of Oxford Dominicans to follow and provoked the opposition of the Franciscan master, Richard Rufus. His greatest contributions lay in the area of natural philosophy, especially his speculations on the nature of light, the nature of the heavens, the eternity of the world, and the division of the waters in the Genesis text; he also has interesting things to say about the absolute power of God. Of the divine attributes, he considered infinity to be the most significant. He quotes Aristotle with approval, though his direct acquaintance with the Aristotelian corpus was limited. As was the case with most of his contemporaries, both his metaphysics and his philosophy of human nature were rooted in what historians have labeled Augustinianism. He was, for example, a proponent of a plurality of forms in material substances and spiritual matter. His view of the free choice issue is also noteworthy and influenced Bonaventure's thought on the subject.

## Biographical Information

Richard Fishacre was born in the diocese of Exeter, in the south of England, of Norman ancestry. As a young man, he went to the schools at Oxford, where he entered the Order of Preachers. Subsequently, he came under the tutelage of Friar Robert Bacon, the first Dominican master in theology at the fledgling university. We have no record of when Fishacre incepted in theology, but the best estimate is about 1240. There is persuasive evidence that his major work, a commentary on Peter Lombard's *Books of Sentences*, the first such work composed at Oxford, was the work of a master. Though commenting on Lombard's *Sentences* eventually was set as a requirement for the degree and hence the exclusive province of

bachelors, Fishacre's Commentary is the work of a mature scholar and was composed between the years 1241 and 1245 (Long and O'Carroll 1999, pp. 15–26).

Nicolas Trivet, writing two decades later, testifies that Fishacre lectured in theology along with Bacon, but it is not clear which of the two was *magister regens*, a term not in use among the Dominicans. Whatever the case, death came for Fishacre in 1248, when he was approximately 40 years of age (Long and O'Carroll 1999, pp. 26–29).

His rather brief life did not afford Fishacre the time to write much. In addition to his *Sentences* Commentary, comparable in size and scope to the one being composed during the same decade at Paris by Albert the Great, he is credited with a commentary or *postillae* on the Psalms, but if this work survived the dissolution, it has not been identified. However, we do have in addition to several sermons a single copy of a treatise on heresies and also on the Ascension of Christ, both of which have been edited (see Long 1978, 1993). Lastly, we possess four *quaestiones disputatae* (on the subject of light, the nature of the heavens, the eternal duration of the world, and the waters above the firmament), written after the completion of his Commentary and inserted into later copies of that work (see Long 2010, pp. 315–363).

## Philosophy

Fishacre's metaphysics can be located comfortably within the Christian Neoplatonic tradition: being is essence. The divine being is completely what it is, simple and immutable; the metaphysical scandal is change, and to the extent that creatures change, they are shot through with nonbeing. Given his metaphysics, it is not surprising to find Fishacre an enthusiastic champion of Anselm's *Proslogion* argument. His list of ten arguments for God's existence, all but one the kind Aquinas would label *a priori*, includes three that are patently variations on the Anselmian argument (see Long 1988).

Of the divine attributes, it is God's infinity that is the focus of Fishacre's attention. It has been

argued, in fact, that Fishacre is the first western thinker to attach such importance to the issue (Sweeney and Ermatinger 1958, pp. 191–192). He takes up the doctrine condemned at Paris in 1241, namely, that neither men nor angels will ever behold the divine essence. The problem, as he sees, is the infinite distance between the creature and the Creator. It is precisely this matter of distance (*elongatio*) that becomes Fishacre's most telling argument for God's infinite power: there is an infinite distance between nothingness and prime matter (in other words, between nothing and something); but the greater the distance to be spanned the greater the power required; therefore, creation *ex nihilo* requires infinite power.

Does infinite power, however, imply that there are no limits? Is God, for example, free to undo the past? The solution for Fishacre lies in a distinction: power over the past is of two kinds. There is first the power to reconstitute in being something that had ceased to be; the other is to cause that which in fact had been not to have been, to make it such, for example, that Caesar, having crossed the Rubicon, did not cross the Rubicon. The latter according to Fishacre is not within God's power (see Long 2007).

With respect to his philosophy of knowledge we find ourselves in a world which Aristotle would not have recognized. The species of the thing, which Fishacre calls the "word by which the exterior thing speaks to me," reaches as far as my innermost sentient power (the common sense) – but no farther. It is axiomatic that the inferior cannot act on the superior, and thus the word cannot beget itself in the mind. Rather, Fishacre invokes the authority of Augustine: the soul in marvelous fashion and with equally marvelous speed produces in itself a similitude of that species which is in the common sense – that is, it makes itself like and conforms itself to that received species, just as light conforms itself to the water with which it comes into contact (*In 2 Sent.* 1:228).

The soul, says Fishacre, is like a *tabula*, but not a *tabula rasa*. In fact, on the canvas which is the soul are to be found the likenesses of things, like pictures, which are illuminated by the divine Light. In this life, however, the soul focuses on

the pictures, not on the canvas, much less the light itself: the soul knows neither itself nor God directly. It is, however, owing to the presence in the soul of all forms that Aristotle can say "the soul is in a way all existing things."

This noetic is rooted in a philosophy of human nature for which Fishacre is remotely indebted to Saint Augustine, but more proximately to Robert Grosseteste. Typically, soul and body are in his view separate substances; however, it is not the case that a human being is essentially a soul and the flesh merely a garment, notwithstanding the opinion of Avicenna and "certain theologians" – among whom he numbers Hugh of St. Victor.

In defining the soul, however, Fishacre resorts to a stratagem first attempted by Avicenna and in his own time by Albert the Great: namely, the soul is a *forma coniuncta* according to its being (*esse*) but a *forma separata* according to its essence; put thus, the human form occupies a middle position between the *forma elementaris* and the *forma angelica*. Although the doctrine is not developed systematically or in much detail, Fishacre's talk of a rational and a sensible form in the human composite cashes out as at least tacit acceptance of a plurality of forms. He is careful to describe the three contemporary opinions on the subject, but then hesitates to embrace any of the three, possibly owing to one of the objections against pluralism, namely the authority of the *De ecclesiasticis dogmatibus*, whose author he presumes to be Augustine. Reluctant openly to contradict the unambiguous testimony of the bishop of Hippo, Fishacre was nonetheless in practice a pluralist (see Long 1975).

As to the other half of the *binarium famosissimum*, namely universal hylomorphism or the doctrine of spiritual matter, Fishacre, like the majority of his contemporaries, was unquestionably a proponent. Composed of matter and form are the human soul and the angel. But it is in his teaching concerning the latter that Fishacre works out the full implications of spiritual matter – almost as if the angels constituted a kind of metaphysical testing ground.

His discussion of reason and will eventually yields to the issue of *liberum arbitrium*, the free choice of the will. Devoting more pages in his



Commentary to this question than any other, Fishacre's discussion constitutes a self-standing treatise on the subject, dependent on Grosseteste's treatment, yet displaying a remarkable subtlety and independence of thought. How is this power which is called *liberum arbitrium* related to reason and will? His conclusion is that act of free choice is the turning back on oneself in the act of willing or, better, on its own incomplete will and passing judgment on it. Since therefore *liberum arbitrium* is the medium between the apprehension and incomplete will on the one hand and the completed will or consent on the other, it is defined by each of the extremes (see Long 1995).

How does one summarize Fishacre's philosophical position? He was not hostile to Aristotle, indeed he was convinced that Aristotle is in possession of the truth about the created realm; but aside from the logical and biological works, he had only a passing and for the most part indirect acquaintance with the *corpus Aristotelicum*. Could he fairly be labeled an Augustinian? In the sense in which Augustine is obviously his preeminent authority, and from whom he never explicitly parts company, the answer is a resounding "yes." Yet Fishacre has positions that are decidedly non-Augustinian: his teaching on spiritual matter, for example, or on the plurality of forms, or on the direct knowledge of the soul (see Long 2006). The safest course finally is to avoid labels and to see Richard Fishacre as a venturesome thinker, deferential to the established authorities, but showing signs of an emerging independence of mind in the few works that can be dated toward the end of his career.

## Cross-References

- ▶ [Albert the Great](#)
- ▶ [Anselm of Canterbury](#)
- ▶ [Arabic Texts: Natural Philosophy, Latin Translations of](#)
- ▶ [Aristotelianism in the Greek, Latin, Syriac, Arabic, and Hebrew Traditions](#)
- ▶ [Augustine](#)

- ▶ [Being](#)
- ▶ [Essence and Existence](#)
- ▶ [Hugh of St. Victor](#)
- ▶ [Ibn Sīnā, Abū 'Alī \(Avicenna\)](#)
- ▶ [Mental Word/Concepts](#)
- ▶ [Metaphysics](#)
- ▶ [Natural Philosophy](#)
- ▶ [Peter Lombard](#)
- ▶ [Philosophical Psychology, Jewish Tradition](#)
- ▶ [Richard Rufus of Cornwall](#)
- ▶ [Robert Grosseteste](#)
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## Richard Fitzralph

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### Abstract

Richard Fitzralph, d. 1360, Archbishop of Armagh, completed *Sentence* commentary at Oxford in 1328 and was active at Avignon until 1344. He compiled a critique of the Franciscan doctrine of *usus pauper* based on the theory of grace as foundation for just lordship. His *De pauperie salvatoris* would become very influential in late medieval antifraternalism and also influenced Wyclif's political thought. He also was at the forefront of Avignon's embassy to the Greek and Armenian churches, and his *Summa de quaestionibus Armenorum* gives a record of late medieval conceptions of the relation of Catholicism to the Orthodox traditions.

Richard Fitzralph (c. 1300–1360) called Armachanus, Archbishop of Armagh (1346–1360), studied at Oxford 1315–1328, was chancellor of the university 1332–1334, and became prominent at Avignon after refuting John XXIII's controversial position on the beatific vision. Subsequently he served as papal representative in conferences held with the Greek and Armenian churches from 1337 to 1344, where he compiled a formulation of the differences separating the Roman from the Orthodox churches in the *Summa de quaestionibus Armenorum*. The *Summa*, for which there is no modern edition, served as

an important theological document into the Counter-Reformation and provides a valuable window into fourteenth-century conceptions of the Eastern churches and their theologies. As Archbishop, Fitzralph was active in the reform of the Irish church and, in doing so, developed a careful and penetrating critique of the mendicant orders in his eight-volume *De pauperie salvatoris*. His critique of the mendicants was later associated with Wyclif's thought, which detracted from his reputation in the fifteenth century, but he was counted among the most influential Oxford theologians by his contemporaries and immediate successors.

### Fitzralph's *Sentence* Commentary

Fitzralph's *Sentence* commentary appears to have been influential in staking out a generally mediating position in Oxford's "Golden Age" of theology. The Ockhamists, broadly construed as those influenced by Ockham's metaphysics and epistemology, including Adam Wodeham, Robert Holcot, and, to a lesser extent, Walter Chatton and William Crathorn, made one camp, and their opponents, including Walter Burley, Thomas Wilton, and Thomas Bradwardine, led the other, although the range of thought of the period defies simple classification. Later theologians came to understand Fitzralph's position as incorporating elements of each in the establishment of a philosophical theology consonant with a traditional approach, yet sensitive to the complexities of *Moderni* thought. A thorough understanding of Fitzralph's position will only be possible with the publication of his *Sentence* commentary, though, and what follows is a very general sketch of his position.

Fitzralph was strongly influenced by Henry of Ghent in three areas. He supported Henry's belief that intellect, memory, and will are distinct within the human mind, and so serve as an image of the Trinity, his epistemic account includes species, and he distinguished between sensory and intelligible knowledge, following Henry in asserting that the human mind relies upon divine illumination for understanding. Each of these positions

runs against the Ockhamist position, which has led scholars to classify Fitzralph as among the traditionally minded critics of Ockhamism. Presently it seems clear that, while Fitzralph represents an epistemological approach representative of a generally traditional position consistent with Henry of Ghent, he was by no means the ardent theological traditionalist that Bradwardine was, as is apparent in his position regarding God's knowledge of future contingents.

The need for recognizing a distinction of some sort between memory, reason, and will is based on the traditional Augustinian understanding of our capacity to recognize the Trinity through analogy with our own mental structure. By the fourteenth century, this position did more than signify allegiance to an Augustinian view of the mind's faculties, though; it indicated a firm stand on the question of the compatibility of faith and human reason. Before Ockham, it had been a standard for Thomists and Scotists to account for the apparent conflict between unaided human reason and the Christian faith by stipulating that properly understood the truths of the faith perfect rational understanding. Regarding the analogy of the human mind to the Trinity, the relation only becomes comprehensible once the reason makes the appropriate recognition of the possibility of real distinctions. The relation of the divine persons is a distinction holding between three really distinct persons in one divine nature; this is an element of the faith, which, when recognized, allows the faithful reason to perceive a similar, but by no means identical, relation holding between the faculties within the human mind. Ockham's response was to argue that certain theological truths, foremost among them those regarding God's triune nature, so far exceed human reason as to preclude the applicability of basic logical rules. This amounts to the need for recognizing a difference in kind between faith and reason, rendering impossible the unaided reason's recognition of similarity holding between the threefold structure of the human mind and the relation of the divine persons. Hence, Fitzralph's arguments in favor of the reasonability of recognizing this similarity represent a determined opposition to Ockham's separation of theology and philosophy.

Fitzralph's defense of a species-based epistemology is another instance of this opposition to Ockhamism. Roger Bacon had constructed an epistemic model based on the apparent functioning of the eye, arguing that the objects we perceive project their actual appearance by means of species or apparent images that we perceive and that serve as the basis for our understanding of the world. Philosophers had followed this species-based epistemic model, using it as the basis for complex accounts of the apprehension, perception, conceptualization, and comprehension of objects in the world. Ockham's rejection of the species account was based on the threat of skepticism he believed it entailed; if what we perceive of an object are the species, and not the object itself, what basis is there for certainty that the species are reliable indicators of the object and its properties? Ockham rejects the species account in favor of what philosophers today would call "direct perception"; when we perceive an object, we do not perceive the appearance of the object, but the object itself. This is not to say that the eyes actively reach out in some manner to "touch" the object. Instead, Ockham believes that the object we perceive acts upon our vision, producing a veridical intuitive cognition of the object. This simplified model was popular and led to considerable discussion regarding the possibility of error; if we directly perceive the object, how to account for illusions? And given that God is sufficiently powerful to cause us to perceive what is not there, how to be certain that this does not happen with some regularity? Ockham's rejection of species was influential on Wodeham and Auriol, and those who defended species in epistemology were among the minority in mid-fourteenth-century Oxford. Hence, Fitzralph's assertion that the older model, reliant on species in accounting for human perception, puts him in the anti-Ockhamist camp, but this does not mean that his position is consonant with Aquinas or Scotus. In his argument in favor of the need for divine illumination for intellectual cognition of God and eternal truths, he rejects the Thomist argument that sense-based knowledge can lead to intellectual understanding of higher truths.

Following Henry of Ghent, he distinguishes between two kinds of illumination. In one, all human beings capable of rational understanding are given access to the higher truths of mathematics, logic, and metaphysics, but in the other, God provides the elect with an understanding of the theological truths of the faith.

Fitzralph was also active in the ongoing Oxford debates regarding motion, time, and eternity, following the lead of the Mertonian "Calculators" who had revolutionized Aristotelian physics with their attention to mathematical analysis of problems that had generally been the province of a more purely philosophical approach. The Mertonian Bradwardine, whose innovations typify the Calculators' method, was also notably Augustinian in his attitude toward Ockham in the question of predestination and human free will. Despite advocating a notably Augustinian epistemology and following the Mertonian approach in questions of physics, Fitzralph was unwilling to endorse Bradwardine's profoundly deterministic approach in refuting Ockhamist arguments regarding God's knowledge of what for us are future-contingent events. Rather than engaging in concentrated analysis of questions of kinds of necessity or distinguishing between species of grace, as was common in the ongoing debates that came to define Oxford theology in the mid-fourteenth century, Fitzralph relied on scriptural precedent alone to assert the compatibility of God's foreknowledge and human free will.

### ***De pauperie salvatoris***

By the 1350s, the Franciscan poverty controversy had evolved from its earlier focus on arguments regarding *usus pauper*, shifting to the friars doing pastoral work outside of diocesan supervision. While at Oxford, Fitzralph's attitude toward the friars may have been friendly, but when he became the Archbishop of Armagh in 1346, his opinion changed, and he developed a concerted philosophical criticism of the mendicant ideals into a collection of seven books entitled *De pauperie salvatoris*. While he held respect for their ideals of apostolic poverty and their

commitment to pastoral care, he could not understand their reasoned refusal to cooperate with the ecclesiastical hierarchy as they made use of its property. In analyzing their position, he catalogues the species of private, communal, and corporate property relations then common in fourteenth-century dialogue regarding property ownership and authority. At the same time, he developed the idea that grace alone is the justification for any instance of dominion or just lordship, which is ultimately directly associated with God's eternal lordship. Human lordship was initially shared by all, which entailed communal use and ownership of property, but the fall introduced private property ownership and a corresponding political authority, which is the hallmark of the postlapsarian world. God infuses certain instances of this lordship with grace to facilitate justice in the fallen world, although Fitzralph is not especially clear regarding the hallmarks of this grace. This theory of grace-founded lordship was influential in later political theory, most especially in the thought of John Wyclif.

## Cross-References

- ▶ [Adam Wodeham](#)
- ▶ [John Wyclif](#)
- ▶ [Oxford Calculators](#)
- ▶ [Peter Auriol](#)
- ▶ [Roger Bacon](#)
- ▶ [Thomas Bradwardine](#)
- ▶ [Thomas Wylton](#)
- ▶ [Walter Burley](#)
- ▶ [Walter Chatton](#)
- ▶ [William Crathorn](#)
- ▶ [William of Ockham](#)

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## Richard Kilvington

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### Abstract

Richard Kilvington (c. 1302–1361) (i.e., Covington, Chilingtonensis, Kaylrygton, Kyluxoton with many spelling variants exist) received his master of arts (1324/1325) and doctor of theology (c. 1335) in Oxford, where he and Thomas Bradwardine constituted the first academic generation of the school so-called Oxford Calculators, a group of philosopher-mathematicians whose discoveries led to the development of a new mathematical physics. Along with Richard Fitzralph, Kilvington was involved in the battle against the mendicant friars' privileges. Kilvington's academic career, a relatively short stint early in his life, ended when he was about 33, and launched him on the successful diplomatic and ecclesiastical trajectory. He was in service of Edward III and took part in diplomatic missions. His career culminated in his service as a dean of St. Paul's Cathedral in London. Although he originated new ideas and methods in logic, natural philosophy, and theology and influenced his contemporaries and followers, he has been little studied until recently.

All of Kilvington's philosophical works: *Sophismata*, *Quaestiones super de generatione et corruptione* (written before 1325), *Quaestiones super physicam* (c. 1326), and *Quaestiones super libros ethicorum* (before 1332) as well as his commentary on Peter Lombard's *Sentences* (c. 1334) stem from his lectures at Oxford. (Only *Sophismata* has been edited and translated. All other works are still in manuscript.) In accordance with fourteenth century Oxford practice, the number of topics Kilvington discussed was reduced to a few central and probably most important subjects. The extensive use of the *sophisma* scheme, the mathematization of ethics and theology, and a frequent consideration of hypothetical cases (*secundum imaginationem*) place Kilvington's works in the mainstream of fourteenth century English academic tradition. The application of terminist logic, and the refutation of the Aristotelian prohibition of metabasis resulted in Kilvington's broad use of logic and mathematics in all branches of scientific inquiry. Like other English thinkers, Kilvington focused on three primary disciplines: logic, mathematical physics, and a new theology based on methods and insights achieved in the first two areas. Many of the issues, he dealt with, are thus considered common to the fields of mathematics, logic, natural philosophy, and theology.

In his *Sophismata*, Kilvington mostly concentrates on supposition of terms in propositions about motion and change (especially instantaneous), increase and decrease, remission and intension, measurement and time. The first 11 sophisms deal with alteration as extrinsically limited, both at its beginning and at its end. Sophisms 29–44 reveal Kilvington's interest in local motion, debated with respect to causes (i.e., active and passive capacities) and with respect to effects (i.e., time, distance traversed, and speed in motion). Thus, he can be placed among the fourteenth century pioneers who considered separately the problem of local motion with respect to the causes (*tamquam penes causam*), and with respect to the effects (*tamquam penes effectum*). He considers both uniform motion, that is, a



motion with equal speed and difform motion, either with equal or unequal acceleration, caused by voluntary and natural agents. He sees the possibility of measurement of instantaneous speed in comparison to speed in uniform and accelerated motion. The last four sophisms address epistemology and the logic of knowledge, dealing with the sentences on knowing and doubting.

In his questions on generation and corruption and in his *Physics*, Kilvington works, basically, to establish differences between generation, alteration, and augmentation; to determine the rules for action of causes of changes; and to find rules for a division of different types of *continua*. Like most medieval natural philosophers, Kilvington accepts the Aristotelian statements that “everything which is moved is moved by something” and that “there cannot be a motion without an acting capacity (*virtus motiva*) and a passive one (*virtus resistiva*)”; without resistance, the motion would not be temporal. Motion occurs whenever the ratio of an acting capacity (a force) – F to passive capacity (a resistance) – R is a ratio of *maioris inequalitatis*, that is, when the ratio of F to R is greater than 1:1. Thus, Kilvington affirms that every excess of a force over the resistance suffices for motion, what means that ever a force is greater than the resistance there is a motion. This grants that a force is bounded by a minimum upon which it cannot act (*minimum quod non*), that is, by the resistance, which is equal to a force. Since when a force is equal to the resistance, the ratio of F to R is 1:1, and in such case there is no motion. For a passive capacity, Kilvington accepts the *minimum quod sic*-limit “with respect to circumstances.” He is in accord with Aristotle and claims that to establish a limit for Socrates power of vision (a passive one), we should point to the smallest thing we can see. It happens, however, that we can see not only a small thing like a grain, but also a big one, like a cathedral, if we are close to it. Therefore, not in every case can a passive capacity be described by a *minimum quod non*.

The action of an active capacity upon a passive one that results in motion is already described in Book 7 of Aristotle’s *Physics*. A new

understanding of the Euclidean definition of double proportion, however, stimulated the most useful innovation of the fourteenth century, making it possible to reformulate Aristotle’s rules of motion. In order to produce a mathematically coherent theory, Kilvington insists that the proper way of measuring speed of motion is to describe its variations by double ratio of force and resistance as defined by Euclid, that is, as a duplication of the proportion itself. Speed thus varies arithmetically, while the proportions of force to the resistance determining speed vary geometrically. (So, when proportion of force to resistance is squared, speed will be doubled.) This new function provides values of the ratio of F to R greater than 1:1 for any speed down to zero, since any root of a ratio greater than 1:1 is always itself also a ratio greater than 1:1. And thus Kilvington avoids a serious weakness of Aristotle’s theory, which cannot explain the mathematical relationship of F and R in slow motion, where speed is less than 1.

In theology, Kilvington applied new methods from logic and mathematical physics to typical fourteenth-century problems. He is mostly interested in issues concerning human and God’s love, fruition, human will and freedom, God’s absolute and ordained power, and God’s knowledge of future contingent. All theological problems are analyzed in “modern” language of terminist logic. None of these issues is considered separately from the Creator, therefore Kilvington relates each human action to God. The established order of nature is a result of God’s ordained power, but God can act against the established order with his absolute power. Both God’s powers are absolutely (*simpliciter*) infinite, but God’s absolute power is infinitely greater, that is, more capable to act, since thanks to this power, says Kilvington, God might undo the past or annihilate the world. But there are also actual, “dependent” (*secundum quid*) infinities created by God, such as intensively infinite capacity of a human soul to love, to joy, and to suffer. Like Duns Scotus, Kilvington claims that God’s knowledge, existence, and will are His essence. Therefore, with regard to God’s absolute knowledge assertive

statements about past and present, and contingent statements about future has the same value of certitude, since they have absolute necessity, which refers only to God. With regard to His ordained knowledge, such statements do not have the same value of certitude, and they have only ordained necessity, which refers to the natural, ordained law. Everything revealed absolutely by God happens with absolute necessity, because otherwise He could make Himself incapable to pick up a blade, and this is impossible, because it is a contradiction. Everything revealed by God's ordained power depends on God's absolute will and can be changed. But once changed and revealed it would have ordained necessity forcing, thus, a new law.

Kilvington defends the superiority of the will within moral action, underlining that by free will a human need not sustain a prior choice, or even make any choice at all. But even if an individual makes no choice, this is also a free choice. The cooperation of will and grace, a gift of the Holy Spirit, results in meritorious acts. Grace has an infinite capability to act upon the will, but only in this sense that it is able to decrease continuously the resistance of the will and make it more ready to cooperate, and not that grace infinitely increases its own activity. A lack of knowledge or ignorance does not excuse wrong or sinful choices of the will.

Kilvington's teachings on logic, natural philosophy, and theology influenced both English and Continental thinkers. Richard Bilingham, Roger Roseth, William Heytesbury, Adam Wodeham, Richard Swineshead, John Dumbleton, Adam Junior, and Roger Swineshead were among those English scholars who benefited from Kilvington's works. Kilvington's works also influenced Parisians like Nicholas Oresme, John Buridan, John Mirecourt, Johannes de Burgo, and Thomas of Cracow. Thomas Bradwardine, however, was the most famous beneficiary of Kilvington's questions on motion. In his renowned treatise on the velocities in motion (*Tractatus de proportionibus velocitatum in motibus*), Bradwardine included most of Kilvington's fundamental arguments for the new law of motion describing the relation of forces and resistances.

## Cross-References

- ▶ [Oxford Calculators](#)
- ▶ [Richard Fitzralph](#)
- ▶ [Thomas Bradwardine](#)
- ▶ [Walter Burley](#)
- ▶ [William Heytesbury](#)
- ▶ [William of Ockham](#)

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## Richard of Campsall

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### Abstract

Richard of Campsall (c. 1280–1350) was an English Master of Arts and Theology at Oxford. He wrote a very influential commentary on Aristotle's *Prior Analytics* and influenced later English theology. Very few of his works have survived.

Not much is known about Richard of Campsall, and very little written by him has survived to this day or perhaps still lies in manuscripts undiscovered in some library. He was, however, a fellow of Balliol College in Oxford while studying arts in the very early years of the fourteenth century. Later, as a Regent Master of Arts, he was a fellow of Merton College between 1307 and 1308. He seems to have finished his question commentary on Aristotle's *Prior Analytics* – his earliest logical work – before his regency. He lectured on the *Sentences* of Peter Lombard in 1316–1317 and was the Regent Master of Theology at Merton College after 1322. The date of this death is very uncertain, but some have suggested that he died sometime between 1350 and 1360.

The only surviving complete work, alongside some minor treatises, is his commentary on the *Prior Analytics*. He was, however, very well known in England in the early fourteenth century and is referred to in many theological works of the time. He seems also to have influenced William of Ockham and a whole range of later English thinkers on both logic and theology.

One of the major debates in early fourteenth-century England was about the nature of intuitive and abstractive cognitions. Campsall played an important role in this debate. He argued that there is no need to posit a real distinction between intuitive and abstractive cognitions – one and the same cognition can fulfill both functions. He argued instead that a cognition is intuitive simply if the object it is about is present and it is abstractive if the object is absent. This view was rejected by both Ockham and Walter Chatton.

Campsall's commentary on the *Prior Analytics* is important primarily because he seems to be the first commentator, as far as we know, to systematically apply the distinction between modal sentences taken in a composite (*in sensu composito*) and divided (*in sensu diviso*) sense to Aristotle's modal syllogistics (the distinction roughly corresponds to what we now call *de dicto* and *de re* modal sentences). This distinction, which was not used by Aristotle himself, was known at least since Abelard, but it had not been used systematically before Campsall. This is a very important development in the history of

logic, since applying this distinction to Aristotle's logic opens up whole new perspectives and ultimately changes the original system. Campsall thus stands on the threshold of a whole new logic, which later fourteenth century authors like Ockham and John Buridan developed.

## Cross-References

- ▶ [Intuitive and Abstractive Cognition](#)
- ▶ [Modal Theories and Modal Logic](#)
- ▶ [Walter Chatton](#)
- ▶ [William of Ockham](#)

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## Richard of Middleton

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### Abstract

Richard of Middleton, Franciscan Friar, was born in or before 1249. He became Master of Theology at Paris in 1284, where he presided over one regular and three quodlibetal disputations. He edited his *Sentence* commentary between 1285 and 1295. He probably died in 1307/1308. His thought owes much not only to Bonaventure and the Franciscans of the 1270s and 1280s, but also to Henry of Ghent and Thomas Aquinas. Richard's metaphysics and theory of cognition are largely Aristotelian, whereas his natural philosophy tends to follow the more eclectic trends of his Franciscan *confrères*. Thus, he affirms both the plurality of substantial forms in one substance and universal hylomorphism. His most distinctive doctrines are that degrees of a quality can be construed in quantitative terms, and that substantial forms admit of degrees, a view that he uses to explain how material substances are composed of the four elements.

We know very little of the life of the Franciscan Richard of Mediavilla. Traditions dating back to the early sixteenth century have Richard as an Englishman, possibly based on the probable misidentification of Richard as the canon lawyer Ricardus Anglicus (a misidentification encouraged by Richard's evident familiarity with a great deal of

canon law). But Louis-Jacques Bataillon has recently shown that Richard was from Menneville (in Picardy), not one of many possible Middletons. He became Master (Professor) of Theology at the University of Paris in 1284. Given that one canonical requirement for promotion to a professorship in Theology was to be 35 years old, we can infer that Richard was born sometime before or during the first 8 months of 1249. In 1278, he began the statutory 2 years of lectures on Lombard's *Sentences* at Paris. In 1283, while still Bachelor of Theology, the Minister General of the Franciscans, Bonagratia, appointed him to serve on a commission of seven theologians whose remit was to examine propositions from the works of the Spiritual Franciscan Peter John Olivi. The result – the so-called *Rotulus* – was the condemnation of Olivi's works in 34 propositions on a range of theological topics. In all probability, Richard produced his set of 45 *Quaestiones disputatae* in 1284, followed quickly by three *Quodlibeta* (1284–1285, 1285–1286, and 1286–1287, respectively). He worked on the revision and publication of his *Sentences* commentary between 1285 and 1295 (in book 4 he mentions a “recent” privilege granted to the Franciscans – that is, the Bull *Ad fructus uberes* of Celestine V, November 27, 1294; but he makes no mention of Boniface VIII's important *Liber sextus decretalium* of 1298). The 1304 stationers' lists in Paris show that an exemplar of Richard's *Sentences* commentary was published and was available for hire (the standard way of disseminating and copying university texts in early fourteenth-century Paris). He should perhaps be identified as the R. de Mediavilla who became Provincial Master of the French Franciscans on September 20, 1295. An ordered list of the deaths of Franciscan Masters of Theology places Richard between Walter, Bishop of Poitiers (who died in 1307), and Duns Scotus (who died in 1308). So it may be that his death occurred in one or other of these 2 years.

Richard's thought owes much to his three great predecessors, Bonaventure, Aquinas, and Henry of Ghent, and he eclectically synthesizes from all three, rejecting where he sees fit. The result is nevertheless a coherent and impressive whole, analytically incisive, one that continued to be

regarded as authoritative into the fifteenth century. Richard was even invoked in interventions at the Council of Trent.

Richard follows Thomas Aquinas in adopting a very attenuated form of realism on the question of universals: common natures have no reality independent of their instantiations, but are nevertheless “multiplied” in the particulars that instantiate them. Following Henry of Ghent, Richard explains individuation in terms of a merely negative feature: the negation of divisibility. But Richard explicitly rejects what he takes to be Henry's teaching on the common nature, namely, that common natures have some sort of reality independent of their instantiations, as objects of divine cognition distinct from the divine essence. Richard posits a merely rational distinction between a thing's essence and its existence: to talk of a thing's existence is simply a way of drawing attention to the fact that it has a relation to divine efficient causality. Richard follows Henry of Ghent in holding that the various concepts of being (*ens*, *esse*) are analogical, including no common concept. *Ens* is the first object of the human intellect, but, following Bonaventure, Richard maintains that the transcendental property of goodness is prior to that of being.

Richard agrees with Aquinas' Aristotelianism in rejecting a role for divine illumination in all human cognition, accepting instead that human knowledge derives from the senses. The universal concept exists potentially in the phantasm, and is abstracted by the agent intellect. This abstract mental content is impressed in the possible intellect and actualized in occurrent cognition – the expressed species or mental word. Richard accepts too that our knowledge of God is derived empirically, on the basis of arguments from cause and motion, and he rejects Bonaventure's appropriation of Anselm's ontological argument.

Given that goodness is higher than being, Richard argues that the will is a higher power than the intellect. The will is a self-mover, with the liberty of indifference – granted the condition that the will can only choose when there are reasons for an action: the will can choose between different actions given that each of the actions has some rational motivation. But talk of powers



requires some care here: Richard follows Henry in supposing that talk of intellect and of will are simply ways of talking about the fact that the soul can be related to different sorts of object. (So strictly, the soul is a self-mover with the liberty of indifference, in relation to the different kinds of things it can do; and it is a more perfect function of the soul to be able to choose than it is for the soul to be able to cognize).

There are various novel features of Richard's natural philosophy, the area in which he made perhaps his most significant contributions. For example, he proposed a new account of increase and decrease in the degrees of a quality. He suggests that we should think of such changes on the analogy of quantitative changes: each degree of a quality represents an "amount" of that quality – a *quantitas virtutis*, opposed to the extension of the substance in which the quality inheres: *quantitas molis*. Increases and decreases in the intensity of a quality are understood in terms of changes in the quality's *quantitas virtutis*. As Richard sees it, lower degrees of a quality are in potency to higher degrees – a position he derived from Henry of Ghent. Higher degrees actualize this potency, and this actualization relation is required to explain how it is that degrees of a quality have some kind of intrinsic unity, just as the potency-actuality relation between matter and substantial form explains the unity of a substance composed of matter and form. Scotus took up Richard's quantitative understanding of the degrees of a quality, though he rejected the potency claim that Richard borrowed from Henry.

Richard followed the standard Franciscan line, against Aquinas, in accepting a plurality of substantial forms in animate substances, something he took to be required to explain the generation and corruption of such objects. In addition to this, he posited a novel theory of matter, one designed to accommodate Aristotelian accounts with more standard Franciscan ones. According to these latter accounts, matter must have some actuality all of its own if it is to persist through substantial change. Richard accepts that there is such matter and that it is what enters into composition with

substantial forms as the constituents of a material substance. But he holds that there is a more Aristotelian sort of matter too: pure potency from which forms are "educated." This pure potency somehow inchoately contains the forms which are educated from it, and Richard posits it in order to circumvent the worry that forms are created *ex nihilo* when they begin to enter into composition with matter. Richard posits too a third kind of matter, proper to angels: incorporeal, unextended matter. The idea is that an angel is a self-mover, and anything that is a self-mover must include active and passive components (form and matter): the active component is what moves something, and the passive component is what gets to be moved.

A further distinctive feature of Richard's natural philosophy is his belief that substantial forms, as well as certain accidental ones, admit of degrees. One standard problem in Aristotelian physics is to provide an account of the way in which the four elements exist as components of material substances. Richard's solution has two stages. First, since substantial forms admit of degrees, elements can be educated to greater or lesser degrees from the potency of matter. Secondly, although fully blown instances of the elements are incompatible with each other, lesser degrees are not: they can interpenetrate and thus compose different kinds of things. In the background here is Averroes' view that nonelemental substances include the elements and their distinctive qualities in a remitted or fragmented state.

In addition to this, there is considerable evidence that Richard paid great attention to empirical experience and to inductive arguments made on the basis of such experience: something which is taken to be evidence of his having spent some time in Oxford.

## Cross-References

- ▶ [Bonaventure](#)
- ▶ [Essence and Existence](#)
- ▶ [Form and Matter](#)
- ▶ [Henry of Ghent](#)



- ▶ [Intension and Remission of Forms](#)
- ▶ [Peter John Olivi](#)
- ▶ [Thomas Aquinas](#)

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## Richard of St. Victor

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### Abstract

The writings of Richard of St. Victor contain exegetical, mystical, and theological texts. The exegetical writings of Richard are grounded in the works of Hugh of St. Victor. These exegetical writings support an ambitious project of tracing the soul's spiritual ascent – and its objects of contemplation – as the soul ascends from imagination to reason and finally beyond reason. This spiritual project culminates in Richard's systematic treatise on the Trinity, in which he considers the nature of the Triune God as the highest level of the soul's spiritual contemplation.

Richard of St. Victor (d. 1173) was a member of the Augustinian canons regular at the Abbey of St. Victor, located on the left bank of the Seine just outside the city walls of twelfth-century Paris. Richard probably arrived at the Abbey after the death of Hugh (1141) in the 1150s, and he follows Hugh closely in his exegetical, mystical, and theological writings. Richard was elected sub-prior of the abbey in 1159 and prior in 1162, spending much of his time as prior under the problematic abbacy of Gilduin.

Richard continued the intellectual program begun by Hugh of Saint Victor, employing a similar exegetical method and operating within the same intellectual framework as Hugh. This is evident in Richard's reliance on Augustine of Hippo, and his own intellectual debt to Hugh. But, given these similarities, Richard's own works are more “scholastic” in nature. The methodological approach of Richard's *De trinitate* and his reliance on Anselm's concept of “necessary reasons” anticipate certain late twelfth- and early thirteenth-century developments in trinitarian

theology. Richard's works are collected in *Patrologia Latina* 196 and are currently being edited in modern critical editions.

## Exegetical and Spiritual Writings

The influence of Hugh's *Didascalicon* on Richard is significant, as he relies on the division of the sciences and theory of exegesis that Hugh established. This is evident in Richard's *Liber exceptionum* and *De Emmanuele*: the former is an introductory work of Scriptural exegesis, the latter a significant response to the "Judaizing" exegetical practices of the students of Andrew of St. Victor. Richard's theory of exegesis is perhaps best approached through two of his most influential tropological and spiritual works: *De duodecim patriarchis* (*The Twelve Patriarchs*/also referred to as *Benjamin minor*) and *De arca mystica* (*The Mystical Ark*/also referred to as *Benjamin major*).

*The Twelve Patriarchs* is a tropological and spiritual exegesis of the Genesis account of Jacob, his four wives (Leah, and her handmaiden Zelpha; Rachel, and her handmaiden Baal), and their twelve offspring (patriarchs). The work is an analysis of the soul's affective and rational powers: Jacob representing the rational soul, with Leah and Rachel symbolizing affection (*affectus*) and reason (*ratio*) respectively. The other aspects of the rational soul are represented by Zelpha and Baal, who symbolize bodily sense and imagination. Further, the 12 sons of Jacob represent various aspects of the above rational powers: (1) Leah's six sons represent the virtues that discipline the will; (2) Zelpha's two sons represent the governing of deeds; (3) Rachel's two sons represent contemplation and asceticism; (4) and Baal's two sons represent the governing of thoughts. For Richard, when the soul's affective and rational powers (four wives) are properly governed by their respective virtues (12 children/patriarchs), the soul is properly ordered and fit for contemplation.

Richard develops in *The Twelve Patriarchs* a sophisticated philosophical psychology that is

substantially expanded in *The Mystical Ark*. The latter work, influenced by the Pseudo-Dionysius' *Celestial Hierarchy*, lays out six degrees of contemplation; the first two degrees are located in the imagination, the second two in reason, and the final two transcend reason. The work traces the soul's spiritual ascent and the various objects of speculation that are present to the soul in its ascent. The result is an epistemological as well as spiritual analysis of the human soul and its objects of knowledge and contemplation.

## Theological Speculation

Richard's longest and most theologically sophisticated work is his *De trinitate*, a book that is best understood as building on the program of the soul's ascent described in the *Twelve Patriarchs* and *The Mystical Ark*. Richard's *De trinitate* is known for three aspects: (1) a redefinition of the Boethian definition of person; (2) his argument or "proof" of the Trinity from love in book 3; and (3) his emphasis on a "social Trinity." These three generalities, while not entirely misleading, must be considered within the work as a whole and as part of Richard's larger mystical and theological project.

The *De trinitate* is divided into six books of twelve chapters each. The prologue and the introductory section of the work is largely methodological and essential to locating the work within Richard's spiritual and epistemological writings (*De trin.* Prol.-1.10). Within the schema laid out in the *Mystical Ark*, Richard argues in this methodological discussion that the analysis of the Trinity belongs to the fifth and sixth stages of the soul's ascent and therefore transcends reason. The second section of the work, which concludes book I (*De trin.* 1.11–1.25), is an exposition of the divine unity. Richard focuses on the supremacy and unity of the Divine nature. Book II is an analysis of the attributes of God: eternal, immutable, immeasurable, etc. This discussion also considers the attributes of power and wisdom (*potentia/sapientia*), anticipating the discussion

of the personal properties in chapter V. After considering the divine unity Richard turns to the plurality of the divine persons in chapter III, offering an “argument” for the necessity of the divine persons grounded in the nature of divine love. Richard’s argument, within the context of the prologue, must be understood as transcending reason in the soul’s ascent to God, and not as an Aristotelian demonstration. The fourth book considers the correlation of the divine unity and plurality as expounded in the terms person and existence – offering in conclusion a redefinition of the concept of person as used in trinitarian discourse (*singularem aliquem rationalis existentie, De trin.* 4.24). Book V continues the analysis of the Divine persons and their personal properties. This discussion is significant for Richard’s reluctance to follow Hugh in appropriating power, wisdom, and goodness (*potentia, sapientia, benignitas*) to the Divine persons, given the critique of Abelard’s use of this triadic structure by theologians like Gautier of Mortagne (*PL* 209, col. 573–590; see also Richard’s *De tribus appropriatis personis in trinitate, PL* 196, col. 991–994). In the final book, Richard considers the divine processions and locates the distinction of persons in the processions of the Son and the Holy Spirit from the Father.

Richard’s trinitarian theology is significant historically because of his emphasis on, and divergence from, certain aspects of the Augustinian tradition. His influence is evident in the trinitarian theology of Bonaventure and Henry of Ghent and their emphasis on the divine processions. This focus on the divine processions is followed by numerous Franciscan authors in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, including John Duns Scotus who also adopts Richard’s definition of person in trinitarian discourse.

## Cross-References

- ▶ [Boethius](#)
- ▶ [Bonaventure](#)
- ▶ [Henry of Ghent](#)
- ▶ [Hugh of St. Victor](#)

- ▶ [John Duns Scotus](#)
- ▶ [Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite](#)

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## Richard Rufus of Cornwall

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### Abstract

Richard Rufus of Cornwall was a scholastic philosopher-theologian who flourished between 1231 and 1256. He lectured at Paris on the newly rediscovered Aristotelian *libri naturales*, most importantly on Aristotle's *Metaphysics*. Subsequently, as a Franciscan, he lectured on theology at Oxford and at Paris. At the start of his career, he was most influenced by Averroes, but within a few years he wrote a treatise disputing many of Averroes' views, particularly on the divine intellect and on individuation. In theology, Rufus' dispute with Richard Fishacre set the stage for generations of controversy between Franciscans and Dominicans on the nature of the will. Nonetheless, his works were unremarked and misattributed for centuries after 1350. But though the rediscovery of his works did not begin until 1926, Rufus' influence on Roger Bacon, Albert the Great, and John Duns Scotus has already been documented.

### Biographical Information

Richard Rufus of Cornwall's first appearance in the historical record is his entrance into the Franciscan order in Paris, probably as a master of arts, about 1238. He made his profession in England and lectured on the *Sentences* at Oxford around 1250 and at Paris around 1253–1255. He became the fifth Franciscan regent master in theology at Oxford in 1256, succeeding Thomas of York, and is last heard of in November 1259, as the recipient of the bequest of a habit. Most of the information we have about him comes from Franciscan sources: Adam Marsh, Thomas Eccleston, and Roger Bacon. Marsh tells us that Rufus was brilliant and beloved by all. Eccleston lists him as

the fifth Franciscan lector in theology at Oxford. According to Eccleston, Rufus was a master famous at Oxford and at Paris who brought acclaim to the Franciscan order when he joined the order at Paris. Roger Bacon agrees that Rufus was famous, but claims that this was only with the foolish multitude; the wise considered him insane (Raedts 1987, pp. 1–10).

His major works fall into two broad categories: the Aristotelian commentaries originating in his teaching career in the Parisian arts faculty before 1238 and the theological works of his later years. The Aristotelian commentaries can only be loosely dated in relative terms, but the earliest, perhaps ca. 1231–1235, seem to be the *Memoriale in Metaphysicam*, a set of brief questions, and a commentary on the *Posterior Analytics*, only a fragment of which survives. They were followed by commentaries on the *Physics* and *De generatione*, ca. 1232–1236, and on the *De anima*, subsequent to the *Physics*, and then by the *Scriptum in Metaphysicam*, a lengthy and highly developed work, ca. 1237–1238 (Lewis and Wood 2011, pp. 49–54; Wood 2001, pp. 153–155; Wood and Andrews 1996, app. 1, pp. 341–343). The major theological works ascribed to Rufus are two *Sentences* commentaries. The earlier of the two, referred to here as the Oxford commentary, is dated to Oxford around 1250 (Raedts 1987, pp. 20–39; Wood 1992, pp. 258–262). The second commentary, referred to here as the Paris commentary, is an abbreviation of Bonaventure's *Sentences* commentary with significant additional material, some but not all of it drawn from the Oxford commentary; it post-dates Bonaventure's completion of his own commentary about 1253, but probably not by very long (Raedts 1987, pp. 40–63; Wood 1992, pp. 262–263). There are also a handful of disputed questions and short independent treatises, both philosophical and theological. The two most important of these are the *Contra Averroem*, which follows the *De anima* commentary and precedes the *Scriptum in Metaphysicam*, and the *Speculum animae*, which follows the *Scriptum* and precedes the Oxford *Sentences* commentary (Etchemendy and Wood 2011, pp. 83–104).

The attribution of all these works to the same author has been the subject of scholarly debate, as has their dating. One source of difficulty is that the Oxford *Sentences* commentary's use of the *Scriptum in Metaphysicam*, while extensive, is not unambiguously classifiable as authorial reuse. Not only does the *Sentences* commentary recite the opinions put forward in the *Metaphysics* commentary in the third person, ascribing them to "philosophers," but more difficult to explain, the author of the *Sentences* commentary more than once comments (in the first person) that he simply does not understand the *Metaphysics* commentary's positions. Peter Raedts (1987, pp. 94–105) concludes in his study of Rufus' place in the history of Oxford theology that the two works could not be by the same person, with the consequence that he assigns the *Sentences* commentary to the Cornish Franciscan and the *Metaphysics* commentary to an unknown author. Timothy B. Noone (1989), in reply to Raedts, agrees on the nature of the problem but argues for the opposite solution, crediting Rufus with authorship of the *Metaphysics* commentary, which he places at Oxford in the 1240s, and judging the authorship of the *Sentences* commentary unproven. Rega Wood (1992, pp. 257–258; 1994, pp. 89–92), following a suggestion previously made by Gedeon Gál (1975, 137n6), believes that both works are by Rufus, but that the *Scriptum in Metaphysicam* was written before Rufus entered the Franciscan order, so that the apparently strange form of self-reference is an expression of Rufus' Franciscan humility and his desire as a friar and theologian to distance himself from his earlier secular career.

Silvia Donati (2005) also accepts the attribution of both the Oxford *Sentences* commentary and the *Scriptum in Metaphysicam* to Rufus, but she finds no convincing external reasons to attribute *In Physicam* and several of the other Aristotelian commentaries to Rufus and significant doctrinal reasons to reject the attribution. In her view, the similarities of both style and doctrine among *In Physicam*, *In De generatione*, *In De anima*, and *In Analytica posteriora* make it plausible that these four works do have a single author, but that author is unlikely to be Rufus. Wood's

(2009) reply to Donati, defending the attributions, argues that Donati is too quick to read these early works in the light of later authors, rather than on their own terms, and too quick to see doctrinal inconsistency where Wood sees differences in context, doctrinal development, or the creative exploration of ultimately rejected solutions (see also Lewis and Wood 2011, pp. 17–48). Since the editing and publication of these works is not complete, this debate will no doubt continue; for the purposes of this article, however, it will be presumed that Rufus is the author of all the works discussed here.

## Thought

As one of the first Latin authors to teach Aristotle's newly rediscovered natural philosophy in the 1230s, Rufus engaged extensively with the works of Aristotle's great Arab commentator Averroes, both as a guide to Aristotle and as a thinker in his own right. In his first *Metaphysics* commentary and in his *Physics*, *De anima*, and *De generatione* commentaries, Rufus was most strongly influenced by Averroes, whose views he generally adopted, but even at this stage, his approach to Averroes was not uncritical. Unlike Bacon, he had little interest in Avicenna and other Arab authors (Lewis and Wood 2011, pp. 61–63; Noone 1997, pp. 254–255; Wood 2007). Like Rufus, Bacon lectured at Paris on the newly introduced *libri naturales* before becoming a Franciscan: Rufus in the 1230s and Bacon in the 1240s. Not surprisingly, Bacon was both influenced by Rufus and rejected some of the views Rufus stated, including his views about the logic of empty classes and real names, about divine ideas and the agent intellect, and about the eternity of the world, projectile motion, and place; perhaps more surprisingly, Rufus was sometimes readier to disagree with Aristotle and Averroes than Bacon was (Wood 1994, 1997).

Possibly influenced by Robert Grosseteste, late in his secular career Rufus began to move away from Averroes. His *Contra Averroem* was designed to refute Averroes' views on divine knowledge and on individuation (Karger 1998),



while in his *Scriptum in Metaphysicam* Rufus cited Grosseteste as “a man most excellent in knowledge” (*vir excellentissimus in scientia*), a striking deviation from the standard medieval practice of referring to contemporaries merely as anonymous *quidam* or *aliqui* (“some people”) and one that testifies to his high regard for Grosseteste. Notably, though Bacon in his late works presented himself as the defender of an older tradition exemplified by Grosseteste, in opposition to what Bacon claimed were the dangerous novelties propagated by Rufus, Rufus’ *Scriptum* shows far greater appreciation of and engagement with Grosseteste’s works than Bacon’s questions on the *Metaphysics*. On the interpretation of Aristotle’s views on the eternity of the world, the possibility of a multiplicity of eternal truths, and divine knowledge of future contingents, the differences between Rufus and Bacon can be traced back to Rufus’ more extensive use of Grosseteste (Noone 1997).

As an Oxford bachelor of theology, Rufus continued to rely on Grosseteste’s works but also drew on the works of his Franciscan predecessors at Paris, the *Sentences* gloss of Alexander of Hales and the *Summa* compiled under Alexander’s name. Leading patristic authorities were Anselm of Canterbury, Bernard of Clairvaux, Hugh of St. Victor, and especially Augustine. Most immediately, however, Rufus was responding to Richard Fishacre, the Dominican master of theology responsible for the earliest surviving Oxford *Sentences* commentary. Rufus reused large portions of Fishacre’s commentary in his own work while also regularly criticizing Fishacre’s views. Fishacre himself may have known some of Rufus’ earlier work (Wood 2002, pp. 328–336), but the two men had fundamentally different approaches to their task. Where Fishacre sought to justify what was at the time the curricular innovation of lectures on the *Sentences* by characterizing the *Sentences* as a branch of Scripture, Rufus did not hesitate to draw a sharp line between the two, or to relegate the *Sentences* to a subordinate position. Reflecting Grosseteste’s influence, Rufus claimed that commenting on Lombard was not doing theology, since Scripture is by itself the complete and perfect theology and requires

no summary. His lectures were rather an attempt to elucidate some obscure statements subordinate to theology (Raedts 1987, pp. 122–151; Wood 2002, pp. 292–300).

At the same time, and perhaps precisely because he did not feel the need to tie his lectures on the *Sentences* as closely to the theologian’s traditional task of Scriptural exegesis as Fishacre did, Rufus felt free to bring his knowledge of Aristotelian logic and natural philosophy, more extensive than Fishacre’s, broadly to bear, even as he sought to minimize solely philosophical excurses, in part by referencing his earlier philosophical works, such as the discussion of individuation in his *Contra Averroem* (Wood 2002, pp. 336–337). On controversial questions like the plurality of forms in the human soul (Callus 1939), he drew sharp distinctions between philosophers’ and theologians’ views. As in his Aristotle commentaries, he was especially interested in questions raised by the text itself, whether apparent ambiguities or contradictions within the *Sentences* or objections that might be raised on other grounds, sometimes based on philosophical principles and sometimes on the additional patristic quotations he regularly supplied. He then deployed the same resources in the attempt to resolve these questions, producing an important work that influenced John Duns Scotus. Among the more interesting questions Rufus addressed was the nature of the human will, on which his reply to Richard Fishacre anticipated the long dispute between Franciscans and Dominicans about whether the will should be seen as primarily a volitional or an intellectual faculty (Raedts 1987, pp. 201–221).

In his second commentary on the *Sentences*, Rufus took Bonaventure’s *Sentences* commentary as the basis for his own work, most often abbreviating and digesting Bonaventure’s massive commentary for the benefit of his own students. As a result, Rufus’ Paris commentary is for long stretches more classically scholastic in form, reproducing the tight structure of Bonaventure’s carefully organized disputed questions. Nevertheless, Rufus disagreed with Bonaventure where he felt it necessary, not least where he felt Bonaventure’s opinion lacked



sufficient patristic support. He sometimes substituted his own solution for Bonaventure's and sometimes offered it as an alternative, and he also abandoned Bonaventure entirely on occasion, taking up questions Bonaventure did not explore. Typically Rufus' own contribution is briefer than his presentation of Bonaventure's views. However, Rufus' critical comments on Bonaventure were incisive and exercised an independent influence – on Robert Kilwardby, for example (Wood 2002). Bonaventure himself, moreover, seems to have been influenced on occasion by Rufus' Oxford *Sentences* lectures (Wood 2002, pp. 317–319, 338–339) and also to have known some of his other works (Wood 1992, pp. 268–270; 1994, pp. 98–99). Like his more famous fellow Franciscan William of Ockham, Rufus generally sought to minimize the number of metaphysical entities posited to explain any given phenomenon, a habit that roused the critical ire of at least one medieval reader of his Paris *Sentences* commentary, but one that is closely connected to his origination of the formal distinction, credited to “ancient doctors” (*antiqui doctores*) by its most influential proponent, the likewise Franciscan John Duns Scotus (Gál 1975). His views on individual forms directly influenced Scotus (Wood 1996).

Perhaps no less significant for the development of early scholasticism is Rufus' influence on the next generation of secular arts masters at Oxford. Both Adam Buckfield and Geoffrey Aspill knew Rufus' Aristotelian commentaries well and drew on them for their own work, as did a number of anonymous authors associated with one or another of these masters. Rufus' *Physics* commentary was probably used by Buckfield (Donati 1998, pp. 136–142) and was clearly influential on the broader body of later English commentators, at least two of whom quoted Rufus extensively (Trifogli 2000, pp. 31–33). Rufus' rejection of actually infinite magnitude (Trifogli 2000, pp. 95–99), his explanation of the immobility of place through the immobility of the celestial nature (Trifogli 2000, pp. 171–175), his view that the place of the heavens is their outermost surface (Trifogli 2000, pp. 197–202), and his arguments for the extramental reality of number

and time (Trifogli 2000, pp. 223–225) are only some of his opinions that would find an echo in later authors. His views on place seem to have remained familiar in Paris as well, where they may have been known to Thomas Aquinas (Wood 1994, pp. 124–126). Rufus' *De generatione* commentary was used by Bacon, Buckfield, Aspill, and several anonymous authors (Lewis and Wood 2011, pp. 8–11, 84–97). Aspill's questions on the *Metaphysics* adopted Rufus' reductionist account of the unity of being, and while Aspill rejected Rufus' views on the difference between the metaphysician's and the logician's treatment of being, the analysis of this difference that he developed in response to Rufus became a constitutive element of a distinctively English commentary tradition extending down to Scotus (Donati 2014).

Rufus' theory of appellative terms, as developed in his *Scriptum in Metaphysicam*, influenced Buckfield, Albert the Great, and several anonymous authors (Wood 2008–9). For Rufus, appellation is the function of predicates and refers to forms, while supposition is the function of subjects and refers to form-matter aggregates, but since the same term, a noun such as “human being” (*homo*), can refer to both forms and aggregates and to both universals and individuals, the problem is to determine just what is being referred to any given case. In Rufus' theory, each such appellative term has two significates, each of which in turn has two modes. The primary significate is a form, which may be considered either as it is distinct from its appellates or as it is multiplied in them. In the former case, it is a universal in the soul; in the latter, it is a substantial quality instantiable in and predicable of multiple individuals. The secondary significate is a form-matter aggregate, which similarly may be considered either as it is distinct from its suppositives or as it is multiplied in them. In the former case, it is the nonindividual subject of definition; in the latter, it is the individual subject of propositions, from a logical perspective, or the extramental aggregate individual, from an ontological one. Crucially, this was for Rufus not only a logical theory about the meaning of terms, but just as much an ontological one about what it is that links mental

concepts and extramental objects and allows us to rely on a degree of real correspondence between the two.

This last aspect of the problem was further developed in a brief epistemological treatise written after the *Scriptum* and prominently referenced in the prologue to the Oxford lectures on Lombard, a work entitled *Speculum animae* in the manuscript that preserves it (Etchemendy and Wood 2011). The *Speculum* was Rufus' exposition of Aristotle's claim in *On the Soul* (3.8) that "the soul is in some manner all things." In it Rufus distinguished between the proximate and remote objects of apprehension. The remote objects are nature forms properly classified in the Aristotelian categories, while the proximate objects of apprehension are species forms not included in the Aristotelian categories. It is as it is actualized by species forms that the soul is all things, according to Rufus. Thus Rufus did not consider Averroes' version of the barrenness claim – namely, that the soul cannot receive a form it already has – a problem for self-understanding, since the form understood differs ontologically from its nature form (Normore 2007, pp. 128–129).

As Bacon noted, Rufus was famous not only in his own lifetime but for about 50 years after the presumed date of his death in about 1260. However, after 1350 Rufus was no longer cited, and his works were not rediscovered until the twentieth century. They exercised only an indirect influence on later scholasticism not just because their discussions were brief and not fully adumbrated but also because Rufus' commitment to intellectual humility led him not to name his own works even when quoting from them. Nonetheless, Rufus is an important figure in the history of scholasticism both because of his brilliant arguments and because he played an important role in setting the agenda for later scholasticism.

## Cross-References

- ▶ [Albert the Great](#)
- ▶ [Alexander of Hales](#)

- ▶ [Anselm of Canterbury](#)
- ▶ [Aristotelianism in the Greek, Latin, Syriac, Arabic, and Hebrew Traditions](#)
- ▶ [Augustine](#)
- ▶ [Bernard of Clairvaux](#)
- ▶ [Bonaventure](#)
- ▶ [De generatione et corruptione, Commentaries on Aristotle's](#)
- ▶ [Epistemology](#)
- ▶ [Hugh of St. Victor](#)
- ▶ [Ibn Rushd, Muḥammad ibn Aḥmad al-Ḥafīd \(Averroes\)](#)
- ▶ [John Duns Scotus](#)
- ▶ [Metaphysics](#)
- ▶ [Natural Philosophy](#)
- ▶ [Peter Lombard](#)
- ▶ [Posterior Analytics, Commentaries on Aristotle's](#)
- ▶ [Richard Fishacre](#)
- ▶ [Robert Grosseteste](#)
- ▶ [Robert Kilwardby](#)
- ▶ [Roger Bacon](#)
- ▶ [Sense Perception, Theories of](#)
- ▶ [Species: Sensible and Intelligible](#)
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## Richard Swineshead

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### Abstract

Richard Swineshead (fl. c. 1340–1355, Oxford, England) is most famous as the author of the *Book of Calculations* (*Liber calculationum*), which treats various topics of natural philosophy using a mixture of logic and verbal mathematics. The book was apparently meant to support students in the Arts Faculty at Oxford who were taking part in required disputations.

### Biographical Information

“Richard Swineshead” is here taken to be the name of the author of the well-known *Book of Calculations* (*Liber calculationum*), produced at Oxford University probably in the fifth decade of the fourteenth century. Because of his identification with this book, Swineshead was often called “Calculator” by Continental scholars who used his work in the later fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. There is some uncertainty about his first name – and there were several people with the last name Swineshead associated with Oxford in the fourteenth century who have been confused with one another – but for purposes of this work, it is perhaps sufficient to know that Richard Swineshead was probably not the same person as Roger Swineshead, who wrote the works *De insolubilibus*, *De obligationibus*, and *De motibus naturalibus* at Oxford in the 1330s, and who may have been a Benedictine monk and master of sacred theology. The Richard Swineshead who is the topic of this article probably also wrote short works, known only in manuscript, titled *De motu*, *De motu locali*, and *De caelo*. His name appears in the records of Merton College, Oxford, possibly in 1340; certainly in 1344; and yet again in 1355. Otherwise, very little is known of his life.

## Thought

In his *Book of Calculations (Liber calculationum)*, Richard Swineshead provided an introduction to quantification techniques within a number of different natural philosophical categories, such as qualities, illumination, and local motion. At Oxford University in the fourteenth century, students in the Faculty of Arts took part in disputations testing their ability to detect fallacious reasoning and to argue for one point of view over another. The core discipline that they used in their arguments was logic, particularly the “new logic,” based on the “supposition” of terms within propositions, that is, with the way that terms in propositions refer to things in the physical world or to intentions in the mind. After about 1330, however, disputants used not only logical theory but also other sets of analytical tools, such as the analysis of first and last instants (or beginning and ceasing), of maxima and minima, and of the intension and remission of forms such as warmth and coldness or white and black. Swineshead’s *Book of Calculations* included 16 treatises, each one dealing with a different problem area. Swineshead built upon the work of Thomas Bradwardine *On the Proportions of Velocities in Motions* (1328), as well as upon William Heytesbury’s *Rules for Solving Sophisms* (1335). It was probably the perceived achievement of Bradwardine in formulating a mathematical law or function relating forces, resistances, and velocities in alteration and augmentation and diminution, as well as in local motion, that encouraged later fourteenth-century scholastics to intensify their attention to mathematical or quantitative topics, combining logical and mathematical techniques and focusing special attention on infinity and continuity.

One terrestrial subject matter to which calculations had been applied before the fourteenth century was the matter of calculating the degrees of compound medicines, on the Galenic theory that many diseases occur because the person is too hot, too cold, too wet, or too dry, and that the fundamental purpose of medications is to bring the state of the sick person back to the temperate or normal. Usually, there were supposed to be four degrees in

any quality, ranging from the insensible, to the sensible, the strong, through to the lethal. The pharmacist might mix medicines of varying degrees in order to get a compound medicine of an intermediate degree, strong enough to counteract the imbalance in the sick person’s body, but not too strong.

The first and most famous treatise of the *Book of Calculations*, which is sometimes found separately, was concerned with the “intension and remission of forms” or with how the increase or decrease in the intensity of a quality should be measured. If the compounding of medicines had been a primary locus for such concerns before the fourteenth century, it was the intensification of charity or grace given by God that held the attention of theologians in the later Middle Ages, a topic always dealt with in connection with Distinction 17 of Book I of Peter Lombard’s *Book of Sentences*, the primary textbook of systematic theology in medieval theological faculties. The theory of the intensification of grace had many problems special to it, since it was assumed that God gives grace freely – how one’s grace may increase over time does not follow exactly the same pattern as, for instance, the increase of one’s strength over time as the result of doing exercises. Nevertheless, it was in commentaries on Book I, Distinction 17, of the *Sentences* that discussions of the intension and remission of forms most often occurred.

In the *Book of Calculations*, the question of intension and remission of forms is discussed mainly in terms of “any quality you please.” The first subject was whether the intensity of a quality should be measured by its nearness to the maximum degree (and remissness by distance from the maximum degree) or if, instead, intensity should be measured by distance from zero degree and remissness by closeness to zero degree. Of course, the practical problem of the best reference point for measures of quality is familiar to us because of the difference between the Fahrenheit and Celsius temperature scales. For Swineshead, the problem was more abstract. Measuring from the maximum degree might not make sense if there was, in fact, no maximum degree in a given quality. In the case of hot and cold, familiar at the time because of its



importance in medicine and pharmacy, there was the problem of relating hot and cold. For instance, is something twice as hot therefore half as cold? Should a body be considered to be both hot and cold at the same time, or should the temperature scales be arranged so that heat decreases down to zero and then cold begins to increase, as do degrees below zero on modern temperature scales?

After additional treatises on problems of measuring qualities and alteration, Swineshead turned to problems of measuring rarity and density, as well as the velocity of increase or decrease in size. In Treatise VII, he raised the problem of “reaction” – if body A warms body B next to it, will not body B cool body A at the same time? How should the power of a body to heat another body be measured and how should the power of resistance of the body acted upon be measured? After discussing maxima and minima, and a special problem of what would happen if a thin rod fell within a channel running through the middle of the earth, Swineshead came to the problem of speeds of local motion, where he applied Bradwardine’s theory that velocity depends upon the ratio of force to resistance in such a way that a geometric increase in the ratio will lead to a linear increase in velocity. Later treatises measure the diffusion of illumination and the gradual increase over time in the quality of a body that is more affected near the agent affecting it.

Probably the most impressive descendant of Swineshead’s *Book of Calculations* was the *Book of the Triple Motion* meant as an introduction to Swineshead’s book, written by the Portuguese scholar Alvarus Thomas and published at Paris in 1509. Although in the 150 years between the two books there had been relatively few scholars capable of mastering Swineshead’s technicalities, Alvarus Thomas was certainly up to the job.

## Cross-References

- ▶ [Oxford Calculators](#)
- ▶ [Thomas Bradwardine](#)
- ▶ [William Heytesbury](#)

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## Robert Greystones

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### Abstract

Robert Greystones was a Benedictine monk, born before 1290, died in 1334. He attended Durham College in Oxford around 1306–1326, where he lectured on the *Sentences* between 1320 and 1323. His *Sentences* commentary is a valuable guide to the intellectual climate at



Oxford immediately after William of Ockham but before successors such as Robert Holcot and Adam Wodeham. His single complete surviving manuscript is made all the more useful because of its many named and quoted references to his contemporaries, some otherwise unknown. Greystones reveals Scotist tendencies, but not dogmatically so. An insistence upon God's unlimited power, as established by the Condemnation of 1277, led Greystones to radical skepticism about human knowledge. Like Descartes, Greystones held that we can be certain about our own existence (*ego sum*), but not about the conditions of that existence: whether we are in this life or the afterlife, in a body or not. Since God has the power to interfere in the sensations we receive, we cannot be certain about the existence of any external object. We have no certain knowledge of cause and effect, the existence of substances, or any contingent event. Preempting Descartes' appeal to a beneficent, nondeceptive God, Greystones says: God does not deceive. But you deceive yourself if you insist on believing that something exists when you know that it might not! You know that God can intervene at any instant and thus that you can never completely trust your senses. Greystones' skepticism, cutting-edge but representative of his intellectual milieu, is strikingly significant in light of the later historical development of philosophy.

## Life

Robert Greystones was born before 1290, likely in Greystones, South Yorkshire, although perhaps his surname derives from the Greystanes family in the county of Durham. It was at Durham that he entered the Benedictine Order between 1300 and 1310. Likewise he attended Durham College at Oxford around 1306–1326, where he lectured on the *Sentences* between 1320 and 1323. By 1332 he was back at Durham as subprior. His election as Bishop of Durham in 1333 was nullified, because the Pope had already filled the position. He died in late 1334 (Greystones 2017).

## Philosophy

Robert Greystones had almost no influence after the first century subsequent to his philosophical activity. His most important work, a lengthy *Sentences* commentary with associated texts, survives in a single Westminster Abbey manuscript, although a few extracts of that commentary were included in a miscellany assembled by the Carmelite Stephen Patrington about 1390. The selections chosen by Patrington indicate that there was some interest in Greystones' skeptical positions before they were forgotten for 600 years. Kennedy (1985), editing these texts, found it natural to place them in the late fourteenth century; but Greystones was an innovator, not an epigone.

Greystones's commentary is of special interest to the historian of philosophy because, atypically, it provides frequent marginal notes identifying the many near-contemporaries cited – names such as John Duns Scotus, William of Ockham, William Alnwick, Robert Cowton, Henry of Harclay, Richard Campsall, and John of Reading; but also lesser-known names such as Robert of Walsingham, Gerard of Bologna, Nicholas Trevet, (Johannes?) Kykeley, Luke (of Ely?), and an otherwise unknown Surrey (Courtenay 2008). For some of these authors' views, Greystones may be the only identifying source.

Most of what is currently known about Greystones' thought concerns his views on free will and skepticism, although much of his writings remains to be investigated. In his insistence on the primacy and power of the will, Greystones is much like Duns Scotus; while Greystones is an early interpreter of Scotus, accessing his views through the explanations of Alnwick and Harclay (Greystones 2017, p. xxxviii), he is not an uncritical defender, as is evidenced in the many instances where he criticizes specific arguments of Scotus. At other times, he makes his own way along the *via Scoti*. The question concerning the impeccability of the blessed in heaven is instructive. For Scotus, the capacity for choice and so for sinning remains, but its exercise is prevented by God who “holds” the will, much as someone blindfolded still retains the bare capacity to see but is prevented from exercising that capacity

by imposed circumstances. But, Scotus' contemporaries objected, if coercion is to act against a thing's nature or inclinations, how is God's "holding" a free creature not coercion? Greystones' reply to these objections is astonishing: God does not and cannot coerce anything, since God is the all-powerful, sovereign Creator: "His power is not bound to the laws or numbers [i.e., natures] of creation, therefore whatever He does concerning a creature, He does not act against nature, since whatever God does concerning a creature is natural to it" (Greystones 2017, pp. lviii, 93).

Another instance of Greystones going his own way is the case of the divine will. Greystones denies Scotus' position that what is free need not be contingent and that God loves himself both necessarily and freely. Greystones's definition of freedom is the power for alternatives. Thus God's acts with regard to His own nature, being without alternatives, are necessitated, but with regard to creation, alternatives are possible, and His acts are free (Greystones 2017, p. lxiii).

Insistence upon God's unconditional power, carried out to its extreme conclusions with logical consistency, resulted in Greystones' skepticism. Others of an earlier generation had confronted similar skeptical threats, but by various strategies had attempted to avoid them. William of Ockham, for instance, utilized Duns Scotus' distinction between intuitive and abstractive cognition to forestall skepticism; humans have certain knowledge of external reality because it is presented in direct, intuitive cognition. But already John of Reading preempted this strategy: God could instill in us an intuition indistinguishable from intuitive cognition without the existence of an external object. William of Alnwick subsequently proposed a further distinction of intuitive cognition into aptitudinal and actual intuitive cognition: if God were to introduce in us cognition of a non-existent object, we would have aptitudinal intuitive cognition only – thereby providing some sort of certainty concerning actually present objects. But Greystones readily dismisses this move: if God could infuse a non-referring intuitive cognition, He could also infuse a non-referring aptitudinal intuitive cognition. We cannot be certain

about the existence of any external object merely because of an appearance.

Greystones arrives at a series of other radical and disconcerting results. Causal effect cannot be known – as later Nicholas of Autrecourt and much later David Hume maintain, there can be no proof from effect to cause. We cannot distinguish between first and second causes. There is no proof from induction. Substances cannot be known by their accidents – as also later suggested by Thomas Manlevelt (van der Helm 2012). There is no knowledge of contingent events. It is impossible to have knowledge of the external world. These conclusions are not proposed as hypothetical or counterfactual; they are conclusions deductively derived from the possibility of direct divine intervention into any aspect of creation, including human cognition, guaranteed by the 69th proposition of the Condemnation of 1277.

Nevertheless, Greystones does not dismantle all human knowledge. Firm in Greystones' worldview – as in Descartes' – is a commitment to the incorrigible truth of logically necessary propositions, such as "a whole is greater than its parts" or "a triangle has three sides." Human certainty extends to all logically necessary statements – and this is perhaps rather extensive, since all sciences depend upon the principles of mathematics and logic (Greystones 1994, p. 167). The certainty of necessary propositions for Greystones is absolute; if *per impossibile* God did not exist, it would still be true that a triangle has three sides and that a whole is greater than its parts.

Certainty also arises from direct and immediate sensation, within given parameters. We may be certain of our immediate phenomenological experiences, such as that I appear to see a white patch; conclusions drawn from that observation, such as that the white patch is a rabbit, are not at all certain. As Descartes will later hold, I may be certain of my own existence (*ego sum*) and life (*ego vivo*); but Greystones hedges that certainty with reservations: I do not know whether I am alive in this life or the next; I do not know whether my consciousness has been, *Matrix*-like, transferred into another body; I would not even know if I shared my body with another consciousness. I cannot be certain of the existence of anything

external to my consciousness. Furthermore, Greystones, two centuries before Descartes, anticipated and rejected Descartes' appeal to a benevolent, nondeceptive God: God does not deceive, but you deceive yourself if you consider yourself to be certain that a thing exists when you know that it might not (Greystones [forthcoming](#)).

Greystones' skepticism cannot be said to have had any direct influence upon the history of philosophy. Apart from the extracts by Patrington, his original work remained buried in a single manuscript. However, Greystones was representative of a series of philosophers who carried their shared presuppositions to extreme skeptical conclusions. Greystones was the earliest of the tradition of Nicholas of Autrecourt, William Crathorn, *Monachus Niger* (the Black Monk), Nicholas Aston, the mysterious and peculiar John Went (Kennedy 1983), and likely unknown others, who influenced Peter of Ailly, who in turn influenced the educators of Descartes. These figures were part of an unrecognized subcurrent in the development of modern philosophy. The rediscovery of Greystones requires not just a footnote to, but a rewriting of, the history of philosophy.

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## Robert Grosseteste

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## Abstract

Robert Grosseteste (c. 1168–1253) was an outstanding figure in thirteenth-century intellectual life. He developed an original cosmological theory, the so-called metaphysics of light, based on light as the first common form of all bodies and elaborated a scientific method based on the importance of geometry and experience in the explanation of natural phenomena, which he considered as effects of the action of luminous rays. He introduced the Aristotelian natural philosophy to the western Latin world, producing the first commentaries

on Aristotle's *Physics* and *Posterior Analytics* and translations of *De caelo* and *Nicomachean Ethics*. As a theologian, Grosseteste enriched the Augustinian tradition with the doctrines of the Greek Fathers, mainly Pseudo-Dionysius, whose writings he translated and commented. His originality also emerges in his writings on free will, time, and God's foreknowledge. As bishop of Lincoln, he focused on removing ecclesiastical abuses and promoting the pastoral care, acting as a prominent leader in English ecclesiastical and political life. His intellectual heritage influenced both scientific developments and political movements, mainly in fourteenth-century England.

## Life and Works

Grosseteste was born into a humble Anglo-Norman family in Suffolk (c. 1168) and was probably educated at the cathedral school of Lincoln, since he first appears with the title of master in a Lincoln document (c. 1189). A letter (c. 1192) by Gerard of Wales recommends him for his excellence in liberal arts, canon law, and medicine to Bishop William de Vere of Hereford, where Grosseteste remained until the bishop's death (1198) (McEvoy, 1982, pp. 4-7). The high reputation of Hereford for scientific learning likely encouraged Grosseteste to produce his first scientific opuscula *On Liberal Arts* and *On Sound Generation*. The following 25 years are particularly obscure. According to Callus' biography (in Callus ed., 1955), Grosseteste taught the arts at Oxford until 1209, when the schools closed. He moved then to Paris to study theology and returned in 1214 to become the first chancellor and to teach theology until 1229/1230. The evidence for the chancellorship comes from a controversial anecdote, claiming that he was, in fact, entitled *magister scholarium*. Southern (1986) proposed an alternative biography, which places Grosseteste in the provincial setting of England. A few legal documents from c. 1213 to c. 1225 testify to Grosseteste's administrative position in Hereford, in association with the archdeacon, later bishop, Hugh Foliot, whom he followed to France

during the papal interdict of England (1209–1213); but, according to Southern (1986), Grosseteste neither was in Paris nor studied theology there. Instead, he occasionally taught the arts in English schools, while his stable teaching in Oxford – and possibly his chancellorship – started after 1225, when he received a prebend in Abbotsley, became a priest, and, finally, began to lecture in theology. Goering (in McEvoy 1995) rejected Southern's disagreement regarding Grosseteste's familiarity with the Parisian milieu, which is indirectly testified by Grosseteste's friendship with Parisian theologians (mainly Alexander of Hales and William of Auvergne) and his writings from the 1220s. A Parisian contact can be inferred also from Grosseteste's precocious knowledge of Averroes and from the circulation and sources of his cosmological writings of the years 1220–1225: *On the Sphere*, *On Comets*, and *On Heavenly Movements* (Grosseteste 2001, pp. 43–53). Also a controversial charter of 1223 might corroborate his Parisian connection (Schulman 1997; against which see McEvoy, in Mackie and Goering 2003, pp. 19–20). Grosseteste's entire scientific and philosophical production belongs to this obscure period. It comprises his major treatises on Easter computation (*Computus*), on light metaphysics (*De luce*), and on optics and mathematical verification of natural phenomena (*De lineis, angulis et figuris-De natura locorum* and *De iride*) and his commentaries on Aristotle's *Posterior Analytics* and *Physics*. The latter was probably assembled later from Grosseteste's glosses, with additions which also circulated independently (*De finitate motus et temporis*).

Grosseteste's last 25 years are well documented. In 1229/1230 he became the first lecturer to the Oxford Franciscans. His familiarity with the Friars turned into an enduring friendship and a strong spiritual empathy, particularly with Adam Marsh (Gieben in McEvoy 1995). As a theologian, Grosseteste lectured on Scripture, disputed theological questions, and preached university sermons (Ginther 2004). His theological writings have noteworthy philosophical implications and include a brief commentary on *Ecclesiasticus* 43:1–5 and some opuscula on divine

causality (*De statu causarum, De subsistentia rei,* and *De ordine emamandi causatorum a Deo*), on truth (*De veritate* and *De veritate propositionis*), on God's foreknowledge and free will (*De scientia Dei* and *De libero arbitrio*), and on God as first form and the location of angels (*De unica forma omnium-De intelligentiis*). In the 1230s Grosseteste also attended to his major exegetical works: *De decem mandatis* (with remarks on ethics), the *Hexaëmeron* (largely influenced by Augustine and Basil, with large sections on cosmology and against the eternity of the world), and *De cessatione legalium* (on human happiness and natural law). He also commented on the Pauline *Epistula ad Galatas* and wrote a large collection of sermons, among which were the *Ecclesia sancta celebrat* (on human nature), and a huge variety of theological annotations, the *Dicta*.

In 1235 Grosseteste was elected bishop of Lincoln, the largest diocese of England. He was a compromise candidate, but he acted as a powerful and rigorous leader. The Minors were his assistants in ecclesiastical duties and also procured him Greek books. In 1239–1241 he began to make translations from Greek. His translations include the works of John Damascene; the entire corpus of Pseudo-Dionysius, enriched with Grosseteste's own commentary; the *Testament of the Twelve Patriarchs*; the *Nicomachean Ethics*, with accompanying Greek glosses and Grosseteste's annotations; parts of the Greek lexicon *Suidas*; and parts of Aristotle's *De caelo* with Simplicius' commentary. Grosseteste also compiled a *Tabula* of topical concordances of his Christian and non-Christian readings, covering theological and philosophical items, each associated with an indexing symbol. In addition, he composed some Anglo-Norman poems, including the allegorical *Chasteau d'amour*, on world creation and Christian redemption, as well as texts on household management and courtly etiquette. As a bishop, Grosseteste instituted an innovative program of pastoral care, applying principles he had previously elaborated in his pastoral works, including the famous *Templum Dei*, on confession. Also, many of his letters are concerned with his innovative political and pastoral ideas, which drove him to disagree both with the secular and the ecclesiastical power

(Robert Grosseteste 2010). The Lincoln Chapter appealed to the papacy against his innovations, but Grosseteste successfully defended himself in 1245, at the First Council of Lyons, to which he returned in 1250 to criticize the inadequate policy of Pope Innocent IV. He clashed again with the papacy in 1253, in a vigorous letter (n. 128) concerning the appointment of an incompetent cleric. His rebellion made him a hero of the anti-papists, and his ideas influenced church reformers, first and foremost John Wyclif. Grosseteste died in October 1253. Three attempts for his canonization failed. His philosophical and theological ideas influenced thirteenth-century Franciscan thinkers (mainly Thomas of York, Richard Rufus of Cornwall, Roger Bacon, Bonaventure, and the Dominican Richard Fishacre) and fourteenth-century Oxonian philosophers (Adam Wodeham, William of Ockham, Thomas Bradwardine, and William of Alnwick). His fame on the continent was mainly due to his commentary on *Posterior Analytics* and his Greek translations. A detailed essay in modern and medieval historiography on Grosseteste is by McEvoy (in O'Carroll 2003). The catalogue of Grosseteste's works by Thomson (1940) needs an overall updating (partly made by McEvoy 1982; Panti 2013).

## Thought

### Metaphysics and Physics of Light

The notion of light occupies a relevant place in Grosseteste's philosophy and theology, as the fundamental monographs by McEvoy (1982, 2000) clearly show. After his early scientific interests in astrological causality, Grosseteste elaborated his own original doctrine (partly influenced by Avicenna and Avicbron) in his most famous short work, *De luce* (Panti 2013), arguing that light (*lux*) is "corporeity," that is, the first common form which gives dimensionality to the a-dimensional prime matter. Grosseteste builds his own cosmology according to this ontological principle, asserting that, at the beginning of time, first light and first matter multiplied infinitely producing the sphere of the universe, which is structured by



light's replicability (*replicabilitas*) into finite-sized bodies of infinite "light-atoms." Therefore light, according to the Aristotelian concept of *entelechy*, produces the transition from physical potentiality to actuality (Gieben 1966; Grosseteste 2011). In addition to light, natural bodies include other substantial forms, except the outermost heavenly sphere, which is the simplest body. It emits a luminosity (*lumen*) which operates over the lower bodies as an active force, entering within the elements to cause movement, sound, colors (as explained in his short *De colore* (Robert Grosseteste 2013b)), and every natural change, including sense perception. This is the so-called theory of light incorporation (Panti 1999). Light also explains some features of the Aristotelian cosmos developed in the commentary on *Physics*. Basically, Aristotle's three principles of form, privation, and the underlying subject are interpreted as light, the impurity of light in things, and first matter (Lewis 2005).

Thanks to its infinite and indivisible constituents – the light-atoms – every physical body is "measured" through an original mathematics of infinities, introduced in *De luce*, which aims to connect Aristotelian physics and Platonic cosmology. Grosseteste's commentary on *Physics* further develops such an idea, asserting that the true measure of bodies is provided by their different-sized infinities, which only God can count in definite mathematical numbers (Lewis 2005). Besides, the very existence of physical bodies presupposes a Creator of infinite power, for the passing from nothing to being (i.e., from a-dimensionality to dimensionality) requires an infinite efficient power. But in his theological works, such as *De unica forma* and *De statu causarum*, and in the late commentary on Pseudo-Dionysius, Grosseteste develops the idea that the creature's being also needs to be constantly supported by God, who gives it its own form by modeling it to himself, as a vessel shapes water by adhering to it (Gieben in O'Carroll 2003). Grosseteste, following Augustine, describes divine creation as the infusion of the first form, which is now considered to be the simple and separate exemplar in God's mind, by virtue of which a thing exists (Panti

2012a). In his theological works, Grosseteste also uses his metaphysics of light to explain the heavenly movements, associated with angelic operations (McEvoy 1982, part 2; Panti 2017), although in his earlier *De motu supercelestium* he follows the Averroistic doctrine that the heavenly movements are produced by a purely intellectual power (Grosseteste 2001).

In conclusion, Grosseteste develops two complementary ideas on natural being: as a physical body, everything is "made of" atoms of light/form and matter; as a creature, everything is "shaped" from divine light/form, which is its external and perfect exemplar.

### Theory of Science and Optics

Grosseteste's short works in optics, particularly his *De lineis-De natura locorum* and *De iride*, assign great importance to mathematics in scientific explanations of the physical world. This is because natural agents act upon the senses or matter through the multiplication of their "species," or rays, according to the agent's distance, the angle of their incidence, and the sphere or cone resulting from their multiplication, a view later developed by Roger Bacon (Hackett in McEvoy 1995). The geometrical attitude of Grosseteste's physics illustrates the basic assumptions of his theory of science, developed in his *Commentary on Posterior Analytics* (Rossi in McEvoy 1995). Firstly, there is a double inquiring path, called "resolution" and "composition." Resolution or analysis starts with observations to arrive at universal laws, while composition or synthesis moves from universal laws to infer particular facts. Both ways are verified through experimentation and a clear distinction between why (*propter quid*) and how (*quia*) a fact happens. Scientific demonstration of how a fact happens implies the move from effects to cause; conversely, the demonstration of why it happens moves from cause to effects. Secondly, the Aristotelian theory of the subalternation of the sciences implies that the principles of optics are conclusions in geometry. Thus, mathematics is the highest and *propter quid* science, being based first on axioms, and every natural science



ultimately depends on it (Laird 1987). This methodological principle accompanies the theory that light gives the universe both its physical and its mathematical structure, being its first form and acting according to linear rays and geometrical figures. Thirdly, if the human intellect were not lapsed because of the original sin, it would not rely on the senses in its proper operation, but contemplate the exemplar forms; so, in the present life repeated sense experience moves reason to formulate an “experimental” universal principle. The *universale complexum experimentale* is a sort of universal proposition which sets forth the links of causality between two events (Rossi 2008). These three basic principles have nourished Grosseteste’s modern reputation as the beginner of the western experimental method (Crombie 1953). Grosseteste’s claims on controlled experiment have been more rightly linked to everyday observation (Marrone 1986; Hackett in Mc Evoy 1995), but even in his works on optics, Grosseteste fails to apply them. This is true of his *On the Rainbow*, though in this work he is the first in medieval science to introduce the law of refraction as the main cause of the rainbow. Such a theory was criticized by Roger Bacon (Eastwood 1989), who nonetheless admired Grosseteste’s scientific methodology, which he deems to be useful for both natural science and theology. Bacon’s criticism, in fact, points only against Grosseteste’s wrong application of refraction as the cause of the phenomenon of rainbow (Panti 2016). Surely, Grosseteste’s emphasis on mathematics was his chief legacy to natural philosophy in fourteenth-century Oxford.

### Theological Issues

Grosseteste’s theological doctrines have strong philosophical implications, mainly on eternity, time, free will, and divine foreknowledge. Grosseteste’s answers to Aristotle’s arguments on the eternity of the world (Dales 1986) are expounded in his *Hexaëmeron* and in *On the Finitude of Motion and Time* and are finally based on the assumption that Aristotle, using just his reason (*aspectus*), could not achieve the truth, which is understood only when one’s will

(*affectus*) is directed to the unchanging divine realm. In his *On Truth* Grosseteste states that truth is the adequacy of each thing to its exemplar in God’s mind, and only divine light can properly illuminate the human mind to grasp it (Lewis 2008). In the epistolary treatise *On the unique form of everything*, Grosseteste develops the theme of divine exemplarism, and the influence of Augustine is particularly relevant (Rossi 2016). Here, as well as in other theological works, light and its effects become a source of inspiration for developing metaphors and symbolism on the ways in which the human mind receives gifts from the divine light (Panti 2014). Grosseteste also develops a doctrine of time, which has strong theological implications, though it is expounded in his commentary on book 4 of the *Physics*. He closely relates time to existence: the latter being the dependence of every creature on God, which implies its adherence to the divine “all at once” being. Time is the thing’s privation of such *at-onceness* of eternity, so that natural existence is not instantaneous (Marrone 1983).

*De libero arbitrio* is Grosseteste’s most influential work on how to reconcile God’s foreknowledge with free will. His solution is different from that of Boethius and Anselm and implies that there is a family of modal notions according to which future events and true propositions about them may be contingent and that freedom requires only this kind of contingency (Lewis 1991). Duns Scotus’ accounts of nontemporal modality were perhaps partly influenced by this solution; moreover, Grosseteste states with Eriugena that there is no temporal priority of God’s power to its act, but just a causal priority. As regards free will, the novelty of Grosseteste’s account is that freedom is considered a capacity to will alternatives, since the choice of good or evil is not intrinsic to reason and will, otherwise grace would be superfluous. Evil comes from *nihil*, the essential foundation of creaturely life (Lewis 1996).

Finally, Grosseteste’s psychological doctrine concerning the naturalness of the union of soul and body to form the perfect human nature has a strong theological implication in Grosseteste’s idea that Christ’s highest sacrifice for human

redemption was his voluntary submission to the separation of soul and body (McEvoy 1982, part 4).

## Cross-References

- ▶ Adam Wodeham
- ▶ Alexander of Hales
- ▶ Anselm of Canterbury
- ▶ Aristotelianism in the Greek, Latin, Syriac, Arabic, and Hebrew Traditions
- ▶ Atomism
- ▶ Augustine
- ▶ Avicenna
- ▶ Bonaventure
- ▶ Epistemology
- ▶ Form and Matter
- ▶ Future Contingents
- ▶ Ibn Rushd, Muḥammad ibn Aḥmad al-Ḥafīd (Averroes)
- ▶ Ibn Sīnā, Abū ‘Alī (Avicenna)
- ▶ John Duns Scotus
- ▶ John Scottus Eriugena
- ▶ John Wyclif
- ▶ Natural Philosophy
- ▶ Nicholas Oresme
- ▶ Posterior Analytics, Commentaries on Aristotle’s
- ▶ Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite
- ▶ Richard Fishacre
- ▶ Richard Rufus of Cornwall
- ▶ Robert Holcot
- ▶ Roger Bacon
- ▶ Species: Sensible and Intelligible
- ▶ Thomas Bradwardine
- ▶ Truth, Theories of
- ▶ Will
- ▶ William of Alnwick
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## Robert Holcot

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### Abstract

Robert Holcot was an English Dominican theologian and philosopher who was philosophically influenced by the work of William of Ockham and other English philosophers of the early fourteenth century. He is often considered a "skeptic" with respect to what human reason can know about theological truths (Trinity, Incarnation, and Eucharist), although such an interpretation of Holcot is misleading. Holcot, because of his patronage to Richard de Bury and his access to Bury's library, displays

a remarkable familiarity with classical literature and philosophy. His lectures on Wisdom were widely read in the late-medieval period.

Robert Holcot (b. c. 1290–d. 1349) was an English theologian, philosopher, and biblical exegete from the village of Holcot near Northampton. He entered the Dominican order at Northampton and went to Oxford sometime around 1326, commenting on Peter Lombard's *Sentences* during the years 1331–1333. After lecturing on the *Sentences*, Holcot became a Dominican regent master of Theology at Oxford – and, according to tradition, at Cambridge as well – prior to returning to the Dominican priory at Northampton in 1343. Holcot remained at the priory until his death of the plague in 1349.

The writings of Robert Holcot are located chronologically at the apex of English Scholasticism (1330–1340), or what William Courtenay has called "New English Theology" (Courtenay 1987: 268–274). A contemporary of the other great English Scholastics of that decade – Thomas Bradwardine, William Crathorn, Thomas Felthorp, Robert Halifax, Richard Kilvington, Roger Rosetus, and Adam Wodeham – Holcot's writings simultaneously represent the influence of logic in England during the mid-fourteenth century, and a remarkable familiarity with classical Latin authors. Beryl Smalley is correct to note that the result of this diversity is that scholars know of "three Holcots": (1) the "Scholastic" writer who is often criticized for his intellectual skepticism, and for his "semi-Pelagianism"; (2) the assistant of Richard de Bury, the noted bibliophile, who was well versed in classical authors; (3) the English preacher, who had a significant impact on preaching in fourteenth-century England (Smalley, 5–6). Unfortunately, there is not yet a comprehensive overview of Holcot's life and works, and the three perspectives on Holcot noted by Smalley have yet to be adequately harmonized.

### Writings, Texts, and Manuscripts

The writings of Holcot include: a commentary on Peter Lombard's *Sentences* (*De stellis*, a

commentary on Aristotle's *De caelo* that was originally part of his commentary but circulated separately), the *Sex articuli, De imputabilitate peccati*, the *Sermo finalis* (his concluding sermon to his lectures on the *Sentences*), the *Quaestiones quodlibetales*, the *Moralitates*, the *Convertimini*, *Postilla super librum Sapientiae* (lectures on the Book of Wisdom), lectures on Matthew, lectures on the Book of the Twelve Prophets, select lectures on Ecclesiastes, and a sermon collection.

The above works can be divided into five general categories. First, Holcot wrote specifically theological works: a commentary on each book of the Lombard's *Sentences* (6, 4, 1, and 8 questions on the four books of the *Sentences* respectively), and *De imputabilitate peccati*. Second, he also was involved in ordinary and quodlibetal debates, which were often more explicitly philosophical: the *Quaestiones quodlibetales*, and his *Sex articuli* that discuss questions of epistemology. Third, Holcot lectured on various books of the Bible, and produced the following Scriptural commentaries: his lectures on the book of Wisdom (*Postilla super librum Sapientiae*), a commentary on Ecclesiastes and on the 12 minor Prophets. Fourth, he composed two works for preachers: the *Moralitates* and the *Convertimini*. Finally, there is also a collection of Sermons preached by Holcot throughout his career.

The majority of Holcot's writings are only available in late fifteenth-/early sixteenth-century editions and numerous manuscripts. Selected quodlibetal questions have been edited: the *sex articuli*, the *sermo finalis*, and the *tractatus de stellis*. Thus, the more philosophical works have been edited, but few of his theological works, sermons or commentaries. The best introduction to Holcot's theological writings is found in the work of Fritz Hoffmann and Heiko Oberman.

## Faith and Reason

Robert Holcot's quodlibetal question, *Utrum theologia sit scientia* (Muckle (ed) 1958), is a detailed investigation into the scientific nature of theology. The Scholastic authors of the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries debated the question of whether theology is a practical or speculative

science, or whether it was primarily deductive or declarative, but they tended to agree that it was a science. Holcot, breaking with tradition, concludes that theology is not a science per se, if *scientia* is understood strictly as demonstrable knowledge. That is, theological truths – such as the existence of God – are not demonstrable by the viator in this life. Holcot, following William of Ockham, argued against the traditional proofs for the existence of God as developed by earlier theologians such as Anselm, Thomas Aquinas, and John Duns Scotus. Holcot argues that human reason cannot demonstrate the existence of God; and while Holcot quickly dismisses arguments based on empirical premises (i.e., cosmological argument), he devotes more attention to Anselm's ontological argument.

Beyond the question of the scientific nature of theology, fourteenth-century theologians were increasingly concerned with the applicability of Aristotelian logic to certain revealed theological truths (such as the Trinity and the Incarnation). The medieval Scholastics generally agreed that Aristotle's logic was universally valid, and corresponded to natural reason. But, in certain instances there was a tension, or conflict, between Aristotelian syllogisms and particular doctrines. In *Determinatio X* Holcot considers various syllogisms regarding the Trinity that prove particularly problematic (Gelber 1974: 381–443). There he considers the following expository syllogism (a third figure syllogism with a singular middle term):

- *Essentia est Pater* (The Divine Essence is the Father)
- *Essentia est Filius* (The Divine Essence is the Son)
- *Ergo, Filius est Pater*. (Therefore, the Son is the Father)

The problem, of course, is that the individual propositions are true and the conclusion is false, despite the seemingly valid syllogistic form. Medieval authors had proposed various solutions to the problem – that is, Ockham denied that a term that is simultaneously one thing and many things (*essentia* above) is a singular term – but Holcot rejected such solutions that are grounded



in positing a “real,” “conceptual,” or “formal” distinction between the Divine Essence and the Persons of the Trinity. Instead, he followed Richard Campsall in developing a theory of alternative logic.

Holcot argues in his commentary on the *Sentences* I.5 and in *Determinatio X* that there is a twofold logic that applies to all of reality: the *logica naturalis* (logic of nature/natural order) and *logica fidei* (logic of faith). Because of this argument, Robert Holcot, along with the author of the *Centiloquium Theologicum* and Richard Campsall, are often considered “skeptics” with respect to the relationship between faith and reason. But, as Fritz Hoffman and Hester Gelber have argued, the charge of skepticism is unjustly applied to Holcot.

Holcot did not reject Aristotelian logic (*logica naturalis*) or deny that the Trinity can be understood rationally according to particular logical rules. The problem, according to Holcot, is that Aristotle’s logic is not universal; the Divine Trinity and Incarnation are revealed realities that Aristotle did not know about, and therefore did not take into account in his logical works. But, from this it does not follow that the logic of faith is irrational, and in fact Holcot argues that it is fitting (*non est inconueniens*) that natural logic is inapplicable to the Trinity given that faith concerns realities that transcend the physical world (*Sent.* I, q. 5, f. 2ra). Instead, Holcot proposes various rules for excluding middle terms that can stand for one thing and many things simultaneously in an expository syllogism. These rules of faith (*logica fidei*) are logical, grounded on reason, and offer a “supplemental logic” that is applicable to trinitarian syllogisms.

## Covenantal Theology

The theological developments of the early fourteenth century, in authors such as John Duns Scotus and William of Ockham, emphasized the contingency of the world and God’s sovereignty to have chosen the actual world from among various possible worlds. Inherent in the discussion of the contingency of the world was the theological

distinction between God’s absolute power (*potentia absoluta*) and his ordained power (*potentia ordinata*). The absolute power of God can bring about anything that does not involve a logical contradiction, but, of all of the unactualized possibilities, God chooses or ordains according a logically consistent subset of these possibilities (*potentia ordinata*). This basic distinction is found throughout Holcot’s works, and informs his own covenantal theology.

According to Holcot, God *de potentia ordinata*, established a covenant or pact with humanity. This is developed in Holcot’s *Postilla super librum Sapientiae* and Commentary on the *Sentences*, where he argues that God freely established a covenant with humanity to give grace to all who make full use of their natural abilities. Through this covenant that God enters into freely the human being who “does his/her best” (*facit quod in se est*) merits a reward (*meritum de congruo*) from God. There are two points about this general picture that are important: first, Holcot strongly holds that God’s ordained power is radically free and not bound to anything other than the law of non-contradiction; second, the semi-Pelagian position above is contextualized within a broader understanding of God’s eternal predestination. That is, Holcot holds that all good works are the effect of God’s predestination in that God’s prevenient grace provides the possibility for human good works.

## Influence

The works of Robert Holcot were important throughout the fourteenth, fifteenth, and sixteenth centuries. His lectures on the book of Wisdom have been called a “medieval bestseller,” and almost every significant library in late medieval Europe is said to have possessed a copy (Smalley, 10). Further, his theological and philosophical works were widely available, and read seriously, by sixteenth-century theologians. Thinkers as diverse as Martin Luther and Michael Servetus engaged Holcot’s trinitarian theology and soteriology, although much more work on the later middle



ages is necessary before scholars can get a clearer picture of the influence of Robert Holcot, and “New English Theology,” on subsequent thinkers.

## Cross-References

- ▶ [Adam Wodeham](#)
- ▶ [Anselm of Canterbury](#)
- ▶ [John Duns Scotus](#)
- ▶ [Richard Kilvington](#)
- ▶ [Richard of Campsall](#)
- ▶ [Robert of Halifax](#)
- ▶ [Roger Roseth](#)
- ▶ [Thomas Aquinas](#)
- ▶ [Thomas Bradwardine](#)
- ▶ [William Crathorn](#)
- ▶ [William of Ockham](#)

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## Robert Kilwardby

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### Abstract

The English Dominican Robert Kilwardby (1215?–1279) divided his career in between Paris and Oxford. First as a student and then as a master at the Faculty of Arts in Paris in the period 1231–1245, he produced the earliest comprehensive group of commentaries of the arts syllabus that came down to us, with comments on the subjects of grammar, logic, and ethics. After 1245, approximately, he moved back to England where he entered the Dominican Order, studied and then taught theology at Oxford and began a promising institutional career, which had however negative effects in his academic production – almost inexistent after this date. In 1261, he was elected Provincial of the Order in England and in 1272 was

appointed Archbishop of Canterbury, duty he performed until his designation as Cardinal of Porto and Santa Rufina. As a philosopher, Kilwardby is best described in his systematic attempts to find middle ground between the thoughts of Aristotle and Augustine, on matters as diverse as sense perception and the nature of matter. In case of irresolvable conflicting views, as it is the case of intellectual cognition, Augustine is preferred since he is more enlightened than Aristotle in spiritual matters (as Kilwardby himself repeated). Kilwardby is well known as the author of an important encyclopedic work, the *De ortu scientiarum*, which constituted one of the most copied introductions to knowledge in the medieval period. He died in Viterbo, at the Papal court, in 1279, in the mist of the controversy surrounding his participation as the head of the so-called 1277 Oxford Prohibitions. This event, identified as an attack against his Dominican Brother Thomas Aquinas, in particular against his thesis of the unicity of substantial form, contributed largely to the negative way Kilwardby was seen by his and our contemporaries: as a conservative neo-Augustinian, fighting the progress of Aristotelianism and Thomism. Whether he fits into this picture is a matter open to dispute, and recent scholarship has significantly contributed to revise this historical view: his early commentaries on Aristotle are clear statements to the high-level of Aristotelian scholarship he was capable of, namely by attempting to provide solutions to apparently contradictory accounts in different Aristotelian texts, for instance, about the nature of truth. It may however explain the poor circulation of some of his more philosophical works, with the exception of his *Commentary to the Prior Analytics*, which was published under the name of Giles of Rome.

### Life

Robert Kilwardby, or Robertus Kilewardbii, Kilvirbi, Kulverbi, Kalverbi as his name is

misspelled in medieval manuscripts, was an Englishman born either in Leicestershire or in Yorkshire (Sommer-Seckendorff 1937). The date of his birth, unknown, is assumed to have been 1215 because he started his studies at the University of Paris in 1231, becoming master of Arts around 1237. He taught at the Faculty of Arts between 1237 and 1245, when he moved back to England. Around 1245, he entered the Dominican Order (Sommer-Seckendorff 1937) starting a rather successful ecclesiastic career. He taught theology at Oxford from c. 1254 until 1261, when he was elected Provincial of the English Dominicans. In 1269, he participated in the Dominican General Chapter in Paris, where he, together with Thomas Aquinas (and three other members), was responsible for analyzing the process of Bartholomew of Tours. A sign of his intellectual standing within the Order is the questionnaire on doctrinal matters sent in 1271 by the Master General of the Dominicans, John of Vercelli, to Kilwardby, Albert the Great, and Thomas Aquinas. The 43 questions, which should be answered in a *forma taxata*, deal with a wide range of problems, from the cause of motion of the celestial bodies to the location of Hell and the nature of the punishing fire (Chenu 1930; Silva 2007). Continuing his successful ecclesiastic career, Kilwardby was appointed Archbishop of Canterbury in 1272. Two of his acts as Archbishop were the coronation of Edward I, at the Westminster Abbey (August 19, 1274), and the issuing of a list of prohibited articles in Oxford in 1277. This latter event took place on the 18th of March, 1277, just 11 days after the Condemnation of 219 theses in Paris. In Oxford, Kilwardby, at the head of a meeting including all the regent and non-regent masters of the University, issued a list of 30 propositions on the subjects of grammar (4), logic (10), and natural philosophy (16). These propositions were prohibited for being primarily philosophical mistakes and secondarily against Christian faith. The closeness in time to the Condemnations of Paris of March 7, 1277, has given rise to far-reaching speculation concerning the connection between these two events. Upon close inspection, however, no proof of the connection has been presented beyond reasonable

doubt. This is the case especially in what concerns the suggestion that Kilwardby would have acted under Papal orders and targeted specific authors. In fact, the direct targets of these propositions have yet to be identified (Lewry 1981a). Nevertheless, already in Kilwardby's time, some of the propositions in *naturalibus* were interpreted as aimed at the teaching of Thomas Aquinas, namely those propositions related with his unicity of substantial form. The strongest reaction came in the form of a letter written by Peter of Conflento, a disciple of Thomas Aquinas. In his reply, Kilwardby sets out the most complete defense of the doctrine of the plurality of substantial forms in human beings. Kilwardby's clarity of expression cannot be overlooked and its importance should not be diminished: prior to this letter, most pluralists presented their views in a non-committed way, *as one among many* theoretical possible takes on the matter (Bonaventure is a striking example of this attitude). Kilwardby on the other hand is adamant in his objections to this doctrine and emphatic in presenting the *philosophical* motivations for his criticism. As evidence for the supposed explicit targeting of Aquinas is difficult to come by, some scholars have insisted on the institutional reaction which took place when the General Chapter of the Order to which both Aquinas and Kilwardby belonged, meeting in Milan (1278), decided to send a commission in order to investigate and punish those who blackened the writings of Thomas Aquinas *in scandalum ordinis*. The results of this commission are not known but the fact of its institution has been seen as a sign of the Order's willingness to stop Kilwardby from attacking his brother Dominican. How accurate this interpretation is remains the subject of debate, especially because of the inconsequential nature of the threat, if that commission would have really been targeting Kilwardby: the Order did not have the power to remove him from office because the Archbishop is nominated by the Pope. What we do know is that the next Chapter of the Order, held in Paris, repeated the advertence and promoted the praise of Thomas' works. The appointment in 1278 by Pope Nicholas III of Kilwardby to Cardinal of Porto and S. Rufina, which allowed him to move from England to

Italy, has also been seen from two very different perspectives: according to some, this constituted an attempt to stop Kilwardby's actions against Thomas and Thomism; according to others, which seems more probable because it takes into account the Pope's own philosophical stand on this issue, he acted in order to protect Kilwardby from his own Order. In any case, Kilwardby died in 1279, soon after his arrival at the Papal court in Viterbo in circumstances that remain unclear.

## Works

A complete list of works by Kilwardby includes texts on logic, grammar, theology, and natural philosophy in a career that spans for several decades and around two centers of learning: Paris and Oxford. It is important to bear in mind that although Kilwardby died in 1279, he stopped writing philosophical and theological works around 1256, when he produced his *Sentences* commentary. After this date, we only know two important works, the *De 43 questionibus* (from 1271 or 1272) and *Epistola ad Petrum de Conflato* (from 1277 or 1278). So, the majority of his work was written in a period of roughly 25 years, that is, between 1231 and 1256.

Among the works of the Parisian period should be counted the Course on the *Logica vetus*, which consist of a set of commentaries on the *Isagoge*, *Praedicamenta*, *Perihermeneias*, *Liber sex principiorum*, and *Liber divisionum Boethii* (Lewry 1978), the commentaries on the *Analytica priora* (c. 1240, Ebbesen 1997; published as Giles of Rome), on the *Analytica posteriora*, on the *Priscianus minor*, the *In librum topycorum* (of uncertain attribution), on the *Sophistici elenchi*. From the Oxford period are the works *De natura relationis*, *De ortu scientiarum*, *De spiritu fantastico*, *De tempore*, and his *Sentences* commentary in the form of questions, the *Quaestiones in quattuor libros sententiarum*, from the same period are also some minor theological works, namely the *De confessione*, *De necessitate incarnationis*, *De conscientia et de synderesi*, the *Tabulae super originalia patrum*, the *Arbor consanguinitatis et affinitatis*, and some sermons

(the *Sermo in capite ieiunii* and the *Sermo in dominica in passione*). Worth mentioning is a letter expressing some criticism over Franciscan poverty (*Epistola ad novitios de excellentia ordine praedicatorum*), which survives in the reply of his successor at the Archbishopric of Canterbury, John Pecham (*Tractatus contra fratrem Robertum Kilwarby*). Considered unauthentic are the commentary on the *Priscianus maior*, and the *Sophismata grammaticalia* (Grondeux and Rosier-Catach 2006). Doubts have also been cast concerning the authorship of the commentaries *In barbarismum Donati*, the *De accentu prisciani*, and the *Sophismata logicalia*, which can only be fully dispelled after the critical edition of these works appear and other commentaries from the same period have been studied. The identification, first proposed by Gál (1953) of the commentaries on the *Physics* and on the *Metaphysics*, which are ascribed to him by the medieval Catalogus Stamsensis, has been called into question (Callus 1963) and is now thought to be the work of Geoffrey of Aspell. In the case of the *Physics* commentary no doubts are left after the (recent) publication of this work by (Donati et al. 2017).

## Thought

As a central figure of the thirteenth-century philosophy and theology, both in Paris and in Oxford, Kilwardby was influenced by, and in some cases in contact with, the major figures of the period, namely Robert Grosseteste, Richard Fishacre, Richard Rufus of Cornwall, and Bonaventure. The presence of Bonaventure in Kilwardby's *Sentence* commentary is unequivocal, for example, on the topic of Trinitarian theology, and the influence of Rufus has also been noted (Wood 2002), but further research is needed after the issues of attribution surrounding this author have been settled. On the other hand, researchers have been stressing the influence of Kilwardby's commentaries (*Categories*, *Prior* and *Posterior Analytics*) on Albert the Great (Ebbesen 1981; Cannone 2002; Thom 2007), and Roger Bacon (de Libera 1987), but also

Lambert of Auxerre, Simon of Faversham, Radulphus Brito, and Richard of Campsall (Lagerlund 2000). Recent work by both Mora-Márquez (2015) and Hansen (on John Pagus, 2012) has provided a more detailed context of these grammatical and logical developments.

Moving now away from the context to the substance of Kilwardby's thought, the first aspect to consider is logic, which Kilwardby defines as the science of discursive reasoning, and as such it is essential and auxiliary to all other fields of inquiry. But as the aim of inquiry is knowledge, especially or primarily the necessary truth found in the conclusion of a demonstrative syllogism, the task of logic is to discover its rules (Silva 2012a). Although Kilwardby notes at places how syllogisms can be constituted by transcendental (i.e., formalized) terms, he does emphasize the ontological implications of his syllogistic theory, namely his focus on syllogisms with propositions that express per se necessities, which implies an essential relation between subject and predicate (Lagerlund 2000). A correctly formulated proposition expresses something essential about the reality, and the way we understand reality to be (Thom 2007). Kilwardby analyses syllogisms into matter (the constituting terms and propositions) and form (figure and mood). He applies the same matter-form analysis to words. Words are made up of utterance (*vox*), the modulated vocal expression, and the act of signifying, that is the bringing about of a signification to the mind of the hearer (words primarily signify concepts, which signify things). In this context, meaning is defined as the relation of a sign to that of which it is a sign (Lewry 1978, 1981b). Kilwardby's grammatical theory was equally influential. In his commentary on the Priscianus minor, which remains unedited, Kilwardby analyzes the correction (*congruitas*) and the completeness (*perfectio*) of sentences in cases where the rules of construction are not observed. Whereas a normal construction represents the intention of the speaker in correct grammatical terms (Kneepkens 1985), in the case of figurative constructions Kilwardby considers them ungrammatical *simpliciter* but congruous *secundum quid*, that is with relation to the meaning intended by the speaker. This has been

characterized as the formulation of a criterion of grammaticality which is based on authorial intent (Sirridge 1990). But such a sentence can be accepted only because the hearer has the capacity to, from the meaning of the ill-formed utterance, understand what the meaning intended by the speaker was (Rosier 1994).

Kilwardby also comments on the *Ethica vetus et nova*, that is, books I–III of the *Ethica Nicomachea* (Lewry 1986). Although the authorship of the commentary has been open to dispute, recent work by Celano (2016) seems to have settled the matter in favor of Kilwardby, and the edition is forthcoming. This ensemble of ethical and logical treatises constitutes the most comprehensive set of commentaries by a known master of Arts that has survived. In both cases, he introduces the works according to Aristotelian doctrine of the four causes, which became a standard feature of texts from the period: the material cause concerns the subject of the work in question, the formal cause the mode of procedure (*modus* and *ordo*), the final cause the purpose of the work (*utilitas*), and the efficient cause the authorship (Lewry 1978). The importance of Kilwardby's commentary on the *Ethica* resides in the fact that shows the early reception of this work and before the translation of the full Aristotelian treatise. With access to a very limited part of the text, Kilwardby's commentary displays the ability of the Dominican to distinguish between the Aristotelian and Christian understanding of virtue, as in the analysis of happiness, virtue, and human goodness in philosophical terms independent from theological doctrine. The philosophical happiness (*felicitas*) is taken as not coincident with the theological beatitude (*beatitudo*) (Celano 1986, 1999). By holding with Aristotle that human virtuous actions are the cause of happiness, and not the union with God that the theological reading stressed, Kilwardby departs from the positions of his contemporaries. Kilwardby explains that, for Aristotle, happiness is attainable by human beings during their life (Lewry 1986; Celano 1986). In his works, Kilwardby shows an acquaintance with the works of Aristotle, not limited either to the works commented or to commonplaces (Lewry 1978; Brown 1996; against Long 1996; see Silva 2015), as well as an attempt to provide an accurate and



systematized account of Aristotle's text (Thom 2007).

The influence of Averroes is felt in Kilwardby's logic (Lewry 1978; Lagerlund 2000; Cannone 2002) and natural philosophy (McAlear 1999). On two topics, however, Kilwardby criticizes Averroes: on the dependence of the unity of time on celestial motion in the *De tempore*, and on Averroes' theory of one intellect common to all human beings. About the latter, Kilwardby considers it to be contrary to philosophical truth, faith, and even Aristotle's intention. Kilwardby argues against Averroes, that only with respect to the different parts of the same body, and not to different bodies, can the soul be one. Moreover, as the soul is the form of the body (*forma corporis est anima*), there cannot be the same form for all men. Finally, if there would be only one soul to all men, the same soul would know and ignore, be saved, and damned. Kilwardby develops also an important epistemological claim concerning the way the intellects of different human beings are distinct even when they have the same object of thought because the intelligible is one only in species and not numerically (*simulacrum eiusdem rei sensibilis a diversis intellectum non est idem numero sed specie solum*). Plato's likeness is the same only according to the species in the minds of Socrates and Cicero. Universals, which exist in the divine mind as causal forms or exemplars, exist both in the human mind and in real things (Silva 2012). As the essences of real individual things, universals are abstracted by the mind from the species received through the senses. The mind considers that which is common to the multitude of the images, therefore the unity of the universal is based "on agreement in essence" (*convenientia essentiae*) (Lewry 1981a; Silva 2012a, 2013b).

Kilwardby is also the author of a widely circulated introduction to the arts (their classificatory scheme, the definition of their objects and methods), the *De ortu scientiarum*, written c. 1250, which has been qualified as an optimistic encyclopedia. It is based on the Aristotelian notion of science and on the model of Hugh of St. Victor's *Didascalicon de studio legendi*, although the influence of other

classificatory schemes can be found, for example, Gundissalinus' *De divisione philosophiae* (Alessio 2001; Silva 2013a; Maierù 2013). Philosophy is defined as the study of both divine and human things, in order to live virtuously. Also in his commentary on the *Ethica vetus et nova*, Kilwardby stresses that knowledge is motivated by a moral end (Celano 1999), and in the introduction to the *Isagoge* he insists in the perfection of the soul by knowledge and virtue (Lewry 1978). Philosophy (*scientia humana commendabilis*) is divided in *speculativa* (which is further divided into *naturalis*, *mathematica*, and *divina*); *activa* (which is further divided into *mechanica* and *ethica*); and *sermocinalis* (which is further divided into *grammatica*, *logica*, and *rhetorica*) (see Silva 2013a). Following Hugh, Kilwardby includes the mechanical arts in the classificatory scheme, with some terminological changes in order to approach them to the social–economical context (Alessio 2001), and the replacing the *theatrica* for the *architectonica*. As in Hugh, magic (*scientia humana vituperabilis*) is excluded from the sciences.

It is in the *De ortu* as well as in two later works, the *De 43 questionibus* (from 1271) and the *Epistola* (from 1277 to 1278), that we find Kilwardby's notion of *materia naturalis* or *physica*. This is a particular important notion because it stands at the core of Kilwardby's doctrine of the plurality of forms in any composite (Silva 2012a; Donati 2013). Natural matter is impregnated with active potencies, which Kilwardby identifies with the Augustinian seminal reasons. Active potencies are potencies because they strive for form considered as full actuality, but striving (*appetere*) already displays a certain activity, which means that these potencies must be a form of some kind. If that is the case, as Kilwardby argues it is, the difference between the complete form and the active potency is their degree of actuality rather than a difference of essence. The role of these active potencies comes into full view in the explanation of animal generation. Active potencies are transmitted with the semen and are educed from matter through the action of the corporeal spirit, as the vegetative and sensitive forms of the soul. In the case of human



beings, this is then completed by the reception of the intellectual form, directly created by God and infused at a certain stage of fetal development (Silva 2007). This principle of double origin – naturally generated and directly created – is used by Kilwardby to justify the necessary composite nature of the human soul. At the same time, Kilwardby reinforces the conception of a composite soul by arguing that each one of the *potentiae* (vegetative, sensitive, and intellectual) is responsible for certain operations different in kind. The vegetative and the sensitive forms are qualified as the principle of life because through them the being they inform performs the operations of life, self-motion and sensation, while the intellectual form is not act of any part of the body and does not operate through bodily organs but is capable of producing intelligible knowledge and understanding.

It has just been showed that the intellectual soul has a different origin and mode of operation. As the result, it is also qualified as having a different kind of being: the intellectual *potentia* is an individual of its kind (expressed in Latin as a *hoc aliquid*) and it is the perfection of a body informed by the sensitive *potentia*. What that means is that once infused in a particular body by God, the intellectual potency connects the previous *potentiae* (vegetative and sensitive), completing and perfecting them. That perfection seems to indicate something in terms of power-reach but especially means that by it that individual being is completed in its species, as a properly human being. One of the main problems in the doctrine defended by Kilwardby, the plurality of substantial forms, is how to account for the unity among the *potentiae* and between the *potentiae* and the body informed by them. Together the three substantial forms constitute one composite unity due to their natural inclination to each other and to the body. The relation of the rational soul with the body is essential and not accidental, being precisely that which distinguishes the human and angelic rational soul (both are composed of a material together with a formal principle, in a declaration of universal hylemorphism). Also the body is a composite substance constituted by an ordered series of forms. For all this, Kilwardby is

said to hold a plurality of substantial forms in human beings.

Kilwardby also wrote a commentary on the Sentences, in the form of questions (c. 1256). Kilwardby discusses, especially in questions 35–36 of the first book, the problem of the Trinity. The persons are distinguished in the following way. God Father begets God Son from His own substance and the Holy Spirit proceeds from both. The origin, and the way of being originated, brings about opposite relations between the persons: generating, being generated, and proceeding. Divine persons are relations, not in the sense of inhering (otherwise they would be accidents), but in the sense of being related to something extra se (and as such are substances). Moreover, love comes from knowledge, as another expression of Trinitarian relation. The Father and the Son know each other as they are, and the love which arises from this knowledge is the Holy Spirit. An analogous reasoning is applied to the human rational soul, as the image of the divine Trinity.

Although there is a certain continuity of thought between Kilwardby's Parisian and Oxford periods, namely by his use of logical reasoning into theological questions, at least on two subjects Kilwardby changed his mind. The first concerns the cause of movement of celestial bodies, and the second the cause of individuation. About the former, while earlier he holds that celestial bodies are moved by their intelligence, later Kilwardby prefers the original solution from John Blund's *Tractatus de anima*, that is, the natural inclination of the celestial bodies' own weight (Silva 2007). In both solutions, Kilwardby is arguing for celestial motion to be a natural rather than violent motion, as in both cases the cause of motion is internal to the thing moved. About the latter, in his *Sentences* commentary, Kilwardby argues that both matter and form are intrinsic causes for individuation: matter as the passive cause (*causa receptiva*), form as the active cause. This particular individual actual being (*ens actuale et individuum*) is the actual designation (*signatio actualis*) of matter by form. Form designates matter, and designating matter, designates itself *secundum diversas rationes*. The property that characterizes the individual as such is actual existence. This actual existence of the individual is

substantial to the individual and accidental to the species, meaning that the ceasing to be of the individual does not affect the species (and the corresponding universal).

A central issue in Kilwardby's work is the attempt to conciliate the philosophy of Aristotle and Augustine (Lewry 1983), and when this proves not to be possible, he sacrifices Aristotle in favor of Augustine. This is particularly acute in his *De spiritu fantastico* (1256–1261). The Aristotelian scent given by the subtitle of the text – *de receptione speciarum* – is compensated by the strong Augustinianism present in the text. Together with Augustine and Aristotle, this work also displays the influence of Jean de la Rochelle's *Tractatus*, Costa ben Luca's *De differentia spiritus et anima*, and Pseudo-Augustine's *De spiritu et anima* (Lewry 1983). For Kilwardby, sensible knowledge is dependent on the sense object impressing the sensible species in the sense organ, but the passivity of the organ is tempered by the activity of the sensory soul, the efficient cause per se of perception. Kilwardby offers two accounts for perception, one focusing on physiological aspects, like the reception of the species and the activity of the internal spirits (vital and animal) together with the system of ventricular location of the powers of the soul; the other, psychological in nature, focuses on the activity of the soul, immaterial and dynamic, capable of producing from and by itself the images of the sensible objects (Silva 2012a; Silva and Toivanen 2010). This activity of the soul in the process of sense perception consists of two motions: the sensitive soul reacting (simultaneously, possible due to its spiritual nature) to the affection of the body, which results in the soul making an image from the species impressed in the sense organ; the second motion consists on the soul turning upon itself and seeing the image of the object made in itself, through which the object is then perceived (Silva 2008, 2012a, 2013b). The result of this action is then kept by the power of memory, which makes this information available for further cognitive operations. Kilwardby explicates the existence of three distinct memories that deal with different kinds of information: the lower (*brutalis*), which we have in common with

animals and that belongs to the sensitive part of the soul; the middle memory (*rationalis inferior et exterior*), which belongs to the rational part of the soul, but is still about sensible information; and finally, the higher rational memory (*rationalis superior et interior*), which is dedicated to intellectual knowledge.

## Cross-References

- ▶ [Albert the Great](#)
- ▶ [Augustine](#)
- ▶ [Avicbron](#)
- ▶ [Bonaventure](#)
- ▶ [Categories, Commentaries on Aristotle's](#)
- ▶ [Dominicus Gundissalinus](#)
- ▶ [Epistemology](#)
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- ▶ [Hugh of St. Victor](#)
- ▶ [Ibn Rushd, Muḥammad ibn Aḥmad al-Ḥafid \(Averroes\)](#)
- ▶ [Natural Philosophy](#)
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- ▶ [Philosophical Psychology, Jewish Tradition](#)
- ▶ [Posterior Analytics, Commentaries on Aristotle's](#)
- ▶ [Richard Fishacre](#)
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- ▶ [Sense Perception, Theories of](#)
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- ▶ [Thomas Aquinas](#)
- ▶ [Trinity](#)
- ▶ [Universals](#)

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## Robert of Halifax

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### Abstract

Robert of Halifax (c. 1300–c. 1350?) was an English Franciscan theologian active between 1325 and 1350. His only extant work is his commentary on the *Sentences*, probably

written c. 1334 at Oxford although the dating is uncertain. His commentary consists of nine questions, pertaining to books I and II of the *Sentences*, and is a good example of the types of *Sentences* commentaries produced in this period, which concentrate on fewer questions than previously, but in more detail. Although dealing with theological questions pertaining, for example, to grace, merit, enjoyment, and matters of the will, he discusses issues important for natural philosophy, such as light and vision, the continuum, and cognition. He followed the perspectivist tradition concerning vision and espoused a Neoplatonic metaphysics of light. Regarding cognition, he proves to be more a Scotist than Ockhamist, and he argues against Ockham in the question on the “middle act of the will,” a topic that attracted a great deal of attention in this period. The date of his death is unknown, but is thought to be sometime around or after 1350.

Very little is known for certain about Robert of Halifax, O.F.M., also known as Eliphath, Alifas, Elephas, or Olephad. The information available places Halifax among the English Franciscan theologians between 1325 and 1350. Robert was likely born at or near Halifax in Yorkshire around 1300, and probably entered the Franciscan order c. 1318 around the age of 18. It is likely that before being sent to the university to study theology, he studied philosophy at the custodial school in York. His university studies began probably around 1324. Based upon the fact that Halifax cited Wodeham, who lectured at Oxford between 1331 and 1332, and was in turn cited by Gregory of Rimini, who read at Paris in 1342–1343, Halifax most likely read the *Sentences* at Oxford between 1333 and 1340, although narrowing that date further is difficult. Halifax was the fifty-sixth Franciscan lector at Cambridge, the date for which was calculated to c. 1336, which, if true, would place his *Sentences* commentary around 1334. Nevertheless, the date of this lectorship is uncertain, and there are legitimate reasons for dating his commentary between 1336 and 1338 as well. Toward the end of the 1340s, Halifax returned to



Yorkshire where he was licensed to hear confessions in 1349 and 1350, and resided at the convent of Doncaster. The date of his death is unknown (Courtenay 1973).

Although historians have paid relatively little attention to Halifax, as compared to his contemporaries Fitzralph (c. 1300–1360), Wodeham (d. 1358), and Holcot (c. 1290–1349), Halifax nevertheless made a fine reputation for himself both in England and on the Continent, particularly at Paris, as is demonstrated by the fact that he was cited and quoted by figures such as Gregory of Rimini, John of Mirecourt, and Hugolino of Orvieto. His popularity is also attested to in that his *Sentences* commentary had survived in seventeen partial or complete manuscripts, all located on the Continent (Courtenay 1973), although one located in Magdeburg was lost during World War II (Georgesdes 1995).

Halifax's commentary on the *Sentences*, his only known work, is a particularly good example of the type of commentaries produced in the first half of the fourteenth century. From the late thirteenth century, the writing of *summae theologiae* became less important, and in the fourteenth century, commentaries on Lombard's *Sentences* became the most significant source not only of theology but arguably also of philosophy, and at times the only source available for a given author, as in the case of Halifax (Courtenay 1987). Moreover, Halifax's commentary reflects other trends of the period, one of which is a change in content. The use of new analytical tools (particularly the new logic), mathematical language (e.g., the language of measurement, such as the intention and remission of forms), as well as interest in aspects of natural philosophy (physics in particular) were reflected in the concentration more on epistemological and empirical problems, although discussed in the context of theological questions, especially questions pertaining to acts of the will, grace, and merit. Another trend is a change in the structure of *Sentences* commentaries. Authors began to concentrate on fewer questions rather than commenting on the entire *Sentences*. Moreover, commentators began to cite the names of

those whose opinions they argued for or against rather than using the vague "opinion of others." The English theologians, like Halifax, writing between 1325 and 1350, were foremost in these developments. These changes allowed commentators to engage in more speculation, especially via the more extensive use of the distinction of God's absolute and ordained powers, as well as to give more in-depth answers to questions that were of particular interest to them (Courtenay 1987).

Halifax's commentary, although short, is not an abbreviation. It consists of nine total questions that loosely follow Lombard's organization of the *Sentences*, and which were designated under two different forms in the fourteenth century, as "questions" and also as "Book, distinction and question." He begins with a "principium," designated as question 1. Questions 2 and 3 concern the Prologue; questions 4, 5, and 6 pertain to Book I distinction 1; question 7 pertains to Book I, distinction 2; and questions 8 and 9 pertain simply to Book II. Questions 4, 5, 6, and 9 deal with acts of the will, while questions 1 and 9 deal with aspects of merit and punishment, and question 8 deals in particular whether the angels advance in merit. Questions 2 and 3 deal with aspects of the study of theology, knowledge, and foundations of belief (for the list of the complete questions, see Courtenay 1973).

Within the context of question 2 (question 1 of the Prologue: *Utrum per exercitium studii in veritatibus theologiae possit theologus ad maiorem notitiam devinire, quam sit notitia fidei*, which deals with acts of believing and knowing, and the certitude of knowledge), question 5 (Bk. I, dist. 1, q. 2: *Utrum aliquis actus voluntatis possit esse subito productus a voluntate*, "Whether some act of the will can be suddenly or immediately produced by the will"), and question 8 (Bk. II, q. 1: *Utrum angeli beati in merito proficiant?* "Whether the blessed angels advance in merit?"), Halifax discussed light and the mechanism of illumination, vision, and cognition. In doing so he proved to be more of a disciple of Scotus than Ockham, for example, utilizing Scotus' definition of intuitive and abstractive



cognition rather than Ockham's. Halifax also used perspectivist arguments regarding vision, meaning that he argued for *species in medio*. Interestingly, he references both Robert Grosseteste and Pseudo-Dionysius in his discussions, and thus Neoplatonic light metaphysics plays an important role in his views, again, very unlike Ockham (Tachau 1982; cf. Lang's discussion of q. 2, 1930). Nevertheless, Halifax is more representative of the "calculatory tradition" (Murdoch 1975, 1978; Maier 1949), rather than the epistemological issues related to vision and cognition (Tachau 1982). More study is needed to elucidate his thought on these issues, however, and to properly place him within the tradition.

The question that drew a great deal of attention from Halifax's contemporaries was question 4 (Book 1, d.1, q.1): *Utrum inter frui et uti sit aliquis actus voluntatis medius qui nec sit fruitio nec usus* ("Whether between enjoyment and use there is some middle act of the will, which is neither enjoyment nor use"). Halifax was responding to Ockham's assertion that there was such a middle act of the will, which was neither enjoyment of God nor use of anything else (*Ordinatio* I, d. 1, q. 1). Halifax argued that, on the contrary, one may legitimately enjoy only God, and everything other than God may only be the object of use. This response places Halifax squarely in the midst of the Augustinian revival occurring at Oxford and Paris around the mid-fourteenth century. He also maintained, this time contrary to Wodeham, that the viator could not himself actively cause love for God or enjoy God above all and for his own sake in this life without grace except according to God's absolute power (*de potentia absoluta*). Nevertheless, this is impossible according to God's ordained power (*de potentia ordinata*) (Georgesdes 1995, 1997; Courtenay 1973).

Further study of Halifax will greatly advance our knowledge of fourteenth-century scholasticism, the calculatory tradition, views of light and light metaphysics (which are important for the history of science in this period), cognition, and enjoyment.

## Cross-References

- ▶ Adam Wodeham
- ▶ Gregory of Rimini
- ▶ Intuitive and Abstractive Cognition
- ▶ John Duns Scotus
- ▶ Richard Fitzralph
- ▶ William of Ockham

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## Roger Bacon

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### Abstract

Roger Bacon was born in Ilchester in either 1214 or 1220. After his matriculation at Oxford, he was one of the pioneers to teach Aristotle at the University of Paris. His return to Oxford in the late 1240s marked a turning point in his career. He joined the Franciscans in 1257, and in 1267/1268, he sent three works, comprising a plan for the reorganization of Christian studies, to the Pope. In his Parisian phase of career, he developed the idea of the utmost significance of the speaker's intention and original theories of imposition and equivocation. He affirmed that universals are extramental, believed in innate confused knowledge, and held to the theory of universal hylomorphism. In his mature phase of thought, he proposed an order of sciences in which the practical sciences received precedence, advocated the use of experimental method, developed the theory of the multiplication of species, and combined it with Alhacen's ideas on light and vision. By this move, he initiated the tradition of the science of *Perspectiva* in the West. Bacon viewed nature as a coherent system governed by laws and formulated some of them. He stressed the importance of mathematics in providing scientific explanations and drew geometrical diagrams exemplifying various optical phenomena. Bacon described the details of the workings of the sensitive soul and ascribed complex cognitive capacities to animals. He presented an original classification of signs and reversed the linguistic triangle prescribed by Aristotle and Boethius. His view of matter as positive and worthy of investigation found expression in his strong notion of representation, advocating the need to portray both formal and material aspects in cognitive contents and language.

## Biographical Information

Roger Bacon was born in Ilchester, Somerset, either in 1214 or 1220, and was probably matriculated first at Oxford. The date of his MA degree would be about 1240, assuming that he was born in 1220 and that a scholar typically earned the MA at the age of 20. During the 1240s, Bacon was lecturing in the faculty of arts at Paris. His lectures covered Aristotle's *Metaphysics*, *Physics*, *De sensu et sensato*, probably *De generatione et corruptione*, *De animalibus*, and *De anima*. It thus appears that Bacon was one of the early lecturers on Aristotle's *libri naturales* in Paris. About 1247, Bacon gave up his membership in the arts faculty at Paris and returned to Oxford.

The move to Oxford has been assumed to mark the turning point in his interests. This turn involved a broadening of his outlook in the direction of Robert Grosseteste's (1168–1252) philosophy and the contents of various Arabic sources. He may have been assisted in this new direction by Grosseteste's intimate, Adam Marsh (1200–1259). It is not entirely clear where was Bacon stationed in the years 1247–1256. There is evidence which places him in Paris in 1247, 1251, and 1256 (Hackett 1997), and it has been suggested that he returned to Paris and studied theology there (Crowley 1950). It may be the case that when he decided to undertake private study, it was done at Oxford, where he had a greater chance of finding teachers and books in his new interests, but he went to Paris to find *experimentores*, such as Peter of Maricourt (fl. 1269) (Power 2013).

Bacon joined the Franciscans about 1257 and reports a series of hardships in the first 10 years of his life as a Franciscan. He accused his superiors of burdening him with duties and punishing him with isolation, hunger, and “unspeakable violence.” In those first years as a Franciscan (until 1266), Bacon wrote the *De mirabilis potestate artis et naturae*, and *De computo naturali*. This was the period of his most intense occupation with optics, and in the late 1250s or the early 1260s, he wrote *De multiplicatione specierum* and *De speculis comburentibus*. Following a

short correspondence with Guy de Foulques (C 1195–1268), who was elected Pope as Clement IV, Bacon sent him in 1267/1268 the *Opus majus*, *Opus minus*, and *De multiplicatione specierum*. The Pope died in the same year, so Bacon received no answer, and no result had followed from his writings.

In the late 1260s and early 1270s, Bacon probably wrote his *Communia naturalium* and *Communia mathematica*, mature expressions of many of his theories. This was also the period of Bacon's intense occupation with language. The Greek and Hebrew grammars belong to the phase immediately following the *Opus majus*. These were followed in 1271 or 1272 by the polemical *Compendium studii philosophiae*, in which Bacon criticized the Franciscan and Dominican orders for their educational practices. His edition of the *Secretum secretorum* was completed at Oxford, sometime after 1278 (Williams 1994).

A chronicle, from about 1370, reports that Bacon was condemned and imprisoned by his order for "certain suspected novelties." The chronicle further tells us that Bacon's works and doctrines were to be avoided by all, since the order had rejected them (Crowley 1950). Bacon was supposedly confined to the Paris convent around 1277–1279, by Jerome of Ascoli (d. 1292), the Franciscan minister general (Sharp 1930). The reason for this condemnation is unknown. Perhaps it had to do with Bacon's association with the spiritual branch of his order, a branch perceived as a threat by his superiors.

In 1292, at a chapter of the order held in Paris, just after Jerome of Ascoli's death, certain prisoners were set free. It is possible that Bacon may have been one of them (Easton 1952), although the duration of his imprisonment is unknown. The last evidence of Bacon's life is the *Compendium studii theologiae*, which he left unfinished. This was a grammatical work, repeating many of the themes and ideas that had appeared long before in his *De signis* (a part of the *Opus majus*). It is reasonable to assume that he died in 1292 or soon thereafter (Easton 1952).

## His Philosophy

Bacon's works from before 1247 differ on several aspects from his later works. Before 1247 he wrote on grammar (*Summa grammatica*), logic (*Summa de sophismatibus et distinctionibus* and *Sumulae dialectices*), and questions on several Aristotelian and pseudo-Aristotelian texts, which were probably the notes of his lectures, copied down much as he gave them in Paris (Easton 1952).

The *Summa grammatica* was a systematic exposition of the principal points of syntax in the tradition of the Priscian commentaries (Rosier-Catach 1997). Bacon's idea of the utmost significance of the speaker's intention appeared already in this early text. He claimed that the speaker may distance himself from the proper grammatical rules in order to express some precise idea. In his early works on logic, Bacon developed his notion of imposition and his theory of equivocation, according to which a word which is applied to both an entity and a nonentity is the most extreme case of equivocation (Maloney 1984).

In this early period of his thought, Bacon held the agent intellect to be an inseparable part of the soul. He endowed it with the function of abstracting the incoming *species* from their material conditions, a function he would abandon later on. In some of his early works, he mentioned functioning innate exemplars, providing the soul with knowledge of universals, while in others he referred to innate knowledge as vague and indistinct. In his mature works, these will be replaced with the talk of an innate capacity to acquire language, construct arguments, and recognize logical fallacies (Raizman-Kedar 2009). Bacon objected to the idea that matter is one in number in all things, and held to universal hylomorphism, according to which all things except God are composed of matter and form. Thus, Bacon will speak of the matter of both corporeal and spiritual beings, and hence of "spiritual matter" (Crowley 1950).

At this point too, he affirmed that universals are extramental and exist within particular, material objects. The soul does not make universality, so he believed, but finds it as a constituent of beings.

He denied that the rational soul was the cause of universality, for even if it did not apprehend things they would still resemble one another (Maloney 1985). The universals in the mind, so he thought, are likenesses of external things, that is, they are the *species* of the “real” universals, those which are, in particular, physical objects. The same position appeared in his mature writings, especially in the *Communia naturalium*.

In the mature period of his work, Bacon abandoned the commentary literary style. He composed two general works, proposing and explaining his vision of the reform in Christian learning (the *Opus majus* and its two abridgements, *Opus minus* and *Opus tertium*, and the *Communia naturalium*); two optical treaties (*De speculis Comburentibus* and the *De multiplicatione specierum*), of which the latter presents not only his account of light and vision but of natural causation in general; one extended mathematical tract (*Communia mathematica*); and several works on language and semiotics (*De signis*, *Grammatica Graeca*, and *Compendium studii theologiae*). Some of his writings (such as *Opus tertium* and *compendium studii philosophiae*) were devoted in part to social and political criticism. To this are added some small treaties on medicine and alchemy (such as *De erroribus medicorum*) and of course, Bacon’s edition of the *Secretum secretorum*, touching on topics such as government and the conduct and education of rulers.

The *Opus majus* was to a great extent a plea for the study of the practical arts and sciences. These, Bacon exclaimed, rank higher than the speculative sciences. Accordingly, for each science Bacon added a list of its possible uses. Thus, knowledge of foreign languages can foster the development of commerce and secure peace between nations and knowledge of alchemy can be used to prolong human lives. Theology and moral philosophy are the most practical of them all, since they actively contribute to man’s salvation. These sciences should therefore be considered the summit of human knowledge and all the other disciplines considered their aides (Lindberg 1987).

Bacon maintained that a theologian must undergo a full liberal arts training. This conviction

stands at the heart of his proposal for revising the curriculum in the universities. Bacon wanted theologians to be versed not only in the liberal arts but also in the seven practical sciences, including perspective, astronomy, the science of weights, medicine, experimental science, alchemy, and agriculture. Without knowing these subjects, he argued, the theologians would not be able to understand the literal meaning of Scripture, and consequently fail to grasp their spiritual meaning as well.

The method of inquiry to be used in pursuing these sciences should be, according to Bacon, “experimental science,” since logical arguments alone cannot provide the certitude our mind requires. If we wish to attain certitude, we must actively experience the things of the world, using our senses. Bacon listed three tasks for experimental science: to investigate the conclusions of the speculative sciences, to construct new instruments and technologies, and to supply prognostications and predications. It appears that Bacon’s *experimentum* was not simply a repetition of Aristotle’s empiricism, but in fact a critique of pure syllogistic reasoning. There is evidence in *Opus majus* for actual experimental work with instruments in which Bacon was involved (Hackett 2006, 2008/9).

A conspicuous feature of Bacon’s advocacy for a new order of studies has been his praise of mathematics as essential to the study of all other sciences. Although his name is not subscribed under any significant mathematical achievement, he grasped better than most of his contemporaries the fecundity of mathematics as a principle of scientific explanations, and its ability to provide certainty in science. When combined with experimental science, math guarantees full truth free from error or doubt (Lindberg 1982). In advocating for the study of *Perspectiva*, Bacon applied geometrical analysis to optical phenomena wherever possible, thereby pushing the mathematization of light and vision as far as it could go before the seventeenth century revolution (Lindberg and Tachau 2013).

Bacon’s major later work on Physics was the *De multiplicatione specierum*. In this work, he described the details of what he considered the

most fundamental mechanism of natural causation, namely the propagation of species. Although the term had a rather large circulation in thirteenth-century philosophical texts, Bacon had given it a systematic treatment to be found nowhere else. He defined a species as “the force or power by which any object acts on its surroundings,” and posited it as efficient not only on the sensory level but within natural processes as well. A species, Bacon contended, is produced by every active nature; the list of active natures includes not only color, light, and other sensible accidental qualities, but also universals and substances. A species resembles its agent in “nature, specific essence, and operation” and belongs to the same category as its agent. Thus, the species of substance is substance, the species of accident is an accident, and the species of a composite is composite. Bacon established the principle that a species is brought forth out of the potentiality of the matter of the recipient and through it an agent renders its surrounding similar to itself (Raizman-Kedar 2009).

Bacon emphasized the material and natural existence of species, in both medium and senses. There is no “spiritual being” in the medium as was taught by other scholastic philosophers. For Bacon, universal causation is corporeal and material, and matter itself is not just pure potentiality but is positive in itself (Raizman-Kedar 2009). The action of species is of a natural character, which is uniform and necessary. The species’ activity conforms to a set of “laws of nature” (or laws of material forms or of multiplication). Bacon did not only state in general that such laws exist, but actually formulated a few of them, such as the law of reflection and the law of refraction. He prescribed laws that apply in other domains than species, such as the law of the gravity of water and the law of universal nature. These laws form a system, in which some laws derive from others and some are ordered in relations of subordination. At the top there is the overriding law, namely, the law of universal nature, which governs the continuity of matter and the equilibrium among its parts. Bacon declared that the search for laws had not been completed, and more laws can be derived from

the ones already discovered. In Bacon’s eyes, the search for laws is not a theoretical endeavor, for it has a definite practical goal – to enhance human life (Kedar and Hon 2018).

Bacon’s alchemical theory was unique and quite original. He distinguished between theoretical alchemy which teaches how things arise from elemental origins, such as precious stones, metals and pigments, and practical alchemy, which teaches the manufacture of these same products by using chemical technologies of stratification and distillation. Practical alchemy, Bacon believed, can assist mankind to prolong human life. Such prolongation can be achieved by creating an “equal body,” in which the dominating element has been corrupted. The corruption is made by optical instruments, which gather the celestial rays of beneficent stars and project them onto elemental bodies. The body made equal now propagates species, which reproduce the action of the beneficent celestial bodies, by means of which remedies are found and evils are eliminated (Newman 1997).

Bacon’s most notable scientific achievement was the initiation of the tradition of *Perspectiva* in the Latin world and its addition to the *Quadrivium*. He was a very competent reader and transmitter of the fruits of Arab scholarship, and especially of Alhacen (935–C 1039). He adopted Alhacen’s principle of emanation from each point on the object’s surface and argued that the vision-producing rays are only those that are perpendicular to the eye. He successfully communicated the geometrical principles of reflection in mirrors, the precept of equality of the angles in incidence and reflection, and the rules governing the location, size, and direction of images in different kinds of mirrors. The phenomena of refraction were dealt with successfully all the same, and Bacon established the principles of refraction at interfaces of various shapes and various media, all accompanied by geometrical diagrams. In *De speculis comburentibus*, he presented a minute treatment of the phenomena of pinhole images (Lindberg and Tachau 2013). He found by means of observation the universal 42 radius of the rainbow and suggested that the different colors are caused by reflections from small drops of



water, from each of which “reflection occurs as from a spherical mirror” (Lindberg 1966).

He then sketched the psychological processes involved in vision. According to Bacon, sight can perceive 22 visible qualities among which are light, color, remoteness, position, corporeity, shape, size, continuity, number, and motion. Of these, only light and color are perceived directly, since they alone produce species. The other visual qualities are deduced from the way the species of light and color are arranged on the surface of the eye, an arrangement which accurately reflects the original proportions within the issuing object. In deducing visual information, both humans and animals employ a kind of syllogism which resembles reasoning. Bacon ascribed complex cognitive capacities to animals; he adduced that spiders spinning their webs and monkeys taking revenge on people who have hurt them are examples of animals’ ability to learn from experience and to plan their actions accordingly (Hackett 2013).

Bacon’s faculty psychology, derived almost exclusively from Avicenna (c. 970–1037), divided the brain into three chambers. The first chamber – *phantasia* – houses the common sense and imagination. Upon receiving the species, the common sense first makes judgments concerning each sense separately, discerning the distinctive kind of information supplied by the proper senses. The species are then retained in the imagination. In the middle chamber of the brain, the estimative faculty receives the species of the substantial nature of things, and memory, located in the rear chamber, retains them. The species retained in both *phantasia* and memory are multiplied all the way to cogitation, located in the middle cell of the brain. This faculty is responsible for the syllogistic mode of cognition and serves as the link between the sensitive and the rational soul in men (Smith 2015).

At this point, Bacon detached the agent intellect from the soul and identified it with God. He considered that according to Aristotle the agent had to be substantially other than the patient and therefore the potential intellect and the active one must be set apart. He then divided the rational soul in two: the speculative intellect and the practical

one, which he recognized as the will. He designated the speculative part to the speculative sciences, yet ascribed rationality only to the practical intellect, dealing with the practical sciences, because it alone employs deliberation and freedom of choice (Raizman-Kedar 2009). In his moral philosophy, he relied heavily on Seneca (c. 4 BCE–CE 65) and strove to make his ideas known.

In his mature phase of thought, Bacon developed more fully his ideas on language and the imposition of words. He presented an original classification of signs, in which one class included natural signs, representing their significates by concomitance, inference, and consequence, by likeness or in the manner of cause and effect. The other class comprised of signs given by a soul, which could be given either by employing one’s free will or naturally, as if by an instinct. Words belong, according to Bacon, to the second category of signs given by soul. Words differ from natural signs in that no essential linkage exists between them and their significates; they differ from signs given by soul naturally, in that they are based upon pure conception and arise from cognitive and rational processes involving knowledge, reflection, deliberation, and choice. The thing to which a voice is attached depends entirely on the speaker’s intent. Since in most acts of speech we intend to name extra mental objects or events, Bacon argued that this external thing is what the word signifies, and not, as Aristotle and Boethius (c. 480–524/525) claimed, the image of the thing within the mind (Maloney 1983).

No cognitive act, Bacon stipulated, can occur without a due representation of the matter of the thing cognized. All aspects of an object must be a part of its representation and therefore a species represents the whole composite of form and matter. He expressed the same view in his theory of signs. The word, Bacon declared, does not represent only the form or essence of the named thing, but signifies the composite of matter and form as a whole. Against Averroes (1126–1198), who argued that a word represents the form alone since the form is more worthy than matter, Bacon answered that a composite has whatever is of



worth in a form and beyond this the worth of matter. This conception of representation is tightly linked with his view of matter as inherently positive and as an important factor in human life. His stress on the importance of the practical sciences is but another expression of the same position (Raizman-Kedar 2009).

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## Roger Marston

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### Abstract

Roger Marston (c. 1235–1303) was an English Franciscan theologian who studied in Paris in the 1270s, when the challenge coming from Aristotle's philosophical works was reaching fever pitch in the university. He returned to England and became a doctor of theology at Oxford where he left a significant collection of *Disputed* and *Quodlibetal Questions* dealing with the inner operations of the triune God and with creation, with the fallen nature of man and the limitations of his natural powers, especially the will as a remedial agent, and with the nature of the soul, knowledge and freedom. He is considered a significant voice in the Franciscan school, which provided him with a strong collection of influential Franciscan companions, including St. Bonaventure, Richard of Mediavilla, William of Ware, Matthew of Aquasparta and his immediate teacher, John Pecham. This movement represented in a significant way the Augustinian tradition as it faced the alternative Christian Aristotelian vision of reality, presented mainly by Thomas Aquinas.

Roger Marston, as witnessed by the manuscripts of his works, was an English Franciscan. During his lifetime, more than 32 English parishes, towns and townships carried the name "Marston," so modern scholars debate the exact location that bequeathed him his name. The lists of Franciscan lecturers at Oxford and Cambridge and of Franciscan Provincial Ministers, his own declarations, and his many references to the writings of other Franciscans establish his membership in the Order of Friars Minor. It is quite likely that Roger was born around 1235. After joining the Franciscans and completing his novitiate year, he studied

theology for three or four years at an English studium before going on to Paris. He was in Paris for the school year 1269–1270 and spent his years there as a bachelor of theology, returning to England before the school year 1276–1277. He incepted at Oxford, and was known as a doctor of Oxford and Cambridge, not Paris. Most recent scholarship places him in Cambridge during the academic years 1276–1278 and ties his inception at Oxford to the school year 1281–1282. After teaching at Oxford, he was elected the 13th Provincial Minister of the English province in 1292, an office he held until 1298. With sparse evidence to support it, he is supposed to have spent his last years as guardian at Norwich and to have died there in 1303.

There is also only slight evidence that Roger wrote a commentary on Peter Lombard's *Sentences* before he became a Master of Theology. However, manuscript references to it are vague and no text has been found. All of Roger's literary productions are magisterial works: *Disputed Questions* and *Quodlibet Questions*. His *Disputed Questions* have been gathered and edited under three titles: *De aeterna emanatione*, *De statu naturae lapsae* and *De anima*. *De aeterna emanatione (On the Eternal Emanation)* is a collection of seven questions, which center on the inner operations of the divine nature considered in itself and in comparison to the origin of creation, and also on the generation of the Son and the production of the Holy Spirit within the Godhead. *De statu naturae lapsae (On the State of Fallen Nature)*, limited to two questions, examines whether man was created with a faulty nature or whether his present condition is due to an inheritance derived from a fall from the original state of nature, and then asks whether man can attain rightness of will on the basis of his own natural powers. The ten-question treatise, *De anima (On the Soul)*, treats a wide variety of puzzles dealing with the nature of the soul and its faculties of intellect and will, including self-knowledge, the sources of our knowledge of all things, and the challenges to human freedom. The *De anima* questions depend on Matthew of Aquasparta's *De cognitione (On Knowledge)*, disputed in 1278–1279, and on Henry of Ghent's

*Quodlibet V* (1280). The *Disputed Questions*, then, seem to be the product of Roger's work as a Master at Oxford. Henry of Ghent's various *Quodlibeta*, along with other sources, also provide clues to the dating of Roger's four *Quodlibets*. The latest research places Roger's *Quodlibet I* before Easter 1282, *Quodlibet II* before Easter 1283, *Quodlibet III* before Christmas 1283 and *Quodlibet IV* during Lent 1284. All of Marston's surviving works thus fall within the academic years 1282–1284 when he was teaching at the studium of St. Anthony in Oxford.

The principal sources outside the Franciscan order employed by Marston were St. Augustine, St. Anselm, Richard of St. Victor, Robert Grosseteste, Thomas Aquinas and Henry of Ghent. Roger borrows abundantly from St. Augustine for both his theology and philosophy, especially for his theory of science and his judgments concerning the insufficiency and errors of the philosophers in regard to the knowledge of God and even of the world. Using the words of Augustine, Marston praised Plato and Aristotle "who knew many things concerning the one God." Yet, echoing Augustine, and in this case Roger Bacon also, he noted that "all philosophers erred in something." For instance, because they had a false view of man's ultimate end, they fell short in their view of truth and also in their way of living. He warned "philosophizing" theologians, "drunk with philosophic nectar," not to mix the wine of Sacred Scripture with the water of worldly philosophy. Speaking of the immortality of the soul, Roger says: "I believe firmly that the arguments of the Saints are much more efficacious than all philosophic statements, even though in regard to this matter the same truths are affirmed by the Fathers and the philosophers." He refers to St. Anselm and Richard of St. Victor as his teachers and he follows them as the faithful interpreters of St. Augustine. He considered Robert Grosseteste as the *Commentator* of Pseudo-Dionysius and cites in all cases his translations of the *Angelic Hierarchy*, the *Divine Names* and *Mystical Theology*. He also employed the Bishop of Lincoln's commentaries in disputing Richard of Mediavilla's interpretation of St. Augustine's

illumination theory of knowledge. He bears great respect for the subtlety of Thomas Aquinas, but, like many of his contemporary Franciscan colleagues, he judged him to be one of the "philosophizing" theologians who abandoned St. Augustine's teachings and dedicated themselves too much to worldly philosophy. He also criticized Pelagian leanings he found in Aquinas' early writings, though he noted that Thomas either retracted or contextualized his positions on grace and will in his later works. Marston praised Henry of Ghent, whose *Quodlibet* questions served as a major source for Roger's four *Quodlibeta*. He praised his deep philosophical knowledge, noting that he had been steeped in it since infancy. He criticized some of his theories concerning human knowledge and the plurality of forms in man, but these criticisms must be read carefully, since for the most part, he is criticizing Henry as his teachings are presented by opponents, such as William of Ware.

Roger's main Franciscan sources were Alexander of Hales, St. Bonaventure, Richard of Mediavilla, William of Ware, Eustachius of Arras, William de la Mare, Matthew of Aquasparta, and beyond all, his teacher, John Pecham. These authors held many positions in common, so that they have been considered by many historians of medieval philosophy and theology as a unity, usually described as "the Franciscan School." Among their common philosophical doctrines are the primacy of the will, the plurality of forms and the theory of divine illumination. In the sixth of the *Disputed Questions on the "De anima,"* Roger followed Matthew of Aquasparta as he attempted to show how in contemplation the will added a further dimension of savoring experience to whatever is attained by the intellect. The plurality of forms, stressing the increasing developments of living things, was rooted in the teachings of Alexander of Hales and St. Bonaventure, but its explanation was brought to full strength by Marston in the criticisms of the unity of form position of Thomas Aquinas as presented by John Pecham and William de la Mare. In the third of his *Disputed Questions on the "De anima,"* Marston, following Matthew of Acquasparta, acknowledged how

the material content of our knowledge arises from the senses, but that the certainty of our knowledge needs a different ground, i.e., illumination by the eternal reasons, to provide its guarantee. In these matters where the late thirteenth-century Franciscans share common positions, in whole or in part, Marston is known for his long citations from fellow Franciscans, especially John Pecham, and is even accused by some modern historians of plagiarism. The editors of his *Disputed Questions* admitted that “not rarely” do we see long citations from St. Bonaventure, Matthew of Aquasparta and John Pecham in his works. However, the editors of the *Quodlibeta* caution us not to read “not rarely” as identical with “always,” “on the whole,” or “quasi word for word.” To see his originality amid this commonness, it is necessary to note also the differences and to read Marston with exceptional care.

## Cross-References

- ▶ [Alexander of Hales](#)
- ▶ [Anselm of Canterbury](#)
- ▶ [Augustine](#)
- ▶ [Bonaventure](#)
- ▶ [Henry of Ghent](#)
- ▶ [John Pecham](#)
- ▶ [Matthew of Aquasparta](#)
- ▶ [Richard of Middleton](#)
- ▶ [Richard of St. Victor](#)
- ▶ [Robert Grosseteste](#)
- ▶ [Thomas Aquinas](#)
- ▶ [William of Ware](#)

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## Roger Roseth

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### Abstract

Roger Roseth, an English philosopher–theologian, belonged to the generation of Franciscan scholars immediately following William of Ockham. Roseth composed his only surviving

work, a *Sentences* commentary, in the mid 1330s. Where Roseth received his theological education is not known, but his affiliation with Oxford authors, his style, and the content of his book all suggest that he was trained in England. Although we know little about Roseth, his work was once rather renowned: at least 17 preserved manuscripts containing the text or parts of it attest to its popularity. Roseth displays a strong interest in contemporary logic and natural philosophy; he is considered to be one of the key witnesses of the significance of Oxford calculators for English theology.

The exiguous biographical facts about Roseth stem from information in the text itself and in the manuscripts containing the text. Roseth wrote his single work, *Lectura super Sententias*, after 1332 but no later than 1337. The *terminus post quem* is based on the reference Roseth makes to Adam Wodeham's Oxford lectures, given during the academic years 1332–1334. The *terminus ante quem* is the year when the oldest preserved copy of Roseth's work was made at the Franciscan convent in Norwich. Some marginalia indicate that Roseth was an English Franciscan. The manuscripts spell the author's name in various ways; the current spelling is adopted from MS Chigi B. V-66. Modern scholarly literature also uses the Latin equivalent, Rosetus.

Roseth presumably received his education at Franciscan schools, and was most likely acquainted with the intellectual heritage of Duns Scotus and William Ockham. It is not very clear how deeply these predecessors influenced Roseth's thought since he never reveals his indebtedness to either of them. Although Roseth does not explicitly refer to Scotus or Ockham, a careful reader can find passages in Roseth that witness their influence. Thus, for example, in his discussion on the question of whether the will is the cause of its own acts, Roseth seems to reflect some of the themes Scotus had taken up in his *Lectura* II, d. 25. Ockham's influence can also be seen in some of Roseth's views, such as his claim that the moral value of an act is based on the

agent's intentions only, and not on the external act itself.

Such occasional similarities do not, however, indicate that Ockham's ideas had a profound influence on Roseth. Since he refrains from discussing issues that would reveal his attitude toward Ockham's central ideas, such as in metaphysics, it is difficult to determine how deeply Roseth had absorbed Ockham's thought. Roseth's scattered remarks show that his views are similar to Ockham's in some points, while in others he deviates from Ockham's opinions. Roseth's sketchy description of relation is in accordance with Ockham's nominalistic theory of the categories, whereas the definition of *fallacia accidentis* omits Ockham's proposition based on his theory of mental language; and Roseth's remarks on the theory of cognition seem to presume *species in medio*, which Ockham had considered as superfluous. But even if Ockham's direct impact on Roseth's thought may have been sporadic, the intellectual milieu, which Roseth shared was markedly shaped by Ockham's work. This influence is one of the reasons Roseth and his Oxford contemporaries applied so-called metalinguistic analysis in their writing; that is, they dealt with scientific questions in a propositional context. The extensive use of propositional analysis may have been motivated by the need to guarantee the certitude of scientific knowledge in a world that after the nominalistic turn appeared as radically contingent. Thus, scientific knowledge was based not on contingent individuals as such, but on the propositional knowledge about these individuals. In this approach, the propositions carry the desired certainty. The linguistic turn in philosophy and theology became one of the hallmarks of English scholarship in the second quarter of the fourteenth century.

In fourteenth-century English theology, metalinguistic analysis appeared in the wide employment of contemporary logic and in the use of analytical languages that Oxford natural philosophers used to discuss various topics in physics. Bachelors in theology, when reading the *Sentences*, analyzed theological problems by using logical tools such as supposition theory, the doctrine of the compounded and divided

senses of propositions, and the study of consequences. The analytical languages they adopted from natural philosophy included rules for change (intention and remission of forms), limit decision (*de maximo et minimo*, *incipit*, and *desinit*), continuity, and infinity. Robert Holcot and Adam Wodeham are well known among the theologians writing in the new style, but other representatives of this new English theology, such as Roseth have only recently invoked scholarly interest.

Although Oxford thought constitutes Roseth's intellectual background, he appears to be an independent mind who is reluctant to reveal his indebtedness to any particular author. It is, however, obvious that Roseth stands closer to his fellow Franciscan Adam Wodeham than to the Dominican Robert Holcot. Roseth and Holcot merely shared a similar style, which may have been the reason why sections from Roseth's *Lectura* were incorporated into Holcot's *Sentences*, printed at Lyon in 1497. Wodeham had a more profound influence on Roseth; in fact, he is the only confrère Roseth quotes by name. Roseth's direct reference to Wodeham's Oxford lectures is critical, but Roseth sides with his views in other instances as well, although he does not mention Wodeham's name. Roseth's discussion on Trinitarian logic, for example, is strikingly similar to Wodeham's treatment. The other Oxford contemporary mentioned by Roseth is Thomas Bradwardine. When apparently using Richard Kilvington's and Roger Swyneshed's writings, however, he does not explicitly refer to his sources.

The single work that has so far been attributed with certainty to Roseth is a collection of questions that apparently came from a lecture course he prepared on the *Sentences*. The work mirrors the changes in the *Sentences* commentaries, which emerged, particularly in England, during the second quarter of the fourteenth-century. Commentaries written in the new style no longer followed the structure of Peter Lombard's work but concentrated on the topics the author found most interesting. The *Sentences* now contained fewer, yet considerably longer, questions than traditional commentaries. In Roseth's *Lectura*, the text requires 90 manuscript leaves (counted from MS

Bruxelles, Bibliothèque Royale 1551) but is divided into a mere five questions of which only one has a counterpart in Peter Lombard's work: the fourth question, in which Roseth discusses themes related to the augmentation of charity. Of the other questions the first deals with conscience, the second focuses on the nature of the acts of will, the third is divided into an article on Trinitarian logic and a proof of God's existence, and the fifth raises the question of whether some creatures can be infinite. These topics have, broadly speaking, theological relevance, but they do not comprise a systematic account of essential theological questions. In fact, although the topics give an impression of a theological work, much of Roseth's material is not particularly theological but derives rather from various branches of philosophy. A typical example of this is the question on conscience, which begins with an article about the problem of assigning limits to different capacities such as vision or the power to lift heavy objects. Despite its theological origin, this chapter was copied and circulated as a separate treatise in natural philosophy under the title *De maximo et minimo*.

Roseth's keen interest in the languages of measurement and his ample use of propositional analysis characterize his work. Roseth's arguments often deal with infinitely divisible continua by which he discusses theories pertaining to continuous change and the related question of the correct understanding of infinity. These arguments are mostly comprised of thought experiments (*secundum imaginationem*) in which infinite divisibility seems to initiate something that is actually infinite. This result, however, is at odds with the traditional Aristotelian understanding, which allows only potential infinity. Roseth, who was a firm adherent of the Aristotelian notion of the infinite, presents the arguments leading to actual infinity as counterexamples of his own views. In the discussion, Roseth eventually disproves the arguments, thus giving his own position indirect support. Since the arguments involving actual infinity are designed to be refuted, Roseth's book is not an enquiry on infinity as such. Rather, the examples concerning infinity play a methodological role in his writing.



Yet, when the alleged infinite is based on God's essence or absolute power, actual infinity seems to be unavoidable. Roseth resolves such problematic cases by pointing out that the relation to an infinite God does not give rise to an actual infinity in the created order and that God's absolute power is restricted by general laws of thought. Thus, for example, it does not follow from God's ability to perceive any proportional part of a proportionally divided continuum that the number of those proportional parts is actually infinite since the unending mathematical series are unending even for God.

## Cross-References

- ▶ [Intension and Remission of Forms](#)
- ▶ [John Duns Scotus](#)
- ▶ [Natural Philosophy](#)
- ▶ [Obligations Logic](#)
- ▶ [Oxford Calculators](#)
- ▶ [Richard Kilvington](#)
- ▶ [Robert Holcot](#)
- ▶ [Thomas Bradwardine](#)
- ▶ [Trinitarian Logic](#)
- ▶ [Will](#)
- ▶ [William of Ockham](#)

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## Roman Empire

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### Abstract

The Empire and the papacy represented the unity of Latin Christendom. As secular head of Christianity the emperor did not enjoy the same stability in his position of leadership as the pope. An emperor only held office for roughly half the years elapsed between 962 and 1493, as long vacancies interrupted the chain of emperors. Moreover, the concept of Empire was in constant flux. Contrary to the papacy, which was defined by a corpus of canonical laws and conciliar decrees, the Empire was shaped by collective memory and by individual interpretation. The concept of Empire varied according to the knowledge held of the Empire of antiquity. Some authors characterized the office of emperor as an exclusively secular authority which had been

established by Augustus. Others emphasized the Christian duties of the emperor, referring to the famous penance of the emperor Theodosius I in front of Ambrose of Milan. In Rome, the concept of the emperor as head of the city itself had never truly died out. Equally, a king was referred to as emperor in Spain and in England, if he dominated other kings in his region. Yet, in spite of this erratic concept of Empire, it inspired a philosophical discussion about the necessity of a political world order. This discussion emerged in the late Middle Ages and anticipated early modern theories about supranational institutions and the deficiency of nation-states.

When Charlemagne received the imperial crown from Pope Leo III on Christmas Day of the year 800, his dominion over the Frankish kingdom had in fact not been significantly enhanced. The new title of emperor signified his hegemony over Western Europe and his coequality with the Byzantine emperor in the East, but the political landscape had only changed in one respect: after 800, Charlemagne claimed authority over the duchy of Rome, which had traditionally fallen under the sovereignty of the Byzantine Empire. This claim, however, clashed with the aspirations of the pope, who was aiming at territorial autonomy and political leadership in the duchy of Rome. The Donation of Constantine, forged presumably in the decades preceding the imperial coronation, was meant to bolster these aspirations. Therefore, it was all the more important for the pope that the bestowal of the title of emperor remained his exclusive right. Whereas Louis I and Lothar I were crowned emperor by their predecessors, Pope Leo IV recovered this right in 850 when he bestowed the imperial title to Louis II. From this point onward, the pope's right to grant the imperial coronation in the church of St. Peter became the norm throughout the Middle Ages. Consequently, a strong relation between empire and papacy emerged. In the centuries before the Gregorian reform, the emperor claimed to have a supervisory authority over the pope and the papal election. In 963 and 965, Emperor Otto I removed

a pope from office who had not complied with his political intentions. Otto III continued this precedent by appointing several of his own advisors to the Apostolic See, thereby disregarding the traditional procedures of a papal election. This imperial right was further enhanced when several candidates contended for the papal office during a schism in 1046. In this situation, Henry III removed three popes who claimed legitimacy and appointed a candidate on his own. Even after the papal election had again been regulated by well-defined laws, this right of arbitration between contenders for the papacy persisted until the fifteenth century. During the Great Schism, the German king and would-be emperor Sigismund assumed the leadership of the Council of Constance (1414–1418) in his role as defender and advocate of the church (*defensor et advocatus ecclesiae*).

Above all, the medieval emperor was the church's advocate and the patron of the Apostolic See. In contrast, his competence to crown kings was rather elusive. Bohemia was part of the Holy Roman Empire, and the emperor crowned its king in 1085, 1158, and 1198. The coronation of kings in Cyprus and Armenia by Emperor Henry VI were, however, isolated cases. During the early and high Middle Ages, the emperor did not claim a universal authority or rights of interference in sovereign states. The concept of the Empire as a universal dominion over the Christian world emerged only after the renewal of Roman law in the twelfth century. The Hohenstaufen emperors sporadically used the concept of *dominus mundi* as a propaganda tool, but it did not take center stage in political discourse. Equally, it was first with the Hohenstaufen emperor Frederick I that an emperor stressed his affiliation to the Roman emperors by adding two laws to the *Corpus iuris civilis* of Justinian. This relation to the ancient emperors had been strengthened by the idea that the Roman Empire had been succeeded by the German one (*translatio imperii*), which gained increasingly universal approval during the twelfth century.

In the academic discussion of the law schools, the concept of a *dominus mundi* had several meanings. The jurists at the universities adhered to this

concept in order to sustain the ongoing validity of Roman law. But rather than support the universal aspirations of the reigning Roman emperor, they were foremost interested in theoretical debates on the source of law and the relation of the *princeps* to lesser communities. The reality of the Holy Roman Empire only rarely impinged on these debates. The jurists held the view that the world order of Roman law which centered upon a universal emperor was valid *de iure*, even though the emergent nation-states were *de facto* independent units. Since Pope Innocent III acknowledged in 1202 that the French king did not recognize any superior power, this position of *de facto* independence defined the common ground for the continuing debate. Even imperialist thinkers such as Bartolus de Sassoferrato and Baldus de Ubaldis had to come to terms with this exemption from imperial authority. The notion of a universal world order continued to remain the guiding idea against which the reality of the later Middle Ages had to gain legitimacy. The French jurists in contrast considered their king as an emperor in his realm (*rex imperator in regno suo*) and claimed a *de iure* autonomy from the middle of the thirteenth century.

In this debate among jurists, the rights and competences of the emperor were never precisely outlined. Not until the longest vacancy of the imperial office (from 1250 to 1312) came to an end did philosophers adhering to the revisionist policy of Henry VII articulate the emperor's rights in detail. In a letter addressed to the French king Philip the Fair, Henry did not shrink from claiming superiority in secular matters, an affront unique in the Middle Ages, which was answered by a firm and immediate rebuttal. When the Hohenstaufen dynasty ended, the French king obtained the position of leadership in Christianity and considered himself superior to the German ruler. This rebuttal of Philip the Fair inaugurated a fierce debate between adherents of the empire and their opponents. The most distinguished of the followers of Henry VII were Dante Alighieri and Engelbert of Admont. This debate continued into the reign of Louis IV in the writings of Lupold of Bebenburg, Marsilius of Padua, and William of Ockham.

Dante Alighieri (d. 1321), the famous Italian poet, hailed Henry VII as the savior of the infamous state of Italian politics, and was the first philosopher to vindicate the necessity of a universal world monarchy in the context of Aristotelian political thought. In his *Convivio* (1308), he had to overcome a huge obstacle: the fact that the Aristotelian framework was neither compatible with a universal monarchy nor with the idea of a commonwealth aiming at religious salvation. After the death of Henry VII, Dante again turned to the topic of universal monarchy in his famous treatise *Monarchia*. The first part of this treatise is dedicated to the question of whether a universal empire is necessary for the common welfare; the second to the defense of the right of the Roman people to the imperial office; and the third to the rejection of any theory implying the subordination of the emperor to the pope. His main argument in favor of universal monarchy assumes that human nature is prone to conflict, which can only be settled by an ultimate authority. Thus, lasting peace is dependent upon the existence of a universal emperor. Under this condition of peace, mankind can attain its ultimate goal, this being the actualization of human intellect which Dante identifies with the felicity attainable in this life. The emperor is described by Dante as a Platonic philosopher king, unaffected by passions and base motives. His power, therefore, would have no constitutional limitations or checks and balances and would only be "delimited by the ocean."

In the last year of Henry VII's reign, the abbot Engelbert of Admont (d. 1331) composed a treatise justifying the revisionist politics of the emperor in Italy. In his *De ortu et fine Romani imperii* (1312), Engelbert combined the Aristotelian reasoning in favor of a universal monarchy with the genuine medieval tradition of a Christian empire. In contrast to Dante, Engelbert's emperor derives his authority not only from philosophical arguments but also from his role as advocate and patron of Latin Christianity. Moreover, he does not recommend unlimited power for the emperor or a strictly authoritarian universal order. Instead, in his view, the emperor's role is merely to ensure the application of Roman law and to adjudicate jurisdictional disputes. Peace, stability, and

human felicity would only be guaranteed through a hierarchical political order. Engelbert embraced the argument that Christianity would be in need of secular leadership in the organization of crusades and for combating the heathens. Despite this defense of the empire, Engelbert allowed for individual exemption from imperial rule in the cases of France and Spain. In the case of Italy, he insisted that it should again be subject to the emperor's authority, in accordance with the policy of Henry VII.

In his conflict with Pope John XXII, Louis IV ("the Bavarian") firmly adhered to the concept of a universal empire. Louis claimed that imperial authority stemmed solely from the election of the German electoral princes and rejected the need of papal approval. Lupold of Bebenburg (d. 1363), a jurist and bishop of Bamberg, gave a theoretical justification of this position. In his *Tractatus de iuribus regni et imperii Romanorum* (1338), he attached to the German kingdom the same formulas of national sovereignty which had already been developed for the French monarch during the thirteenth century. The king of the Germans should thus in the same way be independent of papal approval, and his authority should rest exclusively on the election by the electoral princes. Concerning universal empire, Lupold was more cautious than his patron. He did not envisage a hierarchical world order but accepted the exemption of the French kingdom from imperial authority. Lupold argued that the emperor was set apart from the other kings in one important respect, this being the entitlement to exert several reserved rights not only in the Empire, but also in the other nation-states (e.g., the appointment of notaries). Lupold, therefore, continued to insist on the universal authority of the empire. This persistence should not be understood as reactionary traditionalism. The imperial tradition was a decisive factor in the emergence of a German identity throughout the high and later Middle Ages, as the German identity coalesced around the unique position of the emperor and the succession of the Empire from the Romans to the Germans. The emperor was regarded as patron of the church, temporal leader of Christianity, and as

surety in view of the coming of the Antichrist. This doctrine of a Christian imperial monarchy continued to command much assent even outside the Empire.

Marsilius of Padua and William of Ockham, both of whom were under the protection of Louis IV, used the theory of a universal empire to counter the claims of the papacy regarding universal rulership as formulated by Boniface VIII and John XXII. Marsilius had been a defender of popular sovereignty and republican government but began to defend the principle of a universal empire when he argued against papal claims to universal jurisdiction over temporal rulers. The emperor was to take the place of the pope, even in ecclesiastical matters, as the ultimate judge of clerics and the head of church councils. Marsilius dedicated his main work, the *Defensor pacis*, to Louis IV. After his flight to Louis in 1326, this adherence to the empire grew even stronger. In his later works (*De translatione imperii*, *Defensor minor*), Marsilius again defended the position of the emperor.

William of Ockham wrote the most extensive work on the problem of empire. Part 3.2 of his *Dialogus* is exclusively dedicated to this subject. Following the scholastic tradition, he dealt with the debate on universal empire in the context of the Aristotelian debate on the ideal constitution. Like Dante and Engelbert, he inquired whether imperial authority was necessary for the common good of humanity. His answer is ambiguous, although he generally seems to favor imperial rule because of its possible convenience in resolving disputes among nation-states. He argues that the leadership of the emperor should come into force in cases of appeal to him as the ultimate judge, in cases when the exercise of his reserved rights is demanded, and in cases where decisions of general principles need to be made. In most instances, however, he argues that national kingdoms should be permitted to maintain their sovereignty. This ideal constitution would not imply a hierarchical derivation of jurisdiction from the emperor, nor would it be implemented without regard to the historical situation. If the nation-states would not tolerate an

intervention by the emperor or if no suitable king could be found to hold the imperial office, this ideal constitution would become inexpedient. Expediency was the principle and measure by which Ockham dealt with the topic of the ideal constitution.

During the fifteenth century, the problem of universal empire again resurfaced in the context of the enduring schism between the Roman and Avignonese papacy. After the church proved incapable of resolving the dispute between three competing popes, the German king and would-be emperor Sigismund assumed the task of unifying the church. The theorists of the conciliar movement assigned the emperor a central role in the convocation of a church council in order to reduce papal authority. When a schism broke out between Pope Eugene IV and the Council of Basel, the conciliarists hoped to gain support from the emperor. It was during this crisis that Nicholas of Cusa (d. 1464) wrote his treatise *De concordantia catholica*, in which he argued for a symmetrical construction of both secular and ecclesiastical authority. Pope and emperor would together fulfill the position of leadership among Christians, whereas church councils and imperial assemblies would function as a balance on monarchical power, as he considered rule without consent to be tyrannical. It is important to note that this understanding of imperial rule shows strong influences from the Christian tradition. Nicholas called for reform in the church as well as in the Holy Roman Empire.

It was also during the fifteenth century that the idea of unrestricted imperial rule experienced an unexpected Indian summer. Aeneas Silvius Piccolomini (d. 1464), later to become Pope Pius II, argued for strict imperial authority to be accepted among Christian kingdoms in his treatise *De ortu et auctoritate Romani imperii*, dedicated to his patron, Emperor Frederick III. Aeneas Silvius supported the restoration of the imperial rule of Antiquity and rejected the medieval idea of national sovereignty. This view was echoed by jurists like Peter of Andlau (d. 1480) and Antonio Roselli (d. 1466). After the ecclesiastical schisms had been resolved, the emerging

threat from the Ottoman Empire further encouraged this new debate concerning the necessity for a universal temporal leader to rule in western Christendom.

## Cross-References

- ▶ [Civil \(Roman\) Law](#)
- ▶ [Dante Alighieri](#)
- ▶ [Marsilius of Padua](#)
- ▶ [Political Philosophy](#)
- ▶ [William of Ockham](#)

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## Roscelin of Compiègne

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### Abstract

Roscelin of Compiègne's reputation in the history of philosophy was secured by his critical interaction with the more famous Anselm of Canterbury and Peter Abelard. Since no writings in his hand, save for one letter written to his former student Abelard (Reiners, *Der Nominalismus in der Frühscholastik: Ein Beitrag zur Geschichte der Universalienfrage im Mittelalter. Beiträge zur Geschichte der Philosophie des Mittelalters*, 8(5). Münster, 1910), have been identified, and reports of his positions come from critical or even hostile sources, determining the precise character of Roscelin's philosophical and theological views is difficult and controversial. Evidence suggests that he was part of a group of scholars who advanced a novel and sophisticated approach to the study of logic at the end of the eleventh century.

Little is known of Roscelin's biography. He was born sometime around the middle of the eleventh century. Roscelin's letter to Abelard, which criticizes the views found in Abelard's *Theologia summi boni* and for which Abelard was



condemned at the Council of Soissons in 1121, gives us some idea of his life span.

Roscelin reportedly held the view that “if three persons are merely one thing and not three individual things like three angels or three souls in such a way that by will and power they are entirely the same, then the Father and the Holy Spirit *has* become incarnate with the Son” (Anselm 1946). Anselm’s reply was this: “Either he wants to set up three gods or he does not understand what he is saying.” Several versions of *De incarnatione verbi* indicate Anselm’s effort to denounce the view of his former friend; at the time of its final publication, Roscelin had been denounced at the Council of Soissons (c. 1090–1092) for commitment to tritheism.

Some scholars claim that Roscelin’s effort to avoid heresy (that the Father became incarnate with the son and thus suffered) might have been the motivation for the allegedly tritheistic Trinitarian thesis (Mews 2002). Possibly it is explained by the new approach to the study of dialectic. Roscelin was one of a number of dialecticians in the late eleventh century who, according to the report of a later chronicler, “was the first in our time to institute the doctrine of words (*sententia vocum*) in logic.” What is meant by “*sententia vocum*” is debatable. The same approach to logic is described as “sophistical,” and its followers were members of a group with many followers, including Robert of Paris, Arnulfus of Laon, and led by some unknown figure named John (Iwakuma 1992). Anselm also refers to the “witty little sophisms” that Roscelin engaged in, but it seems that his approach to dialectic was not all play since, according to Anselm and Abelard, Roscelin also held strong views on the non-reality of relations, composition, properties and dispositional properties, and universals (Kluge 1976; De Libera 1996; Erismann 2008).

According to Anselm’s characterization of Roscelin’s view, genera and species are no more than *flatus vocis*, breaths of spoken air. This is usually taken to mean that universals are identified as words. Peter Abelard’s theory of universals is described as more advanced than his former teacher’s: Abelard insists that the universal is

more than mere air (*vox*) since it is the spoken word insofar as it is significant (*sermo*). Possibly Roscelin had not worked out a sufficiently robust theory to handle the signification of universal words, although another aspect of his view (namely, the denial of the distinction between a substance and its properties, as when he denies that color is something distinct from the colored body) suggests that he adhered to the definition of names given in Priscian’s *Institutiones grammaticae* that the name signifies substance with quality (Mews 2002).

Many of Roscelin’s theses can be grouped together according to the common goal of denying metaphysical plurality in reality, that is, that multiple things can in any way be one. Roscelin denies the unity of universal wholes, such as several individual humans constituting one species human, or several species constituting one genus. The species-name “human” is a mere word; only individually distinct substances exist. Roscelin also denies the composition of integral wholes, such as a house composed of parts. According to Abelard, “our teacher Roscelin had a doctrine so crazy that he didn’t allow anything to be composed of parts; but in the same way he attributed species to be only words, he did the same for parts” (Abelard 1970). “Part,” like “species” and “genus,” is a mere utterance, devoid of metaphysical import; possibly Roscelin regarded anything but names for individual substances to be second-order logical terms, or terms of second imposition. The position could not have been worked out with great precision since it was left open for Abelard to mock. The extent of Abelard’s intellectual debt to Roscelin is unknown, and little help is given by Roscelin’s hostile letter to his former student dissociating his theological views from the controversies surrounding Abelard’s. Roscelin is not mentioned once in Abelard’s autobiographical *Historia calamitatum*.

Some of Anselm’s characterizations of Roscelin’s beliefs are ambiguous. According to Anselm, Roscelin does not recognize the distinction between a substance and its properties, or substances and dispositions, and he denies the reality of relations. Should these comments be understood as positive positions put forward by

Roscelin (e.g., “there is no distinction between a substance and its properties”) or as implications of other views he holds? No answer is clear from Anselm’s text. There have been several recent attempts to reconstruct Roscelin’s doctrine (Kluge 1976; Jolivet 1992; De Libera 1996; Mews 2002; Erismann 2008). Another promising avenue for reconstructing Roscelin’s views is suggested by the *Dialectica* by Garlandus (Garlandus 1959; Tweedale 1998; Martin forthcoming).

## Cross-References

- ▶ [Anselm of Canterbury](#)
- ▶ [Garlandus the Computist](#)
- ▶ [Heresy](#)
- ▶ [Peter Abelard](#)
- ▶ [Universals](#)

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# S

## Sa'īd ibn Dādhurmuz

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### Abstract

Sa'īd b. Dādhurmuz is a syncretist intellectual who was active in the eleventh century of Islam. He was a philosopher, theologian, and mystic at the same time, and his oeuvre exhibits an attempt to combine certain philosophical, theological, and mystical tendencies in classical Islamic thought. While he maintains the philosophical tradition of al-Kindī, the first Muslim philosopher, he also supports the contemporary Mu'tazilite theology in pivotal theological issues. His inclination towards the Sufi tradition is apparent in some aspects of his writings. Sa'īd b. Dādhurmuz is the author of three epistles, *Epistle on the Superiority of the Hereafter over this World* (*Risāla fī Faḍl al-ākḥira alā l-Dunyā*), *Epistle on Soul and Spirit* (*Risāla fī l-Nafs wa-l-rūḥ*), and *Epistle on Unity* (*Risāla fī l-Tawḥīd*). Despite the importance of his philosophical project, his name does not feature in any bibliographical source, a situation that kept his writings in a very limited circulation.

## Theological and Philosophical Teachings

In Sa'īd b. Dādhurmuz's vocabulary, God is described with many names, such as the Creator, Eternal, First Creator, Pure Thatness, Pure Identity, First, True First, True One, First One, Pure Truth, First Truth, Pure Light, Pure Good, and First Cause. According to him, all these names indicate an aspect which sets God as a unique entity among other beings. Indeed, God is the true bearer of all these names; He is creator in real sense, one in real sense, existent in real sense. All beings except Him can only be described with these attributes in a figurative and accidental (*'Aridi*) way. God is not only the cause of the essences of things, but the cause of their existences. Sa'īd b. Dādhurmuz makes the distinction of the essence of things (*māhiyya, waḥdāniyya*) and their existences (*anniyya, wujūd*). In order to demonstrate God's ultimate power of creating, the universe must be accepted as being originated in time, that is to say, everything beside God has a starting point in time due to the free choice of God. Thus, Sa'īd b. Dādhurmuz supported the thesis that the world is created from nothing, as was supported by his predecessors such as al-Kindī and the Ikhwān al-Safā.

In accordance with his stance on the creation of the world, Sa'īd b. Dādhurmuz adopts the Mu'tazilite principles that the universe is the

aggregate of bodies and accidents. Bodies cannot be separated from the four accidents of generation (*al-akwān al-arba'ā*), that is, motion, rest, compositeness, and division. Since these four accidents are evidently subject to change, they are originated (*hādith*) and cannot be seen as eternal entities. Therefore, bodies which can coexist with these accidents in every moment are also originated. This leaves God as the only thing which truly deserves to be called "eternal" (*qadīm*). If bodies were eternal, they would not have changed from the state in which they were in eternity. This is because the eternal cannot change from the attribute of eternity. Similar to that, the originated being cannot change from the true nature of origination. Were it so, the eternal would be originated, and the originated eternal. To state that, is to invalidate the true nature of things. God, as the maker (*fā'il*) of the world, is neither a body nor an accident, because he is the maker of the bodies and accidents, and he is the one who brought them into existence. Besides, the very name of the world (*'ālam*) connotes choice and perfection. Choice and perfection only come from who rules and brings to perfection, that is, God.

There are three ways to acquire the knowledge of things. First knowledge comes by one of the five senses, which are sight, hearing, smell, taste, and touch. Second, it comes by one of the rational faculties, which are thinking, reflection, judgment, true estimation, and pure mind. The third and last way of knowledge is argumentation and necessary demonstration, which is the definitive way of establishing certainty. When it comes to the knowledge about God, certainty can only be achieved about that God exists, not what God is. In other words, God's essence is beyond reach for human mind, while his existence is within the borders of human cognitive capacity. In fact, the knowledge of God is one of the most evident propositions, in that it is necessarily entailed by anyone's inference about the ontological state of the world. Sa'īd b. Dādhurmuz calls this "the common way," that is, the innate knowledge in the natures of created beings which brings them to the existence of the Creator the Exalted. Besides,

there is "the special way," applied by theologians and philosophers with the usage of argumentation and necessary demonstration, all of which depend on a set of rational inquiries. To these two ways of knowing the existence of God, inspired by the Sufi terminology of his time, Sa'īd b. Dādhurmuz adds the way of "light" (*nūr*). Among the servants of God, there are some very special people who are endowed by the divine light; this light enables them to grasp not only the knowledge of God but the knowledge of all other beings. This inclination puts Sa'īd b. Dādhurmuz's stance very close to the mystical tradition, as was supported by such Sufis as Abū Yazīd Bistāmī and al-Hakīm al-Tirmidhī.

Sa'īd b. Dādhurmuz holds that it is essential to have the correct knowledge about the nature of the spirit/soul (*rūh/nafs*), in order to truly understand human beings' place among other beings. One has to acknowledge the existence of the spiritual substances (*al-jawāhir al-rūhāniyya*) as separate entities from material substances. Human spirit (*rūh*) is defined as "a spiritual substance, living by virtue of itself (*bi l-dhāt*), knowing *in potence*, active with divine guidance." Thus, the idea of some naturalist philosophers and heterodox groups (*ahl al-bida'*) that spirit is a material substance, or an accident, or a bodily mixture (*mīzāj*) is not correct. Human beings' salvation is directly related to the knowledge of spirit. This is because the attainment of the eternal bliss in the Hereafter is accomplished only through theoretical sciences and virtues, all of which are related to the human soul, rather than the human body. Sa'īd b. Dādhurmuz also discusses the three parts of soul, the cogitative, concupiscent, and irascible soul according to Plato's teaching, and particularly points to the fact that Plato's division is fully compatible with the prophetic wisdom. In relation to this notion, as is seen in the writings of other Islamic, Jewish, and Christian philosophers in his milieu, Sa'īd b. Dādhurmuz brings forward the fourfold enumeration of ethical virtues as "prudence (*iffa*), courage (*shajā'a/najda*), wisdom (*hikma*), and justice (*'adāla*)," known as "cardinal virtues" throughout the middle ages.

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## Saadia Gaon

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### Abstract

Saadia Gaon (Saadia ben Joseph) (882–942) has an important place in medieval Jewish philosophy and was a distinguished translator (of Bible into Arabic), commentator, author of a Hebrew dictionary and the earliest known Hebrew grammar, and a contributor to liturgy. In *The Book of Beliefs and Opinions*, he formulated many of the main problems of medieval Jewish philosophy. While later thinkers disagreed with him in many respects (e.g., Maimonides criticized his views and his method), medieval Jewish philosophy owes a great deal to him. He was not doctrinally committed to one or another philosophical approach or system, such as Neoplatonism or Aristotelianism. While his thought shows the

influence of *kalam*, dialectical theology, he is important for helping shape a broadly rationalist disposition in Jewish philosophy, maintaining that key elements of Judaism can be shown to have the support of reason. In *The Book of Beliefs and Opinions*, he argues that there are adequate replies to skeptics and other critics who object that Judaism lacks rational justification. His distinction between “laws of reason” and “laws of revelation” has had considerable influence on many thinkers’ treatments of the issue of “the reasons of the commandments.” In that discussion he distinguished different levels of how evident are the rational supports for commandments. Also, Saadia discussed extensively the various parts of the soul, the basic motivational tendencies of human beings, and the question of what is the best life for a human being. He elaborated a rich moral psychology with some Platonic resonances and some Aristotelian resonances, integrated in a way that showed the wisdom of Torah as the guide to life. His discussion of repentance, merit and demerit, prophecy, creation, divine foreknowledge, Messianism, and other topics exhibits considerable philosophical sensitivity along with very great knowledge of Torah and tradition. He addressed a great many particular topics of moral psychology with considerable subtlety. Saadia was also the head of a major Talmudic academy in Babylonia and was a vigorous critic of *Karaism*. Little is known of his education or personal life, but his was a very active, engaged, life, of notable and enduring accomplishment.

Saadia is a key figure in medieval Jewish philosophy. “Gaon” is the title of the head of a Talmudic academy. Saadia was Gaon of the Babylonian academy at Sura. He was born in Upper Egypt and died in Sura, after living there for several decades. He had lived for a time in Palestine and in Baghdad. It is not known by whom or where he was educated, but he had very extensive knowledge and made contributions of numerous kinds.

In addition to his knowledge of Jewish texts and Hebrew language, he exhibited philosophical sophistication but without following the central doctrine or method of any particular philosopher. As a young man, he completed what was the first Hebrew dictionary and also wrote a Hebrew grammar. He also translated the Bible (or at least, most of it) into Arabic, and he wrote commentaries on several of the books of the Bible. His translation and commentaries have long been important to Jews in Arabic-language countries. In addition, Saadia wrote a number of halakhic works (works on Jewish law), and he compiled a prayer book – a *siddur* – including some poetry he wrote himself. His philosophical ideas and his contributions to Jewish tradition remain notable and relevant.

Saadia was no stranger to dispute. In one important instance, this involved disagreement with Ben Meir (Gaon of the Talmudic academy in Palestine) over the regulation of the calendar. In another, he refused to endorse a verdict of the exilarch. Also, he had a prominent role in the controversy over *Karaism*, which he criticized severely. These were serious disputes, and reputation, influence, and standing were very much at stake in them. However, his importance to philosophy is based on the fact that his great work, *The Book of Beliefs and Opinions*, largely set the topical agenda of much of medieval Jewish philosophy. It was perhaps the most important work in Jewish philosophy since Philo. In it, Saadia developed arguments for the existence of God, elaborated on central issues in philosophical theology, and formulated views on providence, free will, repentance, and other matters of philosophical psychology. His conception of the epistemological role and significance of tradition fits very aptly with an enlarged interest in that issue in recent decades as well as being important in its own right.

*The Book of Beliefs and Opinions* has a broadly rationalist character, though not in the sense of his philosophical ideas constituting a demonstrative system. It opens with an extensive treatment of epistemological considerations aimed at showing how Judaism is a religion of reason in the sense

that Jewish faith-commitments and Jewish tradition can be shown to be rationally defensible and can answer skeptical challenges. In part, Saadia was motivated to write the book by concern that many Jews felt a measure of doubt concerning their faith. There were numerous influential Muslim and Christian defenses and articulations of those faiths and challenges to Jewish thinkers to defend their religion. Saadia supplied a powerful philosophical voice to Judaism, and the central role he ascribed to rational justification shaped a great deal of later, important Jewish thought, if not by endorsement of his views, at least in terms of identifying key philosophical issues.

Saadia and Maimonides were much influenced by Islamic intellectual culture. Maimonides objected to the evident influence of *kalām* on Saadia's thought, insisting that Saadia was a dialectical theologian rather than a "genuine" philosopher. His criticism may be somewhat unfair. Saadia was both philosophically alert and philosophically sophisticated, though his thought did not explicitly reflect the pronounced influence of one or another specific philosophical theory, such as Neoplatonism or Aristotelianism. Like the *mutakallimūn* (practitioners of *kalām*), Saadia accepted a number of religious claims and doctrines and then sought to show how reason supported them, and he defended those claims and doctrines against objections. Despite the influence of *kalām*, there is a strong role for the authority of reason in his thought. The doctrines in question, such as free will or God's creation of the world, can be shown, he argued, to be rationally defensible. In either refuting or obviating skeptical considerations, Saadia argued that along with reason and sense, Scripture and tradition are sources of evidence (a stance that would have been widely acceptable to his readers). This proved to be an enduringly important philosophical move, given the significance of tradition to Jewish life and the conception of how it is informed by wisdom. (And, as mentioned, the epistemology of tradition is a topic of genuine interest in our time.)

Another especially important aspect of Saadia's approach is that he argued that among the commandments is the obligation to cultivate



and develop rational understanding to the fullest extent possible. This shaped a highly significant current of medieval Jewish thought. Its influence is detectable in the thought of Bahya ibn Paquda, Maimonides, and Gersonides among others. The notion that enlarged and deepened understanding is vitally important to fulfilling the commandments, to striving to imitate God, and, thus, to aspiring to holiness is crucial to medieval Jewish thought, and Saadia was an early, founding figure in developing it. He did not embrace intellectualist perfectionism in the way that Maimonides did, but the development and deepening of understanding were centrally important to Saadia.

Saadia's distinction between "laws of reason" and "laws of revelation" was highly influential in medieval Jewish thought, even though several thinkers revised his formulation of it. For example, it figures centrally in Maimonides' thought, though he disagreed with Saadia over the explication of rational justification of the commandments. Saadia held that some of the commandments are such that we can ascertain the rational justification for them unaided by revelation and other commandments are such that we could not do so, though they are not arbitrary or without reason. This notion – that divine wisdom informs divine will and that the commandments are rationally supportable – powerfully shaped Jewish thought in respect to the epistemology of tradition. Though Saadia did not think that human beings could discern the reasons for a great many ritual commandments and commandments concerning diet, purity, and so forth, he held that they have a measure of utility we can discern and that there are reasons for them, even if those reasons exceed our grasp to some extent. However, some commandments concerning fundamentally important moral matters, such as those concerning gratitude owed to a benefactor, wages being owed to a laborer, the duty not to cause harm, and some others, are rationally evident – are truths of reason – thus highlighting the place of reason in acceptance of the obligations of Torah. (Maimonides was more emphatic about all the commandments being supported by reason, while he disagreed with Saadia over the issue of

whether some of the commandments are fully rationally evident, i.e., truths of reason.)

This issue, of course, motivates the question of why revelation was necessary. Saadia argued that revelation is necessary for two main reasons. One is that great many commandments are such that, while there are rational justifications for them, we are not able to ascertain those justifications by unaided reason. The commandments are for our good (given God's wisdom and benevolence), but divine wisdom exceeds ours, and it has formulated commandments for our good, though we cannot always understand just how that is so. A second reason is that, even for those that are rationally evident, the specifics of how they are to be fulfilled are not evident, and revelation of that sort of specificity reflects divine graciousness and spares human beings a great deal of disagreement and uncertainty. Saadia noted that we might know, just through reason alone, that we are not to steal, but we do not know through reason alone just what are the specific conditions of ownership and what ownership implies. Similarly, we might rationally determine that it is wrong to commit adultery, but it is not rationally evident just what constitutes proper marriage and so forth. Prophecy (revelation) was needed in order for mankind to be guided to holiness, but there is nothing in prophecy (or in Judaism overall) that is in conflict with reason or ultimately beyond the reach of reason even though our comprehension is finite.

*The Book of Beliefs and Opinions* also contains extensive discussion of creation, redemption, and *olam haba* (the world to come), including a detailed treatment of merit and demerit. In addition to the important epistemological material early in the work, Saadia took up the most fundamental theological issues – creation *ex nihilo* and the divine nature, human free will, and divine justice (including Messianic redemption and also resurrection). Saadia's conception of how reason and revelation are mutually reinforcing and how the claims of both can be integrated in the pursuit of truth shaped an important current of Jewish thought. He sought to show that rational inquiry and speculation could strengthen Jewish faith rather than raise doubts about it.

He was a key figure in developing an understanding of Judaism, in which reason, ritual, worship, rabbinics, and moral life all have vitally important roles and he did much to explicate the relations between them. He said that he was motivated to write his philosophical work because of widespread doubt and confusion. He wanted Jews to be able to overcome that kind of demoralization and to be strengthened in their faith. The depth of Saadia's insights, the emphatic insistence on the role of reason in Judaism properly understood, and his integrative vision were formative for a great deal of succeeding Jewish philosophy, even if much of it was elaborated through methods different from his own.

Some of his works are lost, but it is notable that his work in numerous areas including grammar, liturgy, and commentary as well as philosophy has had enduring influence. He made significant contributions to philology, linguistics, commentary, liturgy, and philosophy. The depth and breadth of his expertise and the lasting influence of his contributions are really quite striking. He was an encyclopedic, creative, and ambitious thinker. He combated *Karaism* and other attacks on rabbinic Judaism and defended and invigorated tradition with philosophical acumen and argument. He made a crucial contribution to articulating Judaism in a way that involved essential roles for rational understanding and revelation. As remarked above, his philosophical work does not clearly show the stamp of a particular "school" or theory; yet, it reflects a powerful, original mind, actively engaged in multiple arguments and inquiries and deploying resources from all of them.

## Cross-References

- ▶ [Aristotelianism in the Greek, Latin, Syriac, Arabic, and Hebrew Traditions](#)
- ▶ [Epistemology](#)
- ▶ [Gersonides](#)
- ▶ [Kalām](#)
- ▶ [Moses Maimonides](#)
- ▶ [Philosophical Psychology, Jewish Tradition](#)
- ▶ [Philosophical Theology, Jewish](#)
- ▶ [Philosophy, Jewish](#)

- ▶ [Platonism](#)
- ▶ [Proofs of the Existence of God](#)
- ▶ [Skepticism](#)
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## al-Sarakhsī, Aḥmad ibn al-Ṭayyib

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### Abstract

Aḥmad ibn al-Ṭayyib al-Sarakhsī (c. 835–899) was a ninth-century polymath and student of the more famous al-Kindī. He worked in a number of fields, including philosophy, geography, refined literature (*adab*), and scientific areas such as medicine and astrology. His writings are almost entirely lost, and it is thus unclear to what extent his philosophical output went beyond transmitting the thought of his master al-Kindī.

Greek-inspired philosophy (*falsafa*) in the Arabic-speaking world became widespread in the tenth century, the time of al-Fārābī and his school, as well as various forms of Neoplatonism. But the philosophical tradition began already in the ninth century with the first reception of philosophical works translated from Greek into Arabic. Even among the relatively few practitioners of *falsafa* during this early period, al-Sarakhsī must be seen as a lesser figure. However, his importance is difficult to judge because not a single philosophical work of his is extant in its entirety. We are thus forced to reconstruct both his life and his thought

as best we can from later reports about him, which include lists of the works that made up his originally voluminous corpus. This reconstruction has been done in a series of studies by the late Franz Rosenthal (see especially Rosenthal 1943), which are the main basis for this entry.

Al-Sarakhsī was presumably born in Sarakhs in Khurasan and probably in about 835 CE. We know this with reasonable exactness because he tells us that he is 61 years old in a work he is writing for “the Caliph,” probably al-Muʿtaḍid (whose reign began in 892). We also know that he died in 899 after falling from favor in the Caliphal court in 896. This catastrophic fall from grace, which involved imprisonment, beating, and ultimately execution, seems to have resulted from a political intrigue, but the exact reasons are shrouded in uncertainty (see Rosenthal 1943: 25–34 for the conflicting reports). It may be that he had expressed religious views, for instance pro-Shīʿite sentiments, that made him an inconvenient figure to maintain at court.

Prior to his disgrace, al-Sarakhsī's career had reached its peak with important administrative duties under al-Muʿtaḍid. He had been appointed tutor to al-Muʿtaḍid when the latter was still a young prince, much as al-Sarakhsī's master al-Kindī had been tutor to Aḥmad, the son of the Caliph al-Muʿtaṣim (who reigned 833–842). When al-Muʿtaḍid ascended to the throne, al-Sarakhsī became a “boon companion,” and he was later given oversight over mercantile accounting (*hisba*), perhaps on the strength of having written on the subject of fraud (Rosenthal 1943: 24).

The chief intellectual event of al-Sarakhsī's career, however, occurred earlier when he became the student of al-Kindī. As Rosenthal (1943: 17) puts it, “it is certainly no exaggeration that he owed al-Kindī very much of his scholarly achievement.” In fact, many of the titles of al-Sarakhsī's works duplicate titles of al-Kindī's, and we may thus speculate that al-Sarakhsī was merely a transmitter of these treatises. Unfortunately, due to lack of textual evidence, we are unable to say how much he might have reworked his material. Other titles ascribed to Sarakhsī show that he in any case tended to agree with

al-Kindī's philosophical stance. For instance, both argued against atomism and in favor of the infinite divisibility of the body.

Al-Sarakhsī is thus a member of what might be called the "Kindian tradition" (for this phrase, see Adamson 2007) and takes his place along two other first-generation associates of al-Kindī's as an important transmitter of Kindian thought. The other two associates are Abū Zayd al-Balkhī, teacher of the well-known al-ʿĀmirī, and Abū Ma'shar, who was arguably the greatest astrologer of Islam. Astrology seems to have been a shared enthusiasm among the Kindians. Al-Sarakhsī followed al-Kindī in using astrological calculations to determine the duration of the reign of the Arabs. He also wrote a work that must have provided a philosophical rationale for the science of astrology, entitled *On the Main Principles of Philosophy and the Establishment of Astrology*. In this he would have been following al-Kindī and Abū Ma'shar, though it must be said that a fragment preserved from this work (see Rosenthal 1943) strikes an un-Kindian note in saying that the Qur'ān encourages us to study the stars but without "searching out a reason or investigating into a cause." (Perhaps this should be seen as an extraneous remark by a later transmitter.)

Another fragment that may derive from an astrological work is a remarkable discussion by al-Sarakhsī on the subject of erotic love (*ishq*) and why it manifests in a desire to kiss the beloved (see Rosenthal 1961). He explains, in a manner reminiscent of Plato's *Symposium* or *Phaedrus*, that the lover desires a commingling of souls but is unable to achieve this and thus seeks the passageway of the beloved's breath.

The stars also play a role in a well-known report by al-Sarakhsī, which claims to repeat al-Kindī's account of the star-worshipping Ṣābians of Ḥarrān (see Rosenthal 1943: 41–51). This report is preserved in three different versions, the most detailed being in the *Fihrist* of Ibn al-Nadīm. Particularly striking is the claim that the Ṣābians followed the teaching of Aristotle. All three versions claim that the Ṣābians were influenced by the *Physics*. The *Fihrist* version then adds that they adopted Aristotelian views about demonstration, natural bodies,

meteorology, the soul, and dreams. Their view about God is described as follows:

God, in their opinion, is one. No attribute can be applied to Him, and no positive statement can be made about Him, and, therefore, He does not fit into any syllogism. This opinion is in agreement with Aristotle's opinion in the *Metaphysics* (Rosenthal trans.).

Although al-Sarakhsī does not identify his own views with those of the Ṣābians, it is tempting to detect here an echo of ideas that are found in the works of al-Kindī, for instance, his *On First Philosophy* (cf. al-Kindī's characterization of Aristotle's *Metaphysics* in his *On the Quantity of Aristotle's Books*).

This raises the question of al-Sarakhsī's attitude toward Islam. As mentioned above, unorthodox religious views may have played a role in his downfall. Some evidence suggests that he tried to integrate Islam with philosophy, which again would be a characteristically Kindian project. Not only did he quote the Qur'ān in support of astrology, but he reports *ḥadīths* (sayings of the Prophet) and is placed by one later author in a group of authors who fused *kalām* (Islamic speculative theology) with philosophy (see Rosenthal 1943: 34–35; also in the group is the somewhat later historian and philosopher Miskawayh, who has likewise been associated with the Kindian tradition).

Al-Sarakhsī also participated in an interreligious dispute regarding the doctrine of the Trinity, serving in this debate as al-Kindī's representative (see Moosa 1972). Al-Sarakhsī's attempted refutations never get far in the account we have, because the report is authored by a Christian who describes the event as a stunning victory by al-Sarakhsī's opponent, the Bishop of Kaskar. Still, it is worth reading the account alongside al-Kindī's brief refutation of the Trinity, which is extant thanks to a counter-refutation by none other than al-Farabi's Christian student Yahyā ibn 'Adī. Kindī's refutation deploys ideas from the Aristotelian tradition, arguing that the Persons of the Trinity cannot be identified with any of the Porphyrian predicables. Similarly, al-Sarakhsī asks the Bishop whether the Persons are differentiated essentially or accidentally (neither, replies the Bishop).

Also typical of the Kindian tradition is participation in the refined Arabic literary culture of the ninth–tenth century. This culture of refinement (*adab*) saw its greatest exponent in a rough contemporary of al-Sarakhsī's, al-Jāhīz. Al-Sarakhsī's own contributions to *adab* include a kind of mirror for princes, entitled *On the Appropriate Behavior of Kings*, which is probably extant (see Rosenthal 1995; on the fusion of philosophy and *adab*, see further Rowson 1990). He is credited with many sayings and witty remarks, which are the subject of praise and quotation by later authors.

He is also praised for the breadth of his knowledge, which took in not only the fields mentioned already but also geography and medicine. Some of his geographical notes are extant, including information he collected while on a military expedition with al-Mu'taḍid in 884 (on this see Rosenthal 1943, 1951). In medicine we know nothing but a few fragments and titles of lost works. It is however interesting to see that the great physician and philosopher Abū Bakr al-Rāzī criticized al-Sarakhsī's refutation of Galen on the subject of bitter foods. (Al-Sarakhsī also disputed with Galen over *al-maḥall al-awwal*, "first location" – the meaning is unclear.)

All of this – the openness toward explicitly Muslim theological speculation, the practice of *adab* and of astrology, and expertise in a wide range of disciplines – is distinctive of other members of the Kindian tradition. If more of al-Sarakhsī's output were extant, we would have a better idea of the philosophical and cultural commitments of the Kindian intellectual heritage.

## Cross-References

- ▶ [Abū Bakr al-Rāzī, Muḥammad ibn Zakarīyā' \(Rhazes\)](#)
- ▶ [al-ʿĀmirī, Abū I-Ḥasan](#)
- ▶ [al-Balkhī, Abū Zayd](#)
- ▶ [al-Kindī, Abū Yūsuf Yaʿqūb ibn Ishāq](#)
- ▶ [Mirrors for Princes](#)
- ▶ [Trinity](#)
- ▶ [Yaḥyā ibn ʿAdī](#)

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## Schools in the Twelfth Century

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### Abstract

There is no general agreement on the meaning of the expression "twelfth-century schools" and the reality of some of them, mainly of the famous School of Chartres, has been seriously challenged. Without solving this problem, we can distinguish three types of institution: (1) The cathedral schools: Notre-Dame of Paris, Chartres, and also Laon, Orléans, Reims. These schools are, first and foremost,

places where theology was taught. (2) Collegial or canonical schools: the most interesting example is the School of Saint Victor. (3) Private schools, led by independent masters, based in Paris and focusing their teaching on dialectic, logic, and the liberal arts but also interested in theology. Schools are different from each other regarding their institutional status, the authoritative texts on which they focus, and their doctrinal inclination.

The expression “twelfth-century schools” refers to a historical object that is difficult to outline and define. Roughly, it is used to speak of the essentially urban multiplication of institutions of teaching and training in central and northern France, mainly in the area around Paris, and of the revival of scholarly thought that came with it. However, according to the interpretation one gives to this expression, its extension may vary considerably. This is because the existence of some schools has been questioned – for example, the reality of the most famous school of the twelfth century, the School of Chartres, has been challenged by Richard Southern; Valerie Flint has given an analogous criticism of the School of Laon – but also because there is no agreement on what is meant by the word “school.” It is the task more of research on intellectual culture and the social history of ideas to determine what the nature of these schools may have been, than that of the history of philosophy *stricto sensu*. A historian of philosophy can acknowledge the fact that some authors influence others or defend the same theses, or disagree; however, it is difficult to provide proof of the reality of the institutional organization of given intellectual centers. Despite the general climate of skepticism, two facts justify our speaking about “schools” – at least in a weak sense – during the twelfth century. The first is obvious: in all periods of history, teaching and training in philosophy required a minimal framework and structure. The second pertains to the unquestionable activity of masters: in a way unprecedented until the twelfth century, some particularly original and charismatic thinkers initiated an intellectual movement, had

an indisputable posterity and attracted around them a group which perpetuated their thought; the twelfth century is clearly, to quote the expression of David Knowles, “the age of the secular masters.”

Previously, teaching was mainly given in monastic schools (Fleury and, more importantly, the Abbey of Bec are good examples); this type of structure began to wane, and monastic schools closed to students from outside. New structures appeared or acquired renewed dynamism: during the twelfth century, a phase of active teaching took place, in particular – and this was new – in towns, masters opened their schools and currents of thought were constituted, in which a feeling of belonging can be identified. The history of this century is particularly rich regarding the teaching of philosophy: in towns, cathedral schools developed, such as Notre-Dame in Paris, a new kind of philosophical work led by authors associated to Chartres flourished, the School of Saint Victor was founded, the Parisian schools of logic were created and grew, innovative thought such as that of Gilbert of Poitiers had a remarkable posterity, an important center for medieval spirituality developed at the Abbey of Clairvaux, and the first universities were founded (in 1200, Philip Augustus issued the privilege to the schools in Paris which marks, at least symbolically, the beginning of the University of Paris).

Grouping these diverse phenomena under the generic name of twelfth-century schools is probably imprecise, such are the differences between them. We may, however, distinguish three types of institutions:

1. The cathedral schools: Notre-Dame of Paris, Chartres, and also Laon, Orléans, Reims. These schools are first and foremost places where theology was taught, although in the case of Chartres for example, great interest was shown for grammar and natural philosophy.
2. Collegial or canonical schools: the most interesting example is Saint Victor.
3. Independent or private schools, led by independent masters, also sometimes called *sectae*.



All these schools were based in Paris and taught dialectic, logic, and the liberal arts. In many cases, theology was associated to logic; it is thus appropriate, following Yukio Iwakuma and Sten Ebbesen, to call such schools logico-theological schools.

Schools differ in their nature and history; some continue a tradition, while others reflect the innovative approach of the twelfth century. Schools can also be distinguished from each other according to the content of their teaching. Some, such as Laon, had recognized expertise in theology, whereas the independent schools became specialized in the teaching of logic, which came to be seen as their hallmark. These schools also differ through the texts that found their teaching: we can observe particularly remarkable climaxes such as the exegetical tradition of the *Timaeus* at Chartres or that of the Pseudo-Dionysius at Saint Victor. In contrast, the schools of dialectic, both of realist and nominalist inclination, are clearly focused on Aristotle's logical writings. However, some thinkers cross these lines. William of Champeaux first taught at the School of Notre-Dame in Paris before founding Saint Victor; and he was interested in Aristotelian logic. Gilbert of Poitiers, who was chancellor at Chartres from 1126 to 1137, was also highly competent in logic, but had little interest in the exegesis of the *Timaeus*.

Let us consider these three types of schools by focusing, in the first two cases, on the examples that provided the most interesting philosophical contribution, Chartres for the first type and Saint Victor for the second. For the third type, we shall consider the case of the Porretans.

### The Cathedral Schools: The Case of Chartres

It is not the role of this entry to decide who, of Richard Southern or the supporters of the School of Chartres (N. Häring, P. Dronke, and E. Jeaneau), is correct. We can adopt a neutral attitude by saying that Chartres can be described as a group of twelfth-century masters working in

various centers, who shared some interests but not others, some references but not all.

Among the Chartrian masters, the first of the new school was Bernard, master at Chartres by c. 1119 and chancellor by 1124, dying perhaps by 1126. Bernard initiated one of the fields of reflection characteristic of the Chartrian milieu: divine ideas. This theme originates in two texts that were centrally important to thinkers associated with Chartres – the *Timaeus* and Boethius' *Opuscula sacra*. As a Platonist, Bernard distinguished between the ideas, which are eternal, and the forms, reflections of the ideas, created by nature with the things which they specify. It was he who originated the phrase “native forms” (*formae natae*). This reading was echoed by later authors associated with Chartres who found a similar idea in Boethius. Bernard of Chartres inspired a community of learning (to use an expression less controversial than “school”) in which Platonic texts, notably the *Timaeus*, Macrobius' *Commentary on the Dream of Scipio* and the *Consolation of Philosophy* played a key role.

Among his disciples, two were great philosophers: Gilbert of Poitiers (born c. 1080, a canon of Chartres in 1124 and chancellor there from 1126 to 1137 succeeding to Bernard) and William of Conches (c. 1080–c. 1154). William of Conches wrote glosses to Boethius' *Consolation of Philosophy*, to Macrobius' *Commentary on the Dream of Scipio*, and possibly to the *De nuptiis Philologiae et Mercurii* of Martianus Capella, as well as a *Philosophia* and a commentary on Priscian's *Institutiones grammaticae* based on the anonymous eleventh-century *Glosule to Priscian*. He wrote a *Dragmaticon* – largely a reworking of his *Philosophia*, made during his spell in the household of the Duke of Normandy, after he had left the schools.

Thierry (“the Breton” or “of Chartres”) became Chancellor in about 1142; previously he had taught in Chartres and almost certainly at Paris. Thierry demonstrates various interests, touching on rhetoric, logic, mathematics, and natural philosophy. His most distinctive philosophical teaching – in which both his realism and his Platonism are expressed – is his activity as commentator on Boethius' *Opuscula sacra* (some of the texts

published under the name of Thierry were probably written by disciples). In his exegesis of Boethius, Thierry denies proper substantial reality to individuals; he considers that the essence is common to the individuals of a same species and that it is possessed in proper by none of them. Only the images of the forms exist in matter, and they come from the real forms that exist in the divine mind. According to him, a species is one and the same form for all the subordinate individuals. In Plato, Socrates, and Cicero, Thierry sees three distinct human beings, three individuals who differ through their accidents. But in them all, there is only one nature, humanity (*una natura una et eadem sit humanitas in omnibus*). The plurality of individuals comes from the diversity of accidents, not from diversity of natures (see the *Commentum super Boethii librum de trinitate*, I, 8; Häring (1971) 64:66–82 which reflects Thierry's teaching).

Whatever may be the status of their school, we can mention some common elements of the intellectual projects of the various concerned authors. The first common trait of the thinkers associated with Chartres is a strong commitment to the *artes liberales* (as distinct from theology). This is true for authors such as Bernard of Chartres, William of Conches, and Bernard Silvestris, who, unlike most of the leading teachers of their time, remained – insofar as we can judge – masters of the arts and did not venture into theology at all, and for those like Thierry of Chartres and, to an even higher extent, Gilbert, who were interested in theology and demonstrated a vivid desire to integrate the seven liberal arts into theological reflection. The second is to believe in the relevance of reading pagan texts as allegories of Christian truth. The most noticeable example of this phenomenon is the interpretation according to which Plato's *Timaeus* is to be related to theology, and that Plato's teaching in this work is consistent with the first chapters of *Genesis*. Thierry of Chartres is probably the thinker who went furthest in this direction, by identifying, in his early commentary on the 6 days of the creation, that which Plato called the *anima mundi* as the Christian Holy Spirit (*Tractatus de sex dierum operibus*, in *Commentaries on Boethius by Thierry of Chartres*

*and his School*, ed. N. M. Häring (Toronto, 1971), 566–567: “*Plato uero in Timeo eundum spiritum mundi animam uocat [. . .]. Christiani uero illum idem Spiritum sanctum appellant*”). It is possible that Abelard's *Theologia summi boni* is, at least in part, an answer to this attempt to relate Platonic teaching to Christian doctrine. The third is the important role given to grammar: Bernard of Chartres, William of Conches, and Bernard Silvestris greatly valued the study of grammar; however, differently from the Parisian masters and their contemporaries, they were not interested in logic. The fourth concerns their characteristic interest for natural philosophy.

The importance of these common points must not be exaggerated. We may indeed acknowledge the central role occupied by Boethius' *Opuscula sacra* in the thought of some of the authors associated with Chartres. Gilbert and Thierry both wrote commentaries on these texts. However, their reading is different in many ways, the most obvious being that Gilbert develops a particularist ontology on the basis of his interpretation of the *Opuscula sacra*, whereas Thierry defends an unsophisticated universalism. From this fundamental disagreement stem many others, on essential unity (Thierry insists against Gilbert that humanity is one for all men; when he mentions Gilbert's opinion on this point, he adds the comment *quod omnino falsum est*), on the explanation of individuality (Thierry defends a literal reading of Boethius, according to which the individuality of an individual is explained by accidental properties, whereas Gilbert limits the role of accidents to the epistemological distinction between two individuals of the same species, ontological individuality being caused by the fact that each individual possesses its own essence).

### **Collegial or Canonical Schools: Saint Victor**

Saint Victor is a particular case in the landscape of twelfth-century schools. It is a new school, related to a city, constituted on the basis of converging intellectual interests, whose members share the spirit of a school. However, it is different from

other institutions that were created in the twelfth century by its limited interest in logic and the arts of language (with the obvious exception of its founder, William of Champeaux, who was an important dialectician) and by its monastic status.

Following a virulent controversy with his disciple Abelard on the topic of universals, William of Champeaux, who had until then been a master in Paris, decided to renounce his chair at Notre-Dame and, in 1108 (or 1111, as convincingly argued recently by Constant Mews) retired, with some students, outside of town, at the Saint Victor hermitage. Following the explicit demand of Hildebert of Lavardin, he pursued his teaching there. In 1113, William became the bishop of Châlons and obtained that “his” school of Saint Victor become an abbey of regular canons and that it adopt the so-called rule of Saint Augustine.

Hugh of Saint Victor gave great intellectual vivacity to the school, but changed its focus from what had been William’s, being less interested in speculation about language and logic. Hugh (Hugo de Sancto Victore) is the first theologian of the school; this German thinker was a master at Saint Victor from 1125 and directed the school from 1133; he died in 1141. As a theologian, he was interested in a variety of topics, both speculative and moral; his two main works are the *Didascalicon de studio legendi*, which provides a method of reading and a systemic presentation of Greek and late ancient science and the treatise *De sacramentis fidei christianae* which is, both in content and form, one of the first theological sums of the Middle Ages. To these two writings we may add his *Expositio* on the *Celestial Hierarchy* of Pseudo-Dionysius. This work, strongly influenced by Eriugena’s commentary, was to be added to the Dionysian corpus of the University of Paris and thus influenced scholastic thinkers.

The *Didascalicon* is an *ars legendi*, which aims at providing students with advice on what must be read (*quid legendum*), in which order (*quo ordine*) and how (*quo modo*); it is also a great widening of intellectual perspectives, an attempt to organize knowledge as a coherent whole, and a treatise of exegesis. Central to this text is an attempt to organize all profane

knowledge around holy knowledge: “All the arts of nature serve divine science; inferior wisdom, correctly ordered, leads to superior wisdom.” One must master profane knowledge before holy knowledge. Like William of Conches, he believed that all fields of knowledge are related. Knowledge of the liberal arts is necessary: “Learn everything, and then you will see that nothing is superfluous” (*Didascalicon*, VI, 3). All forms of knowledge serve wisdom because they help to understand the Holy Scriptures. Hugh believed that the knowledge of the liberal arts should be oriented toward the meditation of Scriptures and is accomplished through contemplation. The second part of the *Didascalicon* (books V and VI) is dedicated to Holy Scripture and constitutes a short exegetical treatise. Hugh gives a theory of the three senses of the Scriptures: historical, allegorical, and tropological. The historical sense or history is the literal meaning. This meaning must be sought as the basis of any reading. The allegorical sense is the dogmatic or theological sense *par excellence*. It consists in the discovery of the organization of creation and of the meaning of human history. Tropology gives the moral meaning of the Scriptures.

In his treatise dedicated to “the holy signs of natural and written law,” the *De sacramentis fidei christianae*, Hugh presents himself in many ways as renewing Latin theology. On the basis of the architectonical structure of John Scottus Eriugena’s *Periphyseon*, and the movements of *exitus* and *reditus*, he tells the story of the destiny and creation of men. The general framework of this sum is provided by time: the time of nature, the time of written law, and the time of grace. He speaks of the creation (*opus conditionis*) and of the fall, then of the “restoration” (*opus restaurationis*) – Christ, the Church, and the sacraments. Beyond the traditional notion of sign inherited from Augustine, Hugh offers a new use of the notion of symbol, until then unknown to Latin theology, in which the efficacious symbolism of sacraments is justified by an analogy or resemblance (*similitudo*) founded in the nature of things themselves that supposes a natural ontological relation between that which signifies and that which is signified.

Several other thinkers contributed to the development of a School of Saint Victor, in which doctrinal research and spiritual life were intrinsically related. Achardus (Achardus de Sancto Victore or A. Abricensis or A. of Bridlington), theologian, preacher, and philosopher, was the abbot of Saint Victor from 1155 to 1160 before becoming the bishop of Avranches, where he died in 1171. He is the author of a treatise *On the Unity of God and the Plurality of Creatures* (*De unitate Dei et pluritate creaturarum*), in which he gives a metaphysical reflection on the one and the many. Achardus develops an original doctrine on the relation between the plurality of creatures and the true unity of God. The plurality of creatures reflects an intelligible plurality “which immediately adheres to the supreme unity.” The second plurality – that of things, created or possible, as they are thought by God – is founded in a distinction, which is internal to the unity of God himself.

Richard (Richardus de Sancto Victore or R. Parisiensis) was master and then prior of Saint Victor until his death in 1173. He was interested in many things and was a philosopher, a theologian, a historian, an exegete, and a mystic. We cannot be certain that Richard was a direct student of Hugh, however, his work was strongly influenced by the author of the *De sacramentis*, whose thought he continues. His *Liber exceptionum* is a propaedeutical work characterized by his interest for the liberal arts and philosophy, written in the spirit of the *Didascalicon*; like Hugh, Richard preached a lot and composed several commentaries on the Bible. The Middle Ages retained more of his spirituality than his exegesis. In the *Divine Comedy*, Dante places him in the Heaven of the Sun, in a group of 12 blessed doctors of holy science. In Dante’s text, Thomas Aquinas presents him in the following way: “Richard who, in contemplation, was more than a man” (*Paradise*, X, 131–132). His main work, the *De trinitate*, proposes to understand the mystery of the Trinity according to a method inspired by Anselm of Canterbury’s contemplative dialectic. Richard seeks to “present, in support of what we believe, reasons that are not only plausible, but necessary, and to elucidate and explain truth.” Richard insists on the necessary

character of his method: the existence of eternal realities is absolutely necessary, they have always existed, and will certainly never cease to exist; they are always what they are, they cannot be different from what they are.

Godfrey (Godefridus) joined the School of Saint Victor around 1155 to become the student of Richard. He wrote an allegorical and moral exegesis of the story of creation (*Microcosmus*) and a *Source of Philosophy* (*Fons philosophiae*), a collection of verses that gives, among other things, a reflection on the body of Christ (*Anathomia corporis Christi*) and a division of philosophy that continues Hugh’s research.

Walter (Gualterus) came to Saint Victor under Gilduin and became prior in 1173, after Richard. Toward 1177, he wrote a text in which he reacts against the theological and philosophical innovations of his day – a manifest of fundamentalist theology – the *Contra quatuor labyrinthos Franciae*. This violent pamphlet is aimed at several innovative theologians of his time, the “band of four”: Abelard, Peter Lombard (who compiled the *Sentences*), Peter of Poitiers, and Gilbert Porreta. Abelard, who had been a violent adversary of William of Champeaux, the founder of Saint Victor, is taken to represent the excesses of dialectic. Peter Lombard, despite having spent time at Saint Victor, is reproached for the influence his *Sentences* had on Abelard’s dialectics. Peter of Poitiers, who had disseminated the work of Peter Lombard his master, is accused of the same crime. Gilbert of Poitiers, who had already been condemned in Reims in 1148 by Bernard of Clairvaux, symbolizes the inappropriate use of metaphysics in theology.

### Logico-Theological Schools

The twelfth century saw the flourishing of competing and self-consciously different schools of liberal arts, mainly dialectic and logic, probably all based in Paris, a city which underwent at the time a period of very rapid growth. This multiplication can be explained by a historical process, which Richard Southern called the deinstitutionalization of the *schola*, that is, the fact that

teaching became detached from the corporate schools of the past and attached to an individual master who taught wherever he could find a place to teach. While cathedral schools only admitted one master, in Paris it was possible to buy a *licentia docenti* by paying a fee to the cathedral authorities and to open a school and settle as a master. These masters received money from their students in response to a new and growing interest of students who sought new skills and knowledge which traditional institutional schools were, by their nature and function, not well adapted to provide. The success of this new type of teaching was such that, according to Southern, there were at least 25 well-known schools within a hundred miles of Paris. These schools, also called *sectae*, were of various size and nature.

With Peter Abelard's *The Story of My Misfortunes* and John of Salisbury's *Metalogicon*, we have kept two lively descriptions of the twelfth-century schools.

These various schools produced introductions to logic, logical treatises, and commentaries, for example, to the *Categories*, to Aristotle's *De interpretatione*, or to Porphyry's *Isagoge*.

The main ones are the following:

1. The *Nominales*. This is the name given to the followers of Peter Abelard. A good testimony of the work done in this school was the *Summa dialectice artis* of William of Lucca, a thinker who was also very open to the ideas of Gilbert of Poitiers. Nominalism about universals (genera and species are *vocabula* or *voces*) is an important thesis of the school; however, the teaching of the school went further, covering theses such as, topical *loci* are not required (*apti*) for syllogisms; one may not infer a negative claim from an affirmative.
2. The *Porretani*. Gilbert of Poitiers had a posterity and influence unequalled in the twelfth century. He had disciples and enthusiastic defenders of his theological thought. An excellent testimony of the reflection produced by the Porretan movement is the *Compendium logicae porretanum*. This text develops one of the main lines of Porretan ontology, ontological particularism, according to which everything which exists is particular. This position rejects universals as shared entities, since the Porretan doctrine states that no entity can exist simultaneously in two spatiotemporally distinct individuals: "nihil quod sit in uno est in alio" (*Compendium logicae porretanum*, III.15). The *Compendium* retains the thesis according to which being comes from the form; however, contrarily to what the realists defend, the same form cannot be common to Plato and Socrates. Therefore, according to this text, there are as many humanities as there are men (*quot homines, tot humanitates*).
3. The *Parvipontani* (so called because they gathered at the Petit Pont in Paris) or *Adamitae* were the followers of Adam of Balsham, sometimes also called Adam of the Petit Pont, the author of a treatise called *Art of Discussing* (*Ars disserendi*), which demonstrates an innovative approach to logic. The second part of the only surviving copy of this text is indeed not Adam's own work, but that of members of his school.
4. The *Meludinenses* or *Robertini*: the disciples of Robert of Melun. The most interesting literary production of this current is the *Ars meliduna*, a text from the 1170s/1180s. The *Ars meliduna* contains an original theory of universals, some elements of which are Stoic in origin. Universals exist, and belong to a realm of their own, different from that of concrete beings. They are outside sensible things and are understood outside them; they are participated by many sensible things (*a pluribus participabilis*). They are not substances or properties and they can only be grasped by the intellect.
5. The *Albricani* or *Montani*: the disciples of Alberic (de Monte) in a school on the Mont Sainte Geneviève. A good testimony of the work of this school is provided by a text that discusses the traditional points of the teaching of logic: the *Introductiones montanae maiores*.

The most interesting case is that of the *Porretani*. On the basis of the thought of a master – Gilbert of Poitiers – we see the constitution of a real current of thought, composed both of people who were deeply influenced by his thought (the

most noticeable example being no doubt Alan of Lille who, in the years 1160–1180, both in his *Summa Quoniam homines* and in his *Rules of Theology*, makes extensive use of Gilbert's ontology and philosophy; Simon of Tournai can also be mentioned), and of people who took to heart to defend his theology against accusations of heresy (Hugh of Honau's quest for references to Patristic authorities, in particular from Hugh Etherian, in order to defend Gilbert's theological positions is characteristic; the result of this work can be found, among other places, in his treatise *De homoysion et homoeyssion* and in his *Liber de diversitate naturae et personae*). The years during which Gilbert taught in Paris (1137–1142) were probably decisive in the formation of his "school." Gilbert's influence can be found both in logic and in theology, in works as diverse as the *Summa Zwettlensis* (written before 1150, maybe by Peter of Vienna), the *Tractatus invisibilia Dei* for the theological aspect, and for the years 1150–1170, in the *Compendium logicae porretanum*, the *Glosulae porretane super Priscianum minorem*, the *Commentarium in Categorias Aristotelis* for the logical and semantical aspect. Gilbert's influence is still perceptible in the last years of the twelfth century, as shown by a remarkable text, the *Dialogus Ratii et Everardi*, written by the Porretan Cistercian Everard of Ypres.

### A Doctrinal Perspective on the Chartres Versus Paris Distinction

The difference between types of schools is institutional, but also doctrinal in nature. We could expect the distinctive criterion to be the fact of privileging in one case the arts of language and in the other theology. However, this criterion quickly leads to a dead end. The schools of logic – first and foremost the Porretans – were fascinated by theology and there was strong interest for grammar at Chartres. Thinkers such as William of Champeaux and Peter Abelard worked both as logicians and as theologians. The divide between types of schools is more to be found in the old

opposition between Platonism and Aristotelianism. Platonic thought clearly dominates the writings of authors associated with Chartres (although this statement must be moderated in the case of Gilbert), in particular the tradition of the *Timaeus* and Platonic authors of late Antiquity. The same can be said of the School of Saint Victor (let us just mention the importance of the Pseudo-Dionysius, the paradigm of Christian Platonism, in the thought of Saint Victor); the central influence of Augustine in cathedral schools confirms this; nothing of this sort can be observed among the Parisian masters of logic. The dominant influence among the new masters is that of Aristotelianism. Whether they were realists or nominalists, the scope of their work was determined by Aristotle's *Categories* and Porphyry's *Isagoge* for ontology, and completed by the *De interpretatione* for philosophy of language. This fact causes a fundamental distinction. For example, even if the two doctrines seem close, realism developed on the basis of the *Categories* and Porphyry (such as the material essence realism of William of Champeaux) is very different from realism inspired by Boethius' *Opuscula sacra* read in a Platonic universalist way (such as that developed by Thierry of Chartres or Clarembald of Arras). In the first case, separate forms are not admitted, real forms are immanent to individuals and do not exist outside them. The second version is based on the Platonist metaphysical principle according to which "forms" of the sensible world (the enmattered forms) are not the real forms, but only images of real forms. Enmattered forms are caused by prototypical forms (the real forms which are in God), of which they are only degenerate images.

### Cross-References

- ▶ [Adelard of Bath](#)
- ▶ [Alan of Lille](#)
- ▶ [Bernard of Clairvaux](#)
- ▶ [Gilbert of Poitiers](#)
- ▶ [Hugh of St. Victor](#)
- ▶ [John Scottus Eriugena](#)



- ▶ [Peter Abelard](#)
- ▶ [Platonism](#)
- ▶ [Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite](#)
- ▶ [Thierry of Chartres](#)
- ▶ [Trinitarian Logic](#)
- ▶ [Universals](#)
- ▶ [William of Champeaux](#)

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## Sense Perception, Theories of

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### Abstract

Medieval views of sense perception took as their starting point the ancient theories, among which Aristotle's view was the most influential. The Augustinian tradition considered the soul as the active agent in perception, with it not being affected by the sense organs. The Aristotelian tradition, for its part, considered the sense as a passive faculty, brought into actuality by sense data. Several late medieval authors, inspired by Averroes, developed the notion of an agent sense, an external non-material agent needed for the actualization of the act of perception in addition to forms in the sense organs. The Aristotelian view was mediated to Latin philosophy largely through Avicenna's faculty psychology. As an explanation of the causal influence of the perceived object on the sensory faculty, a theory of the multiplication of forms was widely accepted. The forms were considered as similitudes of the perceptibilities of the objects, and their function was to make the perception of a particular perceptibility actual. There was a wide discussion on the metaphysical nature of these forms. Some authors adopted the view that the causal influence is to be explained merely by action at a distance. The medieval philosophers commonly described the physiological processes involved in perception with help from the medical and optical traditions. The main sensory faculty was seen as located either in the brain or in the heart. The medieval view on perception was committed to the idea of perceptual realism. Awareness of illusions and misperceptions did not lead to skepticism about the possibility of sense perception rendering veridical knowledge but instead to some reflections on the notion of objective being

distinguished from real being. The philosophers also presented diverse views of the conceptuality of sense perception.

Among ancient philosophical views on sense perception, the most influential in the Middle Ages were those of Aristotle and Augustine. Aristotle's theory of perception in *De anima* and *De sensu et sensibilibus* formed the basis of medieval philosophical theories. Particularly important was Aristotle's view on the act of sense perception as an actualization of the power of perception, triggered by the perceived object. Another influential philosophical tradition behind the medieval theories was the Platonist view. An important factor in the Platonist tradition was that it considered the soul as the prime agent in sense perception. Stoic views were particularly influential in the explanation of the physical causal chain that is necessary for sense perception to take place.

Augustine was a major figure in the mediation of ancient views on sense perception to the Middle Ages. Before the adoption of the Aristotelian corpus as the basis of western natural philosophy, Augustine's views were dominant, and his influence remained even long afterward. He adopted the Aristotelian view of the change in sense organs caused by the object of the sense. Augustine explained the physical causation of the change by discussing the change of the elements in the medium and in the corporeal spirits, which he described according to the medical tradition.

For Augustine, the physical process of perception was not, however, only a passive process of being affected by external activators. Similar to the Stoic optical tradition, Augustine thought that a ray emanating from the eye was necessary for seeing to take place. Incidentally, he also referred to the Stoic metaphor of the stick in describing the active nature of physical processes involved in sense perception. The view that vision involved the physical change of a medium emanating from the eye was commonly rejected by Arabic thinkers such as Avicenna and Alhazen and subsequently by later Latin philosophy. Augustine also developed the notion of an inner sense,

which mediates between external perception and the activity of the soul. He also utilized the Aristotelian distinction between common and proper sensibles.

According to Augustine, as a psychological process, perception takes place as an activity of the soul, which he described in Platonist rather than Aristotelian terms. The soul directs its attention toward the corporeal change in the sense organ and notices it, without being affected by it. At the same time, the soul produces in itself an image or a similitude of the perceived object, which is identical to the image in the sense organ, except that the former is immaterial. The mind then contemplates this immaterial image. Augustine's ideas were appropriated during the Middle Ages in various ways, but in particular, his view on the activity of the soul was adopted by Robert Kilwardby and many twelfth-century writers.

The most influential view on sense perception was the Aristotelian model, which was transmitted to the Latin West mainly through Avicenna's *De anima*. After the introduction of Aristotelian philosophy during the formation of the universities in western Europe, Aristotle's *De anima* soon became part of the curriculum in arts faculties. Students were obliged to participate in the lectures and exercises based on this book as a part of their studies in natural philosophy. Sense perception was also discussed during the study of natural philosophy in the teaching of *De sensu et sensato*. Although Avicenna's *De anima* was not, strictly speaking, a commentary on Aristotle's corresponding work, it provided a frame of reference for the teaching. Later Averroes' commentaries on *De anima* and *Parva naturalia* also became important for Latin commentators.

A central part of the Aristotelian theory was the notion of a teleological dependence between the perceptible qualities and corresponding faculties of the soul. The perceptual faculties were understood as potentialities, which were in a state of waiting to be actualized as perceptions by an impulse from specific external objects of perception. This view presupposed a causal link between the perceptibility of the external world and the faculty of perception.

There were different views on the causal mediation of the impulse. The prominent view was to posit a chain of qualitative changes, which multiplied themselves in the mediating matter. Averroes, whose thought became influential among later writers, stated that the changes are of a material nature in the external objects but that their degree of spirituality gradually rises when they reach the sense organs and the soul.

Averroes often called these spiritual changes "intentions"; Avicenna had earlier used the same term for certain qualities of the objects, which are perceived by an internal sense called "estimation." Both uses of the term influenced later Latin philosophy. The notion of spiritual change was used in this context to explain how the impulse was transmitted through the mediating matter without making the medium itself perceptible. Aquinas thought that the spiritual change in the medium indicates that the lower substances have to some extent the capability of non-corporeal causation typical of higher substances. As well, many writers pointed out the influence of higher spheres as an explanation of spiritual changes.

Various authors considered the different amounts of spirituality that were necessary to explain this causation. Sight was often used as the standard of sense perception but at the same time was seen as more spiritual than the other senses. In the causation of smell and sound, ordinary physical changes such as vibration of air and movement of material particles played a considerable role. Even during the late Middle Ages, authors still argued for both the spiritual and corporeal mediation of sensory impulses. Jean Buridan attempted to show that even the perception of smell and touch presupposes a spiritual change in the medium in addition to an ordinary physical one. In doing this, he hinted at the existence of rays of heat, which mediate the perception of heat. There were also discussions on whether light is mediated by an instantaneous change in the medium or whether the multiplication of changes takes a definite period of time. Peter John Olivi and William of Ockham rejected the idea of spiritual changes in the medium and

considered the notion of action at a distance as sufficient for explaining the causal chain. Their views gained only minor support.

The faculties of perception were divided according to the different objects and organs of perception. The standard division derives from Avicenna, who enumerated five external senses (sight, hearing, smell, taste, and touch) and five internal senses (See the entry on ► [“Internal Senses,”](#) this volume). Averroes considered the “common sense” as part of external rather than internal senses. Among later authors, some functions in external perception were attributed to common sense. While some authors attributed the perception of perception to the external senses, most medieval writers agreed with Aquinas on the contrary position.

Although the distinction between the external senses was for the most part considered as unproblematic, theoretical foundations for the distinction were commonly presented. Therefore, the senses were usually distinguished according to their particular objects and organs. There was also some discussion of the number of external senses, which derived from questions surrounding the sense of touch. This sense had manifold objects, which ranged from qualities of cold and hot to such as phenomena as pleasure and pain.

The physiological process of perception was discussed with the help of ancient medical and optical traditions. Avicenna’s fusion of Aristotelian and Galenic ideas had a notable influence on the later *De anima* tradition, but similar ideas were known even before the introduction of Aristotelianism in the medieval West through a medical compendium called the *Pantegni* and through the works of Qusṭā ibn Lūqā, Nemesius of Emesa, and John Damascene. As a physiological process, perception was understood to take place in the sense organs. Avicenna posited the physiological site of vision in the pupil and in the connection of the optic nerves. According to Avicenna, common sense, which is located in the front part of the brain, consummates the act of perception. Later Latin Aristotelians followed Avicenna’s view but also attributed to common sense the capability of perception of perception. Alhazen and Roger Bacon developed the optical theory of the

generation of the image in the pupil, which they thought was the primary sensory organ of vision.

Avicenna’s view that the primary physiological seat of perception is in the nerves, and especially in the front of the brain, was not universally accepted. It was grounded on the Galenist medical tradition, which was designed to explain the cognitive defects found in the context of lesions in the brain. The awareness of the Aristotelian view, which posited perception as being in the heart, made itself known among several authors. Averroes was a prominent proponent of the Aristotelian heart-centered view, and, during the late Middle Ages, John Buridan advocated this same view. Some authors identified the brain-centered view as one of physicians and the heart-centered as one of philosophers.

The medieval view on perception was committed to the idea of perceptual realism. The Aristotelian tradition called the objects of perception perceptible forms (*species sensibiles*), which denoted the perceptual qualities of extramental material objects. Acts of perception in the soul were considered to be essentially about these objects. The changes in the medium and in the sense organs were also called perceptible forms; these were not considered intentional objects of perception but as still formally identical to the perceptual qualities of the objects. Their function was to enable acts of perception concerning perceptible objects. John Duns Scotus, in particular, stressed the distinction between the presence of a perceptible form in the soul and the intentional act of perception of an object.

During the late Middle Ages, William of Ockham defended a view according to which sense perception is essentially not conceptual but rather a preconceptual process, which was a necessary precondition for the concept formation of the intellect. According to him, however, it did not consist of a mere flow of information but included also acts of discrimination between various sensory contents. On the contrary, some of Ockham’s contemporaries like Adam Wodeham and John Buridan considered some conceptual or semi-conceptual features as essential for sense perception.

The reliability of sense perception was discussed in optical treatises. Alhazen proposed

eight conditions for veridical vision. Six of these were requirements for any act of vision: distance between the object and the eye, direct opposition of the object before the eye, light, sufficient magnitude of the visible object, transparency of the medium between the eye and the object, and density of the visible object. In addition to this, he listed two further requirements for veridical vision: time and a healthy eye. Alhazen's list was used and commented on by later perspectivists. The awareness of such phenomena as illusions and misperceptions did not lead to skepticism about the possibility of sense perception rendering veridical knowledge. In the late Middle Ages, however, Duns Scotus distinguished the element of the objective being of the sensory objects in the intentional content of perception. Accordingly, Peter Auriol argued for a distinctive objective being using a series of examples from misperceptions such as the illusory ring of light, which is produced by a moving torch. Furthermore, Auriol proposed that the ring has an objective or intentional existence in the air, without having a real extramental existence.

The Aristotelian view considered perception essentially as a passive faculty, but this view was never accepted without qualifications. Averroes suggested there was an agent sense, an operative principle outside the human soul, which would be active in sense perception in manner analogous to the agent intellect in concept formation. Some authors took Averroes' remarks as significant, and the discussions about agent sense continued until sixteenth-century philosophy. Among fourteenth-century philosophers, it was common to point out that the soul is the primary sensing agent, since a material entity cannot produce an immaterial act. Some of the later Aristotelian writers, who emphasized the activity of the soul in sense perception, saw this view as a combination of Augustinian and Aristotelian ideas.

## Cross-References

- ▶ [Epistemology](#)
- ▶ [Ibn Rushd, Muḥammad ibn Aḥmad al-Ḥafīd \(Averroes\)](#)

- ▶ [Ibn Sīnā, Abū 'Alī \(Avicenna\)](#)
- ▶ [Intentionality](#)
- ▶ [Internal Senses](#)
- ▶ [John Buridan](#)
- ▶ [John Duns Scotus](#)
- ▶ [Medicine and Philosophy](#)
- ▶ [Natural Philosophy](#)
- ▶ [Parva Naturalia, Commentaries on Aristotle's](#)
- ▶ [Peter John Olivi](#)
- ▶ [Philosophical Psychology, Jewish Tradition](#)
- ▶ [Robert Kilwardby](#)
- ▶ [Skepticism](#)
- ▶ [Species: Sensible and Intelligible](#)
- ▶ [William of Ockham](#)

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stay in Alexandria, he was very likely in contact with the Alexandrian Neoplatonic school of Ammonius Hermias: allusions and quotations from the latter's logical commentaries are to be found in Sergius' treatises on logic, together with quotations from John Philoponus' edition of Ammonius' courses. His translations of astronomical treatises fit this context as well. Sergius introduced Greek philosophy in Syriac as a living system of problems and not as a heritage of the past. Moreover, this philosophical mediation is original from a theological point of view: this newly introduced "pagan" wisdom is reinterpreted as a gift of God's own Wisdom to the ascetic. Therefore, Sergius reinterprets it as a component of an ascetic progression – which is heavily influenced by Evagrius Ponticus' doctrine – on the way to the contemplation of God. These remarks have led to the recent hypothesis that Sergius thinks here of a new sort of Christian *cursus studiorum* which, instead of culminating in Plato, would culminate in the Christian Platonist Pseudo-Dionysius.

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## Sergius of Resh'aynā

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### Abstract

Sergius of Resh'aynā (d. 536), a Syriac doctor and philosopher of the fifth to sixth century, studied in Alexandria and worked as a doctor-in-chief in his native town in Mesopotamia. He died in Constantinople. Sergius produced a wide range of original works and translations in the fields of theology, philosophy (logic and physics), and medicine, but he is best known as the first Syriac translator of the corpus of Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite. During his

## Biography

The biographical details at our disposal for Sergius are scarce: no new source has been discovered since Baumstark (1894). Most of the biographical information concerning Sergius is to be found in the sixth century chronicle of Pseudo-Zacharias, the Syriac continuator of Zacharia of Mytilene's chronicle, which was also written in the sixth century, and now is extant only in Syriac. The Pseudo-Zacharias (IX, 19) provides us with most of our knowledge about Sergius' life: archiater, that is, doctor-in-chief, in his native city of Resh'aynā, east of the Euphrates between Ḥarrān and Nisibis, he studied for a long time in Alexandria, mainly medicine. He read many Greek doctors, and was fond of the teachings of Origen; he knew Greek as well as Syriac, and was the author of a discourse on faith and of a very good translation of Dionysius' works, together



with a preface to the latter. In the last year of his life, that is, 536, Sergius, having gone to Antioch to complain by the Chalcedonian Patriarch about Resh'aynā's bishop, was found clever and intelligent by the same Patriarch, who decided to send him to Constantinople, where the emperor Justinian needed ambassadors to send to pope Agapitus, in Rome. On his return from Rome to Constantinople, Sergius died.

## Works

It is still difficult to establish the real extent of Sergius' writings. They can be subdivided as follows: (1a) original theological works, (1b) original philosophical works, (2a) theological translations or paraphrases, (2b) philosophical translations or paraphrases, and (2c) medical translations or paraphrases from Galen, not treated here. We will not mention the works attributed to Sergius, but surely not written by him.

Here, we give only the extant works:

- (1a) The *Discourse on Spiritual Life (SpL)*, used by Sergius as a preface to his translation of Pseudo-Dionysius' *corpus*; edited and translated by Sherwood (1960–1961) and now newly translated by Fiori (2008), on the base of a wider collation of mss.
- (1b) The *Treatise Composed by Sergius Archiater of Resh'aynā on the Categories of Aristotle the Philosopher*. It is a short introduction to the Aristotelian treatise. Not published; partial translation and commentary in Hugonnard-Roche (2004, pp. 53–163).
  - The *Commentary to Theodore (CT)*, whose real title is *Writing Composed by Mar Sargis the Archiater on the Aim of All the Aristotelian Writings*. Not published; partial translation in Furlani (1922); translation and commentary of the Preface and the first book (of seven) in Hugonnard-Roche (2004, pp. 165–231). It is in fact a longer treatise on the *Categories*, to be understood in the tradition of the Neoplatonic commentaries on Aristotle.
- (2a) While it is doubtful that Sergius was the translator of the S2 version of Evagrius Ponticus' *Kephalaia Gnostika* (see Guillaumont 1962, pp. 14–227), he is assuredly the author of the first Syriac version of the Dionysian *corpus (CD)*. An introduction to this version has been provided by Perczel (2000). (Perczel 2004 has edited and translated Sergius' translation of the fourth Epistle.) Hornus (1970) has edited the first chapter of the *Mystical Theology*.
- (2b) The *Treatise on the Causes of the Universe, Which Has Been Composed By the Priest Sergius of Resh'aynā According to the Doctrine of Aristotle the Philosopher; [Showing] That It Is A Globe (CU)*. Unpublished, and translated by Furlani (1923), it is in fact a sort of epitome of some arguments of a longer treatise by Alexander of Aphrodisias *On the Universe*, whose original Greek text is not extant and can be read in Arabic (edition in Genequand 2001). Discussed by Miller (1994), who advances some legitimate doubts about the attribution to Sergius.
  - A version of the pseudo-Aristotelian treatise *Peri Kosmou/De mundo*, edition De Lagarde (1858), studied at length by Ryssel (Ryssel 1880–1881).

## Thought

As Furlani (1922, 1923) had already pointed out, and Hugonnard-Roche (2004) has confirmed, Sergius is influenced by the Alexandrian Neoplatonism of the beginning of the sixth century. From a close reading of his logical texts, it is evident that he refers, even quoting directly from it, to Ammonius' commentary *On Categories*; sometimes, he is nearer to John Philoponus' editions of Ammonius' courses: it is the case of a corollary on space in the fourth book of his *CT*, quoting John Philoponus' edition of Ammonius' *On Physics*. He also develops some personal points of doctrine. These remarks fit Pseudo-Zacharias' mention of Sergius' stay in Alexandria. His astronomical writings could fit this philosophical context as well: if the *CU* is really to be attributed to

him, one could think that, selecting from Alexander's much longer treatise only the arguments which pertain to the spherical shape of the universe, Sergius (or someone who was soon confused with him, and this cannot be by chance) wanted to contribute, siding with Philoponus, to a famous Syriac–Greek controversy about this topic, whose witnesses are Cosmas Indicopleustes' *Topography* and John Philoponus' *On Creation*. Thus, it seems that Sergius is not simply an interpreter of Greek philosophy for a Syriac-speaking milieu: he introduces that philosophy into Syriac culture as a living body of current problems. Nonetheless, for Sergius this philosophical education, which was the basis of the Neoplatonic *cursus studiorum* culminating in the study of Plato, is to be reinterpreted in the context of a different *cursus*: not a scholastic, but an ascetic one. As Sergius says in the preface to his *CT*, according to the traditional Christian teaching, not everything is good in Greek philosophy: the ascetic must separate what is good from what is bad. The outcome of this separation will be the grafting of pagan philosophy on an ascetic ascent entirely shaped by the model of Evagrius Ponticus, from the *praktikē* to the *physikē theōria*. What is good in physics is reinterpreted as biblical contemplation, guided by the Wisdom of God, of the principles of the world. This ascent culminates in *theologia*. This progression is evident in the *SpL*, where it is clear (see paragraphs 101–113) that philosophical knowledge is a gift of God to the ascetic and is placed under the authority of two Church Fathers, whom Sergius considers as complementary to one another: Evagrius and Dionysius the Areopagite. This is so evident that Bettliolo (2005), followed by Hugonnard-Roche (2009) and Fiori (2008), proposed to interpret Sergius' translation of the *CD*, the Platonic rewriting of Christian philosophy, as an ideal substitute in the new Christian *cursus* for the study of Plato as the ultimate goal of a radically new *cursus*.

## Cross-References

- ▶ [Categories, Commentaries on Aristotle's](#)
- ▶ [John Philoponus](#)

- ▶ [Logic in the Arabic and Islamic World](#)
- ▶ [Logic, Byzantine](#)
- ▶ [Medicine in the Arab World](#)
- ▶ [Medicine: Byzantine](#)
- ▶ [Natural Philosophy](#)
- ▶ [Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite](#)

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## al-Shahrastānī, Muḥammad ibn ‘Abd al-Karīm

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### Abstract

Abū l-Faṭḥ Muḥammad al-Shahrastānī was a Muslim theologian (*mutakallim*) and a historian of religions from northern Iran who lived under the last Seldjuks of Khorasan. He composed commentaries on the Qur’ān and a monumental history of religions, which remains to this day a primary source for scholars of various different fields. He taught at the Niẓāmiyya *madrasa* in Baghdad and was considered a Sunni scholar until modern scholarship has attempted to demonstrate that he may rather had been a crypto-Ismā‘īlī.

According to the Arabic medieval sources, Muḥammad ibn ‘Abd al-Karīm ibn Aḥmad al-Shahrastānī (Tāj al-Dīn, Abū l-Faṭḥ) was born in 467/1074, 469/1076, or 479/1086, and died in 548/1153. He studied theology in Nishapur: Qur’ānic commentary (*tafsīr*) and dialectic

theology with Abū l-Qāsim al-Anṣārī, a colleague of al-Ġāzālī, and jurisprudence with Abū Naṣr al-Qushayrī (see further Monnot 1998). In 510/1117, he came to Baghdad where he started to teach theology at the Niẓāmiyya *madrasa*, which he did for 3 years. When he returned to Iran in 514/1120, the Seldjuk Sandjar had just taken the title of Sultan and Merv, his capital, was a center of attraction for scholars. Shahrastānī became the *nā‘ib* (deputy) of the chancellery and one of the closest confidants of the Sultan. His death followed shortly that of Sandjar, in 1153.

Along with shorter works in the field of dialectical theology (*kalām*), he authored a Qur’ān-commentary (the *Maḥāṭib al-asrār*) and an imposing history of religions and philosophies (the *Kitāb al-Milal wa-l-Niḥal, Book of Religions and Sects*). Many of his works are lost, but his thinking seems to have been evolving from Ash‘arism to Ismā‘īlism, as was first established by the Iranian scholar Muḥammad Riḍa Jalālī Nā‘īnī in 1964. Further, studies by Diane Steigerwald, Guy Monnot, and Wilferd Madelung have finally ascertained the connections between Shahrastānī’s so-called Ash‘arism and his actual crypto-Ismā‘īlism (see Steigerwald 2005, p. 265 and Steigerwald 1997, pp. 298–307). Although the traditional Islamic textbooks would follow the medieval sources in seeing Shahrastānī as an Ash‘arite, Madelung and Meyer consider that al-Shahrastānī may be described as “Sunni socially and communally, but as Shī‘ite and Ismā‘īlī in some of his core beliefs and religious thoughts.” (al-Shahrastānī, *Muṣāra‘at al-jalāsifa*, introduction, p. 4). As noted by Steigerwald (2005, pp. 265 and 268–270), Monnot proved already in a series of lectures given in 1986 that al-Shahrastānī believed in a living Imam, an element linking him to the Nizari Ismā‘īlīs of his time.

His first preserved work of importance, the *Kitāb al-Milal wa-l-Niḥal (Book of Religions and Sects)*, written in 521/1127–1128 while working at the chancellery of the Seldjuk Sultan Sandjar, is an encyclopedia of past and contemporary religions as well as philosophical currents. The Khorasanian context, with its mosaic of people and religions, must have been particularly fitting to such an enterprise. Shahrastānī’s information on the Greek philosophers is mainly

derived from the *Šiwān al-Ḥikma* (*Chest Box of Wisdom*), attributed to Abū Sulaymān al-Sijistānī and from the Arabic translation of Pseudo-Plutarch’s *Opinions of the Philosophers*. But he also makes use of other works on the ancient Greeks (see the introduction of Jean Jolivet, in al-Shahrastānī, 1986–1993). The *Milal wa-l-Niḥal* remains fundamental for modern scholars’ knowledge of Zoroastrianism, Mazdakism, and Manichaeism, as well as of the different Islamic sects, as one could expect. Moreover, it encompasses Hinduism, Judaism, Buddhism, Greek philosophy, and different Christian currents. According to Monnot and Steigerwald, the Šābians in the *Milal* develop the views of the Ismā‘īlīs, and this is also the case with their so-called opponents, the *ḥunafā’* (plural of *ḥanīf*, “monotheist”).

The *Nihāyat al-aqdām fī ‘ilm al-kalām* (*The Last Degree in Theological Science*) was composed after the *Milal*, which is quoted several times. The title uses a pun between *aqdām* (steps) and *iqdām* (eternity of the world), but a quotation from the *Majlis* (see Steigerwald 2001:86 (text) – 87 (translation): *Nihāyat al-aqdām al-a‘māl*, i.e., “The latest steps are in (good) actions”) ascertains the first reading. Shahrastānī studies in 20 chapters the basic rules (*qawā‘id*) of the theological sciences, according to the Ash‘arite method. The themes he discusses in detail, comparing the arguments of the theologians and the Greek and Muslim philosophers, are the following: the temporal origination, i.e., adventicity of the world, the adventicity (*ḥudūth*) of existents, divine unicity, divine attributes, matter and nothingness, divine knowledge, divine will, eternal logos (*al-kalām al-azālī*), the unicity of the logos, the attributes of hearing and seeing, the vision of God, the theory of divine acts, prophecy, paradise and hell, imamate, miracles, and abrogation. As a conclusion to the *Nihāya*, Shahrastānī gives a separate *Treatise on the Question of the Perennity of the Single Substance* (*Mas‘alat fī ithbāt al-jawhar al-fard*, in *Nihāya*, p. 505–514). According to Monnot, Shahrastānī seems to have been willing to explore in the *Nihāya* the limits of Ash‘arite theology (*ET*<sup>2</sup>, p. 215).

An incomplete Qur’ānic commentary, the *Mafātīḥ al-asrār wa-maṣābīḥ al-abrār* (*The Keys of Mysteries and Lamps of the Rightfuls*) was composed from 538/1143 on. The extant part of the unique manuscript goes as far as the second sura, *The Cow* (*al-Baqara*). In the introduction, Shahrastānī gives some general directions as to the study of the Qur’ān. According to Monnot (1998), it is a valuable commentary of no less importance than al-Ṭabarī’s and Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī’s. Traces of Ismā‘īlī influence in this text and in the other books composed by Shahrastānī led Jalālī Nā‘īnī to suggest that Shahrastānī may have been a Niẓārī Ismā‘īlī. His hypothesis was later on pursued by Muḥammad Tāqī Dānishpazūh who established in 1968 that Shahrastānī must have been at least in part a follower of some Ismā‘īlī beliefs while at the court of Sanjar and in Khwārazm. Shahrastānī’s exegetical methods were attacked by Zāhir al-Dīn al-Bayhaqī (c. 490/1097–565/1169), for using philosophy side by side with traditional exegesis (see *Tatimmat-Šiwān al-ḥikma*, s. v. al-Shahrastānī).

Shahrastānī’s last work, the *Muṣāra‘at al-falāsifa* (*Struggling with the Philosophers*), was first studied in a doctoral dissertation by Suhayr Muḥammad Mukhtār in Baghdad before she published the text in Cairo in 1976. A new translated edition with an introduction was given in 2001 by T. Meyer and W. Madelung. Unachieved by Shahrastānī who mentions the disasters of his time, the book addresses theological issues with specifically aiming at refuting Avicenna’s theories and the influence they had reached on the debates. Specifically, Shahrastānī points out the contradictions in Avicenna’s theory of the Necessary being (*wājib al-wujūd*), which he regards as being merely anthropomorphist (see Steigerwald 2005, p. 266). Pointing out a contradiction in Ibn Sīnā’s theory of essence and existence, Shahrastānī notes that in order to be intrinsically necessary, a thing must be absolutely simple. Shahrastānī’s answer to the dilemma is to elevate God above existence, as would the Ismā‘īlīs, and to consider existence as a purely equivocal term (Madelung and Meyer 2001, introduction, p. 11). Following a device already in use in the *Kitāb al-Milal*, the use of *al-shar‘ al-ḥanīfī*

(the “*ḥanīf-law*”) in the *Muṣāra‘at al-falāsifa* points, according to Madelung and Meyer (2001), to the Ismā‘īlīs. *Ḥanīf* is in itself a problematic notion, originally meaning “pagan” in Aramaic, and which came to be used for the “pure monotheism” of Ibrāhīm (Abraham) in the Qur’ān.

Two undated works have also been published: (1) The *Risāla fī ‘ilm wājib al-wujūd, An Epistle on the Knowledge of the Necessary Being*, dedicated to Sharaf al-Zamān, Abū ‘Abd Allāh Muḥammad ibn Yūsuf al-Īlāqī, d. 536/1141. (2) The *Majlis al-khalq wa-l-amr* is the Arabic title of an untitled Persian treatise (*Conversation on Creation and Divine Instauration*). Following M. Jalālī Nā‘īnī, G. Monnot brought to evidence many of the elements of cosmology shared between the *Majlis* and Ismā‘īlī beliefs in a series of lectures (see *Annuaire de l’École Pratique des Hautes Études*, 1983–1988). Further doctrinal evidences were gathered by Diane Steigerwald in different publications (see below, bibliography). In the *Majlis*, Shahrastānī is openly critical of both the Mu‘tazilite and the Ash‘arites, the former being accused of *ta‘tīl*, or of falling into an extreme negative theology, while the latter being accused of *tashbīh*, that is, anthropomorphism, for giving to God attributes that should be reserved to living creatures. The *Majlis* is a cosmological discourse on the Intelligible world, here assimilated to the *amr*, or “God’s Order” (taken from the Qur’ānic notion of immediate creation, also known as “instauration” (*ibdā‘*) following God’s order: “Be!”), described as eternal, and the Sensible world, or *khalq*, that is, “creation,” described as limited and adventive. The distinction between *amr* and *khalq* is already used by Ibn Sīnā and in al-Ġazālī’s latest works. An analysis of the two notions (further identified, respectively, to the One and the Multiple) and of this dichotomy in the writings of some important Ismā‘īlī authors is given by Steigerwald in her introduction to the translation of the *Majlis*, pp. 34–39.

Al-Shahrastānī lived in a time of transition between “the Shī‘ite century” and the Sunni reconquest, first at the hands of the Seldjuks and soon at that of the extreme Sunni Ghaznavids. The living transmission of philosophy in northern Iran

remains to be studied, as is the role played by both the Ismā‘īlī propagandists and the strong Buddhist and Christian communities of Central Asia. Finally, further research on the history of Ismā‘īlism may shed some light on the particular trend al-Shahrastānī represents.

## Cross-References

- ▶ [Abū Sulaymān al-Sijistānī al-Mantiqī](#)
- ▶ [Doxographies, Graeco-Arabic](#)
- ▶ [Ismā‘īlī Philosophical Tradition](#)
- ▶ [al-Mubashshir ibn Fātik](#)
- ▶ [Presocratics in the Arab World](#)

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## al-Shahrazūrī, Muḥammad ibn Maḥmūd Shams al-Dīn

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### Abstract

Al-Shahrazūrī, (Muḥammad ibn Maḥmūd, Shams al-Dīn), the “Ishrāqī” (d. between 1288 and 1304) was a Muslim philosopher of the Ishrāqī (“Illuminationist”) school, strongly influenced by Neoplatonism. He is primarily

known as the biographer and commentator of the Persian philosopher Shihāb al-Dīn Yaḥyā b. Amirak Suhrawardī (1155–1191) known as the Shaykh al-Ishrāqī (the “Master of Illumination”). Ishrāqī philosophy follows an anti-Peripatetic path initiated in the twelfth century by Abū l-Barakāt al-Baḡdādī and 'Umar ibn Sahlān al-Sāwī, which has to be considered, in the post-Avicennian context, as a reaction to Avicenna's philosophy. Al-Shahrazūrī organized the Ishrāqī philosophy into a new system that had not been elaborated by Suhrawardī, the founder of the school.

Al-Shahrazūrī's life is difficult to reconstruct as he has left no trace in the Arabic and Persian biographical dictionaries. The circles to which he may have belonged would lead one to expect to find some information about him in Ibn al-Fuwaḡī's *Majmā' al-ādāb fī mu'jam al-aḡāb*, yet the parts of the volumes that could have contained an entry on Shahrazūrī seem to be forever lost. Some scholars have attempted to connect him with the Shahrazūrī-family of scholars of Aleppo, but no concrete evidence has been offered (see Mascitelli 1995–1996: the identification seems improbable as none of al-Shahrazūrī al-Ishrāqī's book titles are listed in any of the bibliographies given for the shaykh of Aleppo). A mistake in the reading of the colophon of a Vatican manuscript (MS Città del Vaticano, Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, ar. 299) of Shahrazūrī's *Divine Symbols and Parables Kitāb al-rumūz wa-l-amthāl al-lāḥūtiyya* led a number of scholars (including Dozy, Sachau, and Corbin at an early stage) to believe that Shahrazūrī might have been a direct disciple of Suhrawardī, but this was certainly not the case. (The date reads clearly 911 and not 611, as wrongly reproduced by Levi della Vida from the early catalogue of A. Mai.)

A number of elements on Shahrazūrī's life can be retrieved from manuscripts' colophons:

- The date of 665/1266–67 for the composition of a first version (see below) of the *Promenade of Souls (Nuzhat al-arwāḥ)* is given by the MS Istanbul, Esad Efendi 3804.



- The *Metaphysical Tree* (*Shajara al-ilāhiyya*) was achieved in 680/1282 and copied once in Siwas (whose *qāḍī* at the time was none other than Quṭb al-Dīn Shīrazī) during al-Shahrazūrī's lifetime in jumādā al-awwal 687/June 1288, according to the MS Istanbul, Esad Efendi 1926.
- The composition date of the *Commentary on the Philosophy of Illumination* (*Sharḥ ḥikmat al-Ishrāqī*) is given as 685/1286 in the MS Istanbul, Esad Efendi 1932 (see Schmidtke and Pourjavady 2006:77 following Karabulut and Karabulut 2005, t. I/6, no 8408, 5) and a copy of the same commentary by Ibrāhīm 'Abd al-Raḥmān al-Irbilī on 14 shawwāl 704 (9 May 1305) gives Shahrazūrī as passed away (see Cottrell 1999, for the complete text of the colophon of MS London, Brit. Lib. Codex 427 [=Arund. Or. 36], erroneously identified by Rieu (1894) in his *Catalogue* as the *Ḥikmat al-Ishrāqī* by Suhrawardī, whereas it is Shahrazūrī's commentary on it).

While the biographical data make it certain that Shahrazūrī cannot have been a direct disciple of Suhrawardī, it is surprising to discover that Shahrazūrī shares with his master a common historiography of ancient philosophy which is ultimately rooted in such works as the anonymous *Ṣiwān al-ḥikma* (see Gutas 1982) and the *Mukhtār al-ḥikam* of Mubashshir ibn Fātik. In turn, these important eleventh-century histories of philosophy may rely on some lost translations emanating from both Ḥunayn b. Iṣḥāq's and al-Kindī's circles in Baghdad. The history of Greek philosophy is linked by both Suhrawardī and Shahrazūrī to the ancient Persian and Egyptian civilizations, and they use here and there Gnostic-related myths, apparently familiar to Ibn Waḥshiyya in his *Nabatean Agriculture* and in his book on the "Ancient Alphabets" (actual title: *al-Shawq al-mustaham fī ma'rifat rumūz al-aqlām* (*Flowing Desire for the Knowledge of the Symbols Traced by Pens*)) where the myth of Hermes and his sister as the tutelary figures of the Ishrāqī lineage appears for the first time (uncritical edition and translation by Hammer 1806, tr. p 29–30/Ar. p 101; compare the translation by Matton 1976; the attribution to Ibn

Waḥshiyya has been rejected by Hämeen-Antilla 2006:21).

This historiographical framework of Ishrāqī philosophy is explored by al-Shahrazūrī in the *Promenade of Souls and Garden of Rejoicings in the History of the Philosophers* (*Kitāb nuzhat al-arwāḥ wa rawḍat al-afrāḥ fī ta'rīkh al-ḥukamā'*), a three-part work on the history of philosophy from Adam (!) to Suhrawardī organized as follows: Part 1 – Historical and geographical introduction, Part 2 – Bio-bibliodoxographical chapters on the "Ancients," and Part 3 – On the "Moderns." A supplement of short biographies of Afḍal al-Dīn Kāshānī, Kamāl al-Dīn ibn Yūnis, Naṣīr al-Dīn Tūsī, and some less-known figures may be from another hand (see Cottrell 2004–2005b, for details on this supplement and a list of the manuscripts and editions where it appears).

The *Nuzhat al-arwāḥ* opens with an exhortation to study philosophy following the path of the Ancients (mainly Greeks and Egyptians, but Zoroaster, as well as the Biblical Adam and Seth do also figure, see Cottrell 2010a, b) and explicitly claims that the imitation of the ascetic way of life and the meditation of moral sayings will lead to the separation from the body and to the ascension toward the higher principles. What follows are 40 chapters on the main figures of ancient philosophy and medicine – principally reproduced from Mubashshir ibn Fātik and the *Muntakhab Ṣiwān al-ḥikma* – and around 90 entries on the main "philosophers of the Islamic period," starting with Ḥunayn b. Iṣḥāq and culminating with longer entries on Avicenna and Suhrawardī. The two main sources used for the chapters on the Moderns are the *Muntakhab Ṣiwān al-ḥikma* and the *Tatimmat Ṣiwān al-ḥikma* of al-Bayhaqī (known in Persian as Ebn Funduq). Apart from being influenced by the Neoplatonic theory of the progressive ascent towards truth, the *Nuzhat* represents the file of a scholar, and it was probably enriched all along his life by al-Shahrazūrī. The three editions of the text clearly represent two different recensions, of which only the longer one (edited by Abū Rayyān and Abū Shuwayrib) uses Shahrastānī's *Book of Religions and Sects*. Suhrawardī's treatises are quoted only in the

Suhrawardī biography. Shahrazūrī also made use of an anonymous collection of poems written by famous “modern” philosophers and compiled under the title of *Itmām al-Tatimma*, which appears in the four manuscripts of the *Muntakhab Ṣiwān al-ḥikma*, on which see Gutas 1982. The whole *Ṣiwān*-cycle was at some point summarized by Ġaḍanfar al-Tabrīzī (born in 630/1232–3, d. before 692/1293), a contemporary of al-Shahrazūrī quoted by him as *al-ustādh* (“the Teacher,” also used as a simple honorific title). On the detailed utilization by Shahrazūrī of these sources in the *Promenade of Souls*, see Cottrell (2004–2005b).

In his *Commentary on the Philosophy of Illumination (Sharḥ ḥikmat al-Ishrāqī)*, al-Shahrazūrī defines it as a philosophy based on the illumination (*Ishrāqī*) of thought, including visions and contemplation, in which the role of light is underlined. In the aftermaths of al-Sāwī and Abū l-Barakāt al-Baġdādī’s criticisms, Suhrawardī had departed from Aristotle in rejecting the theory of prime matter and form, and by criticizing the categories, which he reduces to five (see Ziai 1990b; Ziai and Alwishah 2003). Fundamentally, the epistemological method of the Aristotelians is rejected, the Stoic *lektion* theory introduced, and priority is given to the (Neo-)Platonist way of *anamnesis*. The self-conscious being is at the same time the knower and the known and there is no differentiation between the subject and the object. In the *Ishrāqī* system, this theory became known as “knowledge by presence” (*al-‘ilm al-ḥuḍūrī*). This development is reminiscent of Plotinus’ *Enneads*, partly known to Suhrawardī and to al-Shahrazūrī under the title of its Arabic-adapted translation, the *Theology of Aristotle*. Another theme of crucial importance in *Ishrāqī* philosophy is the existence of a realm of semi-embodied figures, different from the world of the Platonic forms and inferior to it, known as the *‘ālam al-mithāl* (see Ziai 1998). Identified with the realm we access through dreams and visions, it met the criteria both of the Qur’ānic cosmos, where dreams played an important role (it is considered that the human soul, when asleep, leaves the sublunary world and is directly connected to God), and of the ancient Persian lore, which was

integrated by Suhrawardī into his syncretistic system.

Hossein Ziai distinguishes two main trends among the commentators of Suhrawardī: one is represented by al-Shahrazūrī, who “tends to emphasize the symbolic and distinctly non-peripatetic components of Illuminationist philosophy,” while the second, represented by the works of Ibn Kammūna (d. 682/1284), “emphasizes the discursive and systematically philosophical side of the philosophy of Illumination and makes every attempt to define Illuminationist symbolic language in terms of standard philosophical terminology” (see Ziai 1995b). Quṭb al-Dīn Shīrāzī, using both authors, attempted a synthesis of the two.

While the *Commentary on the Philosophy of Illumination* was known and was already used by Corbin in his edition of Suhrawardī’s text, it has not been edited in its entirety until the 1993 edition of Hossein Ziai. The *Commentary on the Intimations (al-Tanqīḥāt fī sharḥ al-talwīḥāt)* by al-Shahrazūrī however remains unpublished in its entirety. The recent edition by Ziai and Alwishah (2003) of the second part (on Physics) of Ibn Kammūna’s commentary of the same text (written before Shahrazūrī’s) has finally given access to the totality of the text. An important study of the *Intimations* contents is given by Ziai in his introduction, and addresses the questions on Peripatetic philosophy presented in the text and the answers given by both Suhrawardī and Ibn Kammūna: definition of the body, question on the atoms, form and matter, direction and motion, space and void, time, nature and faculties of the soul, the intellect, the rational soul, and intuition. A comparative analysis of the three texts (Suhrawardī’s, Ibn Kammūna’s, and Shahrazūrī’s) should result in a better comprehension of Shahrazūrī’s originality, but only a few manuscripts are available. Ziai notes that the answers of Suhrawardī are in some ways an anticipation of Descartes’ theory of the sensible object.

*The Divine Tree of the Sciences of Divine Realities (Kitāb al-shajarat al-ilāhiyya fī ‘ulūm al-ḥaqā’iq al-rabbāniyya)*, or *Metaphysical Tree* in Ziai translation, is the magnum opus of al-Shahrazūrī. Composed a little before the

*Commentary on the Philosophy of Illumination*, it enlarges the discussion on the main themes already present in this fundamental text, but according to a novel organization. The text is divided into five main epistles (methodology and division of the sciences, logic, ethics and political philosophy, physics, metaphysics) and consists of discussions, following what Ziai has labelled the “constructivist” method of the Ishrāqī-s (see Ziai 1993, 1995b). Important quotations from the Stoics, from the Muʿtazilite and Ashʿarite theologians, from the Sufis, from al-Fārābī and Avicenna are given and remain to be studied in the light of the extant publications. As for the circle where it was possibly written, Naṣīr al-Dīn Ṭūsī (d. 672/1274) is mentioned as recently deceased, confirming the date of the composition given by one of the Istanbul MSS (680/1282).

The *Kitāb al-rumūz wa al-amthāl al-ilāhiyya fī al-anwār al-mujarrada al-malakutiyya* (*Divine Symbols and Parables About the Simple Lights of the Celestial Realm*), for which we have consulted the Yale manuscript (MS Yale, Landberg 509) and the forthcoming edition by M. Privot, is a text influenced by Sufi (and Ismāʿīlī?) teachings, focused on the metaphysical themes of Ishrāqī philosophy: the knowledge of the self, the soul’s journey to its Creator, and the perception (*idrāk*) of the metaphysical lights, in a Platonic context that was already present in Suhrawardī. The book is an in-depth analysis of the Ishrāqī theory of the Soul, though its layout may seem less rigorous than other works by al-Shahrazūrī. The introduction is a series of notes on some “philosophical” *hadiths*, such as “Who knows himself, knows his Lord” or Qurʾānic extracts. Al-Shahrazūrī seems to have aimed at reconciling the metaphysical theory of light and darkness in Suhrawardī’s works with the beliefs of mainstream Islam, and on a larger scale, to defend philosophy in a language accessible to a “mystical” or “spiritual” audience. Faithful to Ishrāqī syncretism, he also quotes Jesus, who would have said the following, “When I will leave this body, I shall be standing in the air, at the right of the Lord’s throne.” It should be mentioned in this context that in his biography of Suhrawardī in the *Promenade of Souls* (*Nuzhat*

*al-arwāḥ*), al-Shahrazūrī has compared the spiritual exercises practiced by the master to those of the Christians.

In the peculiar syncretism proper to Ishrāqī philosophy, Persian mythology is not ignored by al-Shahrazūrī. Thus, the Sun is once given its Persian name, following the *Ḥikmat al-Ishrāqī* (the manuscripts offer both *khurshīd* and *hūrakhsh*, while it is the latter which is to be found in Suhrawardī, see Privot 2001:314–317). The Sun of the sublunar world is here given the powers of a Demiurge, leaving intact the inaccessibility of the One in accordance with a typical element of Neoplatonism since Proclus (whose works were widely accessible in Arabic). In turn, a study of the genealogy of this Proclean element in the Syriac-speaking context should shed some new light on al-Suhrawardī’s syncretism.

## Cross-References

- ▶ Abū l-Barakāt al-Baḡdādī
- ▶ Abū Sulaymān al-Sijistānī al-Mantiqī
- ▶ Ibn Kammūna, ʿIzz al-Dawla
- ▶ Ibn Sīnā, Abū ʿAlī (Avicenna)
- ▶ Ismāʿīlī Philosophical Tradition
- ▶ al-Mubashshir ibn Fātik
- ▶ Plotinus, Arabic
- ▶ Proclus, Arabic
- ▶ Quṭb al-Dīn al-Shīrāzī
- ▶ al-Suhrawardī, Shihāb al-Dīn Yaḥyā al-Maqtūl

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## Siger of Brabant

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### Abstract

Siger of Brabant (c. 1240–c. 1284) is one of the most controversial authors of the Middle Ages, and there are conflicting opinions about him. Some see him as one of the most dangerous heretics which were condemned by the Bishop of Paris in 1277. Others regard him as one of the most remarkable philosophers of the thirteenth century, whom Dante Alighieri includes in his “Paradise” alongside Thomas Aquinas, Albert the Great, and King Solomon. It is true that he before 1270, as a young professor of the Faculty of Arts in Paris, defended a heterodox thesis, which was inspired by Averroes’ commentary of Aristotle, that there is only one intellect for all humans. Clearly such a position

suppresses any immortality of the soul. The evolution of Siger's thought is very clear, however. He progressively abandons this thesis for the interpretation of Thomas Aquinas. But in other areas he defends an original view, namely a complete separation of philosophy and the teachings of theology. According to him, philosophy should have full autonomy, although within limits. He took stands on some of the most passionate debates at the end of the thirteenth century, such as freedom and the eternity of the world, and Siger of Brabant remains one of the most controversial thinkers of all time.

## Introduction

Siger of Brabant (c. 1240–c. 1284) is one of the most controversial authors of the Middle Ages, and there are conflicting opinions about him. On one hand, some see him as the symbol of a dangerous heresy at the University of Paris. Siger of Brabant, along with Boethius of Dacia, is seen as the figurehead of a movement that sees philosophy as self-sufficient, detached from theology, and hence as the spokesman of disbelief in the Middle Ages. Since the studies of Ernest Renan in the nineteenth century, he is associated with the movement called "Latin Averroism," which comes from the name of the Muslim philosopher Ibn Rushd known in the Latin West under the name "Averroes." Siger is criticized for having supported three theses opposing Christian faith. Firstly, that there exists only one intellect unique to all humans, thus destroying any belief in the immortality of the soul and all personal judgments after death; secondly, that the universe has no beginning, which destroys the belief that the world was created by God; and thirdly, that human freedom exists in name only.

There seems to be good reason for these charges against Siger of Brabant. He was summoned to appear before the Inquisitor of France, Simon du Val, on January 18, 1277. Some think

he would have fled from Paris to plead his case directly to the Pope in Orvieto. However, in 1284, he fell into disfavor, and was murdered by his secretary who had gone mad. The great Parisian condemnation of March 7, 1277, the most important intellectual censorship of the Middle Ages, was largely directed against him. He was considered to be an anti-Christian thinker, and a scandal amongst his contemporaries. He angered the Bishop of Paris, Etienne Tempier. From 1268, Bonaventure vehemently criticized the theories of Siger in several of his university sermons, and in 1270, Thomas Aquinas wrote the well-argued work *De unitate intellectus* to take apart the interpretation that Siger gave Aristotle.

On the other hand, Dante Alighieri did not hesitate to reserve a place in paradise for him. He placed him alongside Peter Lombard, King Solomon, and Dionysius the Areopagite, but especially together with Albert the Great and Thomas Aquinas, who presents him with the highest praise: "It is Siger's eternal light, in teaching at the Rue du Fouarre, that by demonstrating truths created hate and envy" (Dante, *Par. X*, 136–138). Siger is thus presented as one of the most remarkable philosophers of the thirteenth century, and as one of the most "excellent doctors of philosophy." But who was really this "*Sigerus magnus*" mentioned in several manuscripts?

## The Life and Works

The edition of Siger's major works was done in the 1970s and since then historians have been able to place him in the proper historical perspective. To account for the contrasting judgments about him, one should follow Fernand van Steenberghen's judgment and distinguish three distinct periods of his career.

### First Period: Before 1270

The first mention of Siger of Brabant dates to August 27, 1266, when the papal legate Simon de Brion calmed a crisis dividing the Faculty of Arts in Paris. Paris University was in fact made up



of four faculties. Three higher faculties: medicine, canon law, and particularly theology, which were accessible only after having studying for several years at the largest faculty, the Faculty of Arts. Siger was a professor in the Faculty of Arts at a time when it was involved in serious intellectual and political disputes. The four nations that composed it were also divided by controversy. Siger, in the Picardy Nation, was portrayed as a troublemaker. He was suspected of having participated in the kidnapping of a master of the French Nation and of having locked him up. This is the traditional view, which makes Siger to be a leader and head of a sect whose ideas became a kind of “radical Aristotelianism,” highly critical of Christianity.

On the contrary, other historians have concluded that Siger was innocent in the kidnapping case, that political tensions had nothing to do with the philosophical debates about Aristotle, and especially that Siger was a character of limited importance. Was he the head of a sect or an unimportant person? The views are certainly divided.

Besides some logical works a commentary on the third book of the *De anima* of Aristotle, *Quaestiones in tertium de anima*, has been found from Siger's career before 1270. It was transmitted in the form of a *reportatio*, that is, as unreliable notes of the teaching of the master. This book is of great importance because it is the only witness to the “Averroistic” period in which he defended the thesis of the unity of the intellect.

### Second Period: 1270–1275

From 1272 to 1275, the Faculty of Arts in Paris was divided into two groups, each claiming to be the legitimate leader of the University. A dissident minority had promoted Siger of Brabant as Rector and head of Paris University due to his strong personality. Indeed the manuscripts speak of the *pars Sigieri*. For some historians, it was his strong philosophical ideas that made Siger a leader. At the source of tension was the bold thesis that Siger wanted to free the Faculty of Arts from the dominance of theology, and free reason from any control of faith. According to other historians,

such as R.-A. Gauthier, the crisis was purely institutional, without doctrinal issue, and Siger was never the leader of any “Averroistic sect.”

In addition to logic texts, two books from this period are in direct response to the debates of the 1270s, namely the *De aeternitate mundi* and *De anima intellectiva*. Alongside the *Quaestiones naturales et morales*, they are the four published parts of the *Quaestiones in metaphysicam*, which focus on the heart of the debate, namely the relationship between philosophy and theology.

The chronology of the writings of Siger is decisive here, because it shows a profound evolution of the question of the unity of the intellect. Under the effect of the first censure by the Bishop of Paris, dated to December 10, 1270, and particularly under the influence of Thomas Aquinas' *De unitate intellectus*, Siger approaches Thomas' position to the point of rejecting his earlier ideas on Aristotle's interpretation and the unity of the intellect. However, we must be careful not to assume that this evolution affects all of his thinking.

### Third Period: After 1275

Little is known about the third period of his life. Certainly the condemnation of March 7, 1277, was directed at several of his theses, but it is not certain that, summoned to appear before the Inquisitor of France, Siger would have fled Paris in 1276 to plead his case to the papal curia. It is not certain any more that he was murdered by his secretary who had gone mad, and there is no basis for a connection between his teachings and his death. Not much is needed, however, for legend to take hold of history: “The tragic death of Siger has succeeded in making him, for opponents without pity, the kind of heretic that is punished by Heaven” (Gauthier 1984:28). It is also probable that he ended his life peacefully as a canon in Liege.

The last known work of Siger is the *Questions on the Book of Causes*, on which the masters of the Faculty of Arts had to spend seven weeks lecturing, dating from the years 1275–1276. In this work, which in the Middle Ages was attributed to Aristotle, Siger comments on 57 questions that address several major problems of metaphysics.

## Thought

### Before 1270: The Problem of the Unity of the Intellect

The *Quaestiones in tertium De anima* is a document typical of his first teaching. It gives the impression of a young professor (master) of 30 years, teaching at the Faculty of Arts, infatuated by philosophy, and not caring much for the religious implications of his theses. The primary doctrine concerns “the unity of the intellect,” inspired by the third book of Aristotle’s *De anima*. According to this literal interpretation, there exists only one “possible intellect” for the whole of humanity. What is this intellect? According to the doctrine of Aristotle, the intellect has a dual function. On the one hand, it is “active,” like a light that illuminates the sensible images in order to identify the intelligible core. This process of abstraction makes bare the essence of material things to render them compatible with the intellect. On the other hand, the intellect is “passive” in that it receives these intelligible abstract forms. It is this function that is called the “possible intellect.”

However, according to Thomas Aquinas’ interpretation, for example, it is clearly the individual human being, Peter or Socrates, that is the subject of this intellect. It is not the intellect that thinks, but the human being, this human being of flesh and bones. According to Thomas, the intellectual soul, its substantial form, is what constitutes the human being. For Siger, however, the intellect is completely separated from matter. Not only is it not material, as demonstrated by Aristotle, but it is apart from individual humans. The intellect is a separate and eternal substance, unique in species, genderless and incorruptible, therefore it cannot play the role of substantial form of the body. This is the thesis called “Averroistic” about the unity of the intellect, which Siger indeed reads in the Muslim thinker’s commentary of the books of Aristotle.

Is Siger really then this “independent spirit and vigorous thinker” that he has been described as? Or did he simply have second-hand knowledge of Averroes’ books? It is probably by reading Aquinas’ *Commentary on the Sentences* that

Siger discovered the Averroist movement, which defends the separation and the unity of the possible intellect. Siger seems to have been content to unite several views without noticing the inconsistency of holding them simultaneously. We discover an author of limited culture, where lack of information does nothing to the faculty of invention. Once again, opinions differ.

### From 1270 to 1275: The Eternity of the World Between Faith and Philosophy

On December 10, 1270, the Bishop of Paris exercised his authority by condemning 13 theses, some of which defended the unity of the intellect and the eternity of the world. At first glance, each of the denounced theses were opposed to the foundational truths of the Christian faith in that they seemed to deny the immortality of the soul, responsibility and merit, the beginning of the world, prescience, and divine providence, as well as the fire of hell. That was why these errors were condemned and why Etienne Tempier threatened to excommunicate anyone who professed them. The Bishop of Paris believed that the truths of faith should instead lead philosophers to realize the theological implications of their statements and to invite them to correct their doctrines. On March 7, 1277, the Bishop of Paris went even further, solemnly condemning 219 theses, including several theses aimed directly at Siger of Brabant and his colleague, Boethius of Dacia (Hissette 1977:314). He blamed them for holding that some statements are true for philosophy, but false according to the Catholic faith. These philosophers, he said, act as if there were two contradictory truths.

Let us illustrate this difficulty with the controversial issue of the eternity of the world. Here is the problem. The inaugural words of the *Genesis* reads: “In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.” This asserts that the world began to exist temporally. It seems also to absolutely contradict the Aristotelian belief that the world is eternal. Everything had gone very fast when, on March 19, 1255, the Faculty of Arts in Paris introduced into its mandatory program the main and newly discovered works of Aristotle. The clash was unavoidable.

All the thinkers of the late thirteenth century were involved, and the debate took on considerable proportions. Bonaventure, for example, fought tirelessly since 1267 against this error, in which he denounced the hypothesis of a creation *ab aeterno*. The eternity of the world ruins the Holy Scripture, because it describes a world that, having no history, excludes the whole idea of salvation. According to Bonaventure, it is contradictory both to maintain that things are created *ex nihilo* and that the world is eternal.

This is not the way in which Thomas Aquinas saw things. According to him, it is impossible to rationally prove the thesis of the beginning of the world, which is a truth revealed by faith. From a philosophical standpoint, the creation does not prevent the theoretical possibility of an eternal world, because the notion of creation does not have as a consequence the duration of the created world. It expresses an ontological dependence, not a temporal succession. In fact, being created is not the beginning of being, but it means “depending on another” or “receiving its being from another.” It is not then contradictory that the world is created, that is, dependent upon another, but does not have a temporal beginning. Only faith can give an answer to the question about the beginning of the world, not philosophy. In short, for Thomas Aquinas, the beginning of the world is an article of faith that cannot be proven false by reason.

Siger of Brabant also realizes that faith teaches as true that the world and the human species had a beginning, and he never ventured to deny this. But in his eyes, it is illusory to think that philosophy can demonstrate such truths. All the evidence we can come up with is doomed to fail, since they are inconsistent arguments. Siger’s intention is not to demonstrate the opposite of the truths revealed, nor to suggest that the world is eternal. He only wants to show the weakness of the arguments that are in favor of the beginning of the world and the human species.

He adopts a position fairly similar to that of his colleague Boethius of Dacia. When a science, like physics, demonstrates that the world has no beginning, this in reality stems from its own empirical principles. Conversely, when a Christian states

absolutely (*simpliciter*) that the world began to be, he does so by reference to an absolute cause that does not take into account the consideration of the physicist. On the one hand, the physicist says the truth, but only from the principles that are his own. In his proof that the world did not have a beginning, he adopts his conclusion under the condition of the validity of his principles (*ex conditione*). On the other hand, the Christian bases his argument on other principles. He is right in arguing that the world began, because he judges this from a superior cause. Even if their conclusions are contrary, both can be right, but they adopt different perspectives. Thus there is no contradiction, because one does not disagree with the other in the same respect. It is by misunderstanding this subtle distinction that these philosophers have been criticized for defending a “double truth,” and that philosophy denies the truth of faith.

But Siger does not cease to repeat that he proceeds by following the proper method of philosophy. He begins from the principles of experience, which, far from being absolute, are only conditional. It is from this relative data alone that he reasons to the consequences that necessarily follow. This approach, albeit false in its conclusion, should not be distorted or hidden. Philosophy remains indeed a search for truth, but Siger offers a different conception of truth than that of Thomas Aquinas. A truth within certain limits set by the validity of its principles. These are limited and empirical principles, and hence will never yield an absolute truth.

In his eyes, to proceed philosophically, is “to methodologically abstract from faith,” and it is to follow rationally and logically a thought to its conclusion via certain principles. But its premises, drawn from sensory experience, are inevitably unstable, and this is why errors can occur. Herein lays Aristotle’s approach. Siger’s profession, as master in the Faculty of Arts, consists precisely of commenting on Aristotle’s texts in deducing conclusions from partial principles based on experience. Therefore, metaphysics cannot lay claim to an absolute truth (*simpliciter*), which is the prerogative of faith, anymore than physics. “We are looking rather for the philosophers’ intention than

for the truth, since we proceed philosophically” (*De anima intellectiva* VII, 101). Siger therefore never denied the truth to be eminently theological. He only maintained that, because of its limitations, metaphysics does not attain the absolute truth of faith (*simpliciter*). The philosophical truth is only conditional (*ex conditione*). Hence the astonishing thesis according to which human reason leads to conclusions that must then be denied from a religious viewpoint (*Quaestiones in metaphysicam* III, 9, Dunphy 144).

In an original manner, Siger of Brabant ensures the autonomy of philosophy, but he does so by setting strict limits and by circumscribing the scope of its validity. It is by limiting the scope of philosophy that its autonomy is assured. Commenting on Aristotle is to abstract from all revealed truth, and settle for a mere human experience. This clarifies the overall project of Siger, which of course is transferable to other issues, for example, the human soul. “Our main intention is not to seek the truth about the soul, but to clarify the opinion proposed by the philosopher” (*De anima intellectiva* VI, 99). The absolutely true conclusion about the human soul is not philosophical, but revealed and theological. Given this, Siger never proposed the absolute truth about this issue. This was indeed what was imposed by the decree issued by the Faculty of Arts on April 1, 1272, which prohibited teachers from straying from their competences and meddle in theology. But they did not understand Siger’s project, and this is the reason why, on March 7, 1277, the Bishop of Paris not only censored the theses on the eternity of the world, but also on the soul animating humans, and the new conception of philosophy that was offered by some teachers of the Faculty of Arts in Paris.

Besides the theses about the unity of the intellect, and eternity of the world there was yet another thesis, which aroused strong reactions, namely one concerning freedom. Siger did not have the slightest doubt about the existence of human freedom, but the way in which he explained it gave the impression that he denied it. He compares human desire to animal desire. Animals are not free since they are all subject to

instinct that leads them to determined objects. They have no freedom to change their judgments. A human is endowed with free choice. His desire is not chained to any particular object because he is free to judge otherwise. He is not a slave to his desires. It is the intellect that is free, however, not the will, which necessarily follows the intellect’s judgments.

It is this radical form of moral intellectualism that was condemned by the Bishop of Paris in 1277. In fact, if the development of the intellect is sufficient for a good life, and to do what is good, it is not clear why a human being would need to be saved by Christ. Does philosophy propose to supplement faith? Is this enough to ensure the happiness of humans? It is in this way that the censorship of 1277 interpreted the doctrines of Siger of Brabant. The Bishop condemned the following thesis: “If reason is right, so is the will” (*si recta ratio et voluntas recta*), since this thesis seemed to revive the heresy of Pelagius, namely that since science is sufficient for the rectitude of the will, why then would humanity still need the grace of God?

#### **After 1275: Return to Orthodoxy?**

The last known work of Siger is his *Commentary on the Book of Causes*. A careful reading of the book confirms that Siger had definitely abandoned the thesis of the unity of the possible intellect. Indeed, after having presented the philosophical motivation for the position of Averroes, he adds: “But this position is heretical to our faith, and it also appears irrational (*irrationalis*)” (*Quaestiones super Librum de causis* q. 27, 112). The novelty lies not in the rejection of this view, evidently opposed to Christian doctrine, but in his strong affirmation that the thesis of the unity of the intellect does not hold up even in the eyes of reason. On this particular question, there is no doubt that Siger had finally abandoned his way of reading Aristotle before 1270. Thomas Aquinas’ *De unitate intellectus* had him finally convinced. On other points, Siger approaches the Thomistic doctrine, particularly when he states that God, the first cause, is *ipsum esse per se subsistens* (q. 9a), that we must

hold a composition of essence and existence in angels (q. 22), and that each immaterial substance is a species (q. 24).

Historians have concluded that Siger had ended by completely endorsing the doctrines of Aquinas. But this is a conclusion drawn too quickly. Indeed, the explicit desire to stay within the limits of orthodoxy does not constitute the most important aspect in his late work, which provides an interesting example of Siger's intellectual mentality and of his way of working. The 57 questions in this book have indeed literally borrowed many views from the commentary that Thomas Aquinas had himself given on the *Liber de causis*. There are also views borrowed from the *Commentary on the Physics* and especially from the *Summa theologiae*. For example, in question 8 Siger wants to define the notion of eternity. He cites word for word the *Summa* I, 10, 1, but without mentioning his source. However, this usage of the text actually hides important changes. Aquinas' work is exploited, but Siger changes its meaning in order to say something else.

One must avoid judging this practice according to our modern standards and from the accusation of "plagiarism," firstly, because the use of texts of other authors was common practice, and, secondly, because Siger uses some texts of Thomas Aquinas to turn them against him. We have an example in the analysis of the relationship between the primary cause (God) and the secondary causes. Siger begins by criticizing the belief of the "vulgar and popular men" who tend to attribute everything to God, and to ignore the autonomy of the created world. The direct intervention of God must be excluded, and philosophy rejects any direct divine intervention. Thomas Aquinas had also been anxious to strengthen the autonomy of the world and secondary causes, but he nonetheless explained that God always reserves the possibility to directly intervene in the course of events. By using the same texts as Thomas did Siger reversed this thomistic doctrine and logically excludes that the primary cause may alter the natural course and create, for example, an "accident" existing without a "substance." It is clearly the doctrine of the Eucharist which is

here undermined. Siger's thesis made it impossible that the bread, while retaining its unchanging physical properties, transformed into the body of Christ. When Siger is critical of the theologian's ability to argue in a sophisticated manner, it is difficult to maintain that he has at any point agreed with the doctrine of Thomas Aquinas.

Siger of Brabant remains one of the most fascinating witnesses of the philosophical debates that had developed in the wake of Bonaventure and Thomas Aquinas. The true significance of his work is revealed if we relocate its usage in the institutional and historical context of the 1270s, and we refrain from making him the spokesman of "Averroism," which perhaps never existed in the thirteenth century.

## Cross-References

- ▶ [Boethius of Dacia](#)
- ▶ [Bonaventure](#)
- ▶ [Dante Alighieri](#)
- ▶ [Ibn Rushd \(Averroes\), Latin Translations of](#)
- ▶ [Ibn Rushd, Muḥammad ibn Aḥmad al-Ḥafīd \(Averroes\)](#)
- ▶ [Parisian Condemnation of 1277](#)
- ▶ [Thomas Aquinas](#)

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## Simon of Faversham

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### Abstract

Simon of Faversham, c. 1260–1306, was a commentator on Aristotle's works, particularly in logic and on the soul. He taught at Oxford, primarily in the Arts, and although he took the degree in Theology and became Chancellor of the university, almost none of his work outside the Arts survives. His initial formation seems to have been Thomist, whom he follows in his Avicennan understanding of universals, but in his later writings he took issue with Aquinas on the real distinction, following Henry of Ghent, and absorbed much from Giles of Rome. Nonetheless, even in his later works, he takes distinctively Thomist positions in his *Posterior Analytics* commentary, favoring Thomas on the nature of the highest sort of demonstration and the use of the fourth kind of per se statement in demonstration. These were major points of controversy, and Simon's positions reflect the dominance of the Thomistic view of them in later Scholastic work.

Simon of Faversham (c. 1260–1306) was a commentator on Aristotle's works, particularly those on logic and the soul. He was educated at Oxford, and although his commentaries seem to reveal a residence at Paris in the 1270's and 1280's, reflecting in particular the influence of Peter of Auvergne, he spent the rest of his life at Oxford, where he became Chancellor in 1304. Following chiefly Aquinas, he also uses Giles of Rome on many occasions in his commentary on the *Sophistici elenchi*, as well as his account of the nature of logic in his *Posterior Analytics* commentaries. In his second question-commentary on the *Posterior Analytics*, Question 49, he explicitly attacks Thomas and follows Henry of Ghent on the real distinction between essence and



existence (though he does not attribute his view to Henry), though he had followed Aquinas in Question 20 of his commentary on the *Categories*, written much earlier in his career. Simon's objection to Thomas' view is this: if existence differs from essence in creatures, then it is something added, though Thomas, of course, insists that it is not an accident added to the essence, as Avicenna thought. (This common criticism of Avicenna probably misinterprets him, but it was generally accepted as correct at the time on the authority of Averroes.) But if existence is added to essence, then it is a kind of actuality. Now Thomas says it is primary actuality, but this cannot be, for essence is the primary actuality. The essence of a human being, for instance, is rational, not just potentially rational, and so there is a kind of primary actuality here. Nor can it be an added secondary actuality, either, as Thomas confesses. So existence is nothing real added at all to essence, and so does not really differ from essence. But it differs in some way from essence, and that means it differs in formula (*ratio*).

What is the formula of existence? Well, one considers a substance as existing when one considers it insofar as it is part of the causal order, and itself caused by something to be part of that order. So existence is the sort of being possessed by something which is the effect of another thing. It is *esse in effectu*, a being in an effect. Finally, borrowing a notion from Giles of Rome, Simon argues that existence falls under the category of substance, for there are substantial relations; for instance, the relation between matter and form falls under substance. *Esse in effectu*, then, is the sort of being a particular substance has, as opposed to *inesse*, which is the sort of being an accident has.

The phrase "*esse in effectu*" is borrowed from Avicenna (*On First Philosophy* V 1). The term "*esse in effectu*" is accompanied by two other terms, "*esse essentiae*," and "*esse universale*." Simon's Sophisma holds that one can speak of the essence as it is part of the natural world and a particular to be found interacting with other particulars in the natural world, or without reference to anything outside itself (*esse essentiae*), or as it is conceived in the intellect (*esse universale*), so

that it can be asserted of different things. The picture comes from Avicenna, and plays a role in Thomas' thought as well. Like Thomas, Simon insists that the universal concept has a foundation in the essence itself, which is real quite independently of the concept, though it is neither universal nor particular in itself, both because it is not in itself brought under the consideration of the intellect, and because it is not in itself multiplied, or for that matter, singular, in the way that individuals entering into natural causal processes are. But the Sophisma never uses the term "*esse in effectu*," preferring to speak of being in matter or in particulars, or outside the soul, when it wants to indicate existing particulars. Moreover, it does not discuss the real distinction either, restricting itself to a consideration of universality. Like the *Categories* commentary, it seems to predate the reconsiderations that produced the criticism of Thomas in Simon's *Questions on the Posterior Analytics*.

Simon prefers Aquinas in his most characteristic doctrines in his account of the highest sort of demonstration (*demonstratio potissima*), arguing that the real definition of the subject term is the middle term and relying on the fourth mode of per se predication (predicating a thing of its cause) to explain the connection between the real definition of the subject term and the definition of the attribute which is concluded of the subject. This view is rejected by Grosseteste, Albert the Great, and Giles of Rome, though it became the usual view in later authors. Simon follows Aquinas on these matters even in the second *Posterior Analytics* commentary, in which he differs with him on the real distinction.

Simon assumed that the meaning of a term, taken independently of its function in a sentence of signifying individuals, was the nature it indicated. This puts him in the Modist school of interpreting supposition, identifying not the term itself, but something real outside it, as that which is common to the supposita of the term, that is, those items referred to by the term in its sentential contexts. In particular, Simon holds, second intentions do not merely reflect the way in which the intellect classifies individuals, as Thomas asserted, but what the individuals have in common that enables that classification, a view

perhaps first put forward by Henry of Ghent, who held that the second intentions signify things in some manner, not merely acts of the intellect. Thus Simon argues in the *Questions on the Categories* that the categories have a real resemblance, though they have no common substantial form, a view further developed in Duns Scotus.

These points should all be regarded with caution, as a definitive study of Simon's work has yet to be written.

## Cross-References

- ▶ [Albert the Great](#)
- ▶ [Aristotelianism in the Greek, Latin, Syriac, Arabic, and Hebrew Traditions](#)
- ▶ [Essence and Existence](#)
- ▶ [Giles of Rome, Political Thought](#)
- ▶ [Henry of Ghent](#)
- ▶ [Ibn Sīnā, Abū 'Alī \(Avicenna\)](#)
- ▶ [Posterior Analytics, Commentaries on Aristotle's](#)
- ▶ [Robert Grosseteste](#)
- ▶ [Thomas Aquinas](#)
- ▶ [Thomism](#)
- ▶ [Universals](#)

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## Skepticism

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### Abstract

Every inquiry into skepticism in the Middle Ages aims at seeking the missing link that would allow the understanding of how we changed from the ancient conception of skepticism as a way of life (living without belief) to a modern conception of skepticism as the general critique of knowledge. The medieval reception of the ancient mode of skepticism and the transformations they made after its reception allow us to understand this evolution. Thus, the Middle Ages occupy a nodal place in the history of skepticism.

Strictly speaking, there is no skeptical school in the Middle Ages insofar as no one, except John of Salisbury, explicitly claimed to be a skeptic. Medieval epistemology on the other hand accords a place of growing importance to the question of skepticism, ultimately finding incontrovertible the examination and refutation of skeptical arguments. In a way, skepticism in the Middle Ages is primarily a construction lacking a historical foundation; a set of arguments against the possibility of knowledge and a test for all theories of knowledge. Nonetheless, the consideration of these arguments, conjoined with the development of a set of theories of knowledge attuned to the fallibility of human reason and to the problem of induction drove, at the end of the Middle Ages, some philosophers to develop theories of knowledge that produce skeptical effects, limiting the hold of our capacity for knowledge (e.g., Nicolas of Autrecourt, William Crathorn, Robert Holcot). It is in this sense that we can speak of a medieval form of skepticism proper in the fourteenth century.

In order to understand how the medieval skeptical vision was elaborated, we must examine the

medieval reception of ancient skepticism. If Sextus Empiricus' *Outlines of Pyrrhonism* was available in Latin near the end of the Middle Ages, it is not possible to tell today if the text had any readers. In the same fashion, Cicero, whose texts were more widely circulated, could have influenced John of Salisbury (who does not seem to know of the *Academics*, however) and Henry of Gent, but his real influence remains quite minimal. Indeed, the construction of the image of skepticism as that which denies the possibility of knowledge stems from the conjunction of the Augustinian influence and the rediscovery of Pre-Socratic (Democritus, Protagoras, Heraclitus) arguments via Aristotle. Presenting neo-Academic doctrines in a synthetic manner in *Against the Academicians* II, 11, Augustine shows what we can call the logical structure of skepticism. The point of departure and the crux of the Academic position is that nothing can be known. Augustine draws the conclusion, typically skeptical according to him: the sage must suspend assent. This suspension of assent would be taken as a general doubt in the Middle Ages. Augustine thus emphasizes the fundamental status of the thesis according to which nothing can be known (that is to say an object of *scientia*, or to be known with certainty). This thesis is proved by the *Academics* by showing that it is impossible to find a perception that is an evident criterion of truth. Augustine goes on to elaborate a typology of skeptical arguments: (1) disagreement among people (i.e., relativity of knowledge); (2) the fallibility of the senses; (3) dreams and madness, and, finally; (4) paralogisms and sophisms. (1) permits the emphasis that there are no evident and universal criteria for truth, (2) and (3) that the sources of knowledge are not reliable, and (4) that error is found just as much at the level of reasoning as it is in the testimony of the senses. This thus frames the portrait of skepticism as that which denies the possibility of knowledge due to the impossibility of distinguishing truth from falsity since uncertainty is found just as much in objects as it is in the knower. The model of skepticism inherited in the Middle Ages is taken from here. Faced with this kind of skepticism, there is a

complementary double attitude: skepticism must then be refuted by showing that there is evident knowledge (the cogito, mathematics, revealed truths). Once refuted, however, it becomes legitimate to make a limited use of skepticism as a test to distinguish true and false knowledge. Use and refutation: a schema that we find throughout the Middle Ages. If the Augustinian model determines the whole of the medieval conception of skepticism, it will be enriched, however, by the superposition of different traditions. The first enrichment stems from the rediscovery of the pre-Socratic tradition through Aristotle, beginning in the twelfth century. Two sets of texts are important. One, stemming from the *Posterior Analytics*, and book II of the *Metaphysics*, drive the questions of what we must demonstrate and, more generally, justify. It is in this context that the medievals examine the problem of skepticism: can we know anything? Can we apprehend truth? The second set of texts is made up of book IV of the *Metaphysics*. The analyses of Heraclitean, Protagorean, and Democritean doctrines give rise to the examination of a host of arguments thought to be skeptical. According to Aristotle, upholding that all that is apparent is true makes it no longer able to distinguish the true from the false. More often, the reading of these texts allows giving an ontological basis to skeptical doctrines: it is because they hold, like Heraclitus, that all things are in flux, and because they deny the principle of noncontradiction that the Academics hold that we cannot know anything. The second enrichment is properly medieval and results from reflection, mostly from Duns Scotus, on the radical contingency of the created and on the omnipotence of the Divine. The basic idea is to not set a limit to Divine freedom. From here, we must emphasize that the created world is not simply the actualization of Divine Ideas, according to logical necessity, but that the status of this world is contingent and that it could be otherwise. In a like manner, we must pass to a working conception of God's omnipotence. God *de facto* intervenes by means of his Divine power in creating the world with a set of laws, but he maintains the possibility to intervene in the course of things to modify it, through his absolute power. Reflection

on the possibility of God substituting secondary causes in cognitive processes (to substitute the causality of the perceived object) leads to the idea of a deceptive God.

We find in the thirteenth century a resurgence of the problem of skepticism taken as a challenge put to our ability to gain knowledge. It is in this context (and even if Academics are not always explicitly mentioned) that the interest in the problem of our access to truth and our capacity to sufficiently justify our knowledge occurs. Schematically, we can distinguish between three types of responses to the skeptical challenge: an *a posteriori* response, or a weak response seeking to limit the scope of error in order to not give weight to skeptical arguments. It is a response that contextualizes knowledge. We find this notably in Thomas Aquinas and Siger of Brabant, and mostly in John Buridan. Two *a priori* or strong responses accept the presuppositions of skepticism and seek to face it on its terms. It consists of one part theories of knowledge that rest on illumination (in particular, St. Bonaventure and Henry of Ghent), and another part foundationalist theories that base knowledge in *a priori* principles, the clearest expression of which is found in Duns Scotus. We will examine briefly the positions of St. Bonaventure, Thomas Aquinas, and John Duns Scotus.

The skeptical question appears in Bonaventure in his questions on *The Knowledge of Christ* q. 4, as strongly tied to the teaching of Augustine. It displays an intellectualist reading of skepticism, seemingly inherited from a misunderstood Platonism. According to the skepticism identified by Bonaventure, Divine Light is the only mean of knowledge. Bonaventure criticizes this thesis as a reduction of all knowledge to knowledge of Divine Being. It removes the distinction between worldly knowledge (knowledge of the *viator*) and beatific vision, between the knowledge of things in God and direct knowledge of things, between science and wisdom, and between reason and revelation. The problem with skepticism is the reduction of knowledge to the one intelligible world (knowledge of Forms). And yet, this intelligible world is inaccessible to the human mind after the fall (the Christian dimension to

skepticism is explicit here). Faced with this kind of skepticism, Bonaventure defends another conception of illumination: Divine reason is the driving and regulating principle, that is, that which rules the action of human reason. There is no direct intervention as there is in the case of infused knowledge, but only God's presence in the act of intellectual knowing. However, it is just a step from created reason from whence it gets its partial character. God is the standard of Supreme Truth that allows for all inferior truth. The consequence of this recourse to Divine rule is the stability of the object of knowledge and the infallibility of knowledge, two necessary conditions for knowledge (infallibility on the side of the subject and stability on the side of the object). Thus, the conditions for knowledge required by the skeptics (a knowledge that cannot be false and of which we know is not false) can be filled in. But, we must add a final condition for knowledge: completeness in the understanding of the object. Indeed, there are three modes of being: being in spirit, worldly being, and being in the Divine Intellect. Created truth cannot grasp but the first two modes of being where truth is conditional: there is mutability of the sensible world, thus there is mutability in our thoughts of the sensible world. We must then grasp the last mode of being, which is impossible without Divine aid: the mind, not being transformed by God, has not complete, clear, and distinct knowledge. The idea of illumination is that Divine Ideas are the conditions and basis for abstraction, that is, for intellectual knowledge. There is an *a priori* structure to knowledge: we do not know Divine Ideas directly but they serve as standards for human knowledge. We thus find in Bonaventure a view of illumination tied to the theme of Heraclitean skepticism on the mutability of the sensible: evident knowledge supposes immutability, and this is only found in the Divine understanding. Rational thought is the highest form of knowledge that we can attain in this world, but it is a weakened form of the true intellectual knowledge that we will have in the glory of the beatific vision. We must distinguish between degrees of knowing and admit that our knowledge does not perfectly match certain criteria admitted to be necessary for knowledge such as clarity and

fullness. Theories of illumination, because of the importance of the Augustinian influence, are perfect examples of the use of skepticism: they use skeptical arguments to show the necessity of a divine guarantee and the insufficiency of purely natural means of knowledge, and they refute skepticism by means of this intellectual knowledge guaranteed by God. However, we find skepticism surfacing in such a theory since the completeness of knowledge is only guaranteed in an eschatological perspective.

We can present the contextualist position (which consists in limiting the scope of the validity of skeptical arguments to limit its reach) by borrowing Thomas Aquinas' view on the role of Adamic knowledge in the *Questions on Truth*, q. 18, a. 6. The question is to know if Adam, who had an ideal form of knowledge before the fall, could have erred. This thought experiment allows us to determine an exemplary situation from which we can evaluate our own knowledge. Thomas advances two arguments to show that Adam could not have been in error. First, before original sin, there could have been a defect but not a corruption. In epistemological terms, this signifies that either Adam knew truth, and he knew it completely and perfectly, or he did not know it at all. Thus, Adam could have ignored certain things (he is not omniscient) but could not err. Adam could not have incomplete knowledge since it stems from hasty assent. And yet, for Adam the assent is always proportional to the object known. Second, the intellect is created by God to be capable of truth. It can thus know the truth without error, as is attested by the indubitable knowledge of first principles. Consequently, error, the act of the intellect of confusing truth and falsity or approving an incomplete opinion, is a consequence of the fall, that is, a disorder making way for the natural order willed by God. Thus, Adam had but true, firm, and evident knowledge. Skeptical arguments allow to assure that we determine criteria of truth sufficient to elude the skeptical challenge. In the argument from dreams, Thomas replies by qualifying the weight of the objection: on the one hand, in dreams assent is not free, thus the question of error meant as epistemic responsibility does not arise. On the other hand, dreams

stem from sensation, thus it is a particular case. Since Thomas does not consider that we could be dreaming permanently, the objection from dreams is not relevant; not for Adam nor for us. In return, the argument from sensible illusions poses the problem of the conditions for perception and sensory Adamic knowledge. And yet, as a good Aristotelian, Thomas reckons that all knowledge stems from experience. His answer stays no less extremely classical: there is no error at the level of proper sensibles; error is in judgment. The entire skeptical problem is thus reduced to the problem of judgment: the gap between the intellect and the sensible given. The difficulty for us, by comparison with Adam, lies thus in the mastery of sensation by the intellect and in the application of the principle of correction. As such, Adam masters his sensation perfectly thus either he recognizes a situation of appropriateness between the intellect and its object and he judges veridically, or he recognizes an absence of this appropriateness and he corrects his judgment, or if correction is impossible (as when asleep), he differs it. What the case of Adam shows us is that skepticism results from an accidental situation of separating sensation and the intellect, a separation that we can bridge by the temporary suspension of judgment and by the correction of the sensible by the intellect. Thus in a general way, even after the fall, man is created capable of truth, and in normal conditions of cognitive function we are able to judge correctly. Error is but factual, and skepticism does but emphasize that we can occasionally ignore this or that parameter in the knowing of an object. Justifying our knowledge does not then consist in excluding all possible logical objections, of rejecting *a priori* all sources of error, but only in delimiting the scope of what we know and what we do not know. In as much, Thomas' answer is a *posteriori* and cannot, quite evidently, satisfy the skeptic.

John Duns Scotus, for his part, proposes in his *Commentary on the Sentences* L. I, d. 3, q. 4, a foundationalist and rationalist response to the question of justification by explaining the role of principles while at the same time maintaining the demand of infallibility. Against the skeptical position, Scotus aims to provide three categories of

infallible truths that cover the whole of the edifice of knowledge: logical truths, introspection (knowledge of one's mental states), sensible and experimental truths. In effect, Scotus distinguishes between sensation or direct perception and experience or induction (understood as a collection of sensations). The category of logical principles, examined first, regroups at once first principles and propositions known in themselves. The infallibility of these principles is connected to their logical form: these propositions are only known by the analysis of the terms by the connection of including the predicate in the subject. The knowledge of this relation accompanies the truth of this proposition and an evident assent of the intellect. We then have here an *a priori* form of knowledge independent of experience. The second category of evident truths is that of sensation and experience. First, experimental knowledge (i.e., induction) rests on two parameters: the frequency of a case and the addition of a causal principle. If a repeated experience reveals constant reactions in natural agents, then we can conclude with an infallible certitude that the observed effect is proper to this agent and that it will always produce the same effect. This observational reasoning is guaranteed by a causal principle known in itself, that is, a principle which belongs to the first category, according to Scotus, and which maintains that the effect which is frequently a restrained cause is the natural effect of this cause. The principles that base experience are found in sensible knowledge in a way. We must here distinguish two situations, either the convergence of the products of different senses or a conflict. In the first case, the convergence allows to conclude with absolute and infallible certainty about perception. In effect, this convergence supplies the principle of frequency to which induction calls upon. It is, once again, the causal dimension of knowledge that enables its justification. If an object produces uniform impressions that converge on two or more senses, we can then be sure of the truth of our perceptions. Conversely, in the second case, the certainty of sensation rests on the capacity of the intellect to correct the sense. In such a situation, truth is known only through *a posteriori* justifications, through the help of an



infallible intellectual knowledge and thanks to the convergence of several senses. Thus in the case of seeing distant things, sight may err but natural reason tells us that a distant object acts in a weakened manner. As such, once we have realized that sense cannot furnish reliable information in this context we can seek for ways to overcome this inadequacy. The third category is that of mental states: influenced by Augustine's *cogito*, Scotus holds that the apprehension of our own mental states is as certain as principles in themselves. Scotus thus defends a strong response to skepticism; a response that tries hard to defend a model of knowledge where truth, evidence, and infallibility are necessary conditions for knowledge. To do so, he employs a foundationalist and rationalist conception of knowledge: first principles of knowledge, the most evident principles, are *a priori* principles known by the intellect outside of all sensation. And these principles are the ultimate basis of knowledge, which permit the infallible justification of sensible truths. Therefore, we have of the movement of foundation of knowledge on intellectual principles: sensible truths are based on the principle of causality that justifies the cognitive value of sensation. The same causal principle, along with the principle of uniformity of nature, warrants induction. Thus, all reliability of experience comes from first principles, known *a priori* only through the analysis of terms.

Next to these attempts to refute skepticism we find a group of philosophers defending a fallibilist conception of knowledge, such that the majority of our knowledge is never absolutely evident and always susceptible to be otherwise. While most of these philosophers are active in the fourteenth century, the most important and the only to explicitly call himself a skeptic (*academicus*), is a philosopher from the twelfth century, John of Salisbury. This philosopher insists on the cognitive fallibility of Man; a weakness that renders difficult his access to truth: Man must be satisfied with mostly having likely knowledge, and his probabilistic truths conflict such that, Man, incapable of overcoming this is reduced to uncertainty and hesitancy (*Metalogicon*, IV, 40). John of Salisbury's theory of knowledge allows putting this moderate conception of skepticism into

place. This seems to be a fallback to a kind of fallibilism and a probabilism tied to the imperfection of our cognitive apparatus. Proposing a phenomenology of knowledge in several places, Salisbury emphasizes how the process, by which we gain knowledge passing through sensation, imagination, and memory (faculties of the synthesis of sensation) and then, by the prudence of reason and an intellectual judgment, runs the risk of incompleteness and error at each step. In describing the progressive elaboration of our concepts, stemming from sensation up to reason, he stresses hard that, fundamentally, all knowledge is approximate knowledge. The work of analysis and synthesis run at each level by different faculties, works to define precisely the object of knowledge by situating it by its differences and similarities, in relation to what is already known. What interests John of Salisbury are the steps of this approximation and the degrees of justification wherein our knowledge claims to be. A distinction is imposed between judgment (*sententia*) and opinion. Judgment, which is the object of prudence, creates a strong confidence that practically excludes error and allows a reliable approximation of truth, meanwhile opinion is an unjustified belief (*Metalogicon*, II, 5). John of Salisbury thus distinguishes between degrees of justification that determine an assent more or less firm depending on the reliability we can claim to. The importance accorded to the probable is justified both by the reality and the limits of our faculties. As such, to judge veridically with absolute certainty supposes on our part a capacity to judge which events are necessary. But specifically, such complete apprehension of the laws of nature is impossible for us and reserved to God alone: it is too difficult from our point of view to distinguish that which occurs often from that which occurs always (*Metalogicon*, II, 13). It is thus a recourse to a theme from Christian skepticism (only God knows truly what is true) which justifies the recourse to the probable in the study of nature, as far as possible, where thought about the contingent is permitted. From here, we are driven to a philosophical skepticism: the difficulty to perceive truth inclines us to follow the Academics. We must renounce certitude and necessity in the

field of natural philosophy since all that is corporeal and mutable, is contingent and free of necessity, and we must admit that demonstration is not possible but in the domain of mathematics.

## Cross-References

- ▶ [Augustine](#)
- ▶ [Bonaventure](#)
- ▶ [Certainty](#)
- ▶ [Divine Power](#)
- ▶ [Epistemology](#)
- ▶ [Henry of Ghent](#)
- ▶ [Induction](#)
- ▶ [John Buridan](#)
- ▶ [John Duns Scotus](#)
- ▶ [John of Salisbury](#)
- ▶ [Nicholas of Autrecourt](#)
- ▶ [Nicholas Oresme](#)
- ▶ [Peter Auriol](#)
- ▶ [Robert Holcot](#)
- ▶ [Sense Perception, Theories of](#)
- ▶ [Siger of Brabant](#)
- ▶ [Thomas Aquinas](#)
- ▶ [William Crathorn](#)
- ▶ [William of Ockham](#)

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## Sophisms

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### Abstract

In the medieval sense of the word, a sophism is a problematic sentence that is discussed in a technical manner, usually including a solution showing how the apparent problems arise. Sophisms were used from the twelfth century onward as exercises for student in their first years of university studies, but at least in the fourteenth century sophisms were also used for purposes more accurately described as research. The problems with single sentences were for the most part logical or linguistic, but also many issues of natural philosophy were addressed as sophisms. Collections of sophisms may have circulated as exercise books but in the mature form of the genre established authors wrote their own collections, since the solutions provided an efficient context for presenting philosophical doctrine.

## The Structure and Uses of Sophisms

A sophism in the medieval sense of the word is a problematic sentence that is argued for and against the case (*casus*), often against an assumed background situation. The solution of a sophism typically consists of the correct evaluation, an explanation of the problems involved, and a resolution of the argument or arguments for the wrong

evaluation. For example, “all men are all men” (*omnis homo est omnis homo*) can be argued for as a predication where the same is predicated of the same, or by pointing out that “this man is a man, and that man is a man, etc.” The same sentence can be argued against since from a universal predication a particular follows, but “some man is every man” is false, and thus the sophism itself must be false. The sophism is solved through distinguishing two senses of “every man”: the sophism is true if it is taken to claim that the set of all men is the set of all men, but false if it claims that each singular men would be all men.

Sophisms had an important role in the medieval university education. It seems clear that sophisms were actively discussed in medieval universities from the twelfth century to the Renaissance. In medieval writings, sophisms were most importantly discussed in specific collections of sophisms of different kinds. Different authors from the same period would typically discuss roughly similar lists of sophisms. It seems that sophisms would circulate among teachers in roughly the same manner in which logical examples circulate among logic teachers nowadays.

Twelfth- and thirteenth-century sophisms deal mainly with linguistic and logical issues. In the fourteenth century, problems of natural philosophy are addressed through sophisms. These topics belonged to the first years of medieval university education, and indeed sophisms seem to have formed an important part of the first years of study. In fourteenth-century Oxford, a student who had done two years of disputations on sophisms, was called “Sophista.” Later in the Renaissance, the title started to be used in a pejorative sense.

## Magister Abstractionum

A particularly important early collection of sophisms was known as the work of “*magister abstractionum*,” or “magister Ricardus Sophista.” The collection was composed around 1230s or 1240s and contained over 300 sophisms, which

are characteristically logico-linguistic. Scholarship has not yet satisfactorily identified the author. Richard Fishacre and Richard Rufus of Cornwall have been suggested among others. One possibility is that the collection evolved from the work of many authors using sophisms in their teaching. In any case, the collection circulated several decades as the work of “magister abstractionum,” and it was well known even in the 1330s.

### Natural Philosophy “*secundum imaginationem*”

In the fourteenth century, sophisms were used also for the purposes of natural philosophy. They were particularly important in the work of the so-called Oxford Calculators, especially Richard Kilvington and William Heytesbury. Commentators have wondered whether their sophisms really can be directed at first-year students, given the complexity of the issues involved. Rather, it may seem that sophisms were appropriated as a methodology for studying nature “*secundum imaginationem*,” which would involve assuming a casus and reasoning what would happen given such a casus. For example, assume that a hole is drilled through the earth and a stone dropped into it. Will it stop when it reaches its Aristotelian natural place at the center of the earth, or continue further as the *impetus*-theory of movement would have it? One crucial finding achieved by the *secundum imaginationem* – method that may have found its way to modern physics was the mean speed theorem.

### Logical Sophisms in the Fourteenth Century

One important technique used in the solution of sophisms was *expositio*, which typically turns a sentence containing a problematic term or expression into a conjunction of two or more simpler sentences. Thus, for example, “Socrates begins to be white” equals “Socrates is not white and immediately Socrates will be white.” Although *expositio* was a very general logical technique,

the sophisms on beginning and ceasing – on limit-decision problems – can be singled out as an especially important group of such sophisms where also questions of natural philosophy were dealt with.

Epistemic logic was one central interest of Richard Kilvington and William Heytesbury in their respective collections of sophisms. Kilvington’s sophism 47, for example, is “the king is seated,” when it is assumed that if the king is seated, you know that he is, and if he is not seated, you know that he is not. The gist of the sophism is that you may be forced to doubt whether you know that the king is seated, and whether such doubt is in general possible. Also William Heytesbury addresses the issue in his sophisms.

One interesting group of fourteenth-century sophisms concerns insolubles. For example, John Buridan’s *Summulae de dialectica* contains as the last part of the work a large collection of sophisms, including a group of 20 sophisms dealing with self-referential paradoxes. As Buridan does not tackle insolubles seriously anywhere else in his logic, it seems safe to suppose that at least he did not take sophisms simply as a teaching tool. Rather, sophisms were also considered a methodology for serious study.

### Cross-References

- ▶ [Insolubles](#)
- ▶ [John Buridan](#)
- ▶ [Oxford Calculators](#)
- ▶ [Richard Fishacre](#)
- ▶ [Richard Kilvington](#)
- ▶ [Richard Rufus of Cornwall](#)
- ▶ [William Heytesbury](#)

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## Sophonias

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### Abstract

Sophonias is the author of paraphrases of Aristotelian works, most probably active in the latter half of the thirteenth century (see Hunger I:25–26, 37 nn. 139–140, II:267–268; PLP 11 p. 49 no. 26424; Praechter in RE 15,2, col. 1099; Searby In: Goulet R (ed) *Dictionnaire des philosophes antiques*, VI. Paris, pp 473–477, 2016).

He is almost certainly to be identified with Sophonias, the monk from the same period, who lived in Constantinople and spent time in Thessaloniki, concerning whom reliable historical data exists.

### Biography

We begin with the works attributed to him as the basic starting point. Two paraphrases of Aristotle's *De anima* and *Parva naturalia*, attributed in the manuscripts to the "very wise Sophonias," form a clear point of departure in establishing his authorship. According to Wendland, the manuscripts of the *Parva naturalia* can be divided into two classes, one attributing the work to Sophonias and the other to Themistius. The latter attribution is clearly wrong, since the work is based on the later commentary of Michael of Ephesus. Sophonias must have lived long enough after Michael to allow for the text transmission of the latter to become corrupt, since he often agrees with the readings in the inferior group of manuscripts for Michael (cf. [Wendland CAG V.6 pp. VI, X–XI](#); see also [Rose 1867](#)).

Sophonias introduces *De anima* with a preface distinguishing between commentaries and paraphrases. The *De anima* preface is important both for its description of Sophonias' method and for the indication of his intention to apply his method first to *De anima* and then to other treatises (cf. [Sophonias 1883 De anima 2,38–3,1](#)). This provides grounds for attributing to one and the same author the similar, anonymous paraphrases of the *Categories*, the *Prior Analytics I*, and the *Sophistici elenchi*, all edited in vol. 23 of the *Commentaria in Aristotelem Graeca* (= *Sophonias 1884a, 1884b, 1884c, respectively*). The paraphrase of the *Prior Analytics* is erroneously attributed in some manuscripts to Themistius but is actually a compilation of the commentaries of Alexander and Philoponus.

Due to their similarities, however, all the treatises in *CAG 23* may reasonably be attributed to Sophonias. Thus, we are furnished with more precise arguments as to dating. Given the author's use of Blemmydes and Leo Magentenos, Ebbesen



(1981:333) regards a date after 1250 as very probable for the paraphrase of *Sophistici elenchi* and is inclined toward dating it after 1275. Apart from the Aristotelian paraphrases, there is also a brief letter from a “monk Sophonias” to Joseph the philosopher; this letter must have been written between 1307 and 1325, the period when Joseph lived in Constantinople (cf. Mercati 1925). There is also a declamation written in the person of “Paul discoursing in Athens” ascribed to the “very wise monk Sophonias” in *Codex Marcianus Graecus* 266 (Searby and Sjörs 2001; cf. Mioni 1981:383–386). From the vocabulary, style, and philosophical content of the declamation, it is likely that this author was the same as the Aristotelian paraphrast.

In recent times, Sophonias has also been suggested as the translator of parts of the *Speculum doctrinale* of Vincent de Beauvais into Greek. On ff. 225v–228r cod. Vaticanus gr. 1144 contains a collection of sentences under the title “Ἐκ τοῦ ἄκτορος λατινικοῦ βιβλίου” which, according to Sternbach 1900/01, goes back to books IV and V of the *Speculum*. This discovery remained unnoticed until in 1986 Aerts published an edition of the text in Vat. Gr. 1144. In 1997, Pérez Martín supplemented this edition with that of a similar text from cod. Vaticanus gr. 12, ff. 187r–193r. Pérez Martín considers it likely that the anonymous translator of the sentences in the book of the “actor” (= auctor) was the monk Sophonias, but her suggestion rests on slender grounds.

There are important references to Sophonias from this period in various other sources. We have, first of all, Pachymeres’ statement that Sophonias the priest-monk (hieromonachos) was sent by Andronikos II Palaiologos to Italy to negotiate the marriage of his son Michael IX to Catherine de Courtenay (Pachymeres, IX,5, ed. Failler 1984–2000: 227,22 ff.). This embassy, corroborated in historical records (cf. Perrat and Longnon 1967; Dölger 1960:18 no. 2156a; Failler 2002), ended without success in 1296. Moreover, cod. Vat. gr. 1104 ff. 23–46 contains an important letter to Sophonias from Simon of Constantinople, a Greek speaker and Dominican friar, which makes reference to an embassy to Charles d’Anjou as

having already occurred; portions of this letter are published in Laemmer (1866) t. II, t. I, sectio I, 121–125, sectio II, app. XXXII–XXXV, sectio III 312–314. The same friar Simon (c. 1235–1325) dedicated the second book of his work *De processione Spiritus Sancti etiam ex Filio* to Sophonias, using the title *hieromonachos* (cf. Congourdeau 1987: 165–74). Both Sophonias and Manuel Holobolos (c. 1245–1310/14) are described as typifying well-known intellectuals of the preceding generation in a letter directed to Makarios Chrysokephalos, metropolitan of Philadelphia (Walther 1973:229, 28–30). A Latin manuscript in the library of Uppsala University contains a treatise written by Guilelmus Bernardus de Gaillac (Guillaume Bernard) who, in 1307, founded the Dominican monastery in Pera. On f. 5r of this treatise (Stegmüller 1953:342), written after he had left Pera, Guillaume reveals that he was personally acquainted with Sophonias the monk, for he informs us that Sophonias the “kalogeros or monk” knew both Greek and Latin and “had suffered persecution on account of his confession of the true faith as taught by the Roman Church.” Sophonias’ connections with the Roman Church may be one reason why the emperor sent him on an embassy to the West.

Thus, in the same period in which Sophonias the paraphrast of Aristotle must be assumed to have been working, we also find Sophonias the monk, well versed in the intellectual issues of the day, a Greek equipped with the knowledge of Latin, with ties to Dominicans in Constantinople and Pera (cf. Congourdeau 1987:165–174, 175–181). A pertinent observation in this regard has been added by Congourdeau 1987:180 n. 26, namely, that the letter of Simon to Sophonias, written to him as a good friend but before his apparent adoption of the Roman faith, contains numerous references to Aristotle, whom Simon does not cite in his other extant letters (cf. also Congourdeau 1987:168 n. 19). Given this background, a number of scholars have claimed that Sophonias the monk is identical with the paraphrast. Already Fabricius suggested that the paraphrast was the monk to whom Simon of Constantinople had written (*Bibl. gr.*, vol. XI



p. 714 = Lib. V c. XLI). Valentin Rose argued strenuously for the identification of the two, and he has been followed in this by subsequent scholars.

One complication in tracing the history of Sophonias is presented by an extant letter dated 1308 and written by the priest-monk (hieromonachos) Sophronias to Charles d'Anjou (Charles de Valois), addressing him as "emperor of the Romans"; this monk was one of the five Byzantine supporters in high positions who wrote to Charles, urging him to take the Byzantine throne to save it from the Turks (cf. Congourdeau 1987:181 n. 28; Kourousès 1974:312 n. 1; Laiou 1972:216). Was this Sophronias really the monk Sophonias? It would seem so, especially given the embassy to Charles and the attested "conversion" of Sophonias to the Roman Church, despite objections raised by Laiou (p. 216) as to the names being "quite different." The name "Sophronias" occurs only once, on the back of the parchment letter, in the bold address to Charles as emperor of the Romans, according to the text edited in Moranvillé. The name was omitted in the original edition of the letter in Du Cange (1657) and appeared first in print in Omont's revision (Moranvillé 1890:86). The salient point here is that the name "Sophronias" is so rare as not to be included in any form in either the *Lexicon of Greek Personal Names* or the *Thesaurus Linguae Graecae*. Since the name appears not to have been in use at all, one may speculate, given the rest of our knowledge about him, that the author of the letter to Charles is our monk Sophonias and that the name on the back of the page is some kind of error written by someone other than the original sender.

In any case, the identification of the paraphrast and the monk provides a coherent historical context and should be regarded as very probable. Hayduck (CAG 23,1 p. V n. 2) raises one minor objection, saying that the identification of the two does not entirely suit the date of Laur. gr. VII,35 as estimated by Bandini and by Hayduck's colleague Vitelli, though this point is left undeveloped. This ms is dated to the thirteenth and fourteen centuries, the paraphrase of *De anima* belonging to the earlier part. This does not, however, present any real difficulties, given that the ms, while not

regarded as the archetype, is held by Hayduck to be very close to the archetype (*pace* Ebbesen 1981:333). Harlfinger 1976 has more recently described the ms simply as dating from the thirteenth to fourteenth centuries.

## Thought

Although today we might scoff at the endeavor, paraphrasing Aristotelian treatises as difficult as the *De anima* is an impressive enterprise in any language, let alone in the higher style of ancient Greek. It may well have been undertaken in connection with teaching, but we have as yet no further evidence on that point. As he explains in the preface to *In De anima*, Sophonias aimed not merely at paraphrase but at a combination of paraphrase and commentary. For him, the defining characteristic of a commentary is that the commentator divides the philosophical work into discrete, verbatim quotations and adds his own clarification of the philosopher's words that, as Sophonias states, are often "oracular" in their obscurity. Characteristic of paraphrases is that the paraphrast speaks in the voice of Aristotle, rewriting the text in his own style and clarifying the meaning through examples and similes, doing this in a continuous composition as opposed to one arranged under different headings. In the paraphrases conventionally ascribed to him, Sophonias never cites either Aristotle or his other sources by name, but he stays very close to the original texts, abridging considerably, replacing difficult or obscure words here and there, and adding some glosses and examples. Whole sentences are lifted directly from Aristotle with scarcely a change or only moderate ones. The major changes are due to abridgement and omission. The same approach is also applied to his commentary sources, which, moreover, also go through a process of combination.

Most historians of philosophy hold that Sophonias contributes nothing of his own in the way of argument or interpretation, apart from his peculiar method of paraphrase and compilation as well as certain scattered remarks here and there (but see

Blumenthal 1997; Bydén 2006; Ebbesen 1981: 333–340; Tatakis 2003:203). However, both at the beginning and end of the *De anima*, Sophonias does allow himself to speak in his own words. In the preface, he explains his aims and methods, as already mentioned; in an epilogue, he reveals his philosophical, or rather theological, interest in how Aristotle's psychology relates to the question of the immortality of the soul and the resurrection of the body, an interest he has also already indicated earlier in the treatise (see CAG 23,1 p. 7. 29–38, and p. 132,39 – 133,24; cf. Constantinides 1982:131, n. 109). With regard to the Aristotelian tradition, Sophonias' chief value today lies in his offering an indirect tradition for the textual transmission of Aristotle, and he is occasionally cited as a textual witness by the editors of Aristotle. He has proven valuable in corroborating fragments of Philoponus' lost commentary on Book 3 of *De anima* (cf. Van Riet 1965) and may prove useful in similar as yet unstudied contexts.

## Cross-References

- ▶ Alexander of Aphrodisias and Arabic Aristotelianism
- ▶ George Pachymeres
- ▶ John Philoponus
- ▶ Leo Magentenos
- ▶ Michael of Ephesus
- ▶ Nikephoros Blemmydes
- ▶ *Parva Naturalia*, Commentaries on Aristotle's
- ▶ Posterior Analytics, Commentaries on Aristotle's
- ▶ Themistius, Arabic

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## Species: Sensible and Intelligible

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### Abstract

Aristotle regarded the mind as capable of grasping forms detached from matter. Most of his medieval and Renaissance followers interpreted this conception along the lines of a theory of abstraction, grounded in the mediating role of representational forms called “intentions” or “species.” The theory of species addresses the issue of how perception and cognition of sensible reality is brought about; it attempts a non-circular analysis of this process, that is, with the aid of formal principles, such as the species that are not direct objects of perception or cognition, and of mental capabilities, such as the agent intellect, that are not knowing faculties. This approach was not universally accepted. In particular, after Thomas Aquinas’ death, a long series of controversies developed about the necessity of species. The controversy spans a period from the second half of the thirteenth century until the end of the seventeenth century. Here only medieval discussions are analyzed.

“Species” in classical Latin had an active sense (“seeing,” “sight,” “look,” “view”) and a passive sense (“outward appearance,” “shape,” “form,” “figure”). Cicero translated the Platonic *idéa* with “species” or “forma” (*Academica*, I, viii). Seneca introduced the Latin “*idea*” (*Epistulae*, 58 and 65), but later writers, such as Apuleius and Augustine, continued to use “*forma*” or “*species*” for the same Platonic term. Most likely, the medieval controversy about species would have

taken a different course, if the Aristotelian *eidōs* in *De anima*, III had not been translated with “species” (passive sense), in addition to the other rendering “forma.” This translation significantly affects the philosophical perspective, because in medieval philosophy “species” assumes instrumental and representational connotations, whereas the Aristotelian form stands for the defining characteristics of a thing. The Arabic-Latin version of *De anima* by Michael Scotus (c. 1220) offers “forma” for *eidōs* in the crucial sections about the presence of the form of the stone in soul and about intellectual soul as *topos* or *eidōs eidon* (*De anima*, III.8, 431b30-32a3). “Species” for *eidōs* is the rendering of the *Vetus Translatio* (by James of Venice, around the middle of the twelfth century) in the same sections – an example followed by William of Moerbeke, whose translation set the terms for the subsequent species controversies.

According to the theory of species, sense perception occurs when sense organs are affected by external stimuli (sensible species); it consists essentially in the production of sensory representations called “*phantasmata*,” i.e., the product of the inner senses (common sense, imagination or phantasy, “*aestimativa*” and/or “*cogitativa*”), capable of organizing and transforming the information received from sense organs and external senses. Then the active feature of the human soul (agent intellect) derives, by abstraction from sensible representations, an intelligible species, which is received by the mind, and allows the latter to know, by an individual and simple act, the “*quidditas*” associated with the intelligible species. The sensible species is the link between sensible objects and the sense organs, while intelligible species bridges a receptive, interpretation-independent activity (sense perception), and the more specifically cognitive processes such as judgment, reflection, discursive thinking, and syllogistic reasoning. Thus, the sensible species which impinge on the sense organs and the intelligible species which trigger the mental act are strictly instrumental, that is, they are viewed as *quo* and not as *quod* (Thomas Aquinas, *S. theol.*, I, q. 12, a. 9; q. 14, a. 5; q. 85, a. 2; *De ver.*, q. 10, a. 8, ad 2um). This means that human soul grasps

what is transmitted through relevant intermediate “events,” rather than these intermediate events themselves; it grasps the sensible essences progressively detached from matter and individuating conditions. The intentional species must be distinguished from the so-called “*species expressa*,” which corresponds to the concept.

Medieval discussions of mental representation are not only constrained by Aristotle’s cognitive psychology, but also by Augustine’s views on “species” and cognition, and the Arabic development of the idea that cognitive processes involve progressive abstraction through perceptual and cognitive faculties up to immaterial contents. Influenced by Stoic doctrines on sense perception, Augustine assigned a prominent function in our knowledge of sensible reality to (what he calls) the “species” (i.e., shape, figure or form) of material things. He postulated the existence of a chain of entities, interchangeably referred to as “forms,” “images,” “similitudes” or “species,” originating in sensible bodies, penetrating sense organs and eventually reaching perceptual and cognitive faculties (*De musica*, VI, c. 11; *De Genesi ad litteram*, XII, c. 24; *De trinitate*, XI, c. 9). Their presence enables one to attain knowledge of distant bodies or to recall objects perceived in the past. Arabic commentators embodied Hellenistic ideas on cognitive impressions and mental representations in their interpretation of Peripatetic cognitive psychology. The evolution of the concept of “*intentio*” – the Latin translation of *ma‘qul*, the Arabic translation of the Greek *noema*, and of *ma‘na*, which reaches back to the Hellenistic *ennoia*, based in turn on a Stoic-Neoplatonic mediation of the Aristotelian *logos* – in Arabic philosophy, from Alhazen to Averroes, enables one to discern various ingredients of the doctrine of intentional species in Scholastic cognitive psychology. The Arabic intention also echoes the Epicurean *prolepsis* (the effect of an involuntary and unconscious mental mechanism, viewed as the basis for conceptualization), and the *phantasiai kataleptikai* of the Stoics (unerring cognitive impressions, providing reliable data for discursive reasoning): it is both a representational item and the result of the soul’s operations on the effects of sensation. Alhazen’s

intentions, material, albeit non-corpuscular, messengers of specific features of the sensible object, reappear in the doctrine of (sensible) species, and particularly in the strand associated to perspectivistic optics. Avicenna's and Averroes' doctrines of intention, which merely represents the sensible thing-to-be-known, provide rather sophisticated accounts of how a perceptual content is delivered to and becomes present in the soul. In Avicenna, the feature that moves the senses is captured as "*intentio*" by the inner senses, which are capable of some rudimentary form of abstraction. Also, Averroes distinguished between the presence of a perceptual content in the soul as "*intentio*," and the sensible object as such. Avicenna and Averroes, however, did not distinguish precisely, at the intellectual level, between representation and known content. In point of fact, it is not until Aquinas that this distinction is explicitly drawn and convincingly argued for.

After the spread of Aristotelianism in the West, two different doctrines of species were developed by Roger Bacon (and other representatives of perspectivistic optics) and by Thomas Aquinas. Roger Bacon worked out a doctrine of the multiplication of species, based on the central claim that all natural causation occurs according to a process of emanation, the paradigmatic example of which is the propagation of light (Lindberg 1983: IIII–IXXI). Bacon; significantly broadens the meaning of the term "species": no longer used to describe specific perceptual events, it comes to denote the likeness emanating from any given object, independently of whether a percipient being is present to receive it, defining the central meaning of "*species*" as "*primus effectus agentis*." E.g., the visible object generates or "multiplies" species of light in the transparent medium (*De mult. specierum*, II.i, 90), proceeding in all directions through the medium until they reach and are "impressed" on the eyes of the viewer. Once received in the sense organ, each species is again multiplied along the optic nerves into the internal senses. Thus, Bacon provides a physical analysis of the processes that are causally responsible for vision in particular, and for sense perception in general. The internal sensitive

faculties of the soul complete the process of apprehending sensible objects. This does not entail that the process of multiplication of the species continues at the intellectual level, and exerts influence upon conceptualization. Bacon's view on this point is akin to Augustine's, who adopted a mechanical model only for the initial stages of sense perception. When Bacon speaks of species present in the rational soul and originating from the "*cogitativa*," he merely qualifies them as instruments of our soul, without presupposing any abstraction from or impression of these species: Bacon maintains that all species are essentially material, whereas the human soul is strictly spiritual (*Opus maius*, pars V, 9).

Thomas Aquinas' theory of mental representation displays a complete symmetry between sense perception and intellectual knowledge, distinguishing in both stages between *quod* and *quo*. In its contact with external reality, the human soul grasps the sensible object in its formal structure, that is, in its "*esse spirituale*" or "*intentionale*" (*In De anima*, I, lectio X, 159). Perception is an intentional and causal transaction between soul and reality (*In De anima*, II, lectio XXIV, 553), and depends on sensible species, that is, on the external object inasmuch as it affects the medium and the sense organs. Sensible species are brought about by an action of bodies, inasmuch as they participate in a mode of action proper to separate substances (*De pot.*, q. 5, a. 8). The full actualization of the physiological structures of the senses enables the human soul to construct a representational device called phantasm. The phantasm, in turn, enables the agent intellect to produce the intelligible species. The intellect abstracts and receives the species from the senses. Their ultimate origin, however, is the divine light, giving rise to the "*lumen intellectus agentis*," which produces them effectively (*Summa theol.*, I, q. 84, a. 4, ad 1um). Although the various modes of being for intellect, species and object may change, they are identical with respect to their formal structure in the cognitive act. Hence, according to Thomas, man does not know a deformed, "spiritualized" object: he is capable of grasping the intelligible structure of sensible objects, for material beings naturally tend toward

an “*esse spirituale*” – in the same way the human mind is capable of containing more forms than just its own.

The doctrine of species began to be perceived as controversial during the later thirteenth century. Roughly speaking, criticisms involve two main types of objections. Ontological objections purport to show that physiologically embedded representations cannot determine the immaterial soul. Logical objections attempt to demonstrate that the idea of a formal mediation in perception and/or intellectual knowledge is intrinsically inconsistent. Major critics, including Henry of Ghent and William Ockham, argue that the sole purpose of perception and knowledge, according to the species doctrine, is to construct an internal copy of the perceived or known thing. But this view involves an infinite regress: if seeing or knowing simply amounted to constructing a copy of the thing seen, one would have to make another copy to see the copy, and so on. The fourteenth-century controversies on the issue of species – marked by lively exchange and mutual influences between Franciscans, Dominicans, Averroists, and Augustinian Hermits – show that it is misleading to speak schematically of a conflict of ideas between doctrinal schools. Staunch defenders and vigorous opponents of the species can be found among Dominicans as well as Franciscans. The Dominicans mostly abide by Aquinas’ teachings. There are, however, outstanding exceptions, such as Durand of St. Pourçain. Influential representatives of this order, such as Thomas Sutton, suggest essential modifications; others, such as Hervaeus Natalis, express strong reservations. In turn, the psychological views of Duns Scotus and his disciples are heavily influenced by Aquinas. Furthermore, one may detect doctrinal affinities on the generation of intelligible species between some Augustinian Hermits – Giles of Rome and Alphonsus Vargas Toletanus, for example – and the Averroist school.

Henry of Ghent accepted sensible species, but rejected intelligible species (*Quodlibeta* IV, q. 21, and V, q. 14): (1) abstracted species presupposes that the intellect cannot receive anything from the senses; (2) any mediating species would become the object of knowledge, thus preventing a

cognitive grasp of essences; (3) the intelligible species as a singular entity could never mediate knowledge of a universal essence; (4) postulating intelligible species forces one to accept the undesirable consequence that the intellectual act is a necessary physical phenomenon, independent of the will; (5) a formal mediation leads to an infinite regress of cognitive representations.

Peter John Olivi rejected both sensible and intelligible species, because he thought it crucial to support the active nature of the cognitive powers (*In II Sent.*, q. 58 and q. 74). Perception occurs by means of a “virtual” or an “actual attention,” and mental acts do not depend upon intelligible species. In general, if intelligible species were the effective principle of intellectual cognition, cognitive capabilities should be assigned to them, rather than to the soul. Any interaction between species and the cognitive faculty in the production of the cognitive act must be excluded, since the latter, like the intelligible species, is a simple effect. Moreover, if species mediate between mind and object then either the proper object of the mind becomes unattainable or objects can be known both through species and through themselves. Thus, Olivi holds that representation through species interposes a veil between mind and object. Finally, if the species is an instrument in the production of mental acts, then the cognitive faculty would have a function different from the generation of knowledge. This last claim derives from Olivi’s basic assumption that the cognitive faculty either has an exclusive role in the generation of knowledge or none at all.

Other critics active at the turn of the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, such as Godfrey of Fontaines, Radulphus Brito and John Baconthorpe, identified the species with the intellectual act itself, and argued for this identification using the Aristotelian thesis that the mind is “nothing” before it effectively knows.

John Duns Scotus considered the doctrine sensible species as uncontroversial. Instead, answering criticisms of Henry of Ghent, Peter John Olivi and Godfrey of Fontaines, he advanced two related arguments for the necessity of intelligible species (*Ordinatio*, lib. I, dist. 3, q. 1): (1) sensible things, in their concrete existence, are not



“proportionate” to the immaterial intellectual act, and must be differently “presented” to the human mind; and (2) knowledge of the universal can be attained only through species.

Most medieval Averroists, including John of Jandun, accepted sensible and intelligible species. The production of the latter by perceptual faculties ensure that human beings can be cognitively joined to a separate intellect. Indeed, Averroist cognitive psychology is bound to postulate links preserving the continuity of the causal chain from perception to knowledge: gaps in this causal chain would show that no effective co-operation occurs between sensible faculties and the unique intellect.

Many critics of species exclude a priori any direct contact between mind and (the information contained in) sensory representations. The most extreme formulation of this view is in Durand of St. Pourçain (*In II Sent.*, dist. III, q. 6, 9–10), who gave his opinion that the doctrine of species was introduced to explain sense-perception, and was transferred to the explanation of intellectual knowledge; he then proceeds to criticize the doctrine of sensible species as follows: “*Omne illud, per quod, tamquam per repraesentativum, potentia cognitiva fertur in alterum, est primo cognitum; sed species coloris in oculo non est primo cognita seu visa ab eo, immo nullo modo est visa ab eo ergo per ipsam, tamquam per repraesentativum, non fertur in aliquid aliud.*” Rejecting any mediating principles, Durandus stated that the mind has a direct and conscious cognitive grasp of whatever may “encounter,” determine or influence it. The thesis of the direct cognitive grasp of sensible objects will be more convincingly argued for by William of Ockham, who expressed the most radical opposition to the species, and put forward an alternative view that avoids the metaphysical obstacles usually associated with the idea of formal mediation. He regarded species as ontologically suspect and as epistemologically superfluous, and introduced a new view of perception and intellectual cognition, based essentially on a direct (semantic) relation between the human mind and sensible reality. Ockham rejected both sensible and intelligible species on the ground that intermediary entities

or functions between the human intellect and individual things would terminate the cognitive act, thus making actual objects inaccessible. This criticism of the species doctrine, whose principal targets are Thomas Aquinas and Duns Scotus (*In II Sent.*, q. 13), is strictly related to Ockham’s dismissal of epistemological views dominated by the perspectivist-optical model, inspired in its central features to the Arabic interpretation of the Neoplatonic theory of emanation. His five arguments in defense of the claim that (intelligible) species are superfluous became a milestone in the species controversy: (1) if the species has to secure the assimilation of soul and object, then one would only attain knowledge of accidents, through processes possibly involving an infinite regress; (2) there is no need of species representing objects, for the objects are capable of representing themselves; (3) the idea that matter cannot interact with immaterial entities does not ensure the necessity of species for knowledge acquisition; on the contrary, it establishes that sensible reality does not play a causal role in the production of intelligible species. If, by contrast, one assumes that the material world has a causal efficacy on the mental realm, then it can also weigh directly on the production of the intellect; (4) only the object and the intellect are needed in cognition, because intellectual knowledge does not depend on anything else; (5) assuming that species are necessary for joining object and mind involves, once again, the threat of infinite regress. After Ockham, other authors reject or simply dispense with intelligible species. For example, Gregory of Rimini played down the role of species, grounding the primary acquisition of knowledge in intuition, and understanding species chiefly in terms of memory contents. Roughly speaking, Gregory held that the mind has direct access to cognitive contents that are committed to memory as representations.

During the first fifty years following Aquinas’ death, sensible and intelligible species were the subject of intense philosophical dispute. From the 1320s onward, the issue gradually disappeared from the philosophical agenda, and few doctrinal innovations were introduced until the second half of the fifteenth century. Three characteristic

features mark the fifteenth-century speculation as the cradle of later Renaissance disputes. Firstly, many authors advanced profoundly eclectic views, whether convincingly argued for or manifestly inconsistent, as is illustrated by the works of John Capreolus and Paul of Venice, respectively. Secondly, a return to Albert's psychology, sometimes interpreted in decidedly Neoplatonic terms, dominates the psychological accounts of some North-European Dominicans. Thirdly, a "new" Thomism arises during the second half of this century, as is exemplified by the works of John Versor and Peter Crockaert.

## Cross-References

- ▶ [Epistemology](#)
- ▶ [Intentionality](#)
- ▶ [Intuitive and Abstractive Cognition](#)
- ▶ [Mental Word/Concepts](#)
- ▶ [Philosophical Psychology, Jewish Tradition](#)
- ▶ [Philosophy, Arabic](#)
- ▶ [Sense Perception, Theories of](#)

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## Stephen Langton

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### Abstract

Stephen Langton was born in England around the mid-twelfth century. Around 1170 he arrived in Paris, where he was to remain until 1206, becoming one of the most outstanding

theologians of the newly established university. In 1206, Pope Innocent III made him a cardinal and brought him to Rome, where he probably taught theology until 1207. Hoping thereby to resolve a disputed election to the see of Canterbury, the pope consecrated him archbishop on June 17th, 1207. But King John refused to accept him in England until July 16th, 1213. SL spent the intervening years in exile, mainly at the Cistercian abbey of Pontigny. Once in England, he supported the rebel barons against John and played a key role in the negotiations leading to Magna Carta (June 1215). He was subsequently suspended by the pope and left Britain once again. Also in 1215 he took part in the Fourth Lateran Council. Reestablished by Honorius III in 1216, he governed the archdiocese until his death in 1228. All SL's numerous works that have come down to us are theological works: he did not write any philosophical works nor did he comment on any philosophical text. His *oeuvre* as a whole can be considered as the enactment of a great project of theological training inspired by Peter Cantor, which comprises the clarification of theological statements, a comprehensive study of the Bible, and also a pastoral training for theologians, aiming to make them good preachers and zealous propagandists for the sacrament of penance. Nevertheless, in three of his works (the *Sentence Commentary*, the *Summa magistri Stephani*, and the *Quaestiones theologiae*) SL enunciates a series of philosophical positions, mainly in the field of logic and semantics, but also on other topics, such as God's will and omnipotence, human freedom, and the nature of the soul.

SL was born around the mid-twelfth century (probably between 1150–1155) into a Lincolnshire family of the minor nobility. Around 1170 he arrived in Paris, where he was to remain until 1206, becoming one of the most outstanding theologians of the newly-established university. In

1206 Pope Innocent III made him a cardinal and brought him to Rome, where he probably taught theology until 1207. Hoping thereby to resolve a disputed election to the see of Canterbury, the pope consecrated him archbishop on June 17th, 1207. But King John refused to accept him in England until July 16th, 1213. SL spent the intervening years in exile, mainly at the Cistercian abbey of Pontigny. Once in England, he supported the rebel barons against John and played a key role in the negotiations leading to Magna Carta. The pope suspended him from his functions, and he left England for Rome, where he took part in the Fourth Lateran Council. Reestablished by Honorius III in 1216, he lingered in Rome until 1218 before going back to England. In the following years, despite some other trips to Continental Europe and to Rome, he devoted himself to the government of the archdiocese until his death, at Slindon (Sussex) at the beginning of July (6th or 9th), 1228.

SL's works comprise the following: a commentary on Peter Comestor's *Historia scholastica*, the first version of which probably existed before 1176, while the text was reworked in 1193; a commentary on Peter Lombard's *Sentences*, which has been called the "first example of a genuine Sentence Commentary" (Landgraf 1939); a commentary on the Pauline Epistles (which constitutes an imposing *Glossa in Magnam Glossaturam*, or "super-gloss" on Peter Lombard's *Collectanea*), and one on the Catholic Epistles. From his work of presiding over theological disputations in the Paris schools between c. 1180 and 1206 at least 200 *Quaestiones theologiae* (in different versions) are preserved. He also began a short theological *Summa*, which remained unfinished. He commented upon most of the biblical books from Genesis to Revelation (except Job, Psalms, Baruch, and Daniel; Gospels lost), and his commentaries are preserved in different redactions. Besides this, he wrote several works to support pastoral care and more than 300 of his sermons survive (if we consider the various versions, there are almost 500 of them).

All SL's numerous works that have come down to us are theological works: he did not write any philosophical works (such as a treatise on logic) nor did he comment on any philosophical texts. His *oeuvre* as a whole can be considered as the enactment of a great project of theological training inspired by Peter Cantor, which comprises the clarification of theological statements, a comprehensive study of the Bible, and also a pastoral training for theologians, aiming to make them good preachers and zealous propagandists of the sacrament of penance (Quinto 1998, 2005b). Nevertheless, in three of his works (the *Sentence Commentary*, the *Summa magistri Stephani*, and the *Quaestiones theologiae* – the Commentary on Paul's Epistles have not been sufficiently studied yet) SL makes clear a series of philosophical positions, mainly in the field of logic and semantics. While deeply committed to Peter Lombard's theological project, he joins other contemporary Lombardians by critiquing and developing it, expanding on topics and arguments in the *Sentences* and substituting or adding to the authorities cited. For instance, in discussing the Lombard's definition of *persona* he demonstrates a direct knowledge of Boethius' *Contra Eutichen et Nestorium*. His acquaintance with Aristotle is probably limited to the logical works: although Landgraf maintained that SL referred to the *De anima* in his *Sentence Commentary* (ed. p 123), the passage can also be understood as a reference to *top.* IV, 5 (Bk 126a: Quinto 2010:77), which he also quoted in his question *De libero arbitrio* (ed. Ebbesen and Mortensen 1985:183). The topics which mainly lead SL to express his philosophical views are Trinitarian theology and the problem of the hypostatic union, but he also uses a highly technical method of analyzing statements in other subjects too, such as ethics (Quinto 2009:374–377) and, in particular, sacramental theology (Rosier-Catach 2004:231–260, 346–401, 456–461).

The most characteristic feature of SL's thought is his aim to regulate the use of human language in theology, with the following principal goals: (a) to justify, as far as possible, the validity of theological statements already known to be true (because they are accepted by the ecclesiastical tradition);

(b) to avoid other statements known to be false (or nonorthodox) deriving from accepted theological statements; and (c) to “generate” from admitted premises other correct theological propositions, whose orthodoxy is not warranted by tradition, but by the internal coherence of the system itself (cfr Ebbesen 1987; Valente 2008:374, 385–386). In other terms, SL's “system” aims at explaining *why* certain theological statements are true and others are false, even though the latter seem to be necessarily implied by the former. One important tool he uses in this project is a principle that has been called “the *eadem ratione* principle,” described by Ebbesen (1987:28) as follows: “This principle, which is ever-present though never explicitly formulated, states that if some proposition or inference, *p*, is true or valid, then *q* is too unless it can be shown that *q* differs from *p* in some relevant respect.” In order to show why some statements or inferences differ from others that seem at first sight to be similar or identical, Langton concentrates in particular on the meaning of the terms. For him, meaning is influenced, on one hand, by the propositional context (although with some limitations, see Valente 2008:378–379) and, on the other, it depends on different semantic components (*suppositio*, *significatio*, *consignificatio*, and *modus significandi/modus supponendi*) which contribute to the total meaning of each term. For this reason we can say that SL elaborates a semantic which is both *analytic*, and, at the same time, *contextual*.

As far as the Trinity is concerned, the system recognizes nine “entities,” namely, (1) the one essence (called *Deus*, *deitas*, *essentia*); (2) the three Persons (*Pater*, *Filius*, *Spiritus Sanctus*), and (3) five “notions” or personal properties which distinguish the Persons (*paternitas*, *innascibilitas*, *spiratio*, *filiatio*, and *processio*). The essence can be referred to by neutral pronouns (*quid*), the Persons by masculine (*quis*), and the notions by feminine (*quae*). These three different groups of nouns and pronouns (*quid*, *quis*, *quae*) are in theological discourse the equivalent of what the ten Aristotelian categories are in ordinary language, and can be called “quasi-categories”. These distinctions are particularly

important when placed together with the fundamental principle of absolute divine simplicity, according to which “everything (*quidquid*) that is in God is God.” This makes it possible, for instance, to explain why, although the Persons *are* God, and there are three of them, we cannot infer from this that there are three Gods: Persons and Essence, in fact, belong to different quasi-categories (*quis, quid*), and predicates of the Persons cannot be transferred to the Essence (SL, *In Sent.* I, 1, 2, ed. Landgraf p 3; Ebbesen 1987:405–408). In the same way, the distinction between different semantic components of terms allows us to maintain a difference between sentences on God (which are otherwise mere tautologies). For example, “*Deus est iustus*” and “*Deus est misericors*” could mean the same, since both can be transformed into *Deus est Deus* (God, in fact, *is* his own mercy, as he also *is* his own justice). These sentences, however, are different thanks to the semantic component called *consignificatio*: although *iustus* and *misericors* both *suppone* and *signify* the divine essence, they also *consignify* (or signify secondarily) different effects in creatures and this makes the two sentences differ (SL, *Summa*, ed. Ebbesen and Mortensen 1985:41–47). “*Deus est iustus*” and “*Deus est iustitia*” are also different: although *iustus* and *iustitia* *suppone* and signify the same thing (i.e., the divine essence), they differ in their *modus significandi*, *iustus* signifies divine essence “*ut inhaerentem*” and *iustitia* signifies it “*ut supponentem*” (SL, *Summa*, ed. Ebbesen and Mortensen 1985:37). In conclusion, SL’s “system” can be seen on one hand as a way of preventing the formation of incorrect theological statements, and on the other as a way of preventing theological discourse from being a mere repetition of tautologies. In this context, an important role is played by the theory of supposition of terms, whose elaboration seems to take place at the same time in logic and theology (not without reciprocal influence between the two disciplines) toward the end of twelfth century (Ebbesen 1987:419–24; Valente 2008:361–374, 388–389).

Because of his reverence for the normative value of traditional authorities SL can be considered a pupil of Peter Lombard (like Peter of

Poitiers and Prepositinus of Cremona), but for his interest in a systematic description of the functioning of theological language, his more mature use of logics and semantics (besides grammar), and his desire to “generate” (and not only to “repeat”) orthodox propositions, he can be somehow linked to the school of Gilbert of Poitiers.

In any case, SL is characterized by his strong originality and independence of judgment (on his openly stated disagreement from Peter Lombard, see Landgraf 1939:119–127; Quinto 2010:72–76). Commenting on Peter Lombard’s *Sent.* I, 45, c. 7, he states his disagreement with Augustine’s teaching on God’s will in *ench.* 24, 96: for Augustine, though evil is not good, it is nevertheless good that evil exists besides good. The reason for this is that, since God does not prevent evil from being performed, the existence of evil is somehow contained within God’s will. For SL, the fact that God does not prevent evil does not mean that He wants evil, or that He wants evil to be. On the contrary, God simply “does not want” evil. In order to maintain this, SL distinguishes between two meanings of “does not want”: “does not want” (*non vult*) can be understood either as the third person of the Latin verb *nolo*, or as the result of placing a negation before the third person of the Latin verb *volo*. God “does not want” evil to be in this second sense; see SL, *In I Sent.*, d. 47, c. 7, and d. 46, c. 3, ed. Landgraf:63–66 (the position is confirmed in SL’s unedited *Quaestio theologica De uoluntate Dei*, from which it is taken over by William of Auxerre: Quinto, forthcoming). He is also original in his elaboration of the concept of person: he in fact denies (against Hugh of St. Victor and the *Summa sententiarum*) that the soul united to the body is a person, and also contests Peter Lombard’s opinion that the soul becomes a person when separated from the body; for SL, in order for it to be a *substantia individua*, it is not enough for a substance not to be actually united with another substance: it must also not have the ability (*aptitudo*) to form a compound (such as man). For this reason, not only is the soul never a person, but neither is Christ’s human nature a person, because it is united with divinity, together with which it



forms the Person of the Incarnated Word (cfr Ebbesen and Nielsen 1996; Nielsen 1999; Bieniak 2006; Rossi 2007:164–171; Quinto 2010:66–69).

As far as it is possible to state at this point in research, SL's elaboration of a number of topics reflects the philosophical concerns and contributions of late twelfth-century theologians and remains of critical importance in the thirteenth century, influencing William of Auxerre and, through him, Alexander of Hales and Bonaventure among Franciscans, and Hugh of St. Cher among Dominicans (Ebbesen 1987:408–410; Quinto 1999; Valente 2008:343–344, 379–393).

## Cross-References

- ▶ [Alan of Lille](#)
- ▶ [Peter Lombard](#)
- ▶ [Schools in the Twelfth Century](#)
- ▶ [Supposition Theory](#)
- ▶ [Trinitarian Logic](#)
- ▶ [William of Auxerre](#)

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## Substance, Accident, and Modes

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### Abstract

This entry presents the Aristotelian distinction between substance and accident and the interpretational problems it generated for medieval philosophers and theologians. A survey of the extensional and intensional problems of the distinction and some of the solutions proposed for them will lead to an analysis of the theoretical need to introduce the new ontological category of modes in late-medieval philosophy, paving the way to the abandonment of substance–accident metaphysics in early modern philosophy.

## Aristotle's Ontological Square

The medieval distinction between substance and accident goes back to Aristotle's remarks in his *Categories*, describing what is often referred to as his "Ontological Square" (Angelelli 1991). The basis of the fourfold distinction is provided in terms of two pairs of criteria, namely, *being in/not being in* and *being said of/not being said of* a subject, yielding what is meant to be an exhaustive and mutually exclusive division of the realm of all existents. The resulting division

was usually taken to provide the division of all entities into particular and universal substances and particular and universal accidents (Table 1).

This is the most fundamental division of the Aristotelian ontology of actual entities. Accordingly, slight differences in its interpretation led to vastly different solutions to several problems it generated, both in metaphysics and in theology. The following discussion provides a sampling of these problems, relating them to these interpretational differences.

### Some Problems with the Ontological Square

The problems generated by the Aristotelian Ontological Square can be grouped into *extensional* ones on the one hand (dealing with the extent of these divisions) and *intensional* ones (dealing with their interpretation), on the other. The *extensional* problems concern the *sufficiency* and *necessity* of the division of entities provided by the Square. The *intensional* problems are related to the interpretation of the extent (what counts as an existent in what sense) and criteria (what does it mean for something to *be in/said of* or *not to be in/said of* a subject) of the fourfold division.

The problem of the *sufficiency* of the division is whether it really comprehends *all* entities, or perhaps there are others that cannot be placed in any of the four domains of the Square. The problem of the *necessity* of the division is whether it contains perhaps more than what is needed for classifying all entities, that is to say, whether it contains some nonentities.

The first, naturally emerging Aristotelian suspicion concerning the Square should be that about its *necessity*. After all, the division is supposed to contain universals, whereas Aristotle denies the existence of universal entities. If, therefore, the Square contains universals and universals are not entities, then it seems that the Square has to contain some nonentities, i.e., it contains *more* than is *necessary* for the classification of all entities, for all entities are either particular substances or particular accidents, but there are no universal substances or accidents among real existents.

The problem of *sufficiency*, however, is generated by considerations concerning entities that somehow would not seem to fit into Aristotle’s fourfold division. A case in point is provided by the *significata of propositions*, described most poignantly by the anonymous author of the twelfth-century tract *Ars Burana* as being “extrapredicamental,” i.e., as not belonging to any of the ten Aristotelian categories, namely, the category of substance and the nine categories of accidents (De Rijk 1967: 357–359). Earlier on, Abelard’s *dicta* were also assigned by him a peculiar place, apparently outside the Aristotelian Square. And later authors, continuing in the tradition of assigning propositions their *significata* as distinct from the *significata* or *supposita* of their categorematic terms, would also place them outside the divisions of the Square: thus *enuntiabilia* as conceived by thirteenth-century authors, or the *real propositions* of Walter Burley, or the *complexe significabilia* of Adam Wodeham or Gregory of Rimini, not being identifiable with either substances or accidents, were placed in their own, separate category (Nuchelmans 1973, 1980).

The problem with all these additions is that since Aristotle’s division was provided in terms of contradictory criteria, it was supposed to be an exhaustive and mutually exclusive division of *everything there is*.

This way of putting the problem, however, directly leads us to the *intensional* problems of the Square. Aristotle’s opening words in the relevant passage indicate that his division is supposed to cover *all existents*. However, depending on the interpretation of what we take to be existent and in

**Substance, Accident, and Modes, Table 1** The Aristotelian Ontological Square

	Is not in a subject	Is in a subject
Is not said of a subject	Particular substance	Particular accident
	<i>This man</i>	<i>This whiteness</i>
Is said of a subject	Universal substance	Universal accident <i>whiteness</i>
	<i>Man</i>	

what sense, different items will be taken to fall within the realm of existents to be divided by the Square.

Taking his cue from Boethius' remarks concerning the subject matter of Aristotle's *Categories*, almost a millennium later Thomas of Vio Cajetan characterized the entities to be considered here in the following way:

if one is to ask whether it is words or things which are principally treated of here, we have to say that it is things, though not absolutely, but insofar as they are conceived in an incomplex manner, and, by consequent necessity, insofar as signified by words. (Cajetan 1939: 5)

Cajetan's interpretation of the subject matter of the *Categories* provides an elegant solution to both problems with the Square posed above. Since the entities to be considered here are not only mind-independent real beings but any objects of our simple concepts, universals fit into the Square, even if there are no mind-independent entities existing in a universal manner, insofar as universals are *beings of reason*, having some foundation in reality. For the same reason, however, *enuntiabilia* are ruled out, insofar as they are the objects not of simple, but of complex concepts, namely, of complex thoughts formed by the judgment-forming intellect.

Clearly, Cajetan's solution is able to accommodate beings of reason, because it presupposes the Thomistic interpretation of what and how *being* is divided in the Aristotelian Square, namely, the extension of an analogical notion into the extensions of its *analogata*. According to this doctrine, the extent of the Aristotelian Square should cover both beings in an absolute sense, without qualification, and beings in some diminished sense, with qualification (see the entry on Being in this volume).

This is, in fact, the basis of Aquinas' understanding of the Aristotelian idea of *inherence*, that is, an accident's *being-in* a subject. For an accident *to be* is nothing but for its subject *to be informed* by it or, conversely, for it to be in its subject: *accidentis esse est inesse* ("for an accident to be is for it to be in (a subject)"). This is precisely why on Aquinas' conception an accident cannot be said *to be* in the same sense as a

substance. When we say that an accident, say, the whiteness of a sheet of paper, exists, the act of being signified by the predicate of this predication is not the *act of being of this sheet of paper* without qualification (for that would be the substantial act of being of this sheet) but the *act of being of the sheet with respect to its whiteness*; it is not *the being of the sheet* absolutely, but rather, it is *the sheet's being white*. So, the *act of being of the whiteness of this sheet* is nothing but an *act of being of the sheet*, although, of course, it is just an accidental act of being of the sheet: the sheet may continue in its own existence even if its whiteness perishes, say, when the sheet is dipped in black ink.

### Aristotle Versus the Theology of the Eucharist

However, this interpretation of the Aristotelian notion of the inherence of an accident in its subject seems to be in direct conflict with the theological doctrine of the miracle of the Eucharist, which would require at least the logical possibility of the existence of the accidents of transubstantiated bread and wine without inhering in any substance. For if for an accident to exist is for its subject to be informed by it, then it seems to involve a direct contradiction to claim that an accident exists and yet it does not inform any subject.

The theological requirement of the separability of accidents in continued existence from their subject, therefore, introduced a number of complications into the interpretation of the Aristotelian doctrine of accidental being. The fundamental question is whether the Aristotelian doctrine is absolutely incompatible with the theological doctrine of the Eucharist or whether there is some authentic interpretation of the Aristotelian doctrine that would allow the separate existence of accidents to be at least supernaturally possible, i.e., free from contradiction.

A striking exposition of the "incompatibilist position" is provided in the fourteenth century by John Buridan, who argues that since Aristotle's position is incompatible with Christian faith, Christians actually have to have a radically

different concept of accidental being from that of Aristotle (Bakker 2001: 247–257). On Buridan’s view, the Aristotelian position necessarily implies that an accident is inseparable in continued existence from its subject precisely because on that position for an accident to be is for it to be in a subject, whence the very concept of an accident must be connotative, necessarily implying its being an accident *of* some substance. Therefore, Buridan finds it inevitable that Christians, who uphold the supernatural separability of accidents, must part company with Aristotle on the issue of accidental being, as well as the Aristotelian doctrine of the analogy of being. For Christians, the accidents persisting in the Eucharist without a subject ought to be conceived by means of absolute concepts without any connotation of their subject and so as *beings* in exactly the same sense as their underlying subject.

Thus, Buridan’s analysis closely ties together the Aristotelian doctrine of the analogy of being with that of the absolute inseparability of accidents in continued existence, and, consequently, he also holds that the theological doctrine of the supernatural separability of accidents directly leads to the conception of the univocity of being with regard to substance and accident.

In fact, the nominalist theologian Marsilius of Inghen, summarizing what he takes to be “the common opinion of many theologians” on the basis of the doctrine of the philosopher, John Buridan, explicitly draws the conclusion that on the basis of this opinion, “being” should be regarded as a genus common to substance and all accidents or at least to those accidents that are supernaturally separable in continued existence by divine power. Marsilius, however, does not want to side with the common opinion as described by Buridan. Working out what he takes to be a “more metaphysical” solution, he affirms the analogy of being between substance and accident; still, he does not equate it with the inseparability of accidents in the way Buridan does. He argues that substance and accident do not have the sort of essential agreement on the basis of which we could form a common univocal concept of the two; however, this does not mean that an accident remaining of the same nature

could not be miraculously preserved in its being (Bakker 2001: 257–264).

So, the question really is whether Buridan is correct in claiming that the Aristotelian doctrine of the analogy of being inevitably leads to the claim of the inseparability of accidents in continued existence and thus whether upholding the theological doctrine of the Eucharist entails the commitment to the denial of the doctrine of the analogy of being with regard to substance and accident. The position of Duns Scotus certainly may give this impression. However, Aquinas, who definitely upheld the Aristotelian view concerning the analogy of being, found it to be compatible with the Christian doctrine of the Eucharist.

On Aquinas’ view, the division of “being” into substance and accident is not the division of a genus by means of essential, specific differences but a division of the extension of an analogical term into its *analogata*, in which the nature of the thing, determining the kind of being the thing has, functions as a diminishing determination added to a distinct determinable, the act of being of the thing (Klima 2002). Thus, the kind of being the thing demands by its nature is determined by the thing’s nature. However, if a superior power overrides the natural tendency of this nature to have a certain kind of being, this does not take away the natural tendency of the thing itself and hence does not destroy the thing’s nature, just as a heavy body would not lose its natural tendency to be down, even if an external power lifts it up. The crucial point in Aquinas’ solution, therefore, is the Avicennian interpretation of Aristotle’s doctrine of the analogy of being, as based on the real distinction between the essence and existence of created beings. For this is what grounds his claim that even if the actual mode of being of an accident changes in the Eucharist (from “inherent” to “subsistent”), still, this may leave the distinct nature of the thing unaffected, which only contains the natural tendency to be in a subject.

But then it should not come as a surprise that the philosopher Siger of Brabant, who rejects the Avicennian interpretation of Aristotle and sides with Averroes in rejecting the real distinction between essence and existence in creatures,

could not endorse this sort of solution (Siger of Brabant 1972a: 41). His position is actually the closest to the position of Aristotle as described by Buridan. In his commentary on the *Metaphysics*, after vehemently denying the thesis of the real distinction between essence and existence in the creatures as stemming from an error of Avicenna's (Siger of Brabant 1983: 34), Siger insists (in his reply to one of Aquinas' arguments for the real distinction) that the act of being (*esse*) need not multiply in beings because of something added to it, but rather it is multiplied on account of its *ratio essendi* (its mode of being), the diversity of which in different kinds of beings is entailed by Aristotle's claim that *ens* cannot be a genus (Siger of Brabant 1983: 36–37). However, in the question directly addressing the issue whether existence is a genus, Siger explicitly concludes that the reason why *ens* cannot be a genus is that the *ratio essendi* of accidents, being a non-absolute *ratio*, cannot be the same as the *ratio essendi* of substances, which is an absolute *ratio* (Siger of Brabant 1983: 101). In a different context – most notably in the context of the question whether the intellect can be both subsistent and inherent – he also insists that these *rationes essendi* are so incompatible that they cannot belong to the same thing (Siger of Brabant 1972: 79–80). Indeed, in the context where he directly addresses the question of what sort of quiddity accidents have, he explicitly asserts an accident does not have a *ratio essendi*, except in relation to a substance, whence it cannot be defined, except in relation to substance (Siger of Brabant 1983: 341).

The implication of all this, along with Siger's identification of essence with existence, is clearly that the same thing, while remaining the same thing, cannot have one *ratio essendi* after the other, and thus, an accident, having the *ratio essendi* of an inherent being, cannot, while remaining what it was, an accident, have later on the *ratio essendi* of a subsistent being, on pain of contradiction. But this leaves him with a sheer "fideistic" position concerning the possibility of the separate existence of accidents in the Eucharist, without resolving the contradiction with his philosophical conclusions, provoking both Aquinas' philosophical criticisms, while

defending his own "Avicennean Aristotle," and the wrath of Augustinian theologians, rejecting Siger's "Averroistic Aristotle."

It was this kind of "Averroistic Aristotelianism," famously condemned in 1277, which was sternly rejected by theologians such as Henry of Ghent and later Duns Scotus. However, since they also rejected the Avicennean–Thomistic thesis of the real distinction of being and essence, they more radically reinterpreted the Aristotelian distinction between substance and accident, ending up with positions closer to what Marsilius (taking his cue from Buridan) described as "the common opinion" of theologians.

In general, the most fundamental issue concerning the interpretation of the Aristotelian notion of inherence and its compatibility with the doctrine of the Eucharist seems to be whether the Aristotelian notion can consistently be interpreted in such a way that according to this interpretation transubstantiation does not have to destroy the nature of accidents. Aquinas' "Avicennean solution" is based on the thesis of real distinction between essence and existence; on the basis of which, even if the mode of being of the thing changes, this can leave the distinct nature of the thing unaffected.

Those, however, who rejected this Avicennean interpretation of Aristotle, be they philosophers, like Siger or Buridan, or theologians, like Henry of Ghent or Duns Scotus, ended up either with an irresolvable conflict between their Aristotelianism and their faith, as Siger did, or with a more radical departure from Aristotle in their interpretation of the Aristotelian doctrine of the analogy of being, as Henry, Scotus, and Buridan did. Either way, abandoning the Thomistic interpretation of the Aristotelian distinction seems to drive a wedge between faith and reason, culminating in the attribution of radically different notions of accidental being to philosophers and to theologians by Buridan. Perhaps, this is what motivated Marsilius of Inghen's "more metaphysical" solution, echoing the gist of Aquinas'.

The gist of Marsilius' solution is the permanence of the natural tendency of the accident to be in a subject, even if its actual existence changes from inherent to subsistent, just as it was in



Aquinas (Bakker 2001: 262). However, for Marsilius, the nominalist theologian, this solution was no longer based on the Avicennian interpretation of Aristotle provided by Aquinas but rather on the strict separation of what is naturally and what is only supernaturally possible, indeed, on a radical separation of theological and secular philosophical and scientific discourse initiated in many ways by the nominalism of William of Ockham (see Klima 2009).

Ockham's nominalism, on the other hand, was partly motivated by what he perceived as entirely futile *metaphysical* problems concerning the categories, based on a mistaken *semantic* conception of his contemporaries (Klima 1999a). His new semantic conception motivated by this perception, in turn, led to a radical transformation of scholastic discourse and, along with other conceptual changes in late-medieval philosophy, to the emergence of the possibility of completely and systematically eliminating accidents really distinct from substances and thus eventually to the collapse of the scholastic substance–accident metaphysics in early modern philosophy.

### The Problem of the Distinction of Accidents and the Emergence of Modes

As we have seen, the theological problem of the Eucharist naturally gave rise to the intensional problem of the interpretation of the Aristotelian notion of the inherence of accidents. Particular philosophical problems concerning the distinction of specific kinds of accidents from each other as well as from their subject, however, tended to give rise to a number of more specific extensional problems of the necessity and sufficiency of the Aristotelian division.

The framework of the medieval discussion concerning the distinction of specific kinds of accidents was provided by Aristotle's distinction of the ten categories, namely, distinguishing substance from the nine categories of accidents: quantity, quality, relation, action, passion, time, place, position, and habit. One fundamental question concerning the distinction of the categories was precisely what sort of items these categories

classify. Are they words, or the concepts expressed by these words, or are they the entities themselves already fitted into the broader framework of the Ontological Square by Aristotle?

Various authors handled these issues variously in their interpretation of Aristotle, but few would have subscribed to a simplistic “mirroring” idea, namely, the idea that the ten classes of simple words “mirror” ten classes of simple concepts, which in turn “mirror” the ten fundamental classes of entities there are in reality.

In the first place, that the relationship between words and concepts is more complicated is clear from the phenomena of equivocation (one word expressing several concepts) as well as synonymy (several words expressing the same concept) and translatability (different words in different languages expressing the same concept) or from the fact that a simple word may express a complex concept and a complex phrase may occasionally convey a simple concept (Buridan 2001: xxxvii–xxxix).

In the second place, the relationship between concepts and things is quite complicated as well: universal concepts comprehend several particular things (even if several particular things of the same kind), but even the same (kinds of) things may be conceived in terms of radically different concepts (as, e.g., all triangular things may also be conceived as trilateral and vice versa).

Thus, even the medieval *modistae*, who insisted that the modes of signifying of words (*modi significandi*) follow upon our ways of understanding things (*modi intelligendi*), which in turn reflect the way things are (*modi essendi*), would not have subscribed to the simplistic mirroring view of semantic relations; and, a fortiori, such a view would have been rejected by their late medieval, especially, nominalist critics (Marmo 1999). But still, especially in the thirteenth-century literature on Aristotle's *Categories* and *Metaphysics*, there were various speculations about the sufficiency of Aristotle's classification (in the so-called *sufficiantiae* literature), trying to establish that his ten categories comprehend all entities, sorting them into their ten and only ten most universal essential kinds (McMahon 2002; Gracia and Lloyd 2006).



However, apart from the issue of the *sufficiency* of the categories to classify all entities into their essential kinds, there was also the intriguing question of the *necessity* of Aristotle's categories, as far as the classification of real entities is concerned, for nobody seems to have denied the usefulness of Aristotle's classification of predicable terms and the concepts they express in the ten genera he distinguished, establishing a certain system of them all; but there were serious doubts as to whether this classification is at the same time the classification of the essential, natural kinds of all entities there are. Are there really (at least) ten classes of really distinct, essentially different entities in the universe?

One consideration that prompts this conclusion is the following piece of reasoning, which may be dubbed the *argument from separability*:

1. Any entities that can exist without each other are distinct from each other.
2. The entities in distinct categories can exist without each other.
3. Therefore, the entities in distinct categories are distinct from each other.

If this argument is sound, then the ten categories provide a mutually exclusive (and hopefully also exhaustive) tenfold classification of all entities.

However, in this argument, a great deal depends on the interpretation of its second premise. The obvious justification for this premise is the fact that accidents are "separable" from their subject as well as from each other in the sense that a subject may continue to exist while its accidents come or cease to inform it, independently from each other. (Of course, this natural "separability" of accidents must not be confused with the question of their supernatural separability *in continued existence* discussed above.) After all, on Porphyry's description of accident, "accident is what comes and goes without the destruction of the substrate" (Spade 1994: 11). For example, the white sheet of paper that turns black when dipped in ink certainly continues to exist, while its whiteness is gone, and the same goes for its other accidents in the other categories.

We need not be detained here too much by the issue of naturally inseparable accidents discussed by Porphyry, such as the blackness of a crow (to use his example), which are inseparable only assuming the present course of nature, but could be separated from their subject (without preserving them in continued existence) in a different system of nature, simply on account of their non-essentiality. So, in a different system of nature, with different laws in force, the same subjects could be present without their actually naturally inseparable accidents. For instance, in a different system of nature, there could be white crows. (Indeed, we could actually produce them even in this system of nature by dipping them in hydrogen peroxide, but Porphyry apparently did not think of this cruel possibility. Thus, a better example of a naturally inseparable accident in his sense might be the yellow color of pure gold.) By contrast, in a different system of nature, the same subjects could not be present without their essential properties, because then they would just not be the same things. We certainly could not have crows that are not crows or animals or bodies (or gold that is not an element or does not have atomic number 79).

However, the justification of premise (2) above in terms of the Porphyrian definition clearly presupposes that what we are referring to by means of the abstract term "whiteness," namely, the accident that verifies the corresponding concrete term "white" of this sheet, cannot cease to be referred to by this term unless it ceases to exist, that is to say, that this abstract term is an essential predicate of this accident. For, if the term were not an essential predicate of this thing or would not refer "rigidly" to this thing, to use the contemporary jargon, then the thing could cease to be referred to by the term "whiteness," i.e., it could cease to be whiteness, without ceasing to exist. And so, even if the white sheet *was* identical with its whiteness, it could cease to be white without its whiteness ceasing to exist, for its whiteness could just cease to be whiteness without ceasing to be.

To be sure, in the case of this example, one may have the intuition that the thing that is called "whiteness" cannot cease to be whiteness without ceasing to be. However, consider another example in the category of quality, in the species of shape,

such as straightness. Scholastic “realists” (for the significance of the quotes see Klima 2008) committed to the essentiality of abstract terms in this species would have to claim that when, say, a piece of wire is straight, then this is because the matter of this piece of wire is informed by the quality of straightness, and so when the wire is bent, its straightness is destroyed while the wire itself continues to exist, which clearly indicates that the wire and its shape are not the same thing.

However, what if this shape is not construed as a simple quality essentially named “straightness”? After all, for the wire to be straight is just for its extremes to be maximally distant; thus, the wire’s shape is nothing, but the way its quantity is extended; indeed, one may say, it is just this quantity extended this way. But of course when the wire goes from straight to bent, its quantity does not cease to exist; it just goes from existing in one way to existing in another. However, these “ways,” that is, *modes* of being of this quantity, are not further things added to this quantity: they are the quantity itself arranged one way or another, on account of which it once can be called straight and then bent. Therefore, straightness is nothing but the quantity of the wire arranged in a certain way, not a thing really distinct from this quantity. Indeed, if quantity terms can be analyzed along similar lines, then its quantity can also be identified with a material substance, for again, then the dimensions of the substance are nothing but the substance itself, its matter being arranged in a certain way.

This is precisely the gist of the idea of Ockham’s nominalist program of “ontological reduction,” whereby he sought to get rid of all sorts of “weird entities” to which his realist opponents were apparently committed (see Klima 1999a, b). Perhaps, the best illustration of the kind of ontological commitment Ockham wanted to eliminate can be found in the following passage, coming from the auspiciously titled treatise, *A Very Useful and Realist Logic of Campsall the Englishman Against Ockham*:

there are individuals subjected to each category that are really distinct from the individuals of another category of which it [their category] is properly and directly predicated; for example, we can truly

assert: ‘This is [a] when’ pointing to the relation which is caused by the motion of the first movable [i.e., the celestial sphere of the fixed stars] in the inferior things, so that, if that individual had a distinct proper name imposed on it, one could just as truly respond to the question: ‘What is it?’ by saying: ‘[A] when’, as one can reply to the question ‘What is it?’ asked about a man, by saying: ‘A substance’. (Pseudo-Campsall 1982: 216–217)

Indeed, the realist author of this treatise is willing to go as far as to claim that denying the real distinction of individuals in the ten categories would lead to the destruction of philosophy and science:

we should see whether a when-ness is distinct from absolute things. . . . And this appears but some quibble: for denying that in any category there is to be found a thing distinct from the things of all other categories amounts to denying philosophy in general and several particular sciences that deal with these categories. (Pseudo-Campsall 1982: 327)

The most important point in these passages is that our realist author would take the categories as well as their subordinate genera and species to be essential predicates of their particulars. But this is precisely the assumption that allows “the argument from separability” to go through, thereby generating a “Porphyrian forest” consisting of distinct Porphyrian trees (the arrangement of genera and their subordinate species) in each category. Consequently, it is no wonder that this is precisely the assumption that Ockham’s and his followers’ new semantic conception would systematically undermine, allowing them to cut down what they took to be the realists’ “Porphyrian forest,” leading to commitment to all sorts of “weird entities” in one’s ontology, causing all sorts of apparently insoluble problems in one’s logic, metaphysics, and physics (for some of Ockham’s particular arguments, see Klima 1999a).

The gist of the Ockhamist idea, as I have indicated above, was that abstract terms in the accidental categories can be analyzed in terms of their nominal definitions, revealing the complex conceptual structures “covered-up” by the syntactic simplicity of these terms. But within the Ockhamist semantic framework, the revelation of this complex conceptual structure at the same

time reveals that the corresponding term is a non-essential predicate of its particulars, which means that “the argument from separability” cannot stand in the way of identifying this particular with one in another category. Thus, providing such “eliminative definitions” could become a powerful analytic tool for carrying out the Ockhamist program of reducing the really distinct ontological categories to two (substance and quality – as was Ockham’s original program) or three (substance, quality, and quantity – as was Buridan’s program).

Indeed, this conceptual tool in principle could have been used to eliminate all real accidents, even in the category quality, leaving only substances whose matter being arranged in different ways is what causally accounts for their various properties classifiable in the system of the categories, in the framework of an atomist physical theory. Buridan, however, who was well aware of this possibility (explored by his contemporary John of Mirecourt), rejected atomism as “an obscure and dangerous” doctrine (Buridan 1989: 122) and argued for the real distinction of some species of quality, quantity, and substance (for more on this, see Klima 2003).

However, despite the nominalists’ charges to the contrary, authors working in the older semantic framework did not have to be committed to a full blown “Porphyrian forest.” Even if they did not have the systematic analytic tool of “eliminative nominal definitions” that the nominalists could apply in eliminating unwanted ontological commitment to distinct entities in the accidental categories, these authors could still use other conceptual means to identify or “quasi-identify” entities across categories, provided they could abandon on principled grounds the crucial assumption of the essentiality of abstract terms in accidental categories.

One such conceptual tool was the distinction between two types of relations: relations in being (*relationes secundum esse*) and relations in speech (*relationes secundum dici*). It is only abstract relational terms of the former type of that would be essential predicates of distinct relation-things; abstract relational terms of the latter type would just be relative denominations of absolute things

in other categories. Apparently, some authors would identify this distinction with the distinction between real relations (*relationes reales*) and merely conceptual ones (*relationes rationis*). However, Cajetan insisted that the former distinction is one to be applied *within* the realm of real relations.

But similar considerations allowed the identification or quasi-identification of items in other categories. For instance, Aquinas would often cite Aristotle’s authority to endorse the identification of action and passion with the same motion or a location with the dimensive quantity of the locating thing. In all such cases, what allows the identification of items across categories is the consideration that the terms referring to these items need not be their essential predicates, which neutralizes the force of the argument from separability. But the conceptual device of allowing the nonessentiality of abstract terms in accidental categories in and of itself would only produce the recognition of conceptual distinctions of otherwise really identical items in one’s ontology, just like the merely conceptual distinctions produced by the nominalists’ eliminative definitions.

Another important conceptual tool among non-nominalists, combined with allowing the non-essentiality of abstract terms, but also emphasizing the mind-independence of some distinctions, involved tweaking the notions of unity and distinctness. This is how Henry of Ghent’s *intentional distinction* and Scotus’ *formal distinction* and later Suárez’s *modal distinction* were all capable of providing a way to “quasi-identify” items across categories without, however, *fully* identifying them. The best description of this strategy can be found in Suárez’s presentation of his modal distinction, as being somehow halfway between a full-blown real distinction and a mere conceptual distinction:

I think it is true without qualification that there is among created things a certain actual distinction which is found in nature prior to any activity of the mind and that such distinction is not so great as the distinction between two altogether separate things or entities. This distinction, to be sure, could be designated by the general term “real,” inasmuch as it is truly verified in reality, and is not merely an extrinsic denomination issuing from the intellect.

However, to differentiate it from the other, namely, the major real distinction, we can call it either a “distinction from the nature of the case,” thus applying to this imperfect distinction a term that is in common use, or more properly a “modal distinction.” For, as I shall explain, this distinction is invariably found to intervene between a thing and its mode (Suárez 1947: 27).

So, what is a mode? Suárez is well aware of the fact that modes are not his invention. He mentions Giles of Rome, Durand of Saint-Pourçain, and especially Petrus Fonseca, as his forerunners on this issue, although he could have mentioned even earlier figures, such as John Peter John Olivi or Peter Auriol. Indeed, even earlier, Albert the Great tended to refer to all accidents as the modes of substance, but he probably did not have in mind the specific notion of a *mode* in Suárez’s sense, which, following Fonseca, Suárez carefully distinguished from the broader senses of the term.

In this specific technical sense, a mode of something “is something affecting [it] and, as it were, ultimately determining its state and manner of existing, without adding to it a proper new entity, but merely modifying a pre-existing entity” (Suárez 1947: 28).

So, modes are something real, indeed, as Suárez insists, mind-independently distinct from the things of which they are the modes, and yet they are not *as* distinct as one thing from another, as a real accident would be distinct from a substance. Indeed, they are not sufficiently distinct to be separable even by divine power; thus modes could not be sustained in separation in the way accidents can in the Eucharist. Therefore, modes in this strict sense constitute a genuinely new category wedged “between” the categories of substance and accident.

Of course, this characterization of modes and their distinction from the substances and accidents of which they are the modes makes the problem of the sufficiency of the division of being into substance and accident return with a vengeance. Suárez valiantly struggled with the problem, trying to save the idea of sufficiency, but his solution may have just added to the sense of later generations that the distinction is radically flawed.

Indeed, the conceptual tools introduced by late-medieval realists and nominalists discussed above opened up the possibility of totally eliminating the distinction, which, after a flourishing of talk about modes of substances instead of their real accidents, is basically what happened in the early modern period.

## Cross-References

- ▶ [Being](#)
- ▶ [Boethius](#)
- ▶ [Categories](#)
- ▶ [Essence and Existence](#)
- ▶ [Henry of Ghent](#)
- ▶ [John Buridan](#)
- ▶ [John Duns Scotus](#)
- ▶ [Marsilius of Inghen](#)
- ▶ [Parisian Condemnation of 1277](#)
- ▶ [Siger of Brabant](#)
- ▶ [Terms, Properties of](#)
- ▶ [Thomas Aquinas](#)
- ▶ [William of Ockham](#)

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## al-Suhrawardī, Shihāb al-Dīn Yaḥyā al-Maqtūl

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### Abstract

Shihāb al-Dīn al-Suhrawardī (d. Aleppo, c. 1191) is a mystical philosopher who founded a new tradition in Islamic thought, that of Ishrāq (“Illuminationism”). This term applies first to a new method: Suhrawardī introduces illumination or knowledge by presence as the foundation of a sounder way to apprehend the universe and ourselves. Ishrāq is also a new understanding of what is, conceived of as the participation of all that is in one fundamental reality, Light. Suhrawardī's thought had lasting influence on later Islamic speculative tradition, especially in the East, as an alternative trend to the “Peripatetic” tradition represented by thinkers such as Avicenna.

### Biographical Information

Born in Suhraward near Zanjān (NW Iran) in the middle of the sixth/twelfth century (probably c. 549/1155), Shihāb al-Dīn Yaḥyā b. Ḥabash b. Amīrak al-Suhrawardī received his first education in Maragha. After a few years of travel in quest of knowledge in Anatolia, Syria, and possibly Isfahan, he arrived in Aleppo, probably in 579/1183. There he gained the favor of the court,

then ruled by al-Malik al-Zāhir Ġāzī, the son of Saladin. This short period of favor was followed by a dramatic reverse of fortune, instigated by local religious scholars, which resulted in Suhrawardī's condemnation to death by the order of Saladin. The earliest account known, 'Imād al-Dīn's *Bustān al-jāmi'*, a chronicle contemporary with the event, mentions Suhrawardī's death in the year 588/1192. One century later, Shahrazūrī speaks of the end of 586 or of 588/1191 or 1192. In the same thirteenth century, Ibn Khallikān rejects the date 588 and gives precise dates according to two different accounts: Suhrawardī was incarcerated and then strangled on 5 Rajab 587/July 29, 1191; his dead body was carried out of the citadel of Aleppo on Friday, end of Dhū al-Ḥijja 587/January 17, 1192. Suhrawardī was then 38 in lunar years, or 36, or even 50 according to another version related by Shahrazūrī. The accounts are no more precise regarding the manner in which Suhrawardī died (starvation to death, strangulation, execution followed by crucifixion for several days), and the ultimate reasons for his condemnation, probably a mix of religious and political factors.

During his short life, Suhrawardī produced an impressive number of writings both in Arabic and Persian, some very brief, others lengthy, written in various styles, from allegoric tales to scholastic treatises very much in the manner of the writings typical of Islamic philosophers in the Peripatetic tradition. His works comprise four major philosophical treatises written in Arabic: *al-Talwīḥāt* (*The Intimations*), *al-Muqāwamāt* (*The Oppositions*), *al-Mashāri' wa-l-muṭārahāt* (*The Paths and Havens or Conversations*), and *Kitāb Ḥikmat al-Ishrāq* (*The Philosophy of Illumination or Book of Illuminationist Wisdom*), his masterpiece completed in 582/1186 (*Ḥikma* § 279). These treatises are accompanied by shorter texts of different types: mystical allegories such as the *Qiṣṣat al-ġurba al-ġarbīya* (*The Story of the Occidental Exile*), epitomes of philosophy such as the *Hayākil al-nūr* (*Temples of light*), and prayers and invocations.

## Thought

Suhrawardī's thought represents a profound change in Avicennan philosophy on which it is founded. The main points of divergence have to do with epistemology and with the conception of the structure of reality. Suhrawardī's writings denote a strong dissatisfaction with discursive rationality and the will to find an alternative ground on which to build a sounder system to apprehend the universe and ourselves. This ground is found in intuitive knowledge, the kind of knowledge experienced by mystics in their visions, but also in the experience of self-knowledge. This "presential knowledge" or "knowledge by presence" (*'ilm ḥudūrī*), which is thus for Suhrawardī the only way to truly access what is, is characterized by the fact that it is not mediated through any image or representation. It allows for a direct vision, an intuition, providing the principles of a new comprehension of reality. As stated in the introduction of *Ḥikmat al-Ishrāq*, beside the sciences drawn from the observation of phenomena perceived by our senses, such as geometry, there are sciences built on principles known from our experience of the spiritual: "Those who do not proceed according to this method have no share in wisdom; doubts will toy with them!" (*Ḥikma* § 6).

The integration of presential experience as a source for knowledge does not entail a complete dismissal of discursive rationality. The recommendation made at the end of the *Ḥikmat al-Ishrāq* states unequivocally that this book should not be made available "except to whom has mastered the Peripatetic method," which is precisely the method using discursive argumentation (*Ḥikma* § 279). However, discursive rationality alone cannot lead to true knowledge because it lacks the validity given by mystical experience. Only the speculative mystic who brings together mystical vision and excellence of reasoning can reach certainty. Hence the end of the quotation just given: "... and who is enamored of the Light of God." Mystical experience is still more important than reasoning skills however: in a hierarchy of



sages given in the same book, second to the speculative mystic are sages who follow the mystical path with no attempt at speculation, followed by those who are skilled in discursive rationality without mystical experience (*Hikma* § 5).

In metaphysics, Suhrawardī builds an elaborate system centered on Light. From the Light of lights emanates a vertical hierarchy of pure immaterial lights, paralleled by a horizontal order of lights, and from these emanations and the interactions between the different orders, further entities are produced. There is thus a gradual unfolding of Pure immaterial lights – triumphant (only concerned with themselves and the higher realms) and regent (i.e., those ruling over the bodies) – of accidental lights, and obstacles to light (*barzakh*), that is, the bodies.

The main characteristics of Suhrawardī’s metaphysical system are as follows. Everything is conceived of as participating in one fundamental reality, Light. Even that which is an obstacle to light is caused by light and defined by its relationship to light. Lights are primarily differentiated by their degree of intensity: the level of their share in light makes them what they are and is the very principle of individuation, even if other elements are also included the further one gets from the higher levels. Intensity is also understood in dynamic terms: a reality can be more or less what it is, says Suhrawardī, thus introducing movement in the category of substance. A corollary of this principle is the ontological weight given to the lowest degrees of light: this is a metaphysics attentive to the multiple instances of light, a metaphysics of lights rather than of Light. Finally, Suhrawardī reintroduces Platonic Ideas of some sort, the “Lords of species,” and maintains the reality of a separate World of images.

On human nature and destiny, Suhrawardī considers human soul as an immaterial light imprisoned in this world and using the body as a tool to perfect itself, in order to escape from its exile in the material world and reach the world of Lights. Some passages in the *Hikmat al-Ishrāq* showing sympathy toward the affirmation of

transmigration of souls (*tanāsukh*) have led to discussions by later Ishrāqīs and opponents as to how this should be understood (*Hikma* § 229–236). Questions of conscience of self and personal identity are also of special interest for Ishrāqī thought.

Suhrawardī presents his system as a break from the views of the “Peripatetic” (*mashshā’ī*) philosophers of Islam (even though some of his writings are written in their manner, see *Mashāri*’§ 208), and many of his theories are introduced as an alternative to their erroneous conception (e.g., on definition, syllogism, hylomorphism, metempsychosis, Platonic Ideas, and “being” conceived as anything beyond a mental attribute). This break is presented as a return to the doctrines of the first sages – Greeks, Persians, Indians, etc. – with tutelary figures such as Hermes, Plato, and Zoroaster.

Suhrawardī’s writings had a lasting influence in Islamic thought, not only through a line of commentators and disciples such as Ibn Kammūna (d. 683/1284), Shahrāzūrī (thirteenth century), and Quṭb al-Dīn al-Shīrāzī (d. 710 or 716/1311 or 1316), but also as a method, considered as a distinct trend in contrast with the *mashshā’ī* tradition, and as a set of questions and problems. To mention just one example, Suhrawardī’s insistence on the purely mental character of universals, especially of being, had a profound impact on later debates on the essence/existence distinction.

Modern scholarship is divided on how to interpret the different aspects of Suhrawardī’s thought. This debate, which has consequences on the classification of Suhrawardī’s writings, is doubled by an interrogation on the importance of Suhrawardī’s departure from Avicenna, itself depending greatly on the manner Avicenna’s thought is understood. Some scholars stress the mystical aspects, others the Iranian heritage, yet others, the philosophical aspects, with a will to fully acknowledge the scholastic elements in Suhrawardī’s writings. This last approach led to a better grasp of the importance of Suhrawardī’s logical theories (it is interesting to note that only the parts on metaphysics were included in Corbin’s edition of the *Talwīḥāt*,

*Muqāwamāt*, and *Mashārī'*, and that his translation of the *Kitāb Hikmat al-Ishrāq* skips over the first part on general questions regarding logic and epistemology). A few scholars have also pointed to other intellectual traditions, which may have contributed to Suhrawardī's system, such as Ismā'īlī thought, opening new perspectives still to be explored.

## Cross-References

- ▶ Ibn Sīnā, Abū 'Alī (Avicenna)
- ▶ Ismā'īlī Philosophical Tradition
- ▶ Logic in the Arabic and Islamic World
- ▶ Philosophy, Arabic
- ▶ al-Shahrazūrī, Muḥammad ibn Maḥmūd Shams al-Dīn

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## Supposition Theory

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### Abstract

Supposition theory is one of the most important later medieval semantic theories (in the Latin tradition). Supposition is the property of terms (occurring in propositions) of standing for things, so that these things can be talked

about by means of propositions, and supposition theory (in its different versions) is a theory codifying the different *uses* of terms in propositions, based on the idea that one and the same term can stand for different things when occurring in different propositional contexts. The different kinds of supposition are attempts to capture the phenomenon of semantic variation prompted by different propositional contexts. The theory emerged in the twelfth century, and the two main traditions contributing to its development were the tradition of commentaries on Aristotle's *Sophistical Refutations* and the tradition commenting on the fourth-century grammarian Priscian. Supposition theory acquired its first mature form in the thirteenth century, with the terminist/summulist tradition (in the works of William of Sherwood, Peter of Spain, Roger Bacon, and Lambert of Lagny/Auxerre), and was further developed in the fourteenth century by authors such as Walter Burley, William of Ockham, and John Buridan.

## Introduction

Supposition is one of the properties treated within the doctrine of the properties of terms, a doctrine whose development started in the twelfth century and which then became the cornerstone of later medieval semantics (see Read 2006, and the entry on Terms, Properties of in this volume). In fact, the development of this doctrine from the twelfth century onward consists precisely in “the growing dominance of just one of the properties of terms, supposition” (De Rijk 1982:161). Indeed, by the fourteenth century the concept of supposition had almost entirely superseded or absorbed the other properties of terms for the purposes of semantic analysis. A section (often several chapters) specifically on supposition is to be found in every single logical textbook of the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries (not to mention the several *De suppositionibus* treatises in the fourteenth century).

Very generally put, supposition is the property of terms (occurring in propositions) of standing for things, so that these things can be talked about

by means of propositions. Thus described, it may appear to be the medieval counterpart of the modern concept of reference, and indeed such a comparison has often been put forward. But there are also significant dissimilarities between medieval theories of supposition and modern theories of reference, and in fact this comparison can be quite misleading (see Dutilh Novaes 2007: chap. 1). Rather, it seems more appropriate to view medieval theories of supposition as having no exact modern counterpart – one must attempt to understand them in their own terms. Moreover, throughout the centuries the concept of supposition “developed in response to a variety of needs, and one mistake of modern attempts at interpretation is to seek a unique rationale” for its various formulations at different stages of its development (Read 2006: Introduction).

Nevertheless, a fairly accurate general characterization of the different versions of supposition theory is as a theory codifying the different *uses* of terms in propositions; such variations of uses are important as such, but they are also crucial for key logical concepts such as truth, (fallacious or valid) inference, and propositional content. In other words, a trait common to the different formulations of the theory is the idea that one and the same term can stand for different things when occurring in different propositional contexts, thus having distinct semantic contributions to the content of a proposition at each time. The different kinds of supposition are attempts to capture the phenomenon of semantic variation prompted by different propositional contexts. Indeed, theories of supposition deal with four main kinds of semantic variation:

1. Whether a term is taken literally or metaphorically.
2. The different ontological kinds of the *things* that one and the same term can stand for – the *supposita*: (extra-mental) individual entities, universal entities, mental entities, or linguistic entities.
3. The different temporal and modal statuses of the *supposita*: present, past, future, actual, or possible.
4. The different quantities of entities required to verify or falsify a proposition.

(1) The first kind of variation is usually codified by means of the distinction of proper vs. improper supposition. For reasons of space, though, improper supposition will not be analyzed in any detail here, and we shall concentrate on proper supposition. (2) The second kind of variation is accounted for by means of the distinction of the main kinds of proper supposition, usually personal, simple, and material supposition (such as in Ockham’s *Summa logicae*). The contextual element usually thought to provoke this kind of variation is the ontological kind(s) of the things of which the other term in the proposition is correctly predicated, as suggested by an oft-repeated motto (Ebbesen 1981:41): “subjects are such as the predicates permit” (see Sherwood 1966:113). (3) The third kind of variation is addressed by the concepts of ampliation and restriction, originally independent properties of terms that in later developments were absorbed by the supposition machinery. The contextual element usually (though not always) thought to provoke this kind of variation is the tense (past, present, future) and the mode (actual, possible, necessary) of the verb in the proposition. (4) The fourth kind of variation is dealt with by means of the distinction of the modes of (common) personal supposition, whose main modes are confused and distributive, merely confused, and determinate supposition (such as in Ockham’s *Summa logicae*). The contextual element usually thought to provoke this kind of variation is the presence or absence of syncategorematic terms (i.e., terms such as “every,” “some,” “no,” “not”) and word order. (This last distinction is treated elsewhere in this volume; see the entry on Quantification.)

Among the other early properties of terms, the only one having resisted total absorption by supposition in the long run is the property of signification. Indeed, while the notion of supposition implies that a given term does not have a stable, general meaning, but rather that its semantic contribution depends fundamentally on the propositional context (and thus on specific uses), the property of signification is thought to be context-independent and pre-propositional. Signification concerns the first imposition of what a term shall be used to talk about, whereas supposition

concerns uses of a term that already has a signification, and the semantic variations that may be prompted by the propositional context.

Another important point to bear in mind is that supposition theory was not simply a sterile exercise, developed for purely theoretical reasons. Much to the contrary, supposition theory was widely used as a semantic tool in an ample range of fields, most notably theology (Brown 1993) and physics. Hence, besides the bare presentations of the theory that one encounters in medieval logical textbooks, the theory actually put to practice is perhaps even more fascinating. For reasons of space we shall not deal with specific applications of supposition theory, but one should bear in mind that supposition theory was essentially developed to be *used*, to be put to practice as a semantic tool for the analysis and interpretation of discourse, and thus also to deal with matters of truth and inference in different fields of investigation.

In what follows, I present a chronological account of the development of supposition theory in the twelfth, thirteenth, and fourteenth centuries. Such a partition although obviously somewhat arbitrary is nonetheless supported by the significant coherence within each century. Moreover, it should not be taken to imply that after the fourteenth century no developments worth mentioning took place: much to the contrary, in very late medieval authors one finds sophisticated solutions to many of the issues left open by previous generations (see Dutilh Novaes 2008a; Ashworth 1974). Nevertheless, these three centuries embody what we could call the “classical era” of supposition theory.

### Early Developments: Twelfth Century

The historical emergence of supposition theory was the topic of De Rijk’s groundbreaking study *Logica modernorum*, published in three volumes (De Rijk 1962/1967) and including the edition of a wide range of twelfth- and thirteenth-century crucial (anonymous) texts. De Rijk identified two main traditions contributing to the development of supposition theory: the tradition of

commentaries on Aristotle’s *Sophistical Refutations* and, more generally, of theories of fallacies; and the tradition commenting on the fourth-century grammarian Priscian. This account is still thought to be essentially correct, but since the publication of De Rijk’s study, some scholars (e.g., Ebbesen 1981) have questioned certain aspects of De Rijk’s account. Also, it appears that other elements (such as the theological tradition stemming from Gilbert of Poitiers’ writings; see Kneepkens 1987 and Valente forthcoming) must also be taken into account to explain these developments. Furthermore, it is now believed that a more cautious timeframe for the seminal texts would be the very last decades of the twelfth century and the first decades of the thirteenth century, differing thus from De Rijk’s earlier dating of these texts. Nonetheless, the significance of these two traditions – the grammarian tradition and the tradition on the fallacies – is beyond any doubt, so let us examine how exactly the suppositional framework may have emerged from them.

At this early stage (second half of the twelfth century), *suppositio* is often related to the syntactic act of putting a term as the grammatical subject of a proposition (see Kneepkens 1987). But it has been argued (Ebbesen 1981) that even at this early stage, the *suppositio* terminology is used not only to refer to a syntactic act but also to the semantic relation between a term and what it stands for, which was later to become the standard notion of *suppositio*. In fact, these two apparently different acceptations of the *suppositio* terminology (present, for example, in the twelfth-century grammarian Peter Helias, whose *Summa super Priscianum* is a key text for these developments) – the syntactic one and the semantic one – are not really dissimilar if one considers that the prototypical subject of a proposition is a substantive noun and that, according to the grammatical tradition following Priscian, a noun signifies a substance together with a quality. Hence, by placing a noun as the subject of a proposition, one also naturally invokes the substance that the noun signifies. The noun “man,” for example, signifies the individual primary substances that are men insofar as they instantiate the universal nature humanity, and thus it may stand for men in a proposition.



Moreover, following Aristotelian hylomorphism, universal natures and qualities are usually viewed as corresponding to forms, which are combined with matter to give rise to individuals. Thus, in the twelfth century, to be a *suppositum* is regularly used in the sense of being the bearer of a name or, equivalently, of a form/quality: and indeed, the notion of “bearer of form” is (according to Ebbesen 1981:38) crucial in the early development of supposition theory.

Unsurprisingly, in this period supposition is often viewed as a property pertaining exclusively to the subject term, the corresponding property for predicates being copulation; but soon thereafter (e.g., in the first English texts of the thirteenth century – *Logica* “*Cum sit nostra*,” *Logica* “*Ut dicit*,” and *Introductiones Parisienses*), supposition is seen as a property of predicates as well.

But even at this early stage, it is also widely acknowledged that terms can be used to stand for things other than what they signify depending on the specific context of use. Particularly in the formulation of grammatical theories, one must often use a term to talk about the very term itself (for example, to say that “man” is a noun and that “to run” is a verb), and thus not to talk about the thing(s) they usually stand for. Now, in order to indicate this autonymic use of a term, twelfth-century authors belonging to the grammatical tradition (such as in William of Conches, Adelard of Bath and Peter Helias (De Rijk 1962:108–109)) often spoke of terms being “materially imposed” (*materiale impositum*) in such cases. The notion of *materiale impositum* is the forerunner of the later notion of material supposition (see Rosier-Catach 2003), to appear for the first time in William of Sherwood, which again indicates the crucial role of the grammarian tradition for the development of supposition theory.

As for the fallacies tradition, it is immediately apparent why the fact that the very same term can be used in different acceptations is of crucial importance for the diagnosis of fallacious arguments; Ebbesen (1981:39) argues that in the twelfth century this might have been seen as the main purpose of supposition theory. Generally speaking, fallacies are arguments that appear to be sound in that they seem to display one of the

forms usually associated with sound arguments (for example, a valid syllogistic mood), but which are in fact unsound in that they feature true premises leading to (what appears to be) a false conclusion. The challenge is to identify where the problem lies, i.e., what (semantic) phenomenon is behind the false appearance of validity. A standard example of a fallacy is:

<i>Homo est dignissima creaturarum</i>	(Man is the worthiest of creatures)
<i>Sortes est homo</i>	(Socrates is a man)
<i>Ergo Sortes est dignissima creaturarum</i>	(So Socrates is the worthiest of creatures)

This is an obvious fallacy because the premises are true but the conclusion is false, and yet it does seem to present a valid (syllogistic) form. Intuitively, we immediately perceive that the problem lies in the different uses of the middle term “man” in the first and second premises: in the first one, “man” seems to stand for the nature common to all men, i.e., humanity, while in the second one it seems to stand for a particular man, i.e., an individual instantiating the common nature.

Traditionally, a fallacy such as this one is diagnosed as a fallacy of equivocation, as “man” is used in equivocal ways in the first premise and in the second premise. Now, it is precisely this variation of uses of one and the same term in different propositional contexts that supposition theory seeks to codify. In the case of the example above, supposition theory will allow the theorist to say that the term “man” supposits for different things in the first and second premises (a common nature vs. an individual man), and thus that it has different kinds of supposition. Typically, the occurrence of “man” in the first premise is said to have simple supposition (insofar as the proposition is true), whereas the occurrence of the same term in the second premise is said to have personal supposition (insofar as the proposition is true). Indeed, in the fourteenth century, with Ockham (*Summa logicae* I chap. 65) and Burley (*De puritate* Longer Treatise §44), the distinction between personal, simple, and material supposition is still associated to the fallacy of equivocation. Now, for an inference to be valid, the



recurring terms must supposit for the same things in all premises, and thus must have the same kind of supposition; in these early developments, one encounters formulations of rules of the form “no inference is possible from supposition A to supposition B” (Ebbesen 1981:39).

## The Age of Terminism: Thirteenth Century

The first decades of the thirteenth century are characterized by logical texts (several of which are edited in De Rijk 1962/1967) still presenting supposition theory in its early stages. Its first reasonably mature versions, where it acquires the more or less standard shape it was to retain for many centuries, are to be found in the writings of the thirteenth-century terminists, also known as “summularists” because they produced complete overviews of logic (*summa*, “sum” or *summula*, “little sum”) where the properties of terms, and supposition in particular, occupy a key position. The main authors of this generation are William of Sherwood, Peter of Spain, Roger Bacon, and Lambert of Auxerre/Lagny, each of them having written at least one comprehensive logical text.

Moreover, the thirteenth century is also the period when the Oxford/Paris opposition becomes significant. In effect, while in the twelfth century the development of supposition theory is restricted to the Parisian schools, the thirteenth century witnesses the emergence of a distinctively Oxford school in logic, and concerning supposition in particular, even though there were many points of mutual influence between the two centers (see De Libera 1982). One distinctive characteristic of the Parisian tradition is the importance of natural supposition, which is usually construed as the non-contextual, stable supposition of a term (resembling thus the notion of signification), as opposed to accident supposition, i.e., the supposition that a term actually acquires in a given propositional context (such as in Peter of Spain and Lambert of Auxerre/Lagny). Indeed, natural supposition is the only variation in the development of this concept that concerns terms out of a propositional context.

The four authors just mentioned each offer a particular version of supposition theory, each with its own divisions and subdivisions (for trees representing these divisions per author, see Spade 1996:272–276). In fact, the different versions of the theory recognize different divisions and subdivisions of supposition, but they mostly agree on the definitions of the kinds of supposition that they do recognize. For the present purposes, let us examine the divisions and subdivisions presented by William of Sherwood in his *Introduction to Logic*, as his theory contains all the kinds and modes of supposition that remained influential throughout the fourteenth century and beyond.

Sherwood’s first division of proper supposition is between formal and material supposition. He defines formal supposition as “when a word supposits what it signifies” (William of Sherwood 1966:107), as signification is inherently related to forms: for Sherwood, the signification of a common term is the universal form it corresponds to, e.g., humanity in the case of “man.” But formal supposition is of two kinds: simple supposition is when a term supposits “for the signified form”; personal supposition is when a term supposits “for a thing bearing the form” (Sherwood 1966:107), that is, for the individuals instantiating the universal nature. Indeed, these are the definitions of personal and simple supposition that one generally encounters in writings of the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries (with an important modification regarding simple supposition brought about by Ockham, as we shall see). Material supposition is opposed to formal supposition in that it is not significative; indeed, Sherwood continues the tradition of referring to autonymic uses of a word (i.e., standing for itself) as “material,” as in the notion of *materiale impositum* discussed above.

These three main kinds of proper supposition – personal, simple, and material – are in effect to be found in most fourteenth-century texts (except for those following Buridan in his dismissal of simple supposition), and account for the variation of ontological kinds of supposita (variation (2) above). Interestingly, none of the other thirteenth-century main texts has either formal or material supposition as kinds of supposition, but they all have personal and simple supposition: for

Roger Bacon and Lambert of Auxerre, what Sherwood understood as material supposition, namely, the supposition of a term for itself or for other expressions *qua* expressions, becomes a variation of simple supposition. But formal supposition and especially material supposition make a resounding comeback in the fourteenth century.

Another division of formal supposition presented by Sherwood is between common and discrete supposition. It is unclear whether Sherwood intends it to be a subdivision of the simple-personal division or the other way round – or perhaps as an independent division altogether. Either way, the subsequent tradition usually treats this distinction as a subdivision of personal supposition: common supposition is the supposition of common terms, i.e., of terms not meant to designate one specific individual, while discrete supposition is the supposition of singular terms such as proper names and demonstrative pronouns, which pick out one specific individual.

For Sherwood, personal common supposition is further subdivided into determinate and confused supposition; confused supposition is then divided into merely confused, and confused and distributive; and finally, the latter is divided into mobile and immobile. The divisions of the modes of personal common supposition are then to be found in virtually all subsequent texts (although the mobile vs. immobile distinction tends to disappear), and account for the different quantities of *supposita* that are required for the verification of different propositional contexts (variation (4) above, treated elsewhere in this volume.)

As for variation (3) above, it is usually accounted for by means of the concepts of ampliation and restriction, as in William of Sherwood, Peter of Spain, and Lambert of Auxerre/Lagny; Sherwood also discusses this kind of variation within the context of his theory of composite and divided senses of modal propositions. The idea is that some propositional contexts amplify the range of *supposita* being supposed for by a term, for example in a modal sentence such as “A man can be white”; in this case, the supposition of “man” is not limited to the presently existing men, but also to possible men. A similar phenomenon occurs with tensed propositions. Other contexts

restrict the range of supposition, for example, when an adjective modifies a noun, such as “white man.” But ampliation and restriction usually do not generate sub-kinds of supposition, rather it is usually said that the supposition of a given term is amplified or restricted.

In the last decades of the thirteenth century, there was a marked decline of the influence of terminist logic, in particular in Paris, where an alternative approach to semantics became very influential, that of the *modistae* (Ebbesen 1981, 1985). The *modistae* influence in Oxford was less intense, but still felt. In any case, terminism did not go into total dormant state in this period, as is sometimes thought: Roger Bacon’s *De signis*, where a sophisticated version of supposition theory is presented (improving his own earlier theory presented in his *Summulae dialectices*) was written in the last decades of the thirteenth century, in Oxford (see De Libera 1982).

### Later Developments: Fourteenth Century and Beyond

In the fourteenth century, terminist logic somehow reemerges as the chief doctrine for semantic analysis, completely replacing the *modistae* theories. In the very first years of the century, at Oxford, Walter Burley writes a *De suppositionibus* treatise, essentially taking over Sherwood’s distinctions of supposition. At the same time, Burley seems to have been the first to introduce quite a few innovations, which were to remain influential in the fourteenth century and beyond (see Brown 1972). Thus, one can say that Burley’s treatise inaugurates fourteenth-century-style supposition theory.

The next important text in the development of supposition theory was composed in the 1320s by William of Ockham, also an Englishman: his *Summa logicae*. Ockham’s *Summa* is revolutionary for many different reasons, among which his purely extensional definition of signification – for Ockham, a common term such as “man” signifies each and every man, not the universal humanity. Another important innovation developed by Ockham (but with earlier signs in the thirteenth

century, for example, in Lambert of Auxerre/Lagny; see Read 2006: Sect. 3) is the idea that the concept itself is a sign, just as written and spoken terms. In fact, Ockham develops the idea of a mental language functioning very much like written and spoken language, and thus equally apt to undergo semantic analysis; indeed, Ockham applies the supposition apparatus also to mental propositions (see Panaccio 1999), but with some paradoxical results (see Spade 1980).

While Ockham was clearly inspired by Burley's treatise (the section on the supposition of relatives is almost an exact copy of the same section in Burley's treatise see Brown 1972), he had to adjust the supposition machinery to the ontological and semantic modifications he had introduced. Thus, for Ockham simple supposition is no longer the supposition for an extra-mental universal, as such things simply do not exist in his ontology. Rather, he reformulates simple supposition as the supposition for the mental term corresponding to the spoken or written term in question. Similarly, personal supposition becomes the supposition for the thing(s) that the term signifies, given his reformulation of the notion of signification (*Summa logicae* I, chap. 64). For the rest, in particular with respect to the subdivisions of the modes of personal supposition, Ockham maintains the traditional divisions.

After Ockham, one important tradition in the fourteenth century (following Buridan) simply dispenses with simple supposition altogether, maintaining only personal and material as the main kinds of proper supposition. The idea is this: if simple supposition is the supposition for a mental term, as Ockham has it, then it is in fact a kind of material supposition (Buridan, *Summulae de dialectica* 4.3.2). Like Ockham, Buridan rejects the existence of extra-mental universals, so for him simple supposition becomes a superfluous concept.

Another author writing in the Buridanian tradition, Marsilius of Inghen, introduces another important innovation, namely that of applying the subdivisions traditionally reserved to personal supposition to material supposition as well (see Marsilius of Inghen 1983 and Dutilh Novaes 2008a: Sect. 2). With this move, it becomes

possible to "quantify" over occurrences of spoken, written, and mental terms being the material *supposita* of terms, just as one quantifies over the extra-mental individuals that are typically (but not always) the personal *supposita* of 5in all, in the fourteenth century supposition theory is widely applied to a variety of topics; in fact, it becomes an over-arching methodological tool. Ockham, for example, makes extensive use of it for theological as well as physical analyses. In effect, a significant application of supposition theory in the fourteenth century is to the issues surrounding the dogma of the Trinity (see the entry on Trinitarian Logic in this volume). Moreover, the theory continues to develop well into the fifteenth and sixteenth century. (The interested reader is urged to consult the secondary literature on these developments, in particular the work of E.J. Ashworth.)

## Conclusion

For reasons of space, this brief overview has touched upon only some of the important aspects in the development of supposition theory only. However, it seems that two general issues must still be addressed, concerning the very gist and purpose of the theory: (1) What is to determine the kind(s) of supposition that a term has in a given proposition? (2) Is there always only one (correct) kind of supposition for a term in a given propositional context? These are difficult questions with no single answer; different authors seem to have held different views.

Concerning (1), most authors seem to hold that the propositional context is indeed the main determining element, as suggested by the maxim "subjects are such as the predicates permit." Some authors (such as Paul of Venice, at the end of the fourteenth century; see his *Logica parva*, p 27), however, maintain that the desired truth of the proposition, or in any case its intended meaning, is what governs the kinds of supposition allowed for its terms. Others, such as Buridan, seem to think that ultimately the agreed-upon interpretation of a statement by the speakers involved in the situation is what really determines the supposition of a term. Yet other authors, in particular Ockham,

present rules for the determination of the supposition of the terms in a given propositional context that seem to function almost algorithmically (see Dutilh Novaes 2008b).

As for the second issue, Ockham (like Burley and many other fourteenth-century authors) in fact allows for multiple possibilities of kinds of supposition for a term in one and the same propositional context, entailing thus that the context does not always uniquely determine the supposition of a term. For Ockham, supposition theory is an important device for the generation of the (often multiple) possible readings of propositions (corresponding to the different kinds of supposition permitted by a given propositional context), what in the fourteenth century is known as “distinguishing” propositions. But not all authors insist on the possibility of generating the multiple readings of propositions by means of supposition theory: in earlier developments, the underlying idea seems to be that there should be a unique correct kind of supposition for a term in a given propositional context. However, in both cases supposition theory is essentially a theory for semantic analysis and interpretation.

## Cross-References

- ▶ [Gilbert of Poitiers](#)
- ▶ [John Buridan](#)
- ▶ [Lambert of Lagny](#)
- ▶ [Marsilius of Inghen](#)
- ▶ [Mental Language](#)
- ▶ [Modal Theories and Modal Logic](#)
- ▶ [Modistae](#)
- ▶ [Paul of Venice](#)
- ▶ [Peter Helias](#)
- ▶ [Peter of Spain](#)
- ▶ [Quantification](#)
- ▶ [Roger Bacon](#)
- ▶ [Terms, Properties of](#)
- ▶ [Trinitarian Logic](#)
- ▶ [Truth, Theories of](#)
- ▶ [Walter Burley](#)
- ▶ [William of Ockham](#)
- ▶ [William of Sherwood](#)

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## Syllogism, Theories of

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### Abstract

Aristotle's theory of the syllogism is one of the most influential theories ever developed. The theory of the syllogism for assertoric sentences was a remarkable achievement by Aristotle and it was virtually complete already from the beginning. Medieval logicians could generally not add much to it. Small changes were made and it was systematized in different ways. It was not until John Buridan in the mid-fourteenth century reworked logic in general and placed the theory in a context of a wider logic of consequences that the picture of syllogistics also changed. The theory of the modal syllogism was at a completely different stage of completion in the *Prior Analytics*, and in the hands of the medievals, it went through a remarkable development.

In the *Prior Analytics*, Aristotle presents the first logical system, that is, the theory of the syllogism. A syllogism is a deduction consisting of three sentences – two premises and a conclusion. Syllogistic sentences are categorical sentences involving a predicate and a subject connected by a copula (verb), and they are divided into four different classes, namely, universal affirmative (A), particular affirmative (I), universal negative



**Syllogism, Theories of, Table 1** The three Aristotelian figures of the syllogisms

I	II	III
$A-B$	$B-A$	$A-B$
$B-C$	$B-C$	$C-B$
$A-C$	$A-C$	$A-C$

(E), and particular negative (O) sentences. Aristotle writes them as follows:

- A – “A belongs to all B” ( $Aa B$ ).
- E – “A does not belong to any B” ( $Ae B$ ).
- I – “A belongs to some B” ( $Ai B$ ).
- O – “A does not belong to some B” ( $Ao B$ ).

The subject and predicate in the categorical sentences used in a syllogism are called terms (*horoi*) by Aristotle. There are three terms in a syllogism, a major, a minor, and a middle term. The major and the minor terms are called the extremes (*akra*), respectively, major extreme (*meizon akron*) and minor extreme (*elaton akron*), and they are the predicate and the subject of the conclusion. The middle (*meson*) term is what joins the two premises. These three terms can be combined in different ways to form three figures (*skhēmata*). Aristotle presents the following three in the *Prior Analytics* ( $A$  is the major,  $B$  the middle, and  $C$  the minor term): When the four categorical sentences are placed into these three figures, Aristotle ends up with the following 14 valid moods (in parenthesis are the medieval mnemonic names for the valid moods) (Tables 1 and 2).

A fourth figure was discussed in ancient times as well as during the Middle Ages. In the Aristotelian syllogistic, it had the following form: By treating this figure, we derive additional valid moods, which are all mentioned by Aristotle in different parts of the *Prior Analytics* (see, for example, *An. Pr.* 1.7, 29a19–29). The fourth figure moods are the following (Tables 3 and 4).

If one carries out a simple calculation based on the four categorical sentences and the four figures, we find that there are 256 possible combinations of sentences and of these 24 have traditionally been thought to be valid. To the 19 already mentioned, two subalternate moods in the first figure (Barbari and Celaront), two subalternate moods in

**Syllogism, Theories of, Table 2** The three figures with names

First figure	$Aa B, Ba C$ ; therefore, $Aa C$	(Barbara)
	$Ae B, Ba C$ ; therefore, $Ae C$	(Celarent)
	$Aa B, Bi C$ ; therefore, $Ai C$	(Darii)
	$Ae B, Bi C$ ; therefore, $Ao C$	(Ferio)
Second figure	$Ba A, Be C$ ; therefore, $Ae C$	(Camestres)
	$Be A, Ba C$ ; therefore, $Ae C$	(Cesare)
	$Be A, Bi C$ ; therefore, $Ao C$	(Festino)
	$Ba A, Bo C$ ; therefore, $Ao C$	(Baroco)
Third figure	$Aa B, Ca B$ ; therefore, $Ai C$	(Darapti)
	$Ae B, Ca B$ ; therefore, $Ao C$	(Felapton)
	$Ai B, Ca B$ ; therefore, $Ai C$	(Disamis)
	$Aa B, Ci B$ ; therefore, $Ai C$	(Datisi)
	$Ao B, Ca B$ ; therefore, $Ao C$	(Bocardo)
	$Ae B, Ci B$ ; therefore, $Ao C$	(Ferison)

**Syllogism, Theories of, Table 3** The fourth figure

IV
$B-A$
$C-B$
$A-C$

**Syllogism, Theories of, Table 4** The fourth figure with names

Fourth figure	$Ba A, Ca B$ ; therefore, $Ai C$	(Bramantip)
	$Ba A, Ce B$ ; therefore, $Ae C$	(Camenes)
	$Bi A, Ca B$ ; therefore, $Ai C$	(Dimaris)
	$Be A, Ca B$ ; therefore, $Ao C$	(Fesapo)
	$Be A, Ci B$ ; therefore, $Ao C$	(Fresison)

the second figure (Camestrop and Cesaro), and one subalternate mood in the fourth figure (Camenop) have to be added.

The difference between the first figure and the other figures is that the syllogisms in the first figure are complete syllogisms, while the syllogisms in the other two figures are incomplete. This distinction is important in Aristotle’s theory, since a complete syllogism is an immediately obvious syllogism, and an incomplete syllogism requires proof. This gives the first figure of an axiomatic character, while the proofs of the incomplete syllogisms are arrived at foremost through reduction to the complete syllogisms.



The reductions of the incomplete syllogisms were made by Aristotle through conversion rules. He states the following conversion rules in *An. Pr.* I.2, 25a1–26:

- (1)  $Aa B \Rightarrow Bi A,$
- (2)  $Ai B \Leftrightarrow Bi A,$
- (3)  $Ae B \Leftrightarrow Be A.$

(1) was called an accidental (*per accidens*) conversion, and (2) and (3) were called simple (*simpliciter*) conversions during the Middle Ages. Particular negative sentences do not convert at all, according to Aristotle.

In Chapters 3 and 8–22 of Book I of the *Prior Analytics*, Aristotle extends his theory to include syllogisms involving modally qualified categorical sentences. An Aristotelian modal syllogism is a syllogism that has at least one premise modalized, that is, which in addition to the standard terms contains the word necessity, possibility, or contingency. Aristotle’s terminology is not entirely clear, however. He uses necessity and possibility, but he works with two notions of possibility. In his preferred sense, which is foremost used in the *Prior Analytics*, possibility is defined as that which is not necessary and not impossible. This sense of possibility was called contingency in the Middle Ages. In another sense of possibility, which Aristotle used foremost in *De interpretatione*, possibility is placed on an equal footing with that which is not impossible. The first concept of possibility, which I henceforth will call contingency, is used in the modal syllogistic. The second concept of possibility is not treated systematically in the *Prior Analytics*.

Logic in the Middle Ages is generally thought to have started with Boethius (c. 475–526). He wrote quite extensively on the theory of the syllogism. He managed to produce a translation of the *Prior Analytics*, which was not well known, however, until the twelfth century, but he wrote two textbooks on the categorical syllogism. One is known as *On the Categorical Syllogism (De syllogismo categorico)* and the other has been given the title *Introduction to Categorical*

*Syllogisms (Introductio ad syllogismos categoricos)*. He also wrote an interesting book called *On Hypothetical Syllogisms (De hypotheticis syllogismis)*.

Boethius makes no substantial contribution to the theory of the syllogism. He was foremost an important transmitter of the theory to later logicians and his works contain a clear presentation of the Aristotelian theory. The presentation is, however, in one important aspect different from Aristotle’s. In Boethius works, the categorical sentences involves “is” (*est*) and not “belongs” as Aristotle’s. The four sentences thus become

- A – “Every *B* is *A*.”
- I – “Some *B* is *A*.”
- E – “No *B* is *A*.”
- O – “Some *B* is not *A*.”

In this way, it is more obvious that they are subject predicate sentences and moreover that the syllogisms are deductions and not conditional sentences. A consequence of this is that the four figures will look different as well, namely (Table 5).

Systematically, Boethius change makes no difference whatsoever and all medieval logicians writing after him universally adopted it, but it makes the evident character of the first-figure syllogisms less apparent. This is not a quote

The first known commentary on the *Prior Analytics* in the Latin West can be found in an anonymous work. The author has been called Anonymous Aurelianensis III and the work dated to c. 1160–1180. The theory of assertoric syllogism was repeated and summarized in almost all logic works from the early thirteenth century, but there are no major commentaries until the 1240s when Robert Kilwardby (d. 1279) writes his *Exposition on the Books of the Prior Analytics (In libros Priorum analyticorum expositio)*.

**Syllogism, Theories of, Table 5** The four figures according to Boethius

I	II	III	IV
<i>B–A</i>	<i>A–B</i>	<i>B–A</i>	<i>A–B</i>
<i>C–B</i>	<i>C–B</i>	<i>B–C</i>	<i>B–C</i>
<i>C–A</i>	<i>C–A</i>	<i>C–A</i>	<i>C–A</i>

Kilwardby has very little to add to the theory of assertoric syllogism, but his interpretation of the modal syllogistic is quite remarkable and highly interesting. It was also very influential in the thirteenth century; for example, Albert the Great, Simon of Faversham, and Radulphus Brito all follow him in their interpretations, which means that all the major commentators of the *Prior Analytics* in the thirteenth century followed Kilwardby.

He assumes from the beginning that Aristotle's theory is correct and makes it his project to find the interpretation that shows this. He begins by considering a counter-example to the accidental conversion of necessity sentences, namely,

- (4) "Every literate being is necessarily a human being."

According to the conversion rules accepted by Kilwardby (4) should be converted to

- (5) "Some human being is necessarily literate,"  
 (4) is obviously true while (5) is false.

Kilwardby preferred solution to the above counter-examples is based on a distinction between sentences that are necessary per se and those that are necessary *per accidens*. He writes, When it is said: "Every literate being is necessarily a human being," this subject is not something which can be said per se of this predicate, but since "literate being" is not separated from that which belongs to a human being itself, the proposition is conceded to be necessary, but when a proposition is necessary in this way it is necessary *per accidens*. Therefore, when Aristotle says that necessity propositions are convertible, he means that only the propositions that are necessary per se are convertible.

The idea is here that since "human being" is not predicated per se of its subject "literate being," the sentence (4) is not a per se necessity sentence and, therefore, not convertible. (4) is a necessity sentence, not of the per se type, but only of the *per accidens* type, since it is necessarily true only in the sense that being a human being and being literate are not separable. Kilwardby implies that the relation between subject and predicate term must be of a

special kind if a sentence is to be called necessary per se. In (4), "literate being" and "human being" do not have the close per se relation Kilwardby demands of a convertible sentence.

Kilwardby thinks that sentences per se should be understood in the way Aristotle explains them in *An. Post.* I.4–6. Aristotle discusses four different notions of per se (*kath' hauto*) predication, but Kilwardby seems only to have the two first in mind when referring to per se. Aristotle says that the first type of per se predication (per se *primo modo*) occurs when the definition of the subject includes the predicate. The second type of per se predication (per se *secundo modo*) occurs when the definition of the predicate includes the subject. The best characterization of the first relation is the genus-species model, that is, that the definition of a species includes its genus. The second relation is often characterized by a *proprium* (property), since a *proprium* is included in the definition of a subject; for example, in "a human being is able to laugh." The term "human being" is included in the definition of the predicate "being able to laugh." A sentence is per se necessary if it includes any of these two predications, according to Kilwardby. Necessity *per accidens* belongs to all other necessity sentences that do not have the intrinsic relation between subject and predicate.

Around the time, William of Ockham (c. 1287–1347) wrote *Summary of Logic* (*Summa logicae*). Medieval logic was starting to change. More emphasis was put on the theory of consequence. Such a theory was developed by Abelard as part of his discussion of the topical inferences and the hypothetical syllogism. During the thirteenth century, it was developed as part of the topics, but in the fourteenth century, there started appearing works solely on consequences. The most famous one is perhaps John Buridan's *Treaties on the Consequences* (*Tractatus de consequentiis*), but we also find earlier authors like Walter Burley that stress consequences over syllogisms. Burley probably wrote *On the Purity of the Art of Logic* (*Puritate de arte logicae*) as an answer to Ockham's famous book. For Ockham, however, the most important formal inferences are still syllogisms, and he devotes most of Book III of the *Summa* to it.

John Buridan (c. 1300–1358) is perhaps the foremost logician of the Middle Ages and in his hands the theory of the syllogism is reworked and developed well beyond anything seen before in the history of logic. The two foremost logical works of Buridan are the *Treaties on Consequence* and the *Summulae de dialectica*.

In the *Treatise*, he bases his theory of the syllogism on his philosophical semantics and treats the syllogistic inference as a special case of a much wider theory of consequences. As his immediate predecessors he is almost uninterested in the assertoric syllogistic and moves quickly to temporal, oblique, variation, and modal syllogisms, but this does not hinder him from making some original contributions to the theory.

A syllogism is a formal consequence, according to Buridan. The theory of syllogism is hence only a branch of the theory of formal consequence. It is distinguished by having a conjunctive antecedent and a single sentence as consequent, and furthermore by having involving three terms. This last condition is not a necessary one since Buridan also treats syllogisms involving more than three terms.

Buridan treats all the three famous figures and he notes that the conclusion can be either direct or indirect. In an indirect conclusion, the minor term is predicated of the major instead of the other way around. Since the premises are part of a conjunction as the antecedent of a consequent, they can easily be transposed, which means that he can define the fourth figure as a first figure with transposed premises and an indirect conclusion. Hence, he does not need to discuss it independently of the first figure.

A formal consequence holds for Buridan by the principle of uniform substitution, that is, such a consequence is valid for any uniform substitution of its categorematic terms. A syllogism is a special kind of formal consequence since it requires for its validity that terms be conjoined across sentences. How the principle of uniform substitution works in such a case is a bit tricky and it requires him to bring his general semantics and the notions of distribution into the theory of the syllogism. To spell out the relation of the terms and hence the validity of first figure syllogisms, he reformulates

the traditional *dictum de omni et nullo* rules. They can be formulated in the following way:

(7)

Any two terms, which are called the same as a third by reason of the same thing for which that third term supposits, not collectively, are correctly called the same as each other.

(8)

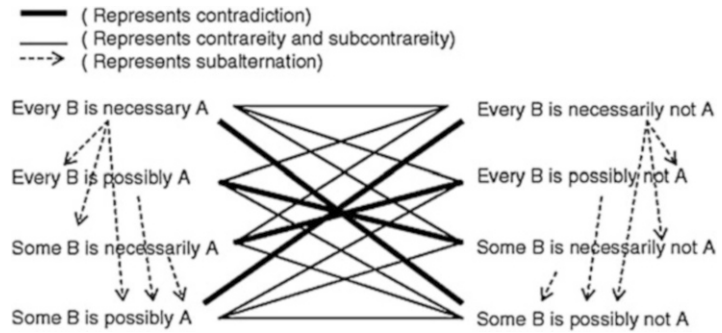
Any two terms, of which one is called the same as some third term of which the other is called not the same by reason of the same thing for which that third term supposits, are correctly called not the same as each other.

One could say a lot about these rules, but the term that carries most of the weight here is of course “supposits.” Supposition is a theory of reference, and it is terms coreferentiality in the different sentences in a syllogism that is going to be the decisive thing in determining whether the principle of uniform substitution is satisfied or not. It is at this point, he brings in his theory of distribution.

The rules governing distribution of terms in a sentence is given as part of his account of common personal supposition. A term is distributed if it in a sentence is taken to refer to all it signifies – the most obvious example is if the term is in the scope of a universal quantifier. He gives five rules for when a term is distributed, but in short, one can say that universals distribute subjects, negatives distribute predicates, and no other terms are distributed. If we stay within the square of opposition, then we get that universal affirmative sentences have the subject term distributed, universal negatives have both terms distributed, particular affirmative have neither term distributed, and particular negative have only the predicate term distributed.

Given the theory of distribution, he turns his attention to the syllogisms, and we see now that in order for a combination of premises to be acceptable, the middle terms need to be distributed, otherwise we will not have a formally acceptable consequence. Buridan approaches it combinatorially. Given four different sentences and two places they can be in, we get 16 possible combinations. Some of these can, based on the rules for distribution, be ruled out immediately. A combination with only negative premises will not work at all; hence, EE, EO, OE, and OO must be rejected. II has both middle terms undistributed

**Syllogism, Theories of,**  
**Fig. 1** John Buridan's octagon of opposition for modal propositions



and can thus be rejected. In the first figure IA, OA, and OI have a middle term undistributed. The other eight are accepted. In the second figure, we see that AA, AI, and IA must be rejected because of an undistributed middle term. The other eight are accepted. In the third figure IO and OI have an undistributed middle but the remaining nine combinations are accepted.

There are some surprises in the assertoric syllogistics in Buridan's presentation. In the second figure, he accepts indirect conclusions for IEO (Tifesno) and OAO (Robaco), and in the third figure indirect conclusions for AOO (Carbodo), AEO (Lapfeton), and IEO (Rifeson). He also accepts syllogisms to what he calls "uncommon idiom for negatives," that is, when the predicate term precedes the negation. This adds another three in the first figure and two in the second. If we add this up and include all the indirect conclusions, we get 33 valid moods as opposed to 19 in the Aristotelian syllogistic. If we then add the supplementary subalternate (weakened) conclusions, we get in the traditional 24 valid moods, but in Buridan's systematization of the theory we get 38.

A theory that all thought was perfect and could not be developed further is in the hand of Buridan changed quite radically. As a matter of fact, Buridan is quite right in accepting these additional 14 moods. They are valid. After having done all this in just a few pages – as mentioned Buridan is rather uninterested in the assertoric syllogistics – he turns to the temporal, oblique, and modal syllogistics. Of these, it is the modal syllogistics he spends the most time on.

A temporal syllogism is made up of sentences involving temporal ampliation of the copula. In such a sentence, the supposition of the subject term is

extended to include past and future things as well as present. The syllogistics for sentences involving oblique terms is important for Buridan's general theory of consequence, since it is here that we find the rules governing the behavior of oblique terms in distributive contexts. His investigation is extraordinarily detailed and maintains a high level of rigor, which is almost unbelievable for someone not having the symbolic tools of contemporary logic.

The syllogistics for composite modal sentences is straightforward and Buridan uses only a couple of pages in the *Treatise on Consequences* to outline its basic structure. The theory of the syllogism for divided modal sentences is given a much more thorough treatment. For Buridan, a modal copula always ampliates its subject term to stand for not only present, past, and future beings but also possible beings unless the supposition of the subject term is explicitly restricted to only actual beings. Based on this, he can outline an exhaustive account of the logical relations between quantified divided modal sentences, which he presents in the octagon of opposition. Slightly simplified and assuming that the complete octagon can be formed by some trivial equivalences holding between the modalities it can be presented in the Fig. 1.

**Cross-References**

- ▶ [Albert the Great](#)
- ▶ [Boethius](#)
- ▶ [Consequences, Theory of](#)
- ▶ [John Buridan](#)
- ▶ [Modal Theories and Modal Logic](#)
- ▶ [Radulphus Brito](#)
- ▶ [Richard of Campsall](#)

- ▶ [Robert Kilwardby](#)
- ▶ [Simon of Faversham](#)
- ▶ [Walter Burley](#)
- ▶ [William of Ockham](#)

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## Syncategoremata

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### Abstract

The distinction between categorematic and syncategorematic words (*syncategoremata*) can be traced to two main sources, viz., the grammarian Priscian (sixth century) and the famous author (commentator and translator of Aristotle's works) Boethius (c. 480–526). With the increasing intertwining of grammar and logic from the eleventh century and the emergence of treatises on logic in the twelfth century onward, the *syncategoremata* gradually became a subject of interest in their own right. The development of theories on *syncategoremata* is closely connected with the emergence of theories on the properties of terms, particularly theories of supposition. The most important factor leading to the development of these related areas of study is the medievals' keen interest in the interpretation of linguistic expressions within the context of the propositions they occur in, a method of analysis that has become known as the contextual approach (De Rijk, *Logica modernorum*. A contribution to the history of early terminist logic. vol I: On the twelfth century theory of fallacy. vol II, Part one: The origin and early development of the theory of supposition; Part

two: The origin and early development of the theory of supposition. Texts and indices. Van Gorcum, Assen, 1962–1967).

Generally speaking, the class of words labeled *syncategoremata* included expressions that, more than their categorematic counterparts, require a context of expressions in order to be meaningful. Nouns and verbs, such as “man” and “to run,” were considered as having a more definitive meaning than expressions like “every” or “not.” In the early days of the *syncategoremata* studies, the criteria for distinguishing categorematic from syncategorematic words were not entirely clear; authors used both syntactic and semantic criteria to separate the two classes from each other. The different ways of describing the two classes of words sometimes led to different lists of *syncategoremata* (Braakhuis, *De 13de eeuwse tractaten over syncategorematische termen*. Deel I: Inleidende studie. Deel II: Uitgave van Nicolaas van Parijs' *Sincategoremata* (diss.). Kreps, Meppel, 1979).

Throughout the Middle Ages, logicians developed their own views about the precise characteristics of *syncategoremata*, including their identity, nature, and (linguistic and logical) function(s). The late twelfth and entire thirteenth centuries produced separate treatises on syncategorematic words, and later on, the topics and analyses featuring in them were incorporated into works of a wider range. The medievals' ideas on *syncategoremata* are not only important for understanding their accounts on language and logic but also shed light on their views in other areas of research (Braakhuis, *De 13de eeuwse tractaten over syncategorematische termen*. Deel I: Inleidende studie. Deel II: Uitgave van Nicolaas van Parijs' *Sincategoremata* (diss.). Kreps, Meppel, 1979; Kretzmann, *Syncategoremata, exponibilia, sophismata*. In Kretzmann N, Kenny A, Pinborg J, Stump E (eds) *The Cambridge history of later medieval philosophy*. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, pp 211–245, 1982).



## Historical Development of the Concept

The use of ‘syncategorema’ as a technical term derives from a well-known passage in Priscian’s *Institutiones grammaticae*, in which he lists the parts of speech (*partes orationis*). In this passage, Priscian refers to the “dialecticians” (most probably the Peripatetici), who distinguish between two parts of speech: the first kind include nouns and verbs, such that when they alone are combined in a proposition they make up a complete statement; the second kind are called *syncategoremata*, that is, consignifying, i.e., having a particular meaning in combination with categorematic words.

While we do not find the expression *syncategorema* as such in his works, Boethius does have clear views about the notion of consignificare. He considers nouns and verbs (including adverbs, participles, pronouns, and interjections) as the only parts of speech; conjunctives and prepositions are not parts of speech, because they either do not have a complete signification of their own or none at all, except when they are used in combination with the ones that do. This idea fits in with his view that only nouns and verbs can function as the subject or predicate of a proposition; the copula *est* (is) and *non est*. (is not), the expressions *omnis* (every), *nullus* (no), and *aliquis* (some) (i.e., the *signa quantitatis*, expressions we now know as quantifiers) do not, but merely indicate the quality and quantity respectively of the propositions they occur in, e.g., *omnis homo est animal*. The semantic function of these signs of quality and quantity is to consignify.

The *syncategoremata* became a distinct topic of interest from about the middle of the eleventh century, when logic first entered the domain of grammar and the two fields became increasingly intertwined. Grammarians commenting on Priscian’s works were particularly interested in providing explanations for the division into different parts of speech, and both grammarians and logicians attempted to deal with the correct way of interpreting linguistic expressions. The logicians’ concern with the *syncategoremata* is to be seen in the context of the *logica modernorum*, which

emerged from the second half of the twelfth century. From then on, the study of syncategorematic words became part of the standard literature on logic.

Several works on grammar, such as the *Ars disserendi* by Adam of Petit Pont (1132), the *Glosses on Priscian* by William of Conches (c. 1080–1154) and the *Summa super Priscianum* by Peter Helias (taught in Paris c. 1140), pay attention to the semantic function of *consignificare*. While Adam appears to confine *consignificatio* to prepositions and conjunctives, his account offers evidence that he also uses the expression in a broader sense for words that acquire a more determinate meaning within a particular context. William’s treatise explicitly distinguishes several uses of the expression *consignificare*, viz., as equivalent to “to secondarily signify” (*secundario significare*), as in “a verb consignifies time” (*verbum consignificat tempus*) to “denominate” (*denominare*), as in “the predicate consignifies the subject” (*predicatum consignificat subiectum*), and as used for that which by itself signifies nothing, but only when it is combined with some other meaningful expression. It is in this latter way that conjunctives and prepositions consignify. He considers the *signa quantitatis* a separate group of nominal expression, alongside expressions that signify a substance (such as “Socrates” and “man”), those that signify things that inhere in a substance (such as “whiteness” and “blackness”), and the ones that signify fictitious entities (such as “goat-stag” and “chimera”); they do not signify a substance or quality, but modes of speaking about things (*modus loquendi de rebus*). Peter Helias also devotes considerable attention to Priscian’s division of parts of speech. In his view prepositions and conjunctives are indeed classes of words and have the same kind of semantic function as prepositions, conjunctives, adverbs, and pronouns do, viz., to consignify (Braakhuis 1979).

In the *Dialectica*, the *Logica ingredientibus* and the *Glossae super Perihermeneias*, the logician Peter Abelard (1079–1142) explicitly devotes attention to the semantic function of

prepositions and conjunctives; of these expressions he says that they have no definitive meaning on their own but only in combination with other linguistic expressions or that they have no meaning whatsoever but only come to consignify when they are combined with other expressions. In general, their function is to indicate some property of that which is signified by the nouns and verbs they are conjoined with. The *signa quantitatis* are counted among the parts of a proposition (*partes propositionis*); they are nominal expressions, but it is difficult to decide what they signify. Of the expressions *est* and *non est*, like *si* (if) and *et* (and), he also says that they do not have a meaning of their own; they only contribute to the affirmative or negative force (*vis affirmationis vel negationis*) of an expression, because they produce a composition or division in the mind. Abelard identifies the basis of these expressions with the intellect's way of conceiving that which is signified by the subject and predicate of the proposition at issue. The expressions *necessarium* (necessary) and *possibile* (possible) do not have a signification of their own either; their semantic function is comparable with that of the copula and conjunctives.

In the period after Abelard, the treatment of syncategorematic terms is incorporated in discussions on fallacious reasoning. In a number of works dating from the third quarter of the twelfth century, syncategorematic words are extensively discussed: they are considered important because they can lead to fallacies and misunderstandings. In the *Fallaciae Parvipontanae* syncategorematic words feature in a section on the fallacy of equivocation: the class of words labeled as *syncategoremata* is identified with that of indeclinable expressions. The *Ars Emmerana* also mentions expressions like *unum* (one), *tantum* (only), *solus* (alone), and *nisi* (unless), which are identified as words that can easily produce fallacies. In the *Tractatus De univocatione Monacensis*, we find similar remarks to the effect that expressions like *tantum*, *solus*, and *nisi* can cause problems in inferences. The *Ars Meliduna* considers the *signa* and the words *solus*, *tantum*, and *preter* as *syncategoremata*. The *Tractatus Anagnini* devotes discussions to distributive

terms, such as *omnis*; infinite terms, such as *non-homo* (not-man); and exclusive terms, such as *tantum* (only), *nisi* (unless), *preter* (but), and *solus* (alone). The focus is on the congruity and incongruity of propositions. In the *Introductiones Montanae maiores*, reference is made to words that cannot be classified as parts of speech, because they do not have a certain *significatio*, but are said to “consignify” instead: examples mentioned are *pro* and *si*, the latter of which was later classified as a syncategorematic word. The tract also pays attention to the *signa quantitatis* and how to interpret a number of problematic propositions in which they occur.

The *Dialectica Monacensis*, which was presumably written somewhere between the end of the twelfth and the beginning of the thirteenth century, lists three kinds of equivocation, one of which is connected with the occurrence of a syncategorematic word in a proposition: among such words are exclusive and exceptive words, prepositions and conjunctives (that can cause ambiguity). Furthermore the expressions *incipit* (begins) and *desinit* (ceases) are reckoned among the *syncategoremata*; so is *est*, insofar as it involves the composition of subject and predicate. Although there is evidence suggesting that the author of the *Dialectica Monacensis* also wrote a treatise on *syncategoremata*, the treatises on which research has been done all stem from the thirteenth century. Other treatises, which deal with *sophismata* (*Sophistaria*), take grammatical and logical distinctions as their starting point for the study of *syncategoremata*.

In general, the thirteenth century forms the highlight of intensive study of syncategorematic words. Throughout this time, the medievals gradually came to form their own ideas about the distinguishing features, the nature and function of syncategorematic words. *Syncategoremata*-treatises proper, which emerged from about the last quarter of the twelfth century onward until the final quarter of the thirteenth century, were devoted to the systematic explanation of syncategorematic words, adding puzzling sentences (*sophismata*) to demonstrate the logical behavior of these words in different propositional contexts. *Syncategoremata* were also at the focus of interest

in treatises called *Distinctiones*, which were manuals organized around logico-grammatical rules connected with the use of syncategorematic expressions in specific propositions. The difficulties surrounding the use of *syncategoremata* in propositions featured in *sophismata* collections, which came to be known as *Abstractiones*, after the title of a work by the thirteenth-century master known by the name of Magister Richard Sophista; these works were not so much devoted to theoretical reflections on the nature of *syncategoremata*, but instead offered an array of puzzling sentences containing one or more syncategorematic expression along with possible ways to solve them.

*Syncategoremata* treatises were compiled by several authors, such as Robert (Roger?) Bacon (whose treatise was written around the first quarter of the thirteenth century), Jean le Page (who taught in Paris between 1225 and 1235), Peter of Spain (whose treatise dates from the second quarter of the thirteenth century), William of Sherwood (who wrote his treatise between 1230 and 1240), Nicholas of Paris (whose treatise was written between 1240 and 1250), and Henry of Ghent (whose tract was written between 1240 and 1250).

In the fourteenth century, all kinds of material discussed in the *syncategoremata* treatises find their way into more general works on logic and works devoted to *sophismata*. Some of these *sophismata* specifically deal with physical problems, particularly those connected with the analysis of motion; examples are found in the tradition of the *De probationes propositionum*, inspired by Richard Billingham (fl. c. 1340). Prominent authors such as William of Ockham (c. 1287–1347), John Buridan (c. 1300–1362), and Peter of Ailly (1350–1420) speak about the distinction between categorematic and syncategorematic expressions in connection with their accounts of mental language.

### Systematic Development of the Concept

Throughout the history of logic and grammar, we gradually see that the list of words labeled as syncategorematic is expanded. While initially

only conjunctives and prepositions were counted as such, the list ultimately came to include all the words that do not function as the subject or predicate of a proposition, but nevertheless modify the expressions they are conjoined with and thus affect the interpretation of the entire proposition they occur in.

The lists of syncategorematic words continued to vary, because two distinct criteria (based upon an ambiguity in the notion of *consignificare* and *dispositio*) were used to discern categorematic from syncategorematic words. The more syntactic criterion identifies syncategorematic words as those that do not function as the subject or a predicate of a proposition but only modify the relationship between subject and predicate. The semantic criterion singles out syncategorematic words by their semantic function, as consignifying a disposition or circumstance of the “things” (*res*) indicated by the categorematic expressions they are conjoined with. The semantic criterion to distinguish the *syncategoremata* is initially the most dominant in the treatises of Robert (Roger?) Bacon, Nicholas of Paris, and Henry of Ghent, whereas in John le Page’s, Peter of Spain’s, and William of Sherwood’s treatises, the syntactic criterion prevails. However, even these two distinct criteria in themselves did not give a sufficient reason for labeling words as either categorematic or syncategorematic. Throughout their treatises, most authors in fact used both criteria to make the distinction, albeit to different extents. In treatises by English authors, we also find another distinction, namely, between the categorematic and syncategorematic use of certain expressions (e.g., “alone” (*solus*) and “infinitely many” (*infinita*)) (Braakhuis, 1979). While continental authors do not mention this distinction explicitly, they do have similar explanations as to how one particular word can be used in two different ways. For instance, in his discussion of the *sophisma* “infinitely many are infinitely many” (*infinita sunt infinita*), Henry of Ghent mentions that the word *infinita* can be taken to refer to *res* (“things”) of a specific amount, or it can be taken as a *modus*, indicating that whichever amount of things one has in mind, the amount of things at issue will always be larger.

The words labeled syncategorematic came to include the following: the verb “is” used as a *tertium adiacens* (i.e., as part of an attribution); the negation “not”; the modal adverbs “necessarily” and “contingently”; the exclusives “only” and “alone”; the exceptives “except” and “unless” (preter, preterquam); the distributive signs “every” (*omnis*), “whole” (*totum*), “both” (*uterque*), and “of whatever kind” (*qualislibet*); the consecutives “if” (*si*), “unless” (*nisi*), and “but that” (*quin*); the copulatives (like “and”); the disjunctive “or” (*vel, aut*); the adverbs “whether” (*an*); and the verbs “begins” (*incipit*) and “ceases” (*desinit*). The *Syncategoremata* authors were inclined to say that syncategorematic words do not signify, but rather carry out what they indicate. Thus, the word *negatio* signifies a negation (as a something), whereas the expression *non* (“not”) in a sentence performs it or carries it out (Nuchelmans 1988). In most *syncategoremata* treatises from the continent, the negation “not” was marked as the basic principle of all other syncategorematic expressions, into which they could all be analyzed. In the fourteenth-century accounts of mental language, the focus on the function of syncategorematic expressions became predominant (Braakhuis 1979).

The emergence of treatises on syncategorematic terms in the Middle Ages has greatly contributed to the growth and development of medieval analyses of ambiguities. It also helped people gain a better understanding of the distinction between material and formal elements of language; discussions of the syncategorematic word *si*, for example, include reflections on the nature of inference (*consequentia*). However, it was not only language itself the medievals were interested in: an author’s views on the function and application of specific *syncategoremata* in propositions can help us shed light on their position regarding ontological matters as well. For example, discussions of the *syncategorema* “to be” and “not” reveal differences of opinion regarding what kind of entities propositions are expressions of; the notion of being itself is under discussion in analyses of *sophismata* like “only one is” (*tantum unum est*); authors also have

different views about what kinds of “things” are to be reckoned as necessary and (im)possible, as is demonstrated in the way they deal with propositions containing the expression “of necessity” (*necessario*), as well as in their accounts of the logical rule “from the impossible anything follows.” Much of this kind of material can help us decide whether an author should be considered a realist or a conceptualist. Finally, expositions of propositions containing the verbs “begins” (*incipit*) and “ceases” (*desinit*) show what an author has to say about the notions of time and motion (Braakhuis 1979, 1999; Spruyt 1989, 1992, 1994).

## Cross-References

- ▶ [Boethius](#)
- ▶ [Henry of Ghent](#)
- ▶ [Peter of Spain](#)
- ▶ [Richard Billingham](#)
- ▶ [Sophisms](#)
- ▶ [Terms, Properties of](#)

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## al-Tawḥīdī, Abū Ḥayyān

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### Abstract

‘Alī b. Muḥammad b. al-‘Abbās al-Tawḥīdī (Abū Ḥayyān), an essayist and a stylist, was one of the main witnesses of the intellectual activity of eleventh-century Baghdad and Rayy during the Buyid period. He was one of the most talented prose-writers in the history of Arabic literature and worked as an erudite courtier and a copyist in the main intellectual circles of his time (Abū al-Faḍl ibn al-‘Amīd, Ibn ‘Abbād, Ibn Sa‘dān). He was close to the philosopher Abū Sulaymān al-Sijistānī.

There is no agreement on the birthplace of al-Tawḥīdī, and nowhere is an exact date given for his birth. From a remark he makes on his being close to 90 years old in his *Epistle to the Qādī Abū Sahl*, written in 400/1008, it has been determined that he was born between 310/922 and 320/932, but according to al-Shālījī (introduction to al-Tawḥīdī, *al-Risāla al-Baġdādiyya [The Baghdad Epistle]*), the phrase “ninety and so” should

be corrected into “seventy and so” and his birthdate should be put around 320–330/932–941. Although the biographers do not show any agreement on his birthplace (given as Wasit, Shiraz, or Nishapur), he seems to have been raised in Baghdad, if we are to follow the *Risāla al-Baġdādiyya*, where he demonstrates his perfect intimacy with the most colloquial vocabulary of this city. The *Risāla al-Baġdādiyya* has been neglected by contemporary researchers though it is expressly attributed to al-Tawḥīdī by Yāqūt, as noted by Muḥyī al-Dīn (1949). The *Risāla* has been recently reedited by ‘Abbūd al-Shālījī, who brings several parallels between the text and other works of al-Tawḥīdī, confirming his authorship (see al-Tawḥīdī, *al-Risāla al-Baġdādiyya*, introd. pp. 9–10).

Some classical writers like Yāqūt would like to see in al-Tawḥīdī a Persian, but this should be excluded as Tawḥīdī himself claims that he could not understand Persian, when it was used once in a *majlīs* (learned meeting) by Ibn ‘Abbād (see Bergé 1990:115–116, quoting *Akhlāq*, 306 and *Imtā‘*, I, 77). Nevertheless, it seems he died in the Iranian city of Shiraz, which was famous for its Sufi congregations and shrines and where he seems to have spent the last part of his life, maybe in the entourage of the vizier in Shiraz of Ṣamṣām al-Dawla, Abū l-Qāsim al-Mudlijī (vizier in 382–383/992–993), for whom he composed the lost *Muḥaḍarāt wa-l-munāzarāt (Lessons and Disputes)* (extracts in Yāqūt, listed by S. M. Stern, *EF*<sup>2</sup>, p. 127a).



Abū Ḥayyān al-Tawḥīdī received a traditional education in the classical fields of grammar, theology, and Islamic jurisprudence. He studied theology with the Shafī'ī scholars Abū Ḥāmid al-Marwarrudhī (m. 362/972) and Abū Bakr al-Shāshī (d. 365/975), and grammar and logics with the Mu'tazilite grammarian Abū Sa'īd al-Ṣīrāfi ibn al-Marzubān (d. 367/977), a disciple of al-Jubbā'ī, and 'Alī ibn 'Īsā al-Rummānī (d. 384/994), who was also a well-versed *mutakallim*. In Sufism, al-Tawḥīdī was a disciple of the Baghdad master Abū Ja'far al-Khuldī (d. 348/959), who had been initiated by the famous Sufi al-Junayd (see Ibn al-Nadīm, *al-Fihrist*, p. 183). One of al-Tawḥīdī's preserved works, the *Ishārāt al-Ilāhiyya* (*The Divine Hints*), a collection of personal prayers (*du'āt*) and lamentations that still awaits to be studied, shows his genuine Sufi leaning.

Al-Tawḥīdī moved to different cities and was in Mecca (353/964), then settled in Rayy at the court of Abū al-Faḍl ibn al-'Amīd (d. 360/970) the vizier of the Buyid prince 'Aḍud al-Dawla. He returned to Baghdad after the death of his patron and attended there a lecture by Yaḥyā ibn 'Adī in 361/971. He was not able to secure the protection of Abū l-Faḍl's son, Abū l-Faḥḥ ibn al-'Amīd, who succeeded his father and remained vizier for only two years before being killed. Al-Tawḥīdī endured from 367/977 the patronage of Abū al-Faḥḥ's successor, the former secretary Ibn 'Abbād, as he bitterly complained later on in his *Akhlaq* (or *Dhamm*, or *Mathālib*) *al-wazīrayn* (*The Manners of the Two Viziers*). Ibn 'Abbād, who had been given the vizierate of Mu'ayyid al-Dawla, is portrayed in detail as a *parvenu* keeping the appearance of an intellectual who did not hesitate to write on theological matters while being actually a conceited libertine. Al-Tawḥīdī became famous for the ingenuity of his curses toward Ṣāhib ibn 'Abbād (as well as against Abū al-Faḍl ibn al-'Amīd, also portrayed in the book but not as much scorned as Ibn 'Abbād), using a range of sexual metaphors in describing the licentious vizier. His blunt language, probably unbearable to the ears of a number of religious scholars, earned him the title of heretic in most medieval biographies (to the exception of Yāqūt, who shows some enthusiasm and quotes him at

length). *The Manners of the Two Viziers* was so offensive that it was certainly edited only after the death of Ibn 'Abbād in 386/995.

At an epoch when the philosophical school of Baghdad had reached its apogee, al-Tawḥīdī naturally completed his education by attending the circles of two of the main philosophers of his time: Yaḥyā ibn 'Adī (d. 364/974) and Abū Sulaymān al-Sijistānī (d. after 391/1000). There he was an active participant in the reception process of the classical heritage that had been transmitted by such luminaries as al-Kindī and Ḥunayn b. Ishāq. He copied the lessons of al-Sijistānī in 371/981, and these notes form part of the raw-material behind his *Muqābasāt* [*Enlightments*], the compilation of which had started in 360/970 and was achieved only after the death of Abū Sulaymān al-Sijistānī, which took place after 391/1000. At an unknown date, he exchanged a correspondence with the Imami (twelver Shī'ite) philosopher Miskawayh, who was acting as the treasure secretary of 'Aḍud al-Dawla and as the director of his library. It was published under the title *al-Hawāmīl wa-l-shawāmīl* [*Open (Questions) and Explicit (Answers)*]. Al-Tawḥīdī addressed to Miskawayh 175 questions on various topics such as linguistics, ethics, and philosophy, often with some strong religious or sociological connotations. This work may have been composed in Rayy with al-Tawḥīdī trying to gain the favorable influence of Miskawayh while serving him as *faire-valoir*. During one of his stays at Rayy, probably at the court of Ibn al-'Amīd, al-Tawḥīdī listened to a discussion of Abū l-Ḥasan al-'Amīrī on ethical matters and metaphysics (see Muḥyī al-Dīn 1949:173).

Al-Tawḥīdī's interest in philosophy, which has been seen as part of his versatile character, should be seen in the context of his classical theological background since the debates of the theologians were either rooted in or echoed by contemporary philosophical discussions. As A. Amīn and S. A. Ṣaqr put it (al-Tawḥīdī, *al-Hawāmīl wa-l-shawāmīl* [*Open (Questions) and Explicit (Answers)*], introd. *waw*): "Abū Ḥayyān was a philosopher with the philosophers, a theologian with the theologians, a linguist with the linguists and a sufi with the sufis." For 'A. R. Muḥyī

al-Dīn, he came to philosophy as a man of letters, a witness of his age, and because of the personalities he became acquainted with (Muḥyī al-Dīn 1949:175). For W. al-Qāḍī, who studied al-Tawḥīdī's thought and edited two of his works, his system rests on three fundamental values: religion, learning, and morality, to which must be added the additional, yet basic, value of reason (see al-Qāḍī 1970).

Al-Tawḥīdī's Sunnism (see al-Qāḍī 2003) may have been a cause of his frictions with Ibn 'Abbad (contrast Miskawayh's most "Shī'ite" short treatise, the *Fawz al-asḡar*, or *Small [Book] of Salvation*). Refusing the pure game of appearances at the courts, he vigorously attacked his former employers on their morals as well as on subtle theological issues in the case of Ibn 'Abbād, who claimed to be an accomplished scholar as well as an Imāmī and a Mu'tazilite (see Yafūt 2003, who insists on the different Mu'tazilite currents at the time as a key to understand al-Tawḥīdī's position). Another of his lost works was devoted to the great stylist of Arabic prose al-Jāḥiẓ, himself a Mu'tazilite (extracts of the *Taqrīẓ al-Jāḥiẓ [Praise of Jāḥiẓ]* listed by S. M. Stern in *EP*<sup>2</sup>, p. 127), who was certainly a literary model for al-Tawḥīdī.

Later on, he became the boon-companion of Ibn Sa'dān, vizier of 'Aḍud al-Dawla's successor Ṣamṣām al-Dawla from 373/983 until 375/985. Al-Tawḥīdī had been introduced to Ibn Sa'dān by the geometer Abū al-Wafā' al-Būzajānī (d. 376/986), one of the last translators of Greek geometry and a commentator of Euclides, Diophantes, and Ptolemy (see Yāqūt, XV, 7) and by the philosopher Zayd ibn Rifā', who was suspected of belonging to the Brethren of Purity. For a time, on the initiative of al-Būzajānī, Abū Ḥayyān worked at the Baghdad hospital, which had been established by 'Aḍud al-Dawla in 372/982. The circle of Ibn Sa'dān was composed of the Christian philosopher Ibn Zur'a – who had translated Aristotle and Nicolaus of Damascus – of al-Būzajānī, Miskawayh, of the secretaries Ibn 'Ubayd, Abū l-Qāsim al-Ahwāzī, and the future vizier Abū Sa'd Bahrām b. Ardashīr. It was a place of intellectual discussion and intense scholarly activity. The *Imtā' wa-l-mu'ānasa (Enjoyment and Familiarity)*, composed by

al-Tawḥīdī at the request of Ibn Sa'dān, reports many of the debates held between the scholars. Several of the philosophical questions discussed are also listed (see e.g., *Imtā'*, III, 106–108 where the vizier asks questions on the soul, its perfection, the spirit, humanity, nature, intellect, resurrection, the souls of the animals . . .). Another treatise the *Risāla fī l-ṣadāqa wa-l-ṣadīq (On Friendship)*, one of his later works, was achieved by al-Tawḥīdī in 400/1009 and dedicated to Ibn Sa'dān. It contains several allusions to the circle "that was unrivalled in Iraq," writes al-Tawḥīdī.

In philosophy, Abū Ḥayyān considered Abū Sulaymān al-Sijistānī as his true mentor. The way of life al-Sijistānī was following, and the discussions on the ethical behavior of "the Ancients," were for al-Tawḥīdī the only philosophical way worth being followed. He showed aversion for dialectics (*jadāl*) and seems to have followed a personal mystical path that led him to write an important, though neglected, Sufi masterpiece, the *Ishārāt al-Ilāhiyya*. Abū Ḥayyān al-Tawḥīdī was one of the greatest literary personalities of the Buyid period and of the whole history of Arabic literature. He represents a certain apogee of the *adīb*-model (both a man of letters and a humanist) deeply influenced by Greek *paideia*. But he was a direct witness of the attacks the humanism had started to suffer, that would lead to its partial recuperation by some theologically oriented circles, and to a final *coup de grâce*.

## Cross-References

- ▶ [Abū Sulaymān al-Sijistānī al-Mantiqī](#)
- ▶ [Ikhwān al-Ṣafā', Encyclopedia of](#)
- ▶ [Miskawayh, Abū 'Alī](#)
- ▶ [Yaḥyā ibn 'Adī](#)

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## Terms, Properties of

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### Abstract

In the theory of the properties of terms, the medievals investigated the semantical properties of words used in a proposition. According to them, terms not only had signification, a kind of essence, but also referred in a context (notably a proposition) to different things (substances or accident, concepts or words). Several properties are distinguished, the most prominent of which are supposition, copulation, appellation, ampliation, and restriction. Individual logicians defined these notions in different ways.

The theory had its origins in the twelfth century and developed until late in the fourteenth century. In the twelfth century our sources are several anonymous tracts. In the thirteenth century, Peter of Spain, William of Sherwood, Lambert of Auxerre, and Roger Bacon were the most prominent masters. In the fourteenth century, William of Ockham and John Buridan were very influential.

## Introduction

The theory of the properties of terms is one of the important innovations of medieval semantics. It

emerged in the twelfth century, and it developed until far into the fifteenth century. Even in the postmedieval period, interesting, though less creative, traces of this theory can be found. The medievals themselves did not consider the theory as something new. In their view it only explained what was implicit in Aristotle's logic. However, from our modern point of view, the theory is original.

The theory concerns the semantic properties of terms. It attempts to analyze the presuppositions of natural language, and deals with the meaning of a term mostly when it is used in a proposition. The theory is about what terms stand for, and their relation to other terms within a certain context.

The expression “properties of terms” reminds one of the properties of natural things. The medievals considered this an apt comparison. As they themselves often say, things are composed of form and matter, which constitute their substance. The most important component of a substance, such as a man, is the form, i.e., humanity. A substance possesses properties, for instance, a stone's property moving downward. In the same way a term can be said to possess form and matter. The form of the term is the signification, for instance, “horse-ness” of “horse”; its matter is its actual occurrence in, for instance, a proposition. In this proposition, a term having a signification stands for something. This is the property of supposition.

The form of a concrete individual thing is stable, but its matter can change. Likewise, the form of a term, its signification, is stable; that to what it stands for, can change. The things for which a term like “man” stands in the proposition “a man runs” are different from those to which the same term “man” stands for in “some men were not running,” or from that “man” stands for in “man is a three letter word.” But some authors, such as Peter of Spain and Buridan, seem to claim that “man” supposits for all men in any proposition, but propositions are verified by different quantities of men, according to the syncategoremata.

In medieval semantics the notion of signification is used in two ways: primarily for a kind of nucleus or what a term essentially means, secondarily for the things a term stands for. The ways in

which a term, which already possesses the primary kind of signification, stands for other things (be they material things or concepts), vary. The things denoted may be, and often are, things in the outside world, such as an individual man or horse, but they may also be things in the mind, for instance, the concept of “man” or that of “horse,” or even the terms “man” or “horse” themselves in their material occurrence, for instance “man” in “man is a noun” or in “man has three letters.”

## Problems

The medieval theory of the properties of terms is complicated and, unfortunately, it is not always clear what it involves (Spade 2000).

As to the historical development of the theory, it is still unclear whether we can distinguish specific traditions in different parts of Europe. More concretely, the question is whether there is a split between the traditions in Paris and in Oxford, the traditional centers of study in the Middle Ages. Is the development continuous, or is there a break, in particular in the last quarter of the thirteenth century, during which modism (a kind of universal grammar) was prominent, at least in Paris?

As to the contents of the theory, we are also left with systematical questions. Which exactly are the properties of terms? To which level of language or to which kinds of terms do they belong? Traditionally three levels of language are distinguished: spoken, written, and mental language (the latter are concepts in the mind as part of a mental language). The question is, for instance, whether mental terms possess properties. Further, do only subject terms possess the properties, or predicate terms as well? Does the theory of the properties, especially supposition theory, form a single theory? If not, was it at least initially a single theory? Can it be compared with modern semantics, in which formalization plays a part? If so, to what extent, and in the semantics of which authors?

In this entry I shall concentrate on the most prominent properties of the terms, and discuss them within the context of individual theories. I shall discuss the properties within the framework

of the rest of the semantics of a specific theory or a period or logician. I prefer this approach above the one in which an individual property, such as supposition, is discussed in connection with the same notion as interpreted by other logicians, and in which the relation between the properties is not made clear. I hope the reader will be presented with material to interpret texts of a specific period or of a particular author.

The most prominent properties of terms are (1) signification (*significatio*; this notion should be taken in contrast to the other properties); (2) supposition (*suppositio*); (3) copulation (*copulatio*); (4) ampliation (*ampliatio*); (5) restriction (*restrictio*); and (6) appellation (*appellatio*). Relation (*relatio*), remotio (*remotio*), and alienation (*alienatio*) are also discussed in tracts as properties, but these will not be dealt with here. Neither shall we discuss the divisions of supposition, except for a few interesting aspects.

The definition of each property varies among logicians. The definitions of supposition, copulation, etc., are connected with the definition of signification, just as the conception of material properties of an individual thing varies with the conception of its form.

## History

In the twelfth century we find some important sources for the theory in the form of anonymous tracts, notably the *Fallacie Parvipontane*, the *Cum sit nostra*, the *Ut dicit*, and the *Introductiones Parisienses*.

In the thirteenth century, the author we usually refer to as Peter of Spain, but whose identity is not yet fixed, wrote a textbook called *Tractatus*, which became very popular. The book was especially influential in Paris and in the continent. In England, William of Sherwood and Roger Bacon were active. They have some common characteristics (it may be noted that William was also active in Paris, and that Roger was influenced by, and reacted to continental doctrines): both studied and/or worked in Paris. In the late thirteenth century modism occupied a prominent place, and even seemed to suppress logic, at least in Paris.

In the fourteenth century William of Ockham's logic was well known. He was primarily active in England. On the continent, John Buridan was a prominent master. He placed Ockham's logic in the background.

The overall history of the theory of the properties of terms is not yet written, especially because many tracts still await an edition. Many historical and systematical questions such as the one mentioned above still need to be solved.

## The Early Period

Aristotle considered the relationships between language, thought and reality in his logical works, for example in his *De interpretatione*, *Sophistical Refutations*, and his *Topics*. In the *De interpretatione*, he deals with propositions, the constituents of syllogisms, in the *Sophistical Refutations* he examined the ways in which someone can be deceived by a certain way of speech or writing used by his opponent. In his *Topics* Aristotle explained on what kind of grounds an argument could be based. These works became known in Latin in western Europe around 1150, and were especially influential on medieval semantics.

Not only logic, but grammar also had language as its object. The authoritative works on grammar were those by Donatus (IVth c.) and Priscian (VIth c.). From these authors the medievals learned the notions of "paronymy," or "denominatives" (for instance, "white" from "whiteness"), "homonymy" or "equivocation" (but equivocation is also a fallacy in the *Sophistical Refutations*) (for instance, in the case of "man," when "man is a kind" is said in contradistinction to "man" in "man is white"), and "univocation" (meaning of terms having a single definition, for instance "horse").

Further, they learned from the grammarians the notion of imposition, i.e., the way in which terms have been given meaning by being applied to things. Priscian taught that names have the function of signifying substance together with quality. In general, his grammar was semantically oriented.

Initially, logic and grammar could hardly be separated. From the eleventh century onward, the

gap between logic and grammar widened. In general, one can say that the medievals distinguished very well between these two sciences.

*Signification* was the basic notion. In the earlier period, we see different definitions. In the *Introductiones ad logicam*, for instance, "signification" is identified with the presentation of some form to the intellect (De Rijk 1967a), or, in the *Introductiones Parisienses* as "that which is principally given by a term for understanding" (De Rijk 1967b).

Signification was distinguished in primary and secondary. For instance, in Anselm of Canterbury's *De grammatico* (1033–1109), one finds a distinction between *significare per se*, i.e., the signification of a form and *significare per aliud*, which was also called *appellare*; in the latter case, the thing signified was meant (Gombocz 1992). This opposition comes back in various forms.

The early development of the notion of signification and the other properties can be followed in, for instance, the *Introductiones Parisienses* (De Rijk 1967b). After the definition of signification just given, the author defines the other properties of terms. *Supposition* is a property of a word, he says, because it signifies in the way of a substantive or as something existing, like a substantive term does. It is attributed both to the subject term and the predicate term. *Copulation* is a property of an adjective. *Appellation* is, according to him and as is usually said, the present belonging of something with another thing, or a property of a term because it signifies present things. Therefore, a word like "Antichrist" (an individual who is not alive now, though he will live in the future, according to faith) does not have appellation, though it has supposition and signification.

The *Introductiones Parisienses* contains accounts that bear resemblance to later tracts, though the definitions used are different. For instance, in an affirmative proposition in which a common term is subject, and the verb is of the present tense, the supposition is only for things of the present, for instance, of "man" in "a man can run," and of "daisy" in "a daisy is considered to be a beautiful flower." Further, the anonymous



already seems to know the property of *ampliation* of a term, for instance, of “man” in “all man were.” Here “man” supposits for men in the present and in the past. In ampliation the extension of what the term stands for is widened.

In the *Cum sit nostra*, the property *supposition* is defined as the signification of an utterance that can function as the subject in a proposition (*sermo subicibilis*), as opposed to a predicate (De Rijk 1967b). Supposition here is ascribed to a subject term. It differs from signification, he says, for supposition means “to bring its content under other thing.”

Supposition may be univocal or equivocal, he adds, depending on the term. “Man” is a univocal word, and “dog” is equivocal (it may stand for a barking animal, or a seadog, or a star). Univocal supposition is primary.

Supposition is further divided into simple and personal. Simple supposition is when a common term supposits for a common form, for instance in “man is the worthiest of all creatures.” Here the term stands for something common, which is on the one hand not exactly the form of a man, but on the other hand neither a logical notion, like “species.” This proposition is difficult to interpret and was frequently debated in the Middle Ages.

The anonymous asks what kind of supposition “man” has in “man is a species.” It is not a simple supposition, he says, like many would say in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries. He interprets it as *discrete* supposition, in the sense that “man” is the proper name of something incorporeal, viz., a logical notion.

Personal supposition is, he says, the supposition for something inferior, for instance “man” in “a man runs.” Here “man” supposits for this man and for that man (he explains it as if there is ampliation).

*Appellation* is defined as signification, without time, of a predicable term; “without time,” he says, to distinguish this property from that of a verb. He immediately adds another formulation, viz., that appellation is a property of a common term as far as it is compared with the singular things under it. He gives an example: “man is an animal” in which the subject term “man” is compared with the singulars under it. In the alternative

formula, appellation apparently also belongs to a subject term.

Another property to be discussed is *restriction*. The anonymous says that in “a white man runs,” “man,” a common term, is restricted. In “all men can be,” “man” is amplified, however. The difference with the *Questiones Parisienses* is clear in this respect.

The final property is *copulation*. In the *Cum sit nostra*, copulation is restricted to a verb. In the *Introductiones Parisienses*, it is connected to an adjective.

From this discussion, it is clear that there are differences between an English tract (viz., the *Cum sit nostra*) and a continental one, viz., the *Introductiones Parisienses*. De Rijk assumed a Paris–Oxford split (Peter of Spain 1972). To what extent this is correct and for which period are matters still open to discussion. It is generally conceded that apart from displaying differences, the two traditions also have a common ground and have influenced each other (De Libera 1982).

We may conclude that appellation is the notion that obtained prominence above and before supposition. The grammarians originally used it as the property according to which a term denotes all the things under it. In a proposition it was made clear which things the term for which the term stands. Originally appellation is the central notion, not supposition. This is especially evident in the *Fallacie Parvipontane*.

### Peter of Spain (Thirteenth Century)

Peter of Spain is the author of the most famous of all medieval handbooks on logic and semantics. He composed his *Tractatus*, later called *Summule logicales*, in around 1235 (Peter of Spain 1972). Until recently, Peter was thought to be the later pope John XXI, but this is no longer accepted (Spruit 2000). His exact identity is not certain.

According to Peter, *signification* has an extensional and an intentional side. He defines it as the presentation of something by way of a conventional word.

The counterpart of signification is supposition and copulation. Peter defines *supposition* as the

acceptance of a substantival term for something. In the proposition “a man runs,” “man” supposits, e.g., Socrates. Peter’s use of “acceptance” is remarkable. Supposition is here less a property of a term than a term as far as it is understood by someone. Supposition is equally related to existing and nonexisting things. Roger Bacon, who will be discussed below, takes a different position with respect to reference to nonexistent things or empty classes, as we shall see.

Peter makes a division of supposition. He divides it into common and discrete (i.e., when a term stands for an individual). Common supposition is subdivided into natural and accidental. Accidental supposition is further divided into simple and personal. The notions of natural, personal, and simple supposition Peter discusses also feature in the tradition, although differently defined.

*Natural supposition* is the natural capacity of a term to have supposition for all actual and possible individuals belonging to the universal term, e.g., “flower.” It owes this capacity to its signification. According to this aspect, the term is able to supposit for things, within or without a context, within or without a proposition. So natural supposition is a kind of extensional counterpart of signification. The latter is independent from any usage. The notion of natural supposition is clearly an extension of his semantics. It resembles Sherwood’s habitual supposition, which I shall explain below.

*Simple supposition* belongs to a general term, Peter says. An example in subject position is “man is a species”; however, it can also occur with a term in predicate position, e.g., “man is an animal,” where “animal” has simple supposition. Another example is “of all contraries is the same discipline.” “Discipline” is in predicate position and has simple supposition. The next kind of occurrence Peter distinguishes is when a term (“man”) immediately follows an exceptive word, e.g., “every animal except man is irrational.” Here there is no descent to “this man.” It is clear that simple supposition is ambiguous: it refers to both a logical notion and to a kind of reality, for instance, animality.

Peter defines *personal supposition* as the acceptance of a common term for its inferiors, for instance of a man in “a man runs.”

Peter clearly distinguishes between supposition and making a proposition true. For in “a man runs,” “man” has personal and determinate supposition, i.e., an indefinite term or a term to which a sign such as “some” is added (“some man runs”) supposits for every man, both running and not running. Still, the proposition is true when only a single man runs. Although the term “man” supposits for men both running and not running, the proposition is true for a single running man. We may conclude that Peter’s notion of supposition is wide: it includes nonexistent things.

*Copulation* is the acceptance of an adjectival term for something. Peter does not devote more words to it.

*Ampliation* is also acknowledged as a property of a term; it is discussed in Peter’s short tract IX. Together with restriction, it is taken as a further refinement of personal supposition. Ampliation is the extension of a common term from a smaller range to a wider, for instance in (Peter’s example) “a man can be the Antichrist,” “man” supposits not only for men that are, but also for men that can be. Such an ampliation occurs, Peter says, when a common noun is used in combination with a verb such as “can,” or with an adjectival noun like “possible,” as in “that a man is the Antichrist is possible,” or with an adverb like “of necessity” in “man of necessity is an animal,” where “man” is amplified to have supposition for the present and the future (note that Peter does not mention the past, to which ampliation does not seem to be possible according to him). Specific expressions possess ampliative force, such as “can,” “necessity,” not just any noun or adverb.

*Restriction* is defined as the limitation of a common term from a wider to a smaller range of supposition. It occurs in virtue of an adjectival noun, for instance, in “white man,” where “man” is restricted in its supposition (note that Peter does not give a proposition with a copula). It can also occur in virtue of a verb, for instance in “man runs”; or it occurs in virtue of a participle, for instance, “man” in “a running man disputes,” or, finally, it can occur in virtue of what he calls an “implication,” for instance, of “man” in “man who is white, runs.”

In this tract, Peter adds the interesting comment that there is a difference between strict logic and common usage, for instance, when we say “nothing is in the box.” There is something in the box, viz., air. The same applies to “the queen arrives” said in the Netherlands. Here “queen” is restricted by usage to Queen Beatrix of the Netherlands.

Peter hardly devotes any attention to *appellation*. He defines it as the acceptance of a common term for an existing thing. He wishes to exclude terms like “Cesar,” “Antichrist,” and “chimera.” Appellation has been moved to the background. It is a kind of restricted supposition, in a proposition with a verb in the present tense, and it has become a secondary notion. As such it is a counterpart of supposition.

### William of Sherwood (1200/1210–1266/1272)

Independent from Peter’s *Tractatus*, William of Sherwood composed his *Introductiones ad logicam* about 1230–1240, before he devoted himself to theological studies (William of Sherwood 1995). Peter of Spain’s *Tractatus* consists of separate treatises discussing the different subjects of logic, such as the properties of terms; William conceived his theory as a whole.

His definitions of the properties of terms, signification included, differ from those of Peter. William defines it as a presentation of a form to the intellect. On the basis of signification there is supposition, copulation, and appellation.

According to Sherwood, *signification* means that something is presented to the understanding. What is presented is a form, a universal nature. His definition of signification can be called “intensional.”

Sherwood defines *supposition* as the ordering of some thought under another thought. His definition of supposition is different from that of Peter of Spain, who defined it as “acceptance.” Sherwood does not use “supponere” in the sense of “supponere pro.” His definition concerns actual supposition (not habitual supposition, which I shall discuss below), when a predicate is joined

to a subject. It reminds us of earlier grammatical theories.

Supposition is divided into material and formal. Material is when a word supposits for an expression as such, or for the word in combination with its signification, as he says (for instance, “man” in “man is monosyllabic”).

Formal supposition is when a word supposits for its significate. It is subdivided into simple and personal. Simple supposition is when a word “supposits for its significate, and significatively.” This formula is also used by Ockham, but with this important difference that in his intensionalistic semantics Sherwood interprets the supposition of “man” in “man is a species” as simple supposition, but explains that the term supposits for its significate. Sherwood adds that personal supposition is when a term “supposits its significate,” that is, for some thing, for instance, “man” in “a man runs.”

The primary notion in Sherwood’s semantics is appellation. He defines it as the property according to which the meaning of a term can be said of something by way of the verb “is.” So appellation is connected with the present tense. It may be amplified or restricted. This use of appellation reminds us of the grammarians. Supposition is secondary, and is taken in a grammatical sense, like “putting as a grammatical subject.” It should be added that Sherwood takes “to supposit” transitively, and not intransitively (in the sense of “to supposit for,” as in, e.g., John Buridan).

The other two properties he discusses are *copulation* and *appellation*. He distinguishes between actual and habitual copulation. *Actual copulation* is a property of a term as predicate. *Appellation* is the property of a term when it denotes individual existing things that are present at the moment when the proposition is uttered.

William’s theory is characteristic in that, according to him, supposition stands for things in the present, and therefore takes the function of appellation. If one refers to other things, this is by way of adjuncts being added to a noun. Sherwood defines appellation as an extensionalistic counterpart of signification. In signification the extensionalistic aspect is *implied*, and appellation brings it to the fore (De Rijk 1982).

William distinguishes between *habitual and actual supposition* and, similarly, between *habitual and actual copulation*. Habitual supposition resembles Peter of Spain's natural supposition. Though it is called "supposition," it bears resemblance to signification. Habitual supposition is defined as belonging to a term as far as it can fulfill the function of subject term in a proposition. This habitual supposition is the signification of existing things in a context. But William does not say that this is a proposition. But what exactly is it?

De Rijk distinguishes between a depth structure of a term (its signification) and a surface structure (habitual supposition). Though this kind of supposition resembles Peter of Spain's natural supposition, the point of difference is that in Sherwood the term stands for presently existing things. Habitual copulation is also a kind of signification, by which something is characterized as property (De Rijk 1982).

### **Roger Bacon (c. 1214–1292/1294)**

Roger Bacon is especially interested in language as it is used. He realizes that meanings of words can vary according to new impositions, which are given by men. A conventional sign has as its immediate significate something in the outside world. The concept is only a natural sign in the sense of an index, secondarily signified.

In his *Summulae dialectices* (an early, but mature work, dating c. 1250; later works are his *De signis* and *Compendium studii theologiae*) Bacon discusses the properties of terms, of which he names three: supposition, appellation, and copulation (De Libera 1982).

He defines *signification*: it is the property of a word, or term, on account of itself, and not in relation to any other term. Therefore, he says, a term has signification both inside and outside a proposition.

*Supposition* is taken in many ways, Roger says. He defines it as a property of a subject term, in as far as it supposits for something else and is subject in a proposition. The term must be actually used in such a proposition.

Supposition is divided into simple and personal. *Simple supposition* is when a term does not stand for its inferior, but for the word. He takes it more or less in the same way as Peter of Spain, that is, when a term "man" stands for a word itself (man is a word)," for man as the worthiest of creatures, for a meaningful word ("man is a noun"), for man as monosyllabic, and for man as a species ("man is a universal").

*Personal supposition* is when a term stands for its inferiors, such as "man" in "man runs." This means that "man" supposits for present man, and it implies that the verb "runs" does not exercise influence on the supposition.

Roger presents two views on *appellation*: some say that a term of itself appellates present things as appellated, past and future things and is common to beings and nonbeings (this gives room for a semantics of empty classes, for instance, of "Cesar" in "Cesar is a man"). Others say that a term only applies to present things, and is not common to being and nonbeing, or past, present, and future, according to Aristotle.

Roger notes that the first view is the common one. He investigates and rejects it. This view comes close to the one advocated in the *Cum sit nostra*, and to what Sherwood labels as the "improper account." Roger chooses the second view, which is close to Sherwood's "proper account." Bacon's characteristic claim is that a term cannot be common to being and nonbeing. If it stands for things that are not present, this is due to equivocation; then it is amplified. One might say that he does do justice to predication with regard to empty classes.

*Appellation* is a property of both subject and predicate terms. He attacks the concept of appellation for all possible referents. This reminds us of the Parisian notion of natural supposition, like we have seen. Due to his strict conception of supposition Bacon does not need restriction. Supposition itself is limited. He opposes conceptions of supposition that include more than present referents, for instance in the way Peter of Spain does.

Lastly, Roger discusses *copulation*. However, he can be brief, because there is no difficulty, he says. Adjectives, verbs, and adverbs that signify something predicable, have copulation.

“Copulation” means that the meaning (*res significata*) of a term is joined to another term as “adjacent inclination.” It is an adjectival mode of signification, in which something is meant as a property. Copulation has lost its function as a property of terms in this period. Supposition takes over its role. This could be regretted, for logically an adjectival term plays a different role than a substantival term (Jacobi 1992).

### William of Ockham (c. 1285–1348)

To understand Ockham’s semantics, one should be aware of his ontological presuppositions. Reality consists of individual substances and individual properties. Mental concepts are important as guides for interpreting conventional signs. This is, in short, Ockham’s nominalism.

The concepts themselves are constructions of the mind, produced by abstraction following the direct cognition of individual things, existing inside or outside the knower. He opposes any form of reification of names in logic and grammar. Words signify what they signify in different ways. His semantics is connected with his theory of knowledge.

The mental concepts are signs. Signs have become the central notion in fourteenth-century logic. In comparison with Peter of Spain and William of Sherwood, Ockham is much more interested in signification. Logic is about signs, and Ockham clearly distinguishes logic from, e.g., physics, a “real” science. “Real science” is about concepts related to things (the medievals called these “first intentions”); logic is a “rational” science and about second intentions (which are concepts denoting concepts, so concepts on a higher level).

Concepts are fundamental in order to be able to talk and write successfully. These are for all men the same, French or English, and are a kind of universal language, having a sort of universal grammar.

Language is essential in Ockham’s philosophy for Ockham, because thought is performed in

language (mental, spoken, or written). *Signification* is a central notion for Ockham, referring to Augustine. It is defined in the first part of his *Summa logicae* (Guillelmi de Ockham *Summa logicae*, 1972). In chap. 26–37 he gives a kind of philosophical dictionary, which students should learn in the pursuit of truth.

Ockham takes *signification* in many ways. He favors the second sense. Signification is not linked to the present, like Bacon said, and is not influenced by change or destruction of something. This mode of signification shows an omnitemporal range. Signification can be called “omnitemporal denotation.” He takes it extensionally.

The key word in Ockham’s semantics is *supposition*. It is a property by virtue of which a term, be it a subject or predicate term, stands for something. A propositional context is required for this two-name theory of reference. Prior to its having supposition, a term has signification. A general term signifies all those things of which it can be truly said (Read 2006).

Ockham distinguishes between three kinds of supposition: personal, simple, or material. Personal supposition (which together with simple supposition is called formal supposition, just like in Sherwood) is primary. In this way, a term supposits for its significate. For example, in “every man is an animal,” “man” supposits for things in the outside world, of which it is true to say that it is an animal. In “every vocal noun is a part of speech”, “noun” supposits for words. In “every species is a universal,” “species” supposits for particular species, for instance *horse*. A term may also supposit for imaginable things. Ockham does not give an example; perhaps he only means that the list is not complete.

Simple supposition occurs when a term supposits for an intention in the mind, e.g., in “man is a species”; here “man” supposits for the logical construct “man.” Material supposition is said to occur when a term supposits for a spoken or written word and is not taken significatively, e.g., in “man is a noun,” “man” supposits for the material or written entity. Whether material

supposition also occurs on the mental level is still a matter of discussion among scholars. It seems to be the case in some respects, and that means that there is equivocity in mental language. Ockham rejects *ampliation*.

There are several problems connected with this division. Firstly, one should note that, according to Ockham, personal supposition is primary. It is what is called “in virtue of speech” that every term in a proposition should be taken according to this kind of supposition. When a term is taken in personal supposition, it stands for things it signifies naturally, e.g., “man” signifies individual men, “noun” signifies words, etc. Ockham expresses this as follows: “every man is an animal, therefore this man is an animal and that man is an animal,” etc. Thus there is no reference to some distributive entity in the sense of Plato, which does not exist. In this analysis, the antecedent is extensionally equivalent with the consequent.

Ockham explicitly says that in personal supposition a term does not stand for a thing, but to its *significate*. Here he criticizes Sherwood, it seems, who speaks about the signification of things. In simple supposition a term does not stand for its significate, Ockham says. He criticizes among others Peter of Spain. According to Ockham, a term having simple supposition supposits for an act of the mind. This corresponds to his conception of universals.

Simple supposition seems to be connected with material supposition rather than to personal supposition. This last form does not seem to belong to the same genus.

Ockham also deals with the expression “man” in “man is the worthiest of creatures.” Some realist philosophers taught that “man” here has simple supposition, for it is false, they say, that this man or that man is the most worthy among creatures. The proposition is therefore false, Ockham says, when “man” is taken in personal supposition. However, one should pay attention to the author’s intention in that he clearly wanted to distinguish man from all other corporeal creatures. One should therefore not take every proposition “in virtue of speech” as Ockham sees it. He is not a radical empiricist.

### John Buridan (c. 1292–1362)

Important though he is as a logician, Ockham was not very influential on the continent. It could be said that in the fourteenth century John Buridan dominated semantics on the continent, especially in Paris. His tract on suppositions, part of his *Summulae*, was very influential in Europe (John Buridan 1998).

Like Ockham, Buridan is a nominalist. He acknowledges only individual substances and individual accidents, both existing on themselves. How these two kinds form a unity does not seem to be his main concern. His interest is in semantics, and traditional metaphysical questions are solved semantically.

A human being possesses the power to express a word (spoken or written) according to the institution given in order to make his thoughts clear. Buridan is especially interested in the conventional level, and takes that more seriously than any of his predecessors. For instance, to the single word “chimera” correspond three different concepts, viz., those of goat, stag, and lion.

*Signification* is primarily a property of conventional signs. These are labels of concepts and can be replaced at will. Concepts determine the truth of a proposition, so they have objective value, but Buridan interprets them as the way in which man approaches reality. Man is not an objective, calculating being who automatically reproduces truth, but one who speaks or writes true, or false, propositions depending on the way under which he understands reality.

Buridan develops his theory on the properties of terms in the framework of his commentary on Peter of Spain. It should be noted that this text of Peter’s is not the original one, and Buridan does not follow it slavishly. Every now and then he seems to be annoyed with it.

*Supposition* can be divided into personal and material, thus into two kinds, not three, as is traditionally the case. Personal supposition is when a subject or predicate has supposition in a proposition for its ultimate significate(s), for instance, the term “man” – not the term



“chimera,” because this does not possess a single ultimate significate in reality.

Material supposition is when a term has supposition for itself, or for a like term, or for a concept (which is called its immediate significate), according to which it is imposed to signify. For instance, the term “man” in “man is monosyllabic,” and “man” in “man is a species.”

In Buridan’s material supposition, simple supposition is included. He is well aware that some adopt the property of simple supposition, for instance of “man” in “man is a species.” He rejects it, however, and adds that Aristotle had already done so. Buridan calls both cases “material supposition,” in line with his ontology. Simple supposition suggests the existence of universals outside the mind, and this kind does not exist, other than the “ancients” say. Universals are just concepts, by which the mind conceives more than one thing in an indifferent way.

Buridan defines the notion of *natural supposition* in another way than Peter of Spain does. Natural supposition is, for instance, of “thunder” in “thunder is a sound in the cloud.” The term stands for all occurrences of thunder in the past, present, future, and possible tense. Taken this way, it is a scientific proposition.

Other properties of terms Buridan acknowledges are appellation, ampliation, and restriction, not copulation, a property that does not play a part any more. *Appellation* is the property of a term according to which a term put in a proposition appellates its form, i.e., those things which the term connotes, and it appellates them as adjacent, either in the present, or in the past, or in the future, or in possibility. Buridan gives an example: “The just devil runs.” He analyses it as follows: the subject of this proposition (“just devil,” i.e., this complex term) does not supposit for anything. Still, “just” appellates justice, as adjacent to the devil for which the term “devil” would have supposition if it would be the subject or the predicate of the proposition.

There is an interesting case of appellation in propositions with a verb denoting an inner act of the mind, such as “to know,” “to promise.” The famous example is “I know the one coming” (*cognosco venientem*). The term “coming” appellates “to come.” The proposition expresses that

I know the one only as far as he is coming. Still, he may be my father, whom I know very well, but at that moment I do not know that he is the one coming. In this case, “you know the one coming” is false, though in fact it is your father. If one says, “the coming one, you know,” in which the substantial adjective is put before the verb, the proposition is true. According to that word order, the aspect of coming does not fall under the scope of the verb “to know,” and is not necessary for the truth of the proposition.

*Ampliation* is the widening of the supposition of a term, e.g., “A” in “A will run” which means, Buridan says that “what is or will be A, will run.” It is amplified beyond its “status,” Buridan says. By “status” he means the condition by which a term signifies all its significates in the present.

*Restriction* is also a property of a term, e.g., of “man” in “every white man will run.” Here “man” is restricted within its status, and stands for all men in the present and future, due to the verb in the future, but is restricted to white men.

## Cross-References

- ▶ [Anselm of Canterbury](#)
- ▶ [John Buridan](#)
- ▶ [Peter of Spain](#)
- ▶ [Roger Bacon](#)
- ▶ [Supposition Theory](#)
- ▶ [Universals](#)
- ▶ [William of Ockham](#)
- ▶ [William of Sherwood](#)

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## Thābit ibn Qurra

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### Abstract

Thābit ibn Qurra (836–901) was an influential figure in the Kindī Circle, a group of scholars who popularized the classical, scientific, and philosophical texts in Muslim society under the reign of the early ‘Abbāsīd dynasty. He is primarily known for his translations, commentaries, and expositions in astronomy and the exact mathematical disciplines, but he figures also in the Neoplatonic interpretation of Aristotelian philosophy.

Thābit ibn Qurra (836–901), astronomer, mathematician, and philosopher, worked at the Islamic ‘Abbāsīd court during the classical stage in medieval Muslim intellectual history. He was a major figure in the so-called Kindī Circle and so participated in the project in which the philosopher al-Kindī (d. after 870) sought to popularize the philosophical and scientific works which the Muslim world inherited from the Greeks as part of the Graeco–Arabic translation movement. Of Ṣābīan origin and thus of this partially pagan but certainly scholarly community of Ḥarrān, Thābit was well-prepared to start his career with knowledge of the important languages (Greek, Syriac, and Arabic) that were the main tools of the translation movement and of the scholarly discussions that took as fundamental, philosophical and scientific principles, those of the pre-Islamic Aristotelian and the subsequent Neoplatonic commentary tradition (of both pagan and Christian Greek Near Eastern communities).

In the field of philosophy, Thābit's familiarity with the Aristotelian corpus is evident from his compendia and abridgments of parts of the Aristotelian logical *Organon* (*Categoriae*, *De interpretatione*, *Analytica priora*). Indicative of

his philosophical studies is an acute presentation of Aristotle's *Metaphysics* and his translation (or reportedly "correction") of Themistius' paraphrase of Aristotle's work. One work, his *Concise Exposition of Aristotle's Metaphysics*, gives us indication of Thābit's intellectual allegiances and achievements. In this work, the concentration of attention is directed toward the "theological" core (the *metaphysica specialis*) of Chaps. 6–9 in the book *Lambda* and the content concerned with a type of reconciliation of its doctrines and Islamic (or at least monotheistic) tenets. Examples of this effort is to be seen in his attribution of will to the vague and pagan articulated "First Principle" and his Islamic-inspired choice of the term *tawhīd* to describe its "unicity." As a result of these pieces of evidence, we can conclude that Thābit ascribed to the "theologizing" interpretation that was very important to the success of the Kindī cycle of works in medieval Islamic intellectual circles. The overall content of this most important philosophical work ascribed to Thābit displays an original and perceptive understanding of Aristotelian doctrine. While clarifying Aristotle's position on the two subjects of the First Mover being the cause of corporeal substance's existence and the First Principle being cause of the universe's existence from eternity, Thābit is quite skilled at introducing and providing solutions for the logical consequences of Aristotle's arguments. The structure of the work also evinces Thābit's expert knowledge of Neoplatonic commentaries; this is especially evident in his prolegomenon's inclusion of the points of information expected in the earlier works.

While Thābit displays an appreciation for the ancient philosophical tradition as well as acumen applied to its problems, he was and is best-known for his work in astronomy (and its attendant fields of astrology and mathematics). In astronomy he not only clarified many aspects of the heritage of Ptolemy, but also contributed original thought that would lead eventually to the common perception of astronomy as an exact science. These contributions included a new empiricist approach to astronomical data and at the same time a "mathematizing" trend in astronomical research by the use of geometrical models. His thought in

the field of mathematics is displayed in a textual dialogue with his contemporary ʿĪsā b. Usayyid. Three issues were addressed. In one, Thābit propounded the Neoplatonic doctrine that numbers have an existence separable from numbered things. In another, he defended the view that infinite numbers actually exist. This research into finitude and infinitude were to be of some importance to the Muslim philosophical tradition, particularly when applied to the question of divine knowledge of universals (the topic of the third question) as well as discussions on the post-mortem existence of particularized or individuated human souls. This correspondence is to be included in the vast mathematical corpus composed by Thābit which includes treatises on geometry (planes and their terminations; the study of planes in relation to discrete substances; the magnitudes of pure figure) as well as mathematics proper (treatises on discrete numeration, etc.).

Thābit's intellectual heritage was of profound importance to developments in the medieval Arabic fields of philosophy and the exact sciences. His penchant for the Platonic tradition was perhaps the most influential trend in determining what of the Platonic corpus would be translated and how its implications for the relevant fields of research would be addressed. His approach to those fields would have major implications for the development of philosophy and the exact sciences at least until the later medieval age.

## Cross-References

- ▶ [al-Kindī, Abū Yūsuf Yaʿqūb ibn Ishāq](#)
- ▶ [Mathematics and Philosophy in the Arab World](#)

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in their entirety, through Arabic (or Hebrew) translations. The Arabic bio-bibliographical sources mention a great amount of his texts. Arabic readers got acquainted, to different degrees, with the Arabic or the Syriac version of his *Paraphrases* of Aristotle's *Prior* and *Posterior Analytics*, *Categories*, *Topics*, *On Generation and Corruption*, *Physics*, *On the Soul*, of Book *Lambda* of the *Metaphysics*, *On the Heavens*, *Poetics*, *Ethics* and of some of Aristotle's zoological works. Only few of these Arabic translations have come down to us. However, fragments of these texts are transmitted through Averroes and a few other Arabic authors. Several of these Arabic versions were in turn translated into Hebrew in the thirteenth century. Part of Themistius' *Paraphrase* of the *Prior Analytics* has come down to us in Hebrew. Moreover, the Hebrew translations of his *Paraphrases* of Book *Lambda* of Aristotle's *Metaphysics* and of Aristotle's *On the Heavens* are extant in their entirety. Both of them are extant also in Latin translations made from the Hebrew in the sixteenth century. Among his works preserved in Arabic, there are also a discourse on *Government* and a treatise on logic, namely, the *Treatise in Response to Maxim on the Reduction of the Second and Third Figures of the Syllogism to the First One*, both lost in Greek. In addition, the ps-al-Kindī's *On how to Dispel Sorrow*, preserved in Arabic, has been traced back to a lost work by Themistius. Finally, some passages that are not related to his or that determined work are also attributed to Themistius by a number of Arab and Jewish authors.

## Themistius, Arabic

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### Abstract

From the sixth century onward, some of Themistius' works were translated into semitic languages. Lost in Greek, some of Themistius' works have come down to us, either in part or

## Themistius' Paraphrases Extant in Greek

Themistius (c. 317–387 CE) was a Greek rhetorician and commentator, who wrote extensively on the Aristotelian *corpus*, embedding in his paraphrases materials from more ancient authors, chiefly from Alexander of Aphrodisias. Themistius describes the origin and the aim of his philosophical production in different ways: his paraphrases contain what Themistius learned

from and inherited by his teachers (*Oration* 23,294d–295a); Themistius wrote paraphrases as a result of his official activity as teacher (*CAG* V/1: 1,7–10; *CAG* V/3: 1,1–5).

Themistius' *Paraphrases* of Aristotle's works which have come down to us in the Greek original are those of the *Posterior Analytics* (*CAG* V/1), *Physics* (*CAG* V/2), and of *On the Soul* (*CAG* V/3).

Even though most of Themistius' paraphrases are lost in Greek, many quotations of them are extant in the works of Simplicius (c. 490–560 CE), Philoponus (c. 490–570 CE), and a few other ancient authors (Eustratius of Nicaea, *CAG* XXI/1: 11,5–9; Sophonias, *CAG* XXIII/1: 1,11–22; Theodorus Metochites, ed. Mueller: p 95–96). More of the works of Themistius was known to Syriac and Arabic authors than has survived in Greek.

Several information about Themistius' paraphrases available in Byzantium are contained in the *Suda* Lexicon (ed. Adler A.: 690–691) and in Photius' *Bibliotheca* (Cod. 74, ed. Henry R., vol. 2: 154; Benakis 1987, p 352). Modern scholarship maintains that the translation of Boethius' *De differentiis topicis* by Maximus Planudes granted an indirect access to Themistius' *Paraphrase* of Aristotle's *Topics* (Todd 2003:62 and n. 33). From the eleventh century, his paraphrases were several times copied by Greek scribes together with Aristotle's works or sometimes in marginal *scholia*. Besides these copies, several quotations from his paraphrases were also cited in anthologies together with other commentaries (Todd 2003: notes 34–35).

Themistius' philosophical works were quoted and discussed by several Arab (and Jewish) authors, whose writings count – together with the Graeco-Latin translations – as a major source of the knowledge of his paraphrases in medieval Europe. An Arabic translation of his *Paraphrase* of Aristotle's *Posterior Analytics* was the basis of the Latin translation by Gerard of Cremona (c. 1144–1187). Themistius became known in medieval Europe through this Latin translation and from the quotations contained in Arabic sources. Besides the translations and the indirect transmission through Arabic sources, the Latin

West also got acquainted with him from other works. The ps-Augustinian *De decem categoriis* (ed. Minio-Paluello 1965) provided an indirect access to his *Paraphrase* of the *Categories*, lost in Greek. Analogously, the *Paraphrase* of the *Topics* was to a certain extent known in the Latin world through several quotations in Boethius and Cassiodorus. From the thirteenth century onward, some of Themistius' paraphrases started to be translated from Greek original into Latin and commented by Latin authors. The Greek original of his *Paraphrase* of Aristotle's *On the Soul* was translated into Latin by William of Moeberke in Viterbo, 1267. Moeberke's Latin translation is extant and edited (*Corpus Latinum Commentariorum in Aristotelem Graecorum*/I 1957). Another Latin translation of this *Paraphrase* was carried out in Venice, 1481, by Ermolao Barbaro the Younger; this translation was also based on the Greek original. Barbaro the Younger's Latin translation has been repeatedly published (Todd 2003), and is edited, too (*CAG Versiones Latinae*/XVIII 1978). Another annotated Latin translation of chapter 3 (paragraphs 4–13) of his *Paraphrase* of Aristotle's *On the Soul* by Ludovico Norgarola was carried out in Verona, s. XVI (c. 1554). Norgarola's Latin translation was based on the Greek original; it has been repeatedly published (Todd 2003). Several versions (s. XVI, 1582–1588) of a Latin translation of his *Paraphrase* by Federico Bonaventura have come down to us and these have been repeatedly published (Todd 2003).

Themistius' *Paraphrase* of Aristotle's *Posterior Analytics* was translated from the Greek into Latin by Ermolao Barbaro the Younger (1454–1493) between 1471 and 1480, in Naples. This translation too is published (Todd 2003). Paolo Orsatto revised and commented Barbaro the Younger's Latin translation of this *Paraphrase*. Orsatto's Latin translation of this text has come down to us undated and incomplete. It is extant in a single manuscript (Milan, Biblioteca Ambrosiana D 129 inf., s. XVI, fols. 34r–60v) (Todd 2003). Ermolao Barbaro the Younger translated from Greek the *Paraphrase* of Aristotle's *Physics*. This has been repeatedly published (Todd 2003).



From the sixteenth century onward, Themistius' *Paraphrases* of the *Posterior Analytics*, *Physics*, and *On the Soul* were several times commented and annotated by Italian Humanists; the commentaries which are available for us are those of Marcantonio Zimara, Ludovico Norgarola, Federico Pendasio, and Federico Bonaventura; scholars also debate on the identity of the author of an anonymous commentary, conventionally called Anonimus ("Anonimus Venetus") (Todd 2003).

### Spurious Works

The *Paraphrase* of the *Prior Analytics* (CAG XXIII/3), preserved in Greek and transmitted under the name of Themistius is commonly agreed to be spurious; it is attributed to Sophonias (Rose 1867; Walzer 1963). The *Paraphrase* of parts of Aristotle's *Parva naturalia* (CAG V/6) transmitted under the name of Themistius is also spurious and should be attributed to Sophonias (Wendland 1903). Ermolao Barbaro the Younger translated it into Latin (*In librum de insomniis paraphrasis*, *In librum de divinatione per somnum paraphrasis*, *In librum de memoria et reminiscencia paraphrasis*, and *In librum de somno et vigilia paraphrasis*): these translations have been printed several times (Todd 2003).

### Syriac, Arabic, and Hebrew Translations of Themistius' *Paraphrases*

From the sixth to the eighth century, during the early moment of Aristotle's reception into the eastern Christian society, in the Syriac world, several of Themistius' works have been translated into Syriac – an Aramaic dialect, which became soon a major literary language and was used for exegetical and philosophical works. None of the Syriac translations of his paraphrases have come down to us.

After the rise of Islam, between the ninth and the tenth century, several of Themistius' *Paraphrases* have been translated from the Greek original or from previous Syriac translation into

Arabic (Endress 1997; D'Ancona Costa 2002). Several of these Arabic translations were in turn translated into Hebrew in the Middle Ages. Some of the Arabic translations of his works are at present available; others, lost in Arabic, have come down to us in Hebrew. Valuable information about the assimilation of his works into Arabic have also been preserved to us by the Arabic bio-bibliographical sources; some attributions in these sources are, however, dubious (see below).

### Prior Analytics

The Greek original of Themistius' *Paraphrase* of the *Prior Analytics* is lost. The Arabic bio-bibliographers mention an Arabic translation of this text by Abu 'Uthman al-Dimashqī (d. c. 900) (*K. al-Fihrist*, Flügel: 249,8; Ibn al-Qifṭī 36). This Arabic translation is however lost, but parts of it are at present available into some *excerpta* translated in Hebrew by Todros Todrosi (fl. around 1330), towards the half of fourteenth century (Zonta 1994; Hasnawi 2002). The Hebrew version of these *excerpta* includes the following passages of his *Paraphrase* on the *An. Pr.*: 24a3–24b20; 24b19–21; 25a1–3; 25a14–16; 27b10–29a18; 30a15–30b7; 32b5–32b23; 37a32–37b11. The text preserved in Hebrew is different from the spurious one attributed to him in Greek. It is considered genuine and is edited (Rosemberg and Manekin 1988).

### Posterior Analytics

According to the Arabic bio-bibliographical sources, Abū Bishr Mattā ibn Yūnus (d. 940) translated into Arabic the first and the second books (*K. al-Fihrist*, Flügel: 249,13). Mattā's Arabic translation is no longer extant. An Arabic translation of the *Paraphrase* has served as a basis for the Latin translation by Gerard of Cremona carried out in Toledo. Gerard's Latin translation is edited (O'Donnell 1958).

Themistius developed an original exegesis of Aristotle's enumeration of the four types of inquiry (*Post. An.* 2,1,89b23ff.: τὸ ὅτι, τὸ διότι, εἰ ἔστι, τί ἔστι). He overcame the Aristotelian dichotomy between inquiries about statements and about substances, referring Aristotle's enumeration exclusively to substances. According to



Themistius, one should first inquire “whether a simple thing exist” (εἰ ἔστι) and then “what it is” (ὅτι ἔστι) (*CAG* V/1: 42,5–14). This interpretation was endorsed by other commentators (Anonymous commentator *CAG* XIII/3: 547,10–548,9) and it is widespread in medieval Arabic and Latin thought.

### Topics

The Greek original of Themistius’ *Paraphrase* of Aristotle’s *Topics* is lost. He himself mentions this work in his *Paraphrase* of the *Posterior Analytics* (*CAG* V/1: 42,15). The bio-bibliographical sources mention an Arabic translation (*K. al-Fihrist*, Flügel: 249,23; Ibn al-Qifṭī 37). Some fragments are transmitted through Boethius and Averroes (Stump 1974; Brague 1999; Hasnawi 2007).

### Categories

Lost in Greek, this work is mentioned by Themistius himself in his *Paraphrase* of the *Physics* (*CAG* V/2: 4,26). He refers to Aristotle’s *Categories* in his *Paraphrase* of *On the Heavens* (*CAG* V/4: Hebr. 10,14 and 29; 103,20); the exact source of these passages is unclear. The text is known to Simplicius (*CAG* VIII: 1,10). The *Fihrist* mentions Themistius among the commentators of this work (*K. al-Fihrist*, Flügel: 248,21).

### Physics

The *Fihrist* mentions an Arabic translation of this *Paraphrase* (*K. al-Fihrist*, Flügel: 250,22–23). This *Paraphrase* was known in the circle of Mattā ibn Yūnus (Endress 1977:35). Some occasional references to the opinion of Themistius (according to Stern, not in the form of direct quotation) are reproduced in an MS housed in Leiden (MS Leiden, Wermar 583), which contains the text of the *Physics* as it was studied in the Baghdad school (Stern 1956:40; Lettinck 1994).

### On the Soul

In the *K. al-Fihrist*, we are told that Iṣḥāq b. Ḥunayn (d. 911) translated it in its entirety (*K. al-Fihrist*, Flügel: 251,12). Iṣḥāq’s Arabic translation is extant and edited. This translation

counts as an independent witness that helps in improving the Greek text (Lyons 1955, 1973: XIII; Browne 1986). Among the Arab authors who refer to his *Paraphrase* by name are Avicenna, Avempace, and Averroes. Several of their references to him are, however, concerned with minor points. The main influence of his exegesis on the Arabic thought concerns his interpretation of Aristotle’s account on intellect and its implications for the issue of the immortality of the soul. These sources frequently mention his authority in opposition to Alexander of Aphrodisias’ interpretation, in particular, regarding the issue of the immortality of the intellect and that of the nature of the passive and speculative intellects.

### Book Lambda of the *Metaphysics*

The Greek original is lost. The *Fihrist* credits Mattā ibn Yūnus with an Arabic translation of this paraphrase. (*K. al-Fihrist*, Flügel: 251, 29–30). Parts of this Arabic translation are at present extant (chapter 1, a portion from chapter 2, and chapters from 6 to 10) and published (Badawī 1947). The Arabic version of the *Paraphrase* has been in turn translated into Hebrew by Moshe ibn Tibbon (d. c. 1283) in 1255. And again, Tibbon’s Hebrew translation of Themistius’ *Paraphrase* was in turn translated into Latin by Moshe Finzi in 1558. Tibbon’s Hebrew translation is extant and edited together with Finzi’s Latin translation (*CAG* V/5 1903). At variance with what is said in the *Fihrist* (see above), one of the Arabic MSS (Badawī 1947:329,2) credits Iṣḥāq b. Ḥunayn with the Arabic translation, saying also that Iṣḥāq’s translation has been in turn corrected by Thābit ibn Qurra (d. 901). This attribution is also attested by one of the Hebrew MSS (MS B quoted in Landauer 1903: V). Some scholars agreed with this attribution (Badawī 1947 *Intro*: 16ssq.; Pines 1987).

The edited parts of the Arabic translation (Badawī 1947) are shorter than the corresponding chapters of the Hebrew translation. About the identity of the translator and the relation between the Arabic and the Hebrew versions, two

hypotheses have been advanced: (1) the extant parts of the Arabic translation are an abridgment of the longer text (Badawī 1947; Pines 1987); (2) they trace back to two Greek recensions, which have been translated into Arabic by the same person (discussed in Pines 1981:177 n. 3). The debate on this point is still open (Pines 1981, 1987; Brague 1999). Tibbon's Hebrew version has been used to complement the Arabic one and the two both are translated into French (Brague 1999; Martini 2003:263). Finally, T. Farhat has detected a long quotation in Ibn Taymiyya (Geoffroy 2003:420). The influence of Themistius' *Paraphrase* on the medieval Arabic and Jewish philosophers lays on his interpretation of divine intellection as it is exposed in Book *Lambda* of the *Metaphysics*. Aristotle's God is designated as the First Intellect; following Aristotle's formulation, Themistius asserts that God intelligizes only Himself and nothing that is extraneous to Himself. But, according to him, this means that God intellects all the existents, because they are not extraneous to Him. According to him, Aristotle's God is both the cause of the cosmos and of the *Nomos* (Ar. *nāmūs*, Hebr. *nimmus*) obeyed throughout the cosmos (Pines 1987:189–190), and this allows him to add that God intelligizes the existents because He is their cause and producer. It has been demonstrated that his conception of God was influenced by Plotinus' description of *Nous* (Pines 1981). Among the Arab authors who refer to his exegesis are al-Fārābī, al-Mas'ūdī (c. 893–956, *Kitāb al-tanbīh wa-l-ishrāf*: 163), al-'Āmirī (d. c. 992, Badawī 1947:18), Avicenna (*In Metaph. Lambda*, ch. 7:26–27; ch. 9:31; *Shifā'*, *Metaph.* VIII 6:358–359, VIII 7:363, IX 2:393); Averroes (*Long comm. of the Metaph.*, ed. Bouyges: 1410, 4–5; 1492,3; 1494; 1635,4–1636,13; *Epitome on the Metaph.*, see references in Brague 1999:28). His interpretation was influent also on the medieval Jewish authors. Among the Jewish authors who refer to his *Paraphrase* or to his interpretation of Aristotelian God are Maimonides (*Guide of the Perplexed* I, 68; I, 69; III, 21), Falaquera (b. c. 1223, *Moreh ham-Moreh* ed. Bisseliches 1837: 76), and Gersonides (*The Wars of the Lord* V, 3, ch. 12).

### On the Heavens

The Greek original is lost. Some fragments are transmitted through Simplicius and Philoponus. In the bio-bibliographical sources, we are told that the *Paraphrase* was translated into Arabic, but this Arabic translation is lost. The *Fihrist* (*K. al-Fihrist*, Flügel: 250,30) attributes an Arabic translation, or rather the emendation of a previous Arabic translation to Yahyā ibn 'Adī (m. 974). According to Ibn al-Sarī (al-Ṣalāh, d. c. 1153), Themistius' *Paraphrase* was first translated from Syriac into Arabic by Mattā ibn Yūnus; then, Yahyā ibn 'Adī revised this translation (ed. Türker: 57,24–58,1 and 68,7–9). The existence of a Syriac translation is a problematical issue still opened. His *Paraphrase* has come down to us in the Hebrew translation of Zeraḥyah ben Yīḥāq ben Shealtiel Ḥen (Gracian) ha-Sefardi carried out in Rome in 1284. This Hebrew translation has come down to us and it is edited (*CAG* V/4 1902; see Zonta 1994). Zeraḥyah's Hebrew translation of Themistius' *Paraphrase* was in turn translated into Latin by Moshe Alatino (d. 1605), between 1568 and 1573. Alatino's Latin translation of Themistius' *Paraphrase* was first published in Venice by Simone Galignano in 1574; both the Hebrew and the Latin versions are edited (*CAGV*/4 1902). Themistius developed an original interpretation of Aristotle's use of the term "heaven" (the discussion on this definition also refers to a passage of the *Physics* IV, 5,212b7–13). He distinguishes between the outermost sphere and the inner spheres. According to him, the Aristotelian use of the term "heaven" refers to the outermost sphere. Since the outermost sphere does not have anything surrounding it, it has as its place the convex surface of the sphere immediately surrounded by it. Hence, the place of the outermost sphere is an equal and separate limit, but not a surrounding limit. The place of all the other spheres is the limit of the body surrounding them, that is, the concave surface of the spheres which respectively surround them. At variance with the place of the outermost sphere, the place of all the other spheres is a surrounding, equal, and separate limit, and it is what is called an essential place (see also *CAG* V/2: 120). Several quotations of the *Paraphrase*

of *On the Heavens* are preserved by Averroes (the passages are listed in Carmody 2003:763). The Hebrew is quoted by Yiṣḥaq Abravanel (1437–1508, *She'elot u'Tešuvot le Rabbi Saul Ha-Kohen* 1574, first noted by Steinschneider, *Die Hebräischen Übersetzungen*: 126 n. 127; also mentioned in Zonta 1994:418 n. 65) and by the translator Zerahyah itself, who quotes it (*CAG* V/4: Hebr. 1,29–2,1) in his own commentary on Maimonides' *Guide* (noted by Ravitzky 'The thought of Zerahyah' 101). It has been shown that the *Paraphrase* influenced Crescas (c. 1340–1410/1411, Wolfson 1971<sup>2</sup>:396–397, 432–437, 597).

### On Generation and Corruption

Themistius refers to this Aristotelian work in his *Paraphrase* of *On the Heavens* several times (*CAG* V/4: Hebr. 65,32; 140,16sq.; 129,29sq.; 162 9–14); the source of these passages has not been inquired yet.

The bio-bibliographical sources credit Themistius with a *Paraphrase* of Aristotle's *On generation and corruption* (*K. al-Fihrist*, Flügel: 251,6; see also Rashed 2003: 312). This text is lost both in Greek and in Arabic. The existence of this *Paraphrase* by Themistius is disputed by some scholars (Todd 2003:60 n. 12).

### Epitome by Themistius of Aristotle's Zoological Works and the *Paraphrase* of Aristotle's *De sensu et sensato*

In his *Paraphrase* of *On the Heavens* Themistius refers to Aristotle's *De animalibus* (*CAG* V/4: Hebr. 61,13 and 62,16) and *De motu animalium* (*CAG* V/4: Hebr. 65,3); the source of these passages is unclear. A *Paraphrase* of Aristotle's zoological writings attributed to Themistius, lost in Greek, has come down to us in Arabic (Badawī 1971). This attribution is challenged (Zimmerman and Brown 1973:323–324; Mattock 1976).

Themistius' *Paraphrase* of Aristotle's *De sensu* is lost in Greek; this work is mentioned by Themistius himself in his *Paraphrase of On the Soul* (*CAG* V/3: 70,8 and 77,26–27). He refers to Aristotle's *De sensu* in his *Paraphrase of On the Heavens* (*CAG* V/4: Hebr. 74,9); the source of

these passages has not been enquired yet. The existence of this *Paraphrase* by Themistius is disputed by some scholars.

### Poetics

A *Paraphrase* of Aristotle's *Poetics*, lost in Greek, is mentioned in the bio-bibliographical sources (*K. al-Fihrist*, Flügel: 250,5; Ibn al-Qiftī 38); it has been argued that the notice of the *Fihrist* seems to be confirmed by Fārābī (Arberry 1937). The existence of this *Paraphrase* by Themistius is still challenged by some scholars (Todd 2003).

### Ethics

The bio-bibliographical sources (*K. al-Fihrist*, Flügel: 252,3; Ibn al-Qiftī 42) credit Themistius with a *Paraphrase* of Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics*. An Arabic translation is also mentioned, which is now lost. This attribution is challenged (Walzer 1963; Ghorab 1972).

### Other Works

A discourse by Themistius on the virtue (*Peri aretēs*), lost in Greek, is extant in Syriac translation and published (ed. Sachau, *Inedita Syriaca*, 1870 (repr 1968):17–47; also edited by Doneway-Norman 1974, in *Themistii Orationes* with Latin trans. by March R: 7–71; German trans. by Gildemeister-Bücheler (1872) *Rheinisches Museum* 27:438–462). Lost in Greek, it is extant in Syriac and published a discourse by Themistius on friendship (ed. Sachau, *Inedita Syriaca*, 1870:48–75).

The *Fihrist* (*K. al-Fihrist*, Flügel: 253,24–27) credits Abū 'Uthmān al-Dimashqī with the Arabic translation of a discourse by Themistius' *On Government*, lost in Greek. This Arabic translation is extant and published (MS Istanbul, Köprülü I 1608, ed. Cheikho, *al-Mashriq* 18 (1920): 881–889; also edited by Shahid I, in *Themistii Orationes* 73–119; see also Gutas 1975:47).

A work lost in Greek attributed to Themistius, the *Treatise in response to Maxim on the reduction*

of the second and third figures of the syllogism, to the first one (*Māqāla fī-l-radd ‘alā Maqṣīmūs fī taḥlīl al-thānī wa-l-thālith ilā al-awwal*), is extant in Arabic. This text is published and translated into French (Badawī 1947, 1968) and lies in the background of some developments by al-Fārābī (Martini Bonadeo 2008).

In addition, a writing by al-Kindī *On How to Dispel Sorrow* has been traced back to a lost work on happiness attributed to Themistius. Kindī’s text is published together with the Italian translation (Ritter and Walzer 1938; Druart 1996; Martini Bonadeo 2008:227–228); however, Themistius’ authorship has been challenged.

Several Arab and Jewish authors credit Themistius with passages that are not related to his or that determined work. Fārābī mentions Themistius’ opinion regarding the date of composition of Archytas’ treatise on *Categories*: according to Fārābī, Themistius said that there were two authors named Archytas, only one of them flourished before Aristotle. Still according to Themistius *apud* al-Fārābī, the Archytas who wrote the treatise on *Categories*, coming after Aristotle, could not be the source of Aristotle’s work (*Kitāb al-alfāz al-musta‘malah fī ‘l-mantiq*, ed. Mahdi 1968:109,7–12; see Zimmerman 1981; Martini Bonadeo 2008).

Al-Sijistānī (c. 913–987 CE) quoted several passages attributed to Themistius, dealing with the definition of happiness (*Muntakhāb Ṣiwān al-ḥikma*, ed. Dunlop 1979:101); this passage is also quoted by al-Tawḥīdī (*R. fī-l-Ṣadāqa wa-l-ṣadīq*, ed. Keilani: 193). The influence of Themistius’ work on friendship has been detected in Miskawayh (s. X–XI, *Tahdhīb al-akhlāq* ed. Tamim: p 139; Rosenthal 1940:402–405).

## Cross-References

- ▶ Abū Bishr Mattā ibn Yūnus
- ▶ Abū Sulaymān al-Sijistānī al-Mantiqī
- ▶ al-‘Āmirī, Abū l-Ḥasan
- ▶ Alexander of Aphrodisias and Arabic Aristotelianism
- ▶ Alexandrian Tradition into Arabic: Philosophy

- ▶ Arabic Philosophical Texts, Jewish Translations of
- ▶ Arabic Texts: Natural Philosophy, Latin Translations of
- ▶ Aristotle, Arabic
- ▶ Boethius’ *De topicis differentiis*, Commentaries on
- ▶ *Categories*, Commentaries on Aristotle’s
- ▶ *De caelo*, Commentaries on Aristotle’s
- ▶ *De generatione et corruptione*, Commentaries on Aristotle’s
- ▶ Ethics, Arabic
- ▶ Ethics, Jewish
- ▶ Eustratios of Nicaea
- ▶ al-Fārābī, Abū Naṣr
- ▶ Gersonides
- ▶ Greek Texts Translated into Hebrew
- ▶ Hasdai Crescas
- ▶ Ibn Rushd, Muḥammad ibn Aḥmad al-Ḥafīd (Averroes)
- ▶ Ibn Sīnā, Abū ‘Alī (Avicenna)
- ▶ Isaac Israeli
- ▶ John Philoponus
- ▶ al-Kindī, Abū Yūsuf Ya‘qūb ibn Ishāq
- ▶ Logic, Arabic, in the Latin Middle Ages
- ▶ Logic in the Arabic and Islamic World
- ▶ Logic, Jewish
- ▶ Metaphysics
- ▶ Miskawayh, Abū ‘Alī
- ▶ Moses Maimonides
- ▶ Natural Philosophy, Arabic
- ▶ *Nicomachean Ethics*, Commentaries on Aristotle’s
- ▶ *Parva naturalia*, Commentaries on Aristotle’s
- ▶ Philoponus, Arabic
- ▶ Philosophical Psychology, Jewish Tradition
- ▶ Plato, Arabic
- ▶ Posterior Analytics, Commentaries on Aristotle’s
- ▶ Sergius of Resh‘aynā
- ▶ Sophonias
- ▶ Syllogism, Theories of
- ▶ al-Tawḥīdī, Abū Ḥayyān
- ▶ Theophrastus, Arabic
- ▶ Translations from Greek into Arabic
- ▶ Translations from Greek into Syriac
- ▶ Yaḥyā ibn ‘Adī

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### Abstract

Theodore Metochites (Theodōros Metochitēs, 1270–1332) was a Byzantine statesman, author, philosophical scholar, and patron of the arts. His philosophical works include paraphrases of Aristotle's natural philosophy, an introduction to Ptolemaic astronomy, and a collection of "philosophical and historical" essays. A leitmotif running through the latter as well as his numerous speeches and poems is his insistence on the instability of things in the sensible world. This has ethical consequences: the proper demeanor under these conditions is to rise above the tide of joy and grief by means of unceasing reflection. It also has epistemological consequences: according to Metochites, nothing can be known with certainty outside the field of mathematics. Since we ourselves are part of the sensible world, our intellectual capacity is limited: this is why even the truths of Christianity cannot be the object of knowledge but only of faith. Without doubt, Metochites' reflective practices, arguing pro and contra, and his vaguely skeptical theory of knowledge reinforce each other. He has often been regarded as a prime exponent of Byzantine humanism (although the very



concept has been controversial). Indeed, it may even be tempting to bestow on him the epithet “Renaissance man,” not only on account of his encyclopedism (spanning poetry and prose on the most diverse topics) and his quest for synthesis (trying to combine philosophy and eloquence as well as to integrate the lives of contemplation and of action) but also in view of his criticism of Aristotle, his sympathy for skepticism, his fideism, and his interest in literary self-representation.

## Life

Theodore Metochites was born in Constantinople as the son of George Metochites, archdeacon of the Hagia Sophia, and a fervent supporter of the union of the Eastern and Western Churches, agreed upon at the Second Council of Lyons. When, in 1283, the agreement of Lyons was repudiated by the new emperor Andronicus II Palaeologus, George Metochites was exiled and imprisoned; as a consequence, Theodore spent his adolescence in Asia Minor, devoting himself to studies. His extraordinary talents brought him to Andronicus II's attention already in 1290/1291; he was made a Senator in c. 1292, and from c. 1305 he played the role of *mesázōn*, or personal advisor to the emperor. His official duties did not stop him from pursuing his literary and scholarly interests: according to his pupil, the historian Nikephoros Gregoras, he spent his days administering the empire and his nights engrossed in his books. Finally reaching the position of Grand Logothete in 1321, he was removed from power in 1328 by Andronicus III's victory in the civil war; after a brief period of exile, he withdrew to the Chora monastery in north Constantinople, where he died.

Metochites was largely an autodidact. He learned some astronomy from Manuel Bryennius and later passed it on to Gregoras. There is no evidence that he was the teacher of Gregory Palamas, as is sometimes claimed. Besides his literary and scholarly pursuits, he is remembered for having commissioned a splendid refurbishment of the church of the Chora monastery (today the Kariye Museum).

## Works

Apart from his letters, all known works by Metochites survive. He wrote 20 poems in dactylic hexameter, 18 orations (*Logoi*), and 3 voluminous works on philosophy, as defined by Metochites and his contemporaries: the *Stoicheiosis astronomike* (1316/1317), the *Paraphrases of Aristotle's Writings on Natural Philosophy* (c. 1320), and a collection of “philosophical and historical” essays, the *Semeioseis gnomikai* (c. 1326).

The *Stoicheiosis astronomike* comprises two volumes. In the first, Metochites sets out the *Handy Tables* of Ptolemy and his commentator Theon and supplements them with theoretical accounts based on Ptolemy's *Almagest*; in the second, he offers an arithmetical and geometrical propaedeutics to the study of astronomy as well as a summary of the whole of the *Almagest*. In the extensive preface, Metochites describes the current state of mathematical and, in particular, astronomical studies in Byzantium and attempts to specify the place of astronomy within the framework of philosophy in general. Being the first serious Greek work in its field for hundreds of years, the *Stoicheiosis astronomike* was a major contribution to the revival of learning in early Palaeologan Byzantium.

The 39 books of *Paraphrases of Aristotle's Writings on Natural Philosophy* were designed to facilitate the understanding of Aristotle's doctrines by reporting them in a plain and straightforward manner and integrating explanatory material from the Greek commentators. They were translated into Latin in the sixteenth century by Gentian Hervet and were then praised for their clarity and conciseness, but made no discernible impact.

Finally, the *Semeioseis gnomikai* was described by Metochites in one of his poems as a picture (or statue) of his mind and a journal of his thoughts, that is, as an intellectual self-portrait. It moves freely, but not randomly, from discussions of classical authors, notably Plato and Aristotle, over ethical, political, and epistemological questions, to meditations on different aspects of Greek and Roman history. Many of these themes are also

touched upon in Metochites' oratory and poetry, but the internal structure of the *Semeioseis gnomikai* strongly indicates that it is no mere commonplace book but was conceived from the outset as a literary whole. Many of the themes are indeed also familiar from one or another of those late antique Platonic philosophers who cultivated a literary – if sometimes inaccessible – style, such as Philo of Alexandria, Plutarch, Maximus of Tyre, and Synesius.

Metochites himself is notorious for his thorny style, especially in his poems and also in some of his prose. Even his own pupil, Gregoras, criticized him for this; he put it down to his teacher's refusal to model himself on any ancient orator. In his *Logos* 13, Metochites defends the ideal of stylistic "forcefulness" (*deinótēs*) which sometimes prescribes complexity rather than clarity. But in *Semeioseis gnomikai* 26, he heavily emphasizes the Platonic opposition between philosophy and rhetoric, contending that it is appropriate for philosophical thoughts to be couched in simple and unadorned language. It seems likely that he is pleading his own cause in both cases. Especially the prose of his *Paraphrases* is plain (and repetitive) to the point of monotony. In the *Semeioseis gnomikai*, he attempted to bridge the dichotomy by combining a philosophical content with natural eloquence: in spite of Gregoras, he seems to have drawn inspiration particularly from Synesius and Plutarch.

## Thought

Metochites' parallel careers as an imperial official and a writer conspired to make him extraordinarily sensitive to the traditional dilemma of whether a contemplative or an active life should be preferred. Many of his essays linger on this theme. In fact, he does view the active life in a more favorable light than probably any Byzantine thinker before him; but in the end, he comes down clearly on the side of contemplation, provided that it is chosen for the right reasons. The interest he shows in the choice-and-motive aspects of moral action is unusual in Byzantium and may suggest familiarity with Aristotelian ethics.

In Metochites' opinion, contemplation is the appropriate response to the fact that the realm of human affairs is so fundamentally unstable that we can never be certain of any set of circumstances in our lives, no matter how well we are doing. But through contemplation, we can raise ourselves so high above the vicissitudes of our lives as to be able to deal with this uncertainty; recognizing the bright and the dark sides of every situation will teach us to bear adversity with cheerfulness and success without elation.

These are familiar sentiments, harking back to popular philosophy of all periods. It has often been claimed that the doctrinal influence of such sources as the four abovementioned late antique Platonic philosophers on Metochites is so massive that it threatens to compromise his Christian orthodoxy. Especially, two leading twentieth-century Byzantinists, Hans-Georg Beck (1952:108–110) and Herbert Hunger (1978:52), both regarded his preoccupation with the arbitrary rule of Tyche (or Fortune) in the realm of human affairs as the sign of a fatalism that could only with difficulty be squared with the Christian belief. But this inference seems to be mistaken. It is true that Metochites denies the existence of any apparent justice in the way that prosperity is distributed in the world. Fortune, he says, is absolutely inscrutable to the human mind. But this means, according to him, that it has to be taken on faith, "from the Fathers as well as the Philosophers," that Fortune is ultimately the expression of Providence. Those who base their belief in Providence on their own limited and biased understanding of what is good and just will run the risk of losing it when Fortune turns against them (*Sem.* 28; 53; 66).

The real power behind Metochites' Fortune is therefore not Heimarmene (or Fate), as Beck thought, but Providence. Throughout his work, Metochites takes a consistently fideist attitude toward theology, which allows him to preserve his faith in goodness, justice, and order in the face of apparent evil, injustice, and chaos. In fact, he inveighs strongly against determinism in the realm of human affairs (since such affairs involve chance and free choice) in his *Stoicheiosis astronomike* (1.5). On the other hand, he equally

strongly affirms the causal influence of the motions and aspects of the heavenly bodies on natural processes – taking care, however, to underline the subordination of these motions and aspects to Providence. In *Semeioseis gnomikai* 58, he confronts head-on the question of whether it is better to exist or not to exist. He finds much to be said in favor of the latter alternative; still, hope and faith persuade us that it is better to exist. Faith, because the goodness of existence is dependent on the goodness of the Creator and Upholder’s will, and hope, because the pain and trouble of this life can be balanced only by the prospect of eternal bliss in the next life.

By the same token, it can only be, in Metochites’ view, on account of our own nature as partly irrational creatures that it is impossible for us to have scientific knowledge of the divine realm, for this realm must be assumed to be free from plurality and change. However, Metochites also holds that scientific knowledge is impossible of the natural realm; and this, he thinks, is due mainly to the fact that natural objects are intrinsically unstable, just like human affairs. He refers to Heraclitus for the doctrine that everything in the sensible world is in flux and to the ancient skeptics for the “not unreasonable” inference that there will always be cogent arguments against any view about anything in this world. He was the first Greek author in hundreds of years to see more than perversity in skepticism: he emphasized its kinship with Socratic *elenchus*.

Metochites’ epistemological pessimism as regards the natural realm contributed to lessening his admiration for Aristotle, who was considered first and foremost an authority on logic and natural philosophy. He criticizes the Stagirite for having promised scientific knowledge in fields where it is not to be had, out of intellectual vanity. His criticism is interesting for its focus on human vice; it provides a link in the history of Byzantine anti-Aristotelianism, from Michael Psellos to George Gemistos Plethon, and points forward to Renaissance anti-Aristotelians like Gianfrancesco Pico della Mirandola.

Sandwiched between the epistemologically deficient realms of human affairs and natural objects and the excessive realm of the divine, the

mathematical realm provides the only proper objects for scientific knowledge. According to Metochites, mathematical objects (including, pre-eminently, astronomical ones) are simple and stable; accordingly, our conceptions of them are definitive, which is proved by the unanimous agreement among mathematicians (as opposed to natural philosophers). In his *Poem* 10 (*On Mathematics*), he describes mathematical objects as being only apparently the products of abstraction from sensibles, and actually unconsciously pre-existing in reason (or “mind”), in a way that suggests that he aligned himself with the “projectionism” of Iamblichus and Proclus. If so, he seems to have shared the rationalist epistemology of his contemporaries Choumnos and Barlaam, if only with regard to mathematics.

## Cross-References

- ▶ [Aristotelianism in the Greek, Latin, Syriac, Arabic, and Hebrew Traditions](#)
- ▶ [Epistemology, Byzantine](#)
- ▶ [Metaphysics, Byzantine](#)
- ▶ [Natural Philosophy, Byzantine](#)
- ▶ [Nikephoros Blemmydes](#)
- ▶ [Nikephoros Gregoras](#)
- ▶ [Philosophical Psychology, Byzantine](#)
- ▶ [Skepticism](#)

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## Theodore Prodromos

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### Abstract

Theodore Prodromos (c. 1100–1156/1158 or c. 1170) was mainly active as a poet at the court of Irene Doukaina and John II Komnenos, and his works had important influence on later Byzantine literature. As a man of broad classical culture, Prodromos also dealt with ancient philosophy, especially with Aristotle's *Organon* and Porphyry's *Isagoge*. Although he confined himself to traditional topics in Byzantine philosophy, his critical sense toward ancient authorities, combined with his writing and rhetorical skills, makes his philosophical work a fine example of twelfth-century Byzantine scholarship.

### Biography

Theodore Prodromos lived in twelfth-century Constantinople, but the exact dates of his life are unknown (c. 1100–1156/1158 or c. 1170). Similarly, relatively little is known about the events of his life (Kazhdan 1984). In one of his poems, Prodromos reports that he was educated by his

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grandfather and uncle, but he elsewhere names as “teachers” his peers Stephen Scylitzes, metropolitan of Trebizond, and Michael Italicos, metropolitan of Philippopolis. His father had wanted him to become a soldier, but his fragile health obliged Prodromos to devote himself to scholarship and writing (Hörandner 1974 XXXVIII, pp. 11–40). He eventually became a poet laureate at the court of Irene Doukaina and, after the latter’s death, at that of her son John II Komnenos (1118–1143), where he mainly composed poetic panegyrics to praise the military victories of the emperor and his noble generals. Prodromos also wrote prose and taught rhetoric and grammar (Zagklas 2011), probably at one of the schools set under the patronage of the patriarchate (Hörandner 1974, pp. 27–28). His career ended with the death of John II. Prodromos retired to the Church of the Holy Apostles, where he was occasionally writing verses for the Byzantine nobility, and died as a monk, having changed his name to Nicholas. As a poet and, more generally, as a man of letters, Prodromos enjoyed great popularity among his contemporaries, and his literary works were widely imitated by later generations (Hörandner 1972). He was a less prolific writer in philosophy, though not necessarily deprived of any influence in later centuries.

## Thought

Prodromos’ philosophical work focuses exclusively on logic. His major contribution to this field, at least quantitatively, is his still unpublished (Cacouros 1992) Commentary on the second book of Aristotle’s *Posterior Analytics*. In it, Prodromos overtly criticizes Aristotle for his elliptical style and tries to restore the meaning of the Aristotelian text through various additions and, also, by rearranging the original phrasing (Cacouros 1989, pp. 327–328). The Commentary became a standard work in Byzantine philosophical curricula by the end of thirteenth century (see the Byzantine list of Commentaries on Aristotle published by Hayduck 1885:V) and was later adapted by the eminent Byzantine scholar John

Chortasmenos (c. 1370–1431) to fulfill contemporary educational needs (Cacouros 1995–1996, pp. 347–352). It is not certain, however, that it was originally conceived to serve didactic purposes. In its prologue (Brandis 1836, pp. 241a1–9), Prodromos states that in writing the Commentary, he does not mean to condemn the attempts made by previous exegetes but to test his own skills in such a difficult task. At least once, he is critical of Eustratios of Nicaea, on whose comments Prodromos’ own Commentary is largely based (Cacouros 1989, pp. 333–334). It is perhaps not unlikely that Prodromos was prompted to produce a better commentary than the existing ones by “literary” friends such as Stephen Scylitzes and Michael Italicos.

Another philosophical work by Prodromos, much shorter than the Commentary on the second book of the *Posterior Analytics*, was written at the request of Michael Italicos. It is called *On “Great” and “Small”* (Tannery 1887) and sets out to prove, in quite an original way, that the great and the small are not relatives, as Aristotle has it in the *Categories*, ch. 6, but quantities. Prodromos gives six arguments, mostly based on linguistic points, to support his thesis, and then takes up another six in order to demonstrate, also against Aristotle, that the great and small are contraries (Ierodiakonou 2005, pp. 28–29).

Finally, Prodromos composed a philosophical dialogue in which he combines Plato’s elenctic method with Lucien’s satirical style. The dialogue bears the title *Xenedemos*, or, *Predicables* (Cramer 1836) and sets out to unveil, again on linguistic grounds, the difficulties arising from Porphyry’s doctrine in the *Quinque voces* (*Isagoge*).

Compared to the extensive work of Aristotelian scholars of the preceding generation, like Eustratios and Michael of Ephesus, Prodromos’ overall philosophical work represents a return to traditional philosophical themes in Byzantium, namely, themes from Aristotle’s *Organon* and Porphyry’s *Isagoge*. At the same time, however, it is a fine example of the high-level scholarship of the twelfth century; in Prodromos’ case, broad classical culture, critical assessment of ancient

authorities, and elegant style seem to have assured the survival of his philosophical oeuvre in Byzantium.

## Cross-References

- ▶ [Categories, Commentaries on Aristotle's](#)
- ▶ [Eustratius of Nicaea](#)
- ▶ [Logic, Byzantine](#)
- ▶ [Posterior Analytics, Commentaries on Aristotle's](#)

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## Theology Versus Philosophy in the Arab World

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### Abstract

When describing the relationship between theology and philosophy in the medieval Islamic setting it is necessary to start with a few qualifications. First, and most importantly, theology and philosophy were never formally ranked as academic disciplines the way they were in the Catholic universities. Rather, *kalām*, or speculative theology, and *falsafa*, or the continuation of Greek philosophy in an Arabic milieu, developed in parallel, under socioeconomic conditions that overlapped in part (the sponsorship of rulers, the needs and ambitions of the educated classes) yet were largely independent of one another. This already changes significantly the dynamics of the conversation that took place between (1) the advocates of this or that theological creed or methodology, and (2) those who endorsed the philosophical agenda of the late antique school traditions.

Second, one should abstain from treating either theology or philosophy as monolithic entities that would have remained unchanging through centuries of evolution and interaction. The very conception of the enterprise of theology was in flux throughout the classical period of Islamic civilization; and although



practitioners of *falsafa* liked to present their heritage as a unitary body of knowledge with a solid sense of identity and aims, in truth the philosophers' interests, too, varied with the times, ranging from logic and natural philosophy to metaphysics and moral psychology. Jews, Christians, and Muslims (Sunni and Shī'ite) alike practiced both disciplines, which led to further variations in tone and emphasis.

The overall picture is one of increasing cross-pollination. One of the signal developments of later times is how philosophical schemata, principally of the Avicennan variety, begin to influence the very organization of theological tracts. Conversely, the later philosophical tradition speaks more about *hikma* (wisdom, *sophia*) than of *falsafa*, marking a stage in the development of Arabic philosophy where grand cosmological schemes and questions of soteriology begin to assume central stage. In this respect it becomes more like natural theology in the Christian sense of the word.

Nonetheless it is true that for a few centuries, at least, relations between authors in the theological and philosophical traditions ranged from the merely inimical to the emphatically hostile, and that this colored the way that histories of Islamic intellectual life were written both within the Islamic world and without. This is to say that although the reality on the ground, as it were, was mostly one of mutual influence and interaction, on the level of rhetoric and polemic there were many who considered it advantageous to present the relation of *kalām* to *falsafa* as being antagonistic – and doubtless some who saw the reality of the situation in this light as well.

Yet this is the final cautionary note we must sound: the representations of *kalām* and *falsafa* that we find in individual authors are always just that, representations. They reflect the way certain historically situated thinkers wished to present the world to their readers, and so their descriptions of the two traditions are always particular to them, not representative of some universal judgment on the part of an entire culture. It is furthermore important to

recognize that besides theology the religious sciences encompassed such disciplines as for instance Islamic jurisprudence (*fiqh*) and the study of the Prophetic traditions (*ḥadīth*). These disciplines were indeed more central to the overall Muslim experience than theology was: and the possible threat that philosophy posed to *their* autonomy and social standing was to many the more serious threat.

## Islamic Philosophical Theology

The beginnings of the science of *kalām*, which translates as “speech” and which thus may correspond to *logos* with all the allusions that word carries, are still partly under a shroud (For studies see van Ess 1991–1995; Frank 2005–2008.) Doubtless the growing intellectual needs of the rapidly expanding Muslim community explain much: the explication of the fundamentals of religion (*uṣūl al-dīn*) without recourse either to the ‘Uthmanic codex, the contested Prophetic traditions (*ḥadīth*), or the divergent paths of Islamic law will have been desirable both in the face of increasing doctrinal controversy and in terms of interfaith dialogue and polemic. *Kalām* provided a tool for explicating the Muslim worldview in more refined terms than mere Scriptural exegesis would allow: it provided the basis for an Islamic metaphysics, which in turn served as the foundation for speculation in domains such as natural philosophy and ethics.

It is difficult to imagine this happening without some influence from the overall Levantine intellectual milieu which the Muslims came to inhabit. Still, attempts to trace the origins of this or that *kalām* doctrine or approach to some specific ancient philosophical school (or indeed Christian theology) have all floundered, to the point that in this stage of the research it seems safer to assume that Islamic theology developed largely along independent lines. It is, for instance, highly doubtful that the atomism developed by the Mu‘tazilite theologians, and later the other schools, would have had much to do with either Epicurus or Empedocles, seeing as how no primary sources in translation have been identified and the

influence of second-hand reports must be considered negligible; and at any rate the atomism of the *mutakallimūn* was very much its own creature. The same goes for the theologians' metaphysics, which appropriated the vocabulary of substance and accident (*jawhar*, 'arad), but interpreted these terms in a way so far removed from the Greek mainstream that it cannot have arisen out of a corruption or a misunderstanding of Aristotelian ontology (contrary to what some Muslim Peripatetics, and later historians of philosophy, may have liked to think). A third example comes from the supposed influence of the Stoic school, which once was a favorite source of speculation among historians, but has now been widely discredited as a hypothesis, for simple lack of evidence (see Gutas 1994). With Richard Frank, it seems better to affirm the possibility of *kalām* theology being philosophical in approach and method without thereby having to reduce it to Greek philosophy, either by way of influence or through an unflattering comparison.

At least in two areas the influence of the late antique school tradition on early Muslim speculation is nonetheless plain to see. In the first place, the method for theological disputation itself appears to have been an adaptation of Aristotelian dialectic, more or less consciously taken up in early encounters with Christian theologians long since accustomed to its application in theological disputes (see Rissanen 1993). In the second, certain cosmological problems and puzzles, having to do with how the world relates to its transcendent cause, were taken over from late antique debates. Going back to pre-Plotinian Platonism, philosophers and theologians (Jew and Christian) had argued over whether the world was eternal, created out of nothing, or formed out of a pre-existent matter: Muslims discussed these problems not only with great vigor, but with obvious recourse to ancient materials. Notably, the Muslim theologians drew on the works of John Philoponus (d. 574) when developing their proofs for the world necessarily having a limited past, a move that would later set them in opposition to the Arabic Aristotelians. These two early examples of an early, "native," and theological use of Aristotle are reflected in the fact that the two Aristotelian

treatises first picked up for translation into the Arabic were the *Topics* and the *Physics* (We also have a report of a late-eighth-century refutation of Aristotelian theology. Given that this predates the translation both of Aristotle's *Metaphysics* and of the so-called *Theology of Aristotle*, the refutation is likely to have had the *Physics* proof for a Prime Mover as its target).

### Islamic Religious Philosophy

The rising Islamicate civilization absorbed into itself many foreign disciplines and intellectual traditions; it is not immediately apparent why it was philosophy (*falsafa*) which came under special scrutiny from the side of the theologians and other self-appointed guardians of Islamic orthodoxy. Indeed, early on, such disciplines as for instance astrology and magic received more attention, and criticizing them provided a way for philosophers to burnish their Islamic credentials; though the speculations of the later Greek philosophers regarding the reality of celestial influence meant that it was typically only the practice and the knowledge-claims of the astrologers that were called into question, and the first "philosopher of the Arabs," Ya'qūb ibn Ishāq al-Kindī (d. c. 870), could still embrace astrology, but only because so still did the upper-class social world in which he moved. Indeed, a favorite trope in the philosophical literature ever since al-Kindī's times was to claim that Islam itself advocated a rational and measured approach to reality, and to recommend philosophy as a straight path toward fulfilling God's command to examine the heavens and the earth and the Prophet's exhortation to seek knowledge (Endress 1990; for a later echo see, e.g., Averroes, *Faṣl al-maqāl*). Thinkers outwardly skeptical or disdainful of revelation were few and far between: Abū Bakr al-Rāzī (d. 925 CE) is very much an outlier in this regard, an example of a passing phase in Islamic courtly life when even outspoken freethinkers were tolerated (Stroumsa 1999).

The explanation for why philosophy was singled out for attention is to be sought in two directions. In the first place, late antique philosophy

was explicitly religious and salvific in orientation, and its overall shape therefore presented a problem to Islamic teaching in a way that the more instrumentally understood arts and sciences did not. Even though the Syriac and Arabic adaptors and translators took pains to excise any traces of polytheism, and even though the theism propounded by Aristotle and his commentators was of a seemingly neutral character, it still occupied essentially the same intellectual space as the teachings of the Prophet and – hardly less important – took away from the work of the theologians themselves. Either one tradition or the other – either the Greek starting-points to explaining the cosmic order and humanity's place in it, or the Prophetic – had to yield to the truth claims made by its opposing number. And even if a harmony was sought, one tradition had to be read on the other's terms, which was enough to set off alarms.

The philosophers' metaphysics and cosmology formed one half of this equation; their perfectionist moral psychology, the other. Whatever the particulars of their metaphysics, the *falāsifa* all conveyed an ordered and interlinked cosmos in which corporeal entities derive from a First Principle or First Cause by means of a series of immaterial and/or celestial hierarchies. This stood in stark contrast to the occasionalist worldview adopted by the theologians, and it would take until the twelfth century before serious attempts at mediation were made. As for the philosophers' psychology and ethics, here the sticking point was the notion that the perfection and destiny of humankind would lie in a life of contemplation, as opposed to the more traditional Islamic virtues of lawful obedience and adoration. The charge that would ring through the centuries was that philosophy taught people to be antinomians, in spirit if not in practice (or vice versa: al-Ġazālī's famous criticism went that even though Avicenna proclaimed the philosophers to be the most law-abiding Muslims of all, the philosopher's habit of wine-drinking was enough to show his boast to be vacuous: *Munqidh*, 44).

Both these points could be finessed. Jahm ibn Ṣafwān (d. 746 CE), for instance, who is one of the earliest Islamic theorists to receive serious attention from the doxographers, in his teachings

exhibits many of the hallmarks of late antique Platonism, but is nonetheless able to pass for a *kalāmī* thinker. And Ismā'īlī thought as a whole shows the wealth of conceptual possibilities that lay in merging Neoplatonic cosmology with a distinctly Islamic outlook on revelation and history. More importantly still, the literature that grew around the Sufi movement shows a widespread adoption of Platonic-Aristotelian moral psychology, complete with a tripartite division of the soul and an intellectualist approach to the disclosure of the divine mysteries. (Here, several centuries of similar efforts on the part of Christian spiritual authors will have helped.)

More than any factual disagreement, what finally pushed philosophy beyond the reach of any easy annexation was its proponents' claim to have privileged access to a superior method for achieving certitude and, consonant with this, the means to judge the relative merits of other disciplines. This would mean not only finding a place for Prophetic revelation within philosophy – itself an act of subjugation – but also the liberty to interpret religious propositions in accordance with the dictates of pure reason. This was an affront not only to theologians but to the practitioners of the more traditional religious disciplines of jurisprudence (*fiqh*) and Qur'ānic exegesis.

Such claims are associated above all with Abū Naṣr al-Fārābī (d. 950), the “second teacher” of philosophy after Aristotle, who established Aristotle's theory of demonstration (*burhān*) as the centerpiece to all subsequent philosophizing in the Peripatetic mould. Al-Fārābī's works neatly tie in logic and metaphysics with epistemological and psychological concerns: the world has a certain necessary ordering and its universal features make it accessible to human reason, which in turn makes its representation possible in scientific discourse and its further investigation feasible using the tools of Aristotelian syllogistic. But theologians correctly discerned in all this a necessitarianism that was unpalatable not because it derived cosmic order from a divine principle, but because it presumed to dictate the terms for such an interface between the mundane and divine, and through this to circumscribe the nature of the divine itself.

## Philosophers Against Theologians

The conflict between the theologians and the philosophers in Islam is usually presented in terms of the theologians being the aggressors (and typically also anti-rational dogmatists), while the philosophers on this telling of the story get to act the part of innocent defenders of reasonable and peaceful coexistence. In light of these Enlightenment historiographical prejudices it is worth noting how in the historical materials, it is the philosophers who early on settle on a polemical invective against the professional theologians, without any recorded provocation on the part of the latter. From al-Kindī to Avicenna, and from al-Fārābī to twelfth-century Andalusia, nary a philosopher can be found who would have a kind word to say either about *kalām* or about its practitioners.

Al-Kindī initiates this trend with a volley against those who would “peddle in religion even as they lack religion” (*On First Philosophy*, 1:104.5 Abū Rīda). The tone is apologetic in the extreme: al-Kindī presents the philosophical project as being identical with the aims of Islam, though not impinging on it in any way – both aim at understanding the transcendent Truth and in acting in accordance with that Truth – while his unnamed opponents are strangers to the truth (*ḡarba ‘an al-ḥaqq*), in thrall to their vices, and intent upon seizing power. Al-Kindī laments how in his time such wretched people can nonetheless be renowned for their speculative acumen (*naẓar*): one or another theological party is meant, though more than this it is difficult to say.

Al-Fārābī expanded this polemic through establishing a general theory of religions – one that, moreover, set religion into a subordinate relation to philosophy. According to al-Fārābī, any veridical religion presents the essential findings of philosophy in more palatable form, in the shape of likenesses and images which faithfully represent – though they do not adequately capture – the true natures or realities of things (*ḥaqā’iq al-ashyā’*, a formulation already found in al-Kindī). Assent to religious propositions, moreover, is achieved through rhetorical or poetic persuasion, not by means of demonstration or

dialectic: the latter mode of reasoning lies beyond the ken of those who cannot adequately comprehend the nature of scientific premises, that is, the multitude (*al-jumhur*; *al-āmma: Attainment of Happiness*, 90 Yāsīn). What this means is that neither the raw notions nor the reasonings presented by religion correspond to reality in any straightforward manner: at best they are simulacra, or likenesses, designed by a teacher to guide people to believe and behave in accordance with a higher truth which they are unable to perceive clearly for themselves (see Maḥdī 1972).

The picture al-Fārābī paints of religion is perhaps unflattering, but there is no reason to doubt that he meant it as an enthusiastic, even uplifting, endorsement of how God, providential nature, and the prophets work in concert to secure the maximal degree of happiness for all humankind. An unsettling corollary to al-Fārābī’s theory, however, is that it makes of the *kalām* theologians a profession without a proper function. The true structure of reality is worked out by the philosophers, after all, while the transmission and safe-keeping of the symbols of faith is the province of the religious authorities; but as the latter base themselves on rhetoric and poetics, dialectic no longer has any place in any well-functioning society. On this understanding, the theologians can only be meddlers (or worse, rank amateurs), building sandcastles on contentious premises. Thus we find Ibn Sīnā (the Latin Avicenna, 980–1037), for instance, situating *kalām* reasoning on a line that stretches from dialectic to rank sophistry (Gutas 2005; cf. Marmura 1991–1992); while Ibn Rushd (Averroes, 1126–1198) expends considerable energy on pointing out the precise ways in which the theologians, especially the Ash‘arites, had gone astray in their attempts at legitimate inference – where they had wrongly tried to pass off dialectical, rhetorical, or sophistic arguments as being certain and irrefutable. Averroes even blames the rise in sectarianism on the theologians trying their hand at something they were not equipped to do (*Kashf*, 251 Qāsim; cp. Fārābī, *Attainment*, 50 Yāsīn).

Averroes’ efforts, however, belong to a different era, one in which the quality of the philosophers’ own inferences had been called into

question. His attempts at reversing the flow of the discussion were unsuccessful as, following upon al-Ġazālī's (1058–1111) incisive analysis of the Peripatetic philosophers' premises, few people were willing to accept at face value anymore their claims to demonstrable truth in matters metaphysical. This did not result in any lessening of the influence of philosophy on theology, indeed, the opposite is the case; it is to this paradoxical development that we turn next.

### Theologians Against Philosophers

Already before the 1095 CE publication of al-Ġazālī's famous treatise purporting to expose *The Incoherence of the Philosophers*, theologians evidently felt comfortable encountering the philosophers on their home turf. Thus for instance Sahl ibn Faḍl al-Tustarī, an eleventh-century Karaite Jew *mutakallim* much influenced by late Mu'tazilite theology, could quite cleverly criticize the notion associated with Avicenna that existence is a something added (*zā'id*) to essence and to do this, moreover, by way of referring to the Peripatetic tradition. Contrasting Aristotle's *Metaphysics* book *Gamma* with his *Categories*, al-Tustarī concludes that any attempt at treating existence as a univocal notion is doomed to failure (Madelung and Schmidtke 2006:75–107). All this bespeaks an intimate familiarity with philosophical teaching, as does the speed with which theologians rushed to adopt certain Avicennan tenets in the century following upon his death (Yahya Michot has in this connection spoken of a veritable Avicennan pandemic in the sixth/twelfth century; but even this may be putting the temporal markers too late).

Two things change with al-Ġazālī. First, his investigations carried unprecedented legal weight. Al-Ġazālī was not content to criticize the philosophers as a philosopher or even theologian would, instead, donning the cloak of a Shāfi'ite jurist, he issued a legal determination and declared that on three counts the Peripatetic philosophers were to be charged with unbelief (*kufr*). On as many as 17 additional points Avicennan philosophy might count as innovation

and heresy, which was a non-punishable offence: but as long as the philosophers taught the eternity of the world, God's ignorance of particulars, and a purely spiritual interpretation of resurrection, they fell outside the boundaries of Islam as a whole and therefore were deserving of being put to death as apostates (*Tahāfut*, 226–227 Marmura).

Because al-Ġazālī was a widely followed and respected, albeit also controversial, thinker already in his lifetime, this decree received widespread attention, and made it more tricky for subsequent generations of philosophers to claim straightforward allegiance to the Peripatetic-Avicennan stream of *falsafa* (see Griffel 2000). Though one should be careful not to overstate the practical impact of al-Ġazālī's *fatwā*, or the level to which people of a philosophical persuasion were in any way actually persecuted – this was, for one thing, leavened by al-Ġazālī's own subsequent exploration of the limits of religious tolerance, which for him reached far indeed – at a minimum we may note that the three doctrines singled out by al-Ġazālī henceforth became inhospitable terrain for philosophical exploration in Islam. Even theories such as perpetual creation (*ḥudūth azalī*) had to be carefully phrased so as to make clear that eternalism of the offending Aristotelian type did not result thereby.

Second, al-Ġazālī's very public wrestling with philosophy resulted in his appropriating a large amount of philosophical teaching into his own thought, to the point that critics charged him with becoming ensnared in the philosophers' nets: and in this al-Ġazālī was not alone, but instead representative of a wider movement that was well underway by his time. Al-Ġazālī had liked to point out how the philosophers often fell short of their own apodeictic ideal, an approach later radicalized in Ibn Taymiyya's (1263–1328) thoroughgoing nominalism, which denied to the philosophers even the capacity to put forward valid definitions. Yet in the process of developing his criticisms, al-Ġazālī effectively put syllogistic reasoning and scientific demonstration on exactly that pedestal which Fārābī had envisioned for it. In *The Just Balance* al-Ġazālī moreover argued

that the art of valid inference was not the exclusive province of the Greek philosophers, rather, the Messenger of God himself had reasoned syllogistically, and in so doing instructed his people in the same art (Rudolph 2005). Equally as importantly, al-Ġazālī in his autobiography contended that the saints and the Sufis had taught ethics long before the philosophers did (*Munqidh*, 24–25 Salība & Ayyād). This provided a formal justification not only for the longstanding practice of teaching Greek-derived moral psychology in conjunction with Islamic spirituality, but also for appropriating Aristotelian faculty psychology as its theoretical backdrop. Finally, al-Ġazālī's cosmology and metaphysics borrow liberally from Avicenna, even as he insists on putting an Ash'arite spin on these materials: and in this too he was followed by countless theologians who came after. In these three interlocking areas of doctrine, therefore – logic, psychology, and metaphysics – the practice of Islamic theology was transformed by its encounter with Avicenna, even as attitudes toward philosophy hardened on the surface level.

The ways in which all these changes played out are complex and resist easy summarization. Much further study is needed before we have an adequate conception of the developments, especially in the eastern part of the Islamic world. A few examples will have to suffice.

1. Consider first 'Umar al-Suhrawardī (1145–1234), who moved in the highly politicized intellectual circles of the Caliph al-Nāṣir li-Dīn Allāh. Suhrawardī could simultaneously boast of washing the ink out of every copy of Avicenna's *Healing* in Baghdad's libraries, and in his *Exposé of the Infamies of the Philosophers* present as his own a cosmology and epistemology that is plainly of Neoplatonic provenance. In keeping with al-Ġazālī's programme of situating Sufism in a respectable Islamic context, Suhrawardī claimed that his vision had a greater authority than the speculations of the philosophers, since it was divinely inspired and thus came from the same source as the prophetic proclamations (see Ohlander 2008:291–303).
2. Second, when we move from the centers of Muslim learning to its periphery, we may take the example of Maḥmūd ibn Malāḥimī (d. 1141), a Mu'tazilite teacher from a period when that particular school of theology had fallen into disrepute if not yet obscurity. From the sidelines, Malāḥimī' can gleefully observe how theologians from the Shāfi'ite and Ḥanafite legal traditions were fast going the way of the Christians, with their Hellenizing (*yūnānī*) tendencies and elaborate metaphysical speculations. These would only serve to lead them further astray from valid rational principles of authentic Muslim origin – a clear recognition on Malāḥimī's part that a displacement of some sort had occurred. Again, this assessment comes coupled with an inability to perceive the extent to which Mu'tazilite teaching itself had become pervaded with philosophical content (Madelung 2007).
3. Third, we have Ibn Khaldūn's famous verdict that the theologians, following in the footsteps of al-Ġazālī, had meddled in philosophy to the point of confusing the two traditions (*Muqaddima*, 3:52, 3:153–154). Ibn Khaldūn's own opinion was that theology should begin from articles of faith as established by tradition; but this again represents a very particular view of *kalām*, and not one that is borne out by the historical materials in all their richness. All in all, the notion that either the theological or the philosophical tradition would have had pure essences, ones whose subsequent contamination should be cause for concern, appears to be an odd and ahistorical claim – although sadly not one to which later historians would have been immune.

## Cross-References

- ▶ al-Fārābī, Abū Naṣr
- ▶ al-Ġazālī, Abū Ḥāmid Muḥammad
- ▶ al-Kindī, Abū Yūsuf Ya'qūb ibn Ishāq
- ▶ Ibn Khaldūn, Abū Zayd 'Abdarrāḥmān
- ▶ Ibn Rushd, Muḥammad ibn Aḥmad al-Ḥafid (Averroes)
- ▶ Ibn Sīnā, Abū 'Alī (Avicenna)
- ▶ Kalām



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## Theophrastus, Arabic

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### Abstract

Theophrastus, a relative of Aristotle and his successor in the Peripatetic school, is well documented in Arabic sources, particularly with regard to logic. He is known by the Arabs as a translator of and a commentator on

Aristotle and as the author of works, some now lost, on minerals and on general questions. Many of his doctrines in physics, psychology, and metaphysics were developed in Muslim thought. Testimonies refer to his scientific interests, his idea of nature as a mixture of mechanics and teleology, and his apophatic idea of knowledge of God. He introduces ideas about the intellect that were later developed by Averroes. With regard to morals, Theophrastus emphasized qualities that would become the basic features of the ideal philosopher and the ideal ruler in Islam.

### Biographical Information

Theophrastus is frequently quoted in Arabic sources, partly because of his presumed relationship to Aristotle – he may have been confused with Speusippus, the son of Aristotle’s sister; the Arabs also refer to him as the son of Aristotle’s brother or of his maternal aunt – and because he was his spiritual successor. The major source for the Arabic Theophrastus is Gutas 1992, which contains all texts, including manuscript sources, in which Theophrastus is named or quoted; sometimes his name is difficult to identify. Gutas describes the main lines of Theophrastus’ thought as known by the Arabs. He is presented as a translator of and a commentator on Aristotle’s *Categories* and *De interpretatione* and of some of Aristotle’s works on physics (cf. Abū l-Faraj ibn al-Ṭayyib, a Nestorian philosopher, physician, and theologian, d. 1043, and known in the Latin world as *Abulfaragius Abdalla Benattibus*).

The philosopher al-Fārābī (d. 950) reports that after the defeat of Cleopatra at Actium in 31 BCE, the Roman emperor Augustus found in the Egyptian libraries manuscripts of Aristotle’s works written in his lifetime and in that of Theophrastus (Gutas 1992:95). Books attributed to Theophrastus include *On the Soul* and *On Meteorology*, *On Sensation*, *On Metaphysics*, and *On the Causes of Plants*, in a single book, and *Natural Questions*. These titles can be recognized in the well-known *De sensu et sensibilibus*, *Metaphysics*, *De causis plantarum*, and *Physicorum opiniones*; whether

the title *On Education*, also in a single book, corresponds to the *Characteres* is uncertain. Several of these works were translated into or commented on in Arabic. A work on Democritus that is related to Theophrastus might be that quoted by Diogenes Laertius (= 68 A 34 Diels-Kranz [*Fragmente der Vorsokratiker* ed.]). An anonymous Latin source (Gutas 1992:439) states that Theophrastus wrote a *Book on Causes* that is no longer extant in Greek but only in Arabic, and that it was translated into Latin by a certain David. Ibn al-Nadīm (tenth century), author of *al-Fihrist*, the “index” of names of authors and works in different fields of knowledge, refers to a book by Theophrastus entitled *On Problems*. Quṣṭā b. Lūqā, a physician and translator of the ninth century, is said to have relied on Theophrastus in his *Book on the Difference Between the Spirit and the Soul*.

Aristotle never wrote about minerals and metals – though he states the contrary at the end of Book III of his *Meteorologica* – but Theophrastus wrote a treatise *De lapidibus* and a work on metals, now lost. He also wrote about fossils, corals, petrified plants, and salts in other lost works (Lettinck 1999:301). Writings in Arabic on these matters indicate that these works may have been seminal in the later tradition. The eleventh century scientist al-Bīrūnī refers to Theophrastus’ statement that a container is heavier if filled with lead than if it is filled with gold or silver.

From the *Ṣiwān al-ḥikma – The Cupboard of Wisdom*, a history of Greek and Arabic philosophy written by Abū Sulaymān al-Sijistānī al-Mantīqī (d. c. 985) – we know that on his deathbed Theophrastus reproached nature for giving humanity so short a life.

### Thought

#### Logic

Logic is by far the best-documented section in Gutas’ collection. According to the Arab sources, Theophrastus wrote a commentary on Aristotle’s *Categories* and a *Book on affirmative and negative (propositions)*. Al-Fārābī states that

it was written on the line of Aristotle's *De interpretatione*, where "the things sought" (*al-maṭlūbāt*) were discussed, not syllogistic premises, to distinguish them from "the other opposite pairs" (*sā'ir al-mutaqābilāt*). Numerous testimonies, among them Avicenna (d. 1037) and Averroes (d. 1198), describe Theophrastus' involvement in the clarification of premises in syllogisms, particularly of the nature of absolute and existential premises (Gutas 1992:153–185). Arabic authors also mention Theophrastus' theories about Aristotle's modal syllogisms; al-Fārābī claims that he also studied hypothetical syllogisms, and Averroes reports his interest in Aristotle's topics.

### Nature and Natural Phenomena

The eleventh century heresiographer al-Shahrastānī ascribes to Theophrastus, as well as to Aristotle, Plato, Porphyry, and Plutarch, the theory reported by Themistius according to which the nature of the world is a single and general nature, while every species of plant and animal is distinguished by a proper nature. Nature is also seen as the principle of motion and rest in things. It manages everything in the world wisely, even though it has no life, potency, or will. Al-Shahrastānī counts Theophrastus among those who met Plato and reported that he said that the world has a creator.

The *Ṣiwān al-ḥikma* attributes to Theophrastus the theory that heaven is the abode of all the stars and earth the abode of all humans, who are similar to the stars because of their rational souls and intellect. The Arab Galen states that according to Theophrastus rain results from compression and pressure, and that the fine parts of water vanish from ice when it melts leaving the muddy and heavy parts behind. With regard to odors, the Pseudo-Platonic Arabic *Book of Tetralogies* attributes to Theophrastus the idea that bad smells fall because of their density and rise because of their rarity.

### God

According to an anonymous Arabic source, Theophrastus believed in the eternal preexistence of God; he thought that God is beyond substance,

that He originated everything, having no originator Himself; that He is not associated with things but is contrary to them; and that He has neither before nor after, nor parts or organs of sense.

### Soul

The *Ṣiwān al-ḥikma* reports that according to Theophrastus the soul is able to fly and to alight wherever it wishes, thanks to its "hidden wings" (cf. Plato), and that it observes everything without being observed.

Albert the Great places Theophrastus with Porphyry, Themistius, and Arab thinkers such as Avicenna, al-Ġazālī (d. 1111), and al-Fārābī as a representative of the theory of three different modes of knowledge: (i) the incomplete, (ii) that supported by a "habit" that helps the intellect, and (iii) that which is good by its nature, illuminated by the universal intellect. The *Ṣiwān al-ḥikma* distinguishes between innate understanding, which is compared to the earth, and understanding through listening, which is compared to a seed, and to water that brings out what lies in the depths of the earth.

### Intellect

The question of intellect is a major topic in the history of Muslim thought. In Averroes, it underwent substantial transformations in all his works on the soul, and more so in those surviving in Latin translation only. One of the most debated issues is the nature of the so-called material intellect. According to Averroes' *Commentarium magnum in De anima*, Aristotle's opinion that the "material" intellect is neither a body nor a form in the body led Theophrastus and Themistius to believe that it was a substance that could neither be created nor destroyed. The "theoretical" intellect was for Aristotle the result of the composition of the "material" and the "actual" intellect, which is the intellect that abstracts forms in matter in so far as it is joined to the "agent" intellect. Theophrastus and Themistius hence inferred that the "acquired" intellect was the "agent" intellect, sometimes weakened, and sometimes strengthened because of its mixture with the "material" intellect. With regard to the "material" intellect, taken to be a potential substance similar to primal

matter in its reception of forms (cf. Averroes' *De connexione intellectus abstracti cum homine*), Theophrastus remarked that primal matter cannot conceive of or make distinctions, nor can it be said to be an abstract thing. Qualities such as simplicity, abstraction, impassibility, and separation from the body, ascribed by Aristotle to the "material" intellect, cannot be proper to a "preparedness" only. Echoes of this debate were preserved by the thirteenth century Sufi and thinker Ibn Sab'īn in the *Sicilian Questions* addressed to the Emperor Frederick II of Hohenstaufen. Here it is stated that, according to Theophrastus and Themistius, the "material" intellect is eternal and the human intellect is a composition of this "material" (passive) intellect and of an "actual" intellect. They also shared the idea that the "material" intellect survives the death of the body, a theory linked to Plato's opinion that the objects of intellect existing in us are eternal and that learning is recollection.

### Morals

The *Šiwān al-ḥikma* ascribes to Theophrastus the saying that control of desire is as difficult as control of anger – that is to say that no good thing is easy to achieve. The eleventh century Egyptian historian and savant, Mubashshir b. Fātik, who was one of the most important collectors of gnomic sayings, recalls that according to Theophrastus, the educated person (*adīb*) is one who speaks of the good qualities of people and conceals the evil. The *Šiwān al-ḥikma* also emphasizes qualities that will become proper to the ideal philosopher in Islam and included among them those of the ruler, whether philosopher or *Imam*, of the "perfect cities" described by al-Fārābī and the Ikhwān al-Šafā'. These include eloquence as separation of truth and lies, generosity, piety, sound judgment, and justice. Al-Fārābī reports that the followers of Theophrastus placed purification of morals at the basis of knowledge because, as Plato said, "whoever is not clean and pure should not approach the clean and pure" (Gutas 1992:295; a similar position is reported by Abū l-Faraj ibn al-Ṭayyib). The more a soul leaves aside worldly pleasures, the more easily it acquires philosophy,

becoming like a lamp luminous in itself, and illuminating others. From this, it can be inferred that it becomes similar to those, including some ancient wise men, who were illuminated by the lamp of prophecy, as al-Shahrestānī says. Again, philosophy is the wealth of the soul, which grants its survival; people must also learn how to make a good use of worldly wealth. A saying reported by the famous physician and translator Ḥunayn b. Isḥāq emphasizes the importance of action over speech.

The tenth century writer al-Mas'ūdī, one of the main, if debatable, sources for Arabic thought, counts Theophrastus among the representatives of the political philosophy (*al-falsafa al-madaniyya*) that began with Socrates and continued with Plato and Aristotle. The *Šiwān al-ḥikma* reports Theophrastus' answer to Alexander the Great about what makes a king's rule good: "When the subjects obey the king and the king acts according to tradition and justice" (Gutas 1992:455). It should be noted that the Arabic words for tradition and justice, *sunna* and *'adl*, correspond to the political and religious rule of the Prophet.

Muslim thinkers of different persuasions shared and developed theories on physics, psychology, and "metaphysics" – "theology" for the Arabs – similar to those attributed to Theophrastus; this could inform inspection of the Greek sources of Muslim philosophy. But the available witnesses testify that Theophrastus had no good opinion of music, unlike many Muslim thinkers who relate to music the ability to influencing moral behavior.

### Cross-References

- ▶ Abū Sulaymān al-Sijistānī al-Mantiqī
- ▶ Doxographies, Graeco-Arabic
- ▶ al-Fārābī, Abū Naṣr
- ▶ al-Ġazālī, Abū Ḥāmid Muḥammad
- ▶ Ibn Masarra, Muḥammad ibn 'Abdallāh
- ▶ Ibn Rushd, Muḥammad ibn Aḥmad al-Ḥafid (Averroes)
- ▶ Ibn Sab'īn, 'Abd al-Ḥaqq
- ▶ Ibn Sīnā, Abū 'Alī (Avicenna)

- ▶ [Ibn al-Ṭayyib](#)
- ▶ [Ikhwān al-Ṣafāʾ](#), [Encyclopedia of](#)
- ▶ [al-Mubashshir ibn Fātik](#)
- ▶ [Natural Philosophy, Arabic](#)
- ▶ [Porphyry, Arabic](#)
- ▶ [al-Shahrastānī, Muḥammad ibn ʿAbd al-Karīm](#)

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## Thierry of Chartres

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Thierry of Chartres (c. 1085–1156) succeeded Gilbert of Poitiers at the Cathedral school at Notre Dame. He is mostly known for his contributions in theology.

## Cross-References

- ▶ [Dominicus Gundissalinus](#)
- ▶ [Gilbert of Poitiers](#)

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## Thomas Aquinas

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### Abstract

Thomas Aquinas was a scholastic theologian active in the thirteenth century, when scholars of the Latin West were assimilating the Aristotelian corpus (rendered into Latin by 1200). These writings and the Islamic-Judeo commentary tradition that accompanied their reception transformed every field of philosophical enquiry and reflected a worldview that led some medieval thinkers to assert that sound philosophical reasoning does on occasion contradict articles of faith and theological doctrine.

Against this, Aquinas argued that faith and reason cannot contradict one another as both are from God. This famous synthesis helped to foster an intellectual culture that allowed for the development of Aristotelian empiricism alongside scholasticism's deeply embedded, Platonic elements. Yet Aquinas was no mere apologist. Just as he produced numerous excellent commentaries on Aristotle, Aquinas likewise developed a metaphysics asserting a distinction between being and essence with respect to all entities save God. Joining to this distinction the medieval doctrine of the convertibility of transgeneric attributes of being (or transcendentals) such as goodness and truth, Aquinas develops a Christian Aristotelianism that informs his epistemology, natural theology, ethics, theory of natural law, philosophical psychology, and semiotics (treated in this entry). Aquinas's proofs that God exists contend that contingent entities (for whom existence and essence are distinct) would not be were it not for the activity of God (the sole necessary entity, the one being for whom existence and essence are identical). Maximally existent, God is therefore maximally good (as goodness and being are convertible). Carrying this over to philosophical psychology, ethics, and natural law theory, Aquinas explains our free actions in terms of an innate desire for happiness, the chief human good, which desire is, at bottom, a desire for the beatific vision, in which the highest possible happiness is obtained. Aquinas's semiotics then seeks to accommodate the meaning of theological discourse to its subject's unique nature.

## Biography

Thomas Aquinas (1224/1226–1274) was born to Landolph Count of Aquino and Dame Theodora of the Neapolitan Caricciolo family at their castle in Roccasecca, Italy (then part of the Kingdom of the Two Sicilies). The youngest son, Aquinas, was given as an oblate to the Benedictine abbey

of Monte Cassino in 1230/1231, likely with the aim of his some day acquiring the lucrative abbacy. Owing to renewed strife between Pope Gregory the IX and Emperor Frederick II, Aquinas was moved from Monte Cassino to the University of Naples in 1239, preceding Frederick's capture of the abbey that November. Naples was central to Aquinas's spiritual and intellectual formation. Here he studied Aristotle, Maimonides, Averroes, and Avicenna and was inspired by friars John of San Giuliano and Thomas of Lentini to join the Dominican order around April of 1244. Aquinas's joining a mendicant order upset his family's ambitions, but the friars' foresight placed Aquinas on the road to Rome prior to Theodora's arrival in Naples to dissuade him. Aquinas again eluded his mother at Rome, departing for Bologna just before her arrival. At this point, Theodora organized a group that took Aquinas in the region of Acquapendente, whence he was confined to Castle Roccasecca. Consequent on Aquinas's refusal to change his mind and Innocent IV's disposal of Emperor Frederick (an ally of the Aquino family), Aquinas was returned in 1245 to the Dominicans, who sent him to Paris. Aquinas remained there for about 3 years, likely pursuing his studies of the liberal arts (begun at Naples) and starting work in theology, while serving as an assistant to Albert the Great. In 1248, Aquinas followed Albert to Cologne, where Albert had been sent to aid in establishing a *studium generale*, or house of study designed to train the order's ablest students, mainly to serve as lecturers at provincial *studia*, where they would organize disputations and lecture on the Bible and Peter of Lombard's *Sentences*. At Cologne, Aquinas studied philosophy and theology under Albert, and perhaps began lecturing as a biblical bachelor, as required during the first year of one's formation as a master in theology. He also produced literal commentaries on the Bible and perhaps *De principiis naturae* (*On the Principles of Nature*). Aquinas returned to Paris in 1252 to begin the next stage in his formation as a bachelor of the *Sentences*, lecturing and producing his *Scriptum super libros Sententiarum* (*Commentary on the Sentences*), as well as *De ente et essentia* (*On Being and Essence*). In



1256, Aquinas received his license to teach and was appointed regent master at the University of Paris, against the protests of secular masters who resented the growing strength of the mendicant orders. As regent, Aquinas taught, commented on the Bible, and participated in disputations. Other writings from this time include several disputed questions as well as the *Expositio super librum Boethii De trinitate* (*Commentary on Boethius' "De Trinitate"*). Aquinas left Paris for Italy in 1259, where he spent a decade teaching at various cities and writing (*Summa contra Gentiles* (begun at Paris), *Sententia super De anima* (*Commentary on Aristotle's De anima*), and the first part of the *Summa Theologiae*, among other works). Aquinas ended these travels at Rome in 1265, where he was sent to establish a *studium* and serve as its regent master. In 1268, the order sent for Aquinas to serve an unprecedented second regency at Paris, where his talents were needed to combat secular attacks against the mendicants' rights to teach, and also to check the spread of Latin Averroism (see below), while simultaneously persuading conservative theologians that Aristotelianism need not pose a threat to Christian teaching. Aquinas's staggering output from this period – including *On the Perfecting of the Spiritual Life*, *On the Unicity of Intellect Against the Averroists*, and *On the Eternity of the World* – reflects these concerns. Aquinas left Paris for Naples in 1272 to establish another *studium* and serve as its regent master. In December 1273, while saying mass, he had a religious experience that led him for the most part to cease writing. He purportedly disclosed to his friend and assistant Reginald of Piperno that in light of what had been revealed to him, he deemed his writings to be worth less than straw and now wished to die. In February of 1274, Aquinas suffered an injury journeying to the Council of Lyons. While convalescing with his niece in the castle of Maenza, Aquinas requested that he be moved to the Cistercian abbey at Fossa Nuova, that the Lord might find him in a religious house; he died here on March 2, 1274. Aquinas matured during the flowering of scholasticism. By 1200, Western scholars had rendered nearly all of Aristotle's writings into Latin. This marked a dramatic shift

from the early twelfth century, when the only widely circulated works were Boethius' translations of *Categories* and *De Interpretatione*, Porphyry's *Isagoge* (a brief introduction to *Categories*), and a few other texts from late antiquity (these works comprised what medievals termed the "old logic (*logica vetus*)"). The appearance of the rest of Aristotle's writings precipitated a series of bans, prohibitions, and ultimately condemnations, beginning in 1210, when the Provincial Council of Paris forbade the teaching of Aristotle's natural philosophy by the Parisian arts masters. In 1215, the Papal legate Robert de Courçon upheld the ban and added a prohibition against lecturing on Aristotle's *Metaphysics*; and in 1231, Pope Gregory IX maintained the prohibition and appointed a commission to correct the prohibited books. The prohibition was likewise maintained by Popes Innocent IV and Urban IV; and yet, when Aquinas was finishing his studies as a bachelor of the *Sentences* in Paris, Aristotelian philosophy dominated the scene. The conservative reaction to Aristotle grew from the fear that his work could in some way undermine Christian teachings, which is just what happened in the mid-thirteenth century, when Siger of Brabant and other Parisian arts masters, reading Aristotle in light of the commentaries of Averroes (the Latinized name of the twelfth-century Islamic philosopher Ibn Rushd), interpreted Aristotle in a way that contradicted certain tenets of faith and argued that philosophical insight into the ordinary course of nature does not always agree with revealed truth. Aquinas attacked these Latin Averroists (or Radical Aristotelians) during his second Parisian regency, claiming that they misconstrued Aristotle, particularly concerning certain ramifications of Aristotle's claim that the human intellect is immaterial (*De anima* III.4–5). Siger had concluded that there can exist only one such immaterial intellect, as entities are not multiplied save through matter. Aquinas's aforementioned *On the Unicity of Intellect Against the Averroists* (*De unitate intellectus contra Averroistas*) argues that a careful reading of Aristotle does not support this position. What is important to note is that Siger advanced his claims as true according to philosophy, suggesting that

philosophy and theology could arrive at different truths. Aquinas's aforementioned synthesis of faith and reason contends that this cannot happen. Though reason cannot establish the tenants of faith, Aquinas denies the possibility of valid demonstrations contradicting these teachings (*Summa Theologiae* (ST) Ia.46.2; *Summa contra Gentiles* (SCG) II.32). Even so, Aquinas's efforts at reconciliation were not immediately successful. Three years following his death, Latin Averroism led to the Condemnation of 1277, instigated by the Bishop of Paris, Stephen Tempier, and drafted with the aid of Henry of Ghent. Among the condemned propositions were 19 drawn from Aquinas's writings (in 1325, 2 years after Aquinas's canonization, the Condemnation was repealed to the extent that it touched on his works). After his death, Aquinas's philosophy found support among his fellow Dominicans, and Pope Pius V declared him a Doctor of the Church in 1567, during the period of Second Thomism (dating roughly through the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries), which included thinkers such as Cardinal Cajetan, Domingo de Soto, and John of St. Thomas. Perhaps the most important revival of Aquinas's teachings grew out of Pope Leo XIII's 1879 encyclical *Aeterni Patris*, which recommended Aquinas as "the prince and master of all Scholastic doctors," so as to furnish Catholic intellectuals with sound philosophical and theological principles in the face of modernism. The period following *Aeterni Patris* has seen the foundation of numerous centers of Thomistic study, an interest in Aquinas's thought spreading outside Catholic circles, and, with this, the growth of an intellectual climate generally amenable to the study of medieval philosophy.

## Metaphysics and Natural Philosophy

Key to Aquinas's metaphysics is his distinction between essence (*essentia*) and existence (*esse*). *De ente et essentia* (DEE) describes the essence or nature of an entity as the principle on account of which it belongs to a specific natural kind (as humanity is the essence of man) (Chapter 1). Essences (also termed "forms") are either

substantial or accidental. A substantial form is that principle just mentioned by which an entity belongs to some natural kind. Aquinas controversially maintained that individuals possess but one substantial form, regardless of what essential predicates we ascribe them (ST Ia.76.3c; *Sententia super De anima* (In DA) II.1.224). Accidental forms, on the other hand, are modes of being, whose presence or absence does not specify an entity as a member of some kind. Aquinas opposes any Platonist reification of essences, yet insists that essence and existence are distinct principles, with existence making an entity to be in actuality, which is contrasted with being in potentiality. Potentiality belongs to an entity which can be in a certain way but does not currently have that way of being, whereas actuality belongs to what is (*De principiis naturae* (DPN), Chapter 1). Transitions from potentiality to actuality are cases of substantial and accidental change. Substantial change is the generation of one substance following the corruption of another, as when a human becomes a corpse, which is a new type of thing that is human only in an equivocal sense (ST Ia.76.8; SCG IV.81). The matter underlying substantial change is conceived as in potentiality to all forms and thus termed "prime matter" (DPN, Chapter 2). Accidental change, on the other hand, involves a substance taking on or losing an accidental form, without itself being corrupted. Thus, generation absolutely speaking (to substantial form) and generation with qualification (to accidental form) require a being in potentiality (matter), nonbeing in actuality (privation), and an actualizing principle (form) (DPN, Chapter 1). (As regards immaterial entities such as angels, Aquinas allows that the same principle holds, though "matter" is used in a looser sense, to indicate potentiality. Hence, in these cases as well, change involves the movement from potentiality to actuality. See Aquinas's *Disputed Questions on Spiritual Creatures* a.1.) To these principles are added agents and ends (DPN, Chapter 3). Agents are required as no form, whether substantial or accidental, renders itself to be in actuality, as it would then have to preexist itself. Again, agents (even unintelligent agents) are inclined toward ends, though it does not follow

that all agents deliberate. Therefore, strictly speaking, change requires four causes: an agent (efficient cause), matter (material cause), form (formal cause), and an end (final cause). As for privation, as a logically prior antecedent to change, privation remains a principle, but it does not count as a cause in the strong sense that requires a cause to produce an effect. If privation were a cause in this sense, mere lack of form would bring about change.

Also important to Aquinas's metaphysics is the convertibility of the transcendental attributes of being: truth and goodness (*Quaestiones disputatae de veritate* (QDV) 1.1). "Truth" and "goodness," along with "thing," "one," and "something," comprise the five transcendentals: predicates true of all existent things qua existent. (Some scholars would add "beauty" to Aquinas's list. Note that other medieval thinkers settle on other lists, e.g., in addition to "unity," "truth," and "goodness," John Duns Scotus recognizes transcendental disjunctions (e.g., "infinite-finite") and perfections.) Considered absolutely, each being is a thing or something with an essence; and every being is undivided and hence one. In relation to other things, every being is itself and not some other and thus something; and in a sense involving relation to the soul's appetitive and intellectual powers, every being is true and good, good inasmuch as it is desired, and desired to the extent that it is a being in actuality (ST Ia.5.5c), that is, a being in actuality with respect to its specific perfections. Truth, on the other hand, is a mode of being involving a conformity of intellect and object when, in cognizing, intellect receives its object's likeness. Thus, entities are termed "true" in a way similar to that in which food is "healthy," both predicates signifying a mode of being whereby the subject acts on another. In the case of truth, this action results in an isomorphic (or true) conformity of the intellect with its object (QDV 1.4). In the proper and primary sense, though, something is true to the extent that it conforms to God's divine idea of it (QDV 1.4). This latter sense relates to actuality, for things can fall short of divine ideas to the extent that they fail to evidence or actualize the potentialities belonging to their specific kinds. Accordingly, there is a

correspondence between actuality and goodness dependent on God's creative intent. Most properly speaking, a thing is good to the extent that it actualizes the potentialities that God has determined with respect to its species, and hence the better an entity is, the more in actuality it is with respect to these potentialities.

## Epistemology

Plato's theory of forms accounts for necessary truths. Whereas Aristotle agrees that we have such truths, he finds the notion of Platonic forms incoherent. In its place, Aristotle hypothesizes the existence of immanent principles or essences by which individuals belong to various natural kinds (see above, q.v. "[Metaphysics and Natural Philosophy](#)"). Knowledge of these essences is had by induction and accounts for necessary truths (see *Posterior Analytics* (An.Post) I.4; *Metaphysics* (Metaph.) XIII, 4–5; and *Commentary on the Posterior Analytics of Aristotle* (In PA) I.1.8, II.20). Aquinas subscribes to Aristotle's account of natural knowledge (i.e., knowledge absent special revelation). Aquinas divides knowledge into two types: (1) certain and (2) probable (In PA *Prooemium*). Certain knowledge comprises (1A) what is absolutely certain (In PA 1.4) and (1B) what is certain for the most part (In PA I.16, 42; II, 12). (1A) pertains to axiomatic systems, e.g., geometry; indemonstrable principles, e.g., the principle (or law) of noncontradiction (In PA I.5); and a limited range of natural phenomena, e.g., eclipses (In PA I.16). (1B) pertains to statistical natural phenomena, where like causes do not always produce like effects, e.g., human generation does not always result in healthy birth outcomes. (2) comprises a variety of epistemic attitudes that correlate with degrees of assent that fall short of certainty, ranging from mere fancy (low) to belief (high) (In PA *Prooemium*). Scientific knowledge (Latin, *scientia*; Greek, *epistēmē*) is the product of a syllogism that either demonstrates the inherence of a property in a subject by a middle term that immediately designates the essence of the subject (An.Post. I.2) or demonstrates a necessary connection between an

essence and a state of affairs by a middle term that indirectly designates the essence (An.Post. I.13). In addition to *scientia*, Aquinas recognizes four other intellectual virtues that are directed to truth: on the one hand, there are the speculative habits of wisdom (which grasps the most universal and primary causes) and understanding (of the principles of *scientia*, had by induction); on the other hand, there are the practical habits of art (concerning production) and prudence (which perfects the agent) (see In PA II.20; Aquinas's *Commentary on the Nicomachean Ethics of Aristotle* (In NE) Book VI; and *Aquinas's Commentary on the Metaphysics of Aristotle* (In M) I.1.34). Aquinas's account of *scientia* seems to be foundationalist, i.e., Aquinas appears to restrict the scope of *scientia* to a small set of propositions known with certainty and those derived from them. Nevertheless, we have seen that Aquinas allows for a variety of epistemic attitudes. Hence Aquinas's account of *scientia* does not exhaust his theory of knowledge; it would be a mistake to label his epistemology foundationalist *tout court*.

*Scientia* comprises two types: *propter quid* (why) and *quia* (that). *Propter quid scientia* accounts for an effect in terms of the essence or nature of its cause, answering the questions (A) "Why is this so?" and (B) "What is it?," whereas *quia scientia* tells us whether (C) something is the case or (D) exists. (A) and (C) are paired. When we learn that something is the case, we may ask why. Likewise, (B) and (D) are paired. Upon learning that something exists, we may ask what it is. These four questions exhaust the scope of *scientia* (In PA II.1.2).

*Propter quid scientia* is *scientia* in the strictest sense (An.Post. I.2). Unlike *quia scientia*, *propter quid scientia* works from a direct grasp of the essence of its subject, which is formulated in ascriptions of what Aquinas terms *per se* (through itself) belonging (*kath'hauto* in Aristotle's Greek). Ascriptions of *per se* belonging make up the statements of the scientific syllogism, defined as a syllogism productive of scientific knowledge (*sullogismon epistēmonikon*) (An.Post. I.2).

Like *propter quid scientia*, *scientia quia* is had by a syllogism. As noted, the *quia* grasp of the essence is indirect: either by an effect concomitant

with the activity of the essence-as-cause (e.g., by the phenomenon of motion, Aquinas infers the existence of a first mover, i.e., God (ST Ia.2.3)) or by a remote cause, i.e., a tangential rather than an immediate cause. Aristotle's example is a proof that walls do not breathe because they are not animals. In fact, walls do not breathe because they lack lungs. Though only animals have lungs, not all animals have lungs; hence the immediate cause of not breathing goes unnamed. This latter type of *quia* proof is, as it were, a defective *propter quid* proof, whose defect can be remedied by the inclusion of the immediate cause: "Walls lack lungs. What lacks lungs does not breathe. Hence, walls do not breathe" (In PA I.24). Another example has it that Scythians lack flute players because they lack vines (*ibid.*). Presumably, vines produce wine, wine merriment, merriment dancing, and dancing the need for music. Again, the immediate cause goes unnamed.

## Natural Theology: The Five Ways

Aquinas's Five Ways are *quia* proofs that God exists (ST Ia.2.2). *Propter quid* proofs are ruled out as we lack the requisite *per se* grasp of the subject's essence (on *propter quid* and *quia* proof, see above, q.v. "[Epistemology](#)") (ST Ia.2.1). Likewise, Aquinas rejects Anselm's proof of God's existence, which Aquinas believes would entail *per se* knowledge of God's essence in this life (*ibid.*). Aquinas's demonstrations (drawn from Aristotle and the Islamic-Judeo tradition of rationalist theology) contend that the existence of God is necessary to account for certain readily observable phenomena (ST Ia.2.3): motion, efficient causality, contingent entities, gradations of perfections, and the seeming end-directedness evidenced by unintelligent things. Each demonstration identifies God as its subject; but the complete rationale for these identifications does not emerge until ST Ia.3-12, where Aquinas reflects on the implications of pure actuality, ascribed to God in the First Way (see below).

The First Way observes that things are in motion or moved (the verb *movetur* allows either

rendering). Following Aristotle, Aquinas recognizes three types of mobile change: in quantity, quality, or place (*Sententia super Physicam* V.3). From the general principle that anything in motion is moved by another, Aquinas concludes that there must be a first unmoved mover, for unless there is an exception to this general principle, we could ask for an explanation of every motion in terms of a previous mover ad infinitum, never arriving at a first mover whose activity is ultimately responsible for the existence of the motion under consideration. It is important to be aware that the discussion of previous movers has in mind ontological rather than temporal primacy. Aquinas's example of a staff moved by a hand illustrates that the unfolding effect requires an agent's ongoing activity; thus, the causal series is synchronic or ordered per se, in contrast with a diachronic series ordered per accidens (accidentally), where events are conceived as unfolding independently of their temporally prior antecedents, as one blow of a hammer follows another. Thus, Aquinas's proof culminates with an unmoved mover continually actualizing the potentiality of all other movers (moving or moved), supporting Aquinas's belief that God continually pours forth being into creation (SCG II.30.3).

Aquinas establishes the aforementioned principle that what is moved is moved by another with a description of motion as the reduction of potentiality to actuality, e.g., a stick catching fire. This reduction from potentiality to actuality requires an agent in actuality with respect to the form that is communicated, e.g., a flame. Not every change involves an agent communicating a form that it actually possesses. Alcohol is not itself inebriated. Aquinas's point is that within the cause there is an element in actuality with respect to the property communicated, inasmuch as when in actuality this element produces such and such a property in an appropriately disposed patient. Given an entity's inability to communicate to itself a motion with respect to which it stands in potentiality (i.e., by means of that part of itself that is in potentiality with respect to that motion), the principle that every mover is moved stands, with the aforementioned caveat that an unmoved mover is required to account for there being now any

motion. Moreover, this first mover must be pure actuality; or else its activity would require that of another mover and so on ad infinitum (ST Ia.3.1c).

Like the First Way, Aquinas's Second, Third, and Fourth Ways demonstrate the existence of an entity that is pure actuality, the Second and Third as they conclude with the existence of an uncaused cause, and the Fourth, since it accounts for gradations of perfection in terms of an entity that is "maximally existent (*maxime entia*)."

Recalling Aquinas's distinction between existence and essence (see above, q.v. "[Metaphysics and Natural Philosophy](#)"), we may note that the first four ways imply the identity of existence and essence in God, as any composition of existence and essence requires an accounting that involves potentiality within the composite (ST Ia.3.4c). Finally, as goodness, truth, and being are, for Aquinas, convertible, he elsewhere argues that the first being, who is maximally good, possesses every perfection, thereby securing the identification of the first being with God (ST Ia.4.2; SCG I.28.2).

### Semiotics: Theological Discourse

A term's signification (what it brings to mind) derives from experience, which does not equip us with the idea of a wholly simple entity possessed of every perfection. Rather than admit language's inability to properly reference the divine essence, Aquinas regulates the signification of theological discourse through the Aristotelian notion of focal meaning. Aristotle sought an element common to our various uses of the term "being," which can refer to both substances and accidents (Metaph. IV.2, 1003b5-11). Technically, the term is equivocal as it signifies differently in different contexts. Nevertheless, the various significations are related. Employing terminology developed by Pseudo-Augustine, Boethius, and Simplicius in their commentaries on Aristotle's *Categories*, medievals generally claimed that the term "being" is equivocal "by design (*a consilio*)," like the term "healthy" said of both medicine and a patient, rather than equivocal "by chance (*a casu*)," as "bat" said of baseball bats

and various mammals. Equivocal terms of any type are contrasted with univocals, which supposit for (or refer to) disparate individuals conceived under a single concept, as “person” said of Aquinas and Aristotle. Note analogy and univocity are context dependent; for instance, “healthy” when said of two different persons is subordinated to one idea and thereby functions univocally. As concerns the term “being,” Aristotle noted that it is said primarily of substances and in a secondary or derivative sense of accidents (Metaph. IV.2, 1003b5-11). Thus, the various uses of the term are unified through a focal meaning appropriate to the primary analogue, to which the term most properly applies. Following Aristotle’s Greek, this species of equivocation is sometimes referred to as an instance of “*pros hen* (toward one)” equivocation, where the various significations of a designedly equivocal term are distinguished through what the medievals term analogy “of attribution (*per attributionem*),” which involves signification in a “prior and posterior manner (*per prius et posterius*),” with the analogous term referring properly to the primary analogue, and in a derivative or posterior sense to the secondary analogues. In addition to analogy of attribution, medieval thinkers also recognized analogy of proportionality (*proportionalitas*), likewise inherited from Aristotle, where a relation holding between members of a set is clarified through a comparison to another set whose members stand in a similar relationship: thus the sepioid is to the squid, as the spine is to the fish, and the backbone is to land animals (An.Post. II.14, 98a 20–23). In *De veritate*, composed during Aquinas’s first Parisian regency, this species of analogy is used to name God (II.11c), but most scholars agree that Aquinas’s later works favor the use of analogy of attribution. Seeing analogy of attribution at play in theological discourse, Aquinas notes that our notions of the traits we ascribe to God derive from creatures, whose modes of existence furnish the everyday or baseline signification of our language (ST Ia.13.6c). This baseline signification cannot do justice to the intention of the theologian, who understands the ramifications of divine simplicity. Accordingly, God talk must

annex notions of supereminence, causality, and simplicity, recognizing that to ascribe a perfection *F* to the divine essence requires that we understand that God is the cause of *F* in creatures and that God possesses *F* in the highest possible degree, but in a manner that does not violate divine simplicity. The adjustment does not suppose that we can comprehend *F*-ness as it characterizes God, but it allows Aquinas to plot a middle ground between idolatry (the worship of a creature) and a negative theology such as that of the influential twelfth-century Jewish philosopher Moses Maimonides, who claimed that we know of God only what God is not (*Guide for the Perplexed* I.58).

## Philosophical Psychology

The human soul is the substantial form of the human being, coming into existence as part of a matter-form composite (DEE, Chapters 2 and 5). The soul (termed “intellect” in its function as the principle of intellectual operation) can grasp the essence of material entities; hence intellect is immaterial, since a particular material configuration would impede such knowledge. Moreover, though knowledge originates with sensation (see below), intellect acquires its concepts through an activity that is proper to it, and thus intellect functions apart from matter and is subsistent, for whatever acts must be in actuality (ST Ia.75.2). Since it subsists, the soul survives the death of the body, undergoing an interim of reward or punishment (SCG IV.91), after which the soul is reunited with its body in the Last Judgment (SCG IV.79, 96). Nonetheless, while separate from its body, the soul lacks the organs necessary for it to perform its proper function, which is to know sensibles. Hence it is contrary to the soul’s nature (*contra naturam*) to subsist in this way (SCG IV.79.10) (cf., In DA III.5.745). As regards cognition, awareness of an extramental essence begins when our external senses transmit impressions of some extramental entity *x* in the form of sensible species, described by Aquinas as immaterial representations of extramental objects (In DA II.24.553). The internal sense dubbed “phantasia”



transforms these sensible species into an internal representation of *x*, termed a “phantasm,” by means of a modification of some bodily organ (ST Ia.85.1c, ad 3). Aquinas’s account suggests that it is through this representation, not the sensible species, that we initially become conscious of extramental entities. Thus far, perception is a physical phenomenon, accounted for by various internal and external organs; but after the generation of a phantasm, the intellect begins its work. First, the aspect termed “active intellect” extracts from the phantasm an intelligible species, which conforms to some aspect of the essence or quiddity of *x* (ST Ia.84.7), but not as the form of any particular entity. Thus an intelligible species pre-scinds from material considerations or physical representations such as are given through the phantasm (ST Ia.85.1, ad 3); nevertheless, as its attending to phantasms is a necessary condition of the active intellect’s production of an intelligible species, the intellect grasps the essence as one that exists in matter. This non-eidetic grasp of the essence or quiddity on account of which an extramental entity falls under certain genera and species is then stored in what is termed the “possible” (or, more loosely, “passive”) intellect, allowing us to retain and hone our concept (ST Ia.79.2, ad 2; 6–7; 85.5c).

Aquinas believes that human beings are free, though they necessarily desire the good. He develops this position in light of a discussion of four types of necessity corresponding to Aristotle’s four causes (ST Ia.82.1). Natural necessity arises from internal material and formal principles. Thus, a substance composed of contraries is necessarily corruptible (material) and the interior angles of a triangle necessarily equal 180° (formal). By contrast, necessity of the end emerges because of something extrinsic, such as food required for living. Finally, necessity with respect to coercion obtains when an action is compelled by some external agent. Only this last type of necessity is incompatible with free will. That we desire the good is a natural necessity, underlying all action of the will in the way that the principle of noncontradiction governs the speculative intellect (ST Ia. IIae.94.2c). Since we

naturally desire the good, we are, on occasion, subject to necessity of the end, because there may be only one way to acquire the good we desire. That this second type of necessity does not preclude free will seems clear enough; we would not ordinarily say that a person who chooses to go on a journey lacks a free will because he must book a flight. However, it may seem that natural necessity robs the will of its freedom. Aquinas’s response emerges in his discussion of intellect and will. Will is an appetitive power, naturally moved by its object, which is happiness (ST Ia.82.1c). Aquinas distinguishes between intellectual and sensitive appetitive powers, classifying the will as intellectual owing to its reliance on intellect, which conceives the good that moves the will (ST Ia.82.3, ad 2). More specifically, the will is moved by particulars conceived as standing under universal types, as one is moved to hatred or desire when conceiving some particular under the type “thief” or “good,” respectively (ST Ia.80.2). The good conceived by intellect is an unmoved mover acting on will through final causality, while the will itself acts as an efficient cause with respect to diverse faculties, setting them in motion to attain the desired end (ST Ia.80.2). Though intellect initially sets will in motion through intellect’s apprehension of a particular under a universal, will’s efficient causality extends to intellect (ST Ia.82.4). Finally, we may note that intellect does not generally present will with only one cognized good; instead, intellect furnishes will with a variety of goods among which will is free to choose (ST Ia.82.2, ad 3). This, coupled with will’s ability to direct the intellect to consider even more goods, or the same goods under different aspects, accounts for freedom of will. Though oriented to the good, when presented with a variety of goods, will is free to choose which to pursue.

## Ethics and Natural Law

Moral philosophy has three branches: ethical, domestic, and political (In NE I.1.6). What we should and should not do is ultimately determined

with reference to the chief human good (ST Ia. IIae.1.6), which we have seen is happiness (ST Ia.82.1c). Following Aristotle, Aquinas accepts that what functions well is good, and thus a human who functions well will be a good human or a human who has acquired the human good. The human good is happiness, so a human who functions well will be happy (In NE I.10.128). That human beings have a function, Aquinas accepts on several grounds, including the belief that it would be absurd to suppose something ordained by divine intelligence should lack a purpose (In NE I.10.121). Our function is what makes us unique vis-à-vis other animals, namely, our rationality (In NE I.10.126). To function well requires possession of the appropriate virtue; thus, the virtue of a knife is sharpness as the function of the knife is to cut. Hence successful moral reasoning involves several factors, since the intellect is divided in terms of practical and speculative applications, to which there correspond various intellectual virtues. However, we have seen that human beings are likewise motivated by intellectual and sensitive appetitive faculties, whose proper functioning requires moral virtues, whose role is to ensure that what we desire is conducive to our overall good. The moral virtues depend on reason if they are to show themselves in activity conducive to our well-being, for without the intellectual virtues of prudence (which grasps means to ends), and understanding (which supplies the deliberations of prudence with the requisite first principles) (among other places, see In NE VI), the mere possession of appropriate desire would be insufficient to ensure our welfare (ST Ia.IIae.58.4, ad 3). Thus the activity of the appetitive faculties that these virtues perfect may be termed rational in a broader sense, inasmuch as these faculties can obey the regulation of reason in the manner that a child obeys her parents or a youth the counsel of wise friends (In NE I.20.240). Conversely, as prudence is right reason about what should be done, it depends on the rectitude of our appetites as concerns the desired end, and thus prudence (a virtue of the practical intellect) depends on the moral virtues, which dispose us toward the proper end

(ST Ia. IIae.57.4c). Morality consequently supposes the exercise of deliberation and volition in accord with the intellectual and moral virtues, respectively. While it is true that happiness is our chief end, our ultimate happiness is not found in this life. Rather the greatest human happiness will come only in the beatific vision, “for man and other rational creatures attain to their last end by knowing and loving God” (ST Ia. IIae.8.2c) (cf., ST Ia.IIae.3.8c). Attainment of our ultimate end requires the supernatural virtues of faith, hope, and charity, which are acquired through grace (ST Ia. IIae.1–46). Nonetheless, Aquinas believes that our lives on earth can afford a measure of happiness; indeed, our inclination to pursue that happiness serves as the first principle of morality underpinning God’s natural law. Natural law is the eternal law ruling creation as subject to God’s providence, imprinted on creatures in the form of proper inclinations (ST Ia.IIae.91.2c). The first precept of natural law is that we should seek good and shun evil, the moral equivalent of the principle of noncontradiction (ST Ia. IIae.94.2c). What humans pursue and avoid is determined by their nature as rational, animate substances, which, among other things, inclines them to preserve their own being, mate and raise offspring, and live together in peaceable society. To the extent we are aware of and follow these desires in an appropriate manner, we follow natural law, and this brings us happiness.

## Cross-References

- ▶ [Aesthetics](#)
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- ▶ [Albertism](#)
- ▶ [Anselm of Canterbury](#)
- ▶ [Arabic Texts: Philosophy, Latin Translations of](#)
- ▶ [Aristotelianism in the Greek, Latin, Syriac, Arabic, and Hebrew Traditions](#)
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- ▶ Will, Weakness of

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## Thomas Aquinas, Political Thought

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### Abstract

Thomas Aquinas (1224/1225–1274) is considered to be one of the greatest thinkers in the history of philosophy, and is most famous for his attempts to interpret and expound Aristotelian philosophy within a Christian framework. His political philosophy thoroughly reflects this Christian Aristotelianism, where man has an end designated by God, operating through nature, and the ultimate purpose of political institutions is to enable man to reach this end. Breaking with the traditional Augustinian view of political institutions as a result of man's sinfulness, Aquinas argued that man was by nature a political animal, both because he had natural impulses to gather with others of his kind and discuss political concepts such as justice and right, and because political institutions could best create the conditions that man needed to reach his end of a life of virtue. Because politics is vested with the purpose of man's moral development, political freedom for Aquinas therefore becomes associated with the regime which leads man to his own good – that is, to a life of rational, virtuous action.

Thomas Aquinas (1224/1225–1274) was an Italian theologian and philosopher, and is regarded

not only as the most famous figure in medieval thought, but also as one of the greatest philosophers of all time. He lived and worked at a turning point in the history of philosophy, when the Aristotelian *corpus* became available to the Latin west. Under his teacher, Albert the Great, Aquinas was among the first in his generation to be thoroughly schooled in Aristotelian philosophy. Although Aristotle's philosophy was regarded as suspect by many at the time, Aquinas made it his life's ambition to integrate Aristotelian philosophy into Christian theology. This article will discuss Aquinas' political thought, which has its deepest inspiration and orientation in Aristotle, most especially in the way in which it asserts political existence as essential for enabling man to access the goods necessary for him to live a fully human life: namely, virtue and freedom.

Aquinas was born in 1224 or 1225, near Naples. After beginning his studies in Naples in the liberal arts in 1239, he was sent by the Dominican Order to study theology at the University of Paris, arriving there in 1245. Here he met Albert the Great, who was passionate about absorbing the new Aristotelian corpus. He followed Albert to Germany, and studied under him from 1248 to 1252. Aquinas returned to Paris in 1252 and completed his commentary on the *Sentences* of Peter Lombard in 1256, after which he held one of two Dominican chairs in theology. His most important works were accomplished later in his life: from 1265 to 1270, he wrote the *Prima pars* and *Prima secundae* of his *Summa theologiae*, and in the last five years of his life he wrote most of his Aristotelian commentaries, as well as the *Secunda secundae* and (the unfinished) *Tertia pars* of the *Summa*. The discussion here of Aquinas' political thought draws from his commentaries on Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics* (*Sententia libri ethicorum*, referred to as *SLE*) and *Politics* (*Sententia libri politicorum*, referred to as *SLP*), his treatment of law and the virtues in the *Summa theologica* (*ST*), and his *De regimine principum* (*DRP*), a short work dedicated to the King of Cyprus written in the late 1260s.

Aquinas' political thought has to be approached *via* his interpretation of Aristotle's political thought, but perhaps more especially,

Aristotle's moral thought. First of all, the Aristotelian *corpus*, specifically the *Nicomachean Ethics* and the *Politics*, provided a new language with which philosophers could discuss political concepts. In his *Politics*, Aristotle had asserted that man was by nature a political animal. Using William of Moerbeke's Latin translation of the *Politics*, Aquinas made the term *animal sociale et politicum*, or *animal civile* central to his political thought as a description of what man was by nature (*SLP*, Book I, ch. 1/b, lines 69–154).

Following Aristotle, Aquinas argued that it was natural for man, more than for any other animal, to live sociably with others of his kind. This is because man has physical, intellectual, and moral needs which can only be filled within a social context (*DRP*, p. 3). For other animals, nature has equipped them with the physical attributes necessary for protection and the enhancement of their survival, such as a natural coat of hair, very sharp teeth, horns, claws, etc. Man, on the other hand, has reason, by which he can plan how to go about reaching both his physical and spiritual ends. Yet, man's individual reason cannot provide him with all the guidance he needs when one considers all that is necessary for human life. Thus, nature dictates that man live in association with other men so that he can benefit from the knowledge and resources of a community. Furthermore, man has the power of speech, which demonstrates not only his need to communicate with others, but also his ability to discuss and deliberate with others about what is right and wrong, just and unjust. This is a further indication of not only his social nature, but of his political nature. Social nature and political nature for Aquinas are inextricably linked, for there cannot be society without a presiding political authority to ensure the common good and unify the community.

Adopting the language, and therefore the concept of man as political by nature, was enough to make a decisive break with the prevailing Augustinian idea of political institutions as a result of man's sinful nature. That man was by nature a "social" being was a concept already firmly entrenched in the Latin west, due to the ideas of both Cicero and the Church fathers, especially

Augustine. However, for Augustine, the archetypal natural society of man was the community of saints in heaven, where men were equals and no man had dominion over another; this, indeed, would have been the organization of man in the state of innocence (Markus 1970:223). Political institutions, by contrast, because they were by definition coercive, were characterized by the dominion of man over man, in the same way that a master has dominion over his slaves. They came into being only in the post-lapsarian world of sin.

For Aquinas, political institutions are indeed by definition coercive, and they are characterized by the dominion of man over man. However, this dominion is not that of master and slave, but one of a master over free men, where the master rules the men in a way that benefits their own ends, rather than rule them for the master's own benefit, as a slave is ruled (*ST*, 1a, qu. 96, art. 4). Furthermore, this dominion would have existed in the state of innocence, for two reasons. First, because in that state, as now, man would have lived a social existence, and, as we have seen, there can be no social life unless there is a political authority to enable the community to remain intact. Second, because in that state, as now, there would have been a natural inequality among men. Men were free agents in the state of innocence; thus, some would have advanced further than others in righteousness. These men, then, should exercise their gifts and be in authority over the rest, and it is after the order of nature that they do so (*ST*, 1a, qu. 96, art. 3). Thus, political institutions, like the family, are a natural part of our human existence; they would have existed if there had been no sin.

This begs the question, however, of what it means for something to be "natural." Aquinas' challenge to Augustine's notion of politics incorporated an idea of natural as what would have been compatible with man in his pre-lapsarian state. While this is part of what Aquinas understands by "nature," the essence of his understanding of what is natural comes from Aristotelian teleology.

Aristotle's account of teleology is based on the idea that certain things come-to-be and exist "by nature." Those things that exist by nature have

their own specific end, dictated by their form, and they change for the sake of that end through their natural impulses. The attainment of their end signifies the completion of their development. Nature is therefore a cause, and what is "natural" is whatever exists in the way that it does because it has an "innate impulse" to become that way (Miller 1995:37). In this sense, man is by nature a political animal – and political institutions are natural – because man has natural impulses to gather with other humans, and the end toward which human association impels itself is the political organization of the city.

Yet, natural impulses in humans are much less deterministic in ensuring the accomplishment of a designated end than in other natural beings (Salkever 1990:69). Aquinas argues that the natural impulse to be in society does not seem to be enough to sustain social existence. The art of rulership is needed to complete nature by building upon the natural impulses of individual men to create a community, and this function is one way in which the ruler features prominently in Aquinas' political thought. Aquinas argues that men, as individuals, pursue their own interests, and that this behavior is ultimately destructive of social life, as "the particular interest and the common good are not identical" (*DRP*, p. 5). In order for the city to exist, "there must be some principle productive of the good of man." The ruler is this separate "principle" – the formal cause of the city, imposing the form of the common good upon the matter of individual men, who have gathered together by natural impulses. He does this specifically in his role as lawgiver, as it is through his laws that he directs men toward the common good.

The ruler's role as the formal cause of the city is reinforced as he is compared both to God as the creator and formal cause of the world, and to the soul as the formal cause of the body (*DRP*, p. 69). God's function as creator was not only to create things themselves, but also included the "orderly distribution" of all things throughout the universe. By the same token, the soul, as the actuality of a living thing, is what makes a whole out of thing's various parts by ordering those parts in a function that is above their individual functions. Hence, as



the formal cause of the city, the ruler creates an integral whole – a unity – out of an array of individual men by ordering them toward the common good.

In light of comparing the ruler with God and with the soul, it follows that Aquinas sees that the best way to create unity in the city is through a government carried out by one person (*DRP*, pp. 11–13). Although there has been much discussion about Aquinas' position on the "mixed constitution" (see for instance Blythe), which for reasons of space I cannot discuss here, the point of the matter is that he believes the best constitution under which man can live is a monarchy.

Thus, Aquinas sees the city as natural for man because he has natural impulses toward it, although those impulses are not enough to sustain it. However, Aquinas considers the city as natural for man in a further, fundamentally important way, for what is natural is not only what comes to be through natural impulse, but also any "condition" necessary for the fulfillment of man's own end given to him by nature, the attainment of which ensures his complete development as a human being (Hamilton-Bleakley 1999:589).

This end is to attain a character such that one consistently acts according to the dictates of reason – that is, it is to develop the intellectual and moral virtues. For Aquinas, to act according to reason is to act in a way that is uniquely human. Man differs from irrational creatures in that he is the master, *dominus*, of what he does (*ST*, 1a2ae, qu. 1, art. 2). He is *dominus* of his actions through a faculty which includes both his reason and his will – it is rational desire, a "deliberate willing." Man is *dominus* of his actions when he uses his reason to determine what goal he will move toward, as well as uses his will to put himself in motion toward that goal, rather than "being moved" by something else. In this way, as a rational being he is his own cause – *sui causa est* – and thus considered free. The man who carries out this action unique to humans in the best way possible is the virtuous man.

However, once again, man is separate from all other natural beings in that he is much less determined through impulse to reach his end designated by nature. For Aquinas, man does have a

kind of impulse toward his end, what he calls a *naturalis inclinatio* for virtuous action (*ST*, 1a2ae, qu. 63, art. 1). It is identified with man's natural understanding of general principles of right and wrong (*synderesis*), as well as with man's natural appetite for the good – which is a general, universal tendency toward the good – both of which are the basis of Aquinas' natural law. Yet, this natural inclination is only the beginning (*inchoatio*), or seeds (*seminalia*) of virtue – what Aquinas calls "natural" virtue (*SLE*, vol. 2, Book 6, ch. 11, lines 20–40). In order for man to attain true virtue – that is, "moral" virtue – and thus reach his end, he must develop the virtue of prudence, or practical wisdom, which is the ability to understand how to apply general moral principles of reason in a particular situation (*ST*, 2a2ae, qu. 47, art. 3). The most important of all the practical virtues, prudence is the quality whereby a man rules himself toward the good. Prudence will ensure that man acts rightly on a consistent basis, and this repeated right action will develop his natural inclinations into virtuous habits in his character.

However, there is a reciprocal relationship between prudence and moral virtue: prudence guides the appetite toward the moral virtues, but a man needs properly habituated appetites in order for prudence to function properly (*ST*, 1a2ae, qu. 58, arts. 4 and 5). Hence, man needs an external guide to help him develop both his prudence and his moral virtue, and this guide comes from the law issued by political institutions (*ST*, 1a2ae, qu. 95, art. 1). For Aquinas, the ruler is to ensure that the actions of his subjects are good, by enacting laws and attaching rewards and punishments which "dissuade men from evil-doing" and "induce them to do good" (*DRP*, p. 83). The repeated right action demanded by the law forms virtuous habits in the subject's appetites, and the law is a model of reason for the subject to emulate as he develops his prudence. In this way, political rule is natural to man, because it creates conditions necessary for the fulfillment of human nature.

Not only is the city the place where the virtues are developed, it is also the place where they are exercised to their fullest extent, by both ruler and subject, and in this way the city is, again, essential

to a well-lived human life. Prudence and justice are singled out by Aquinas as the most important civic virtues for the ruler and the subject. As we have seen, prudence in general is the virtue whereby man rules and commands himself toward the good. Political rulership, however, is prudence on a larger scale, in that it is concerned with actions that will bring about the common good, not just the good of the individual. Furthermore, if prudence in the individual is the ability to act virtuously in a particular situation, prudence on a larger scale must include the ability to guide members of the community, through law, in their actions, so that they might develop into virtuous human beings. For Aquinas, then, the prudence possessed by the ruler, or what he calls regnative or legislative prudence, is the most perfect species of prudence (*ST*, 2a2ae, qu. 50, art. 1).

The moral virtue of justice, too, most properly belongs to the ruler (*ST*, 2a2ae, qu. 58, art. 6). Particular justice orders one rightly toward the good of another individual person. But general or legal justice has as its object the common good, and it directs the activity of all the other moral virtues beyond their own proper ends by setting them toward the further end of the common good. In this sense it is the sovereign moral virtue, essentially distinct from the rest of the moral virtues – although, as a moral virtue it still needs the direction of prudence to function properly. The ruler exercises his legal justice (together with his legislative prudence) by enacting laws which enable his subjects to see beyond their own ends and act for purpose of the common good.

His laws do more than this, however: they allow his subjects to “develop the motivation” to act for the common good. In this way, his laws enable his subjects to develop “and exercise” a kind of legal justice as well, where they experience the attachment to the common good which is morally perfecting (Weithman 1992:371). Aquinas does not see the act of obeying the law as one where the subject is merely forced – or moved upon – to behave in a certain way. Instead, virtue is exercised through political obedience: subjects who obey the law willingly have within themselves a righteousness which allows them to

“move themselves” toward the common good (*ST*, 2a2ae, qu. 50, art. 2). As we saw earlier, moving oneself toward a particular end is the mark of a rational, and therefore virtuous man. Moving oneself in obeying the law is the mark of a man who possesses not only a kind of legal justice, but also the virtue of political prudence – the species of prudence specific to subjects who rule and direct themselves toward the common good. Thus, the laws of the city provide the unique circumstances necessary for subjects to live a fully virtuous life.

Having discussed the two ways in which Aquinas sees political rule as natural to man – because it is a result of natural impulse, and because it is necessary for the fulfillment of human nature – we must recall that the “naturalness” of political rule is dependent upon its “rightness.” Despotism or tyrannical rule, akin to the dominion a master has over a slave, is not natural. Indeed, we have seen that Aquinas uses freedom as a characteristic which distinguishes the dominion natural to man from that which is not. We have also seen that Aquinas defines the free man as he who is ruled and directed toward his own proper good. As man’s proper good is to become virtuous, subjects can be free only if they are asked to obey laws which encourage virtuous action.

Crucially, then, for Aquinas freedom can only be accomplished in subjection – in subjection to reason, that is, to law (Hamilton-Bleakley 1999:599). Freedom for the individual is not defined as the absence of natural impulse, or as the absence of law – spaces where neither nature nor the state has a claim – but as the pursuing and embracing of the end which nature has specifically given to man. Aquinas’ idea of freedom is the ability to use and act in accordance with one’s reason. Because Aquinas sees the government which guides men according to their own good as the government fitting for free men, he therefore defines political freedom within the framework of his distinctive notion of individual freedom. If man is free only when he is living a virtuous life, then it is clear that freedom is found with coercive, but proper, rule – that is, rational law, backed by coercive sanction. Men must be in the city to be fully human and so to be truly free.

In linking political society – and political freedom – so closely with man’s moral attainment, Aquinas differs not only from the Augustinian view of the state as unable to foster any meaningful development or exercise of virtue, but also from the position of contemporary liberalism that governments can be neutral with “regard to nearly all human goods, normative goals and virtues.” The ubiquity of this doctrine may make Aquinas’ political “perfectionism” difficult to countenance today. Yet, this perfectionism comes out of a magisterial attempt to link man’s deepest needs and impulses with his highest goals, and brings with it an honesty about what conditions man needs if he is to flourish. Man’s end is a normative one, and political society, rather than ignoring this fact, must instead embrace it, and accept responsibility for its achievement.

## Cross-References

- ▶ [Heresy](#)
- ▶ [Natural Law](#)
- ▶ [Natural Rights](#)
- ▶ [Political Aristotelianism](#)
- ▶ [Thomas Aquinas](#)

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## Thomas Bradwardine

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### Abstract

Thomas Bradwardine (c. 1300–1349), Merton theologian and Archbishop of Canterbury, famous both for his innovative treatises on physics and mathematics and for his vigorous attack on what he perceived as a revival of Pelagianism in Ockham’s thought regarding divine foreknowledge and future contingents. Bradwardine was one of the “Calculators” of Merton College, philosophers who emphasized the need to incorporate mathematically precise reasoning into problems associated with Aristotelian physics. His treatment of the relation of variation in the velocities of moving objects to variation in the force and resistance affecting velocity led him to postulate the need for geometric, rather than arithmetic, ratios in

understanding kinematics, which would eventually develop into logarithmic mathematics. Bradwardine became interested in formal theology when investigating Ockham's account of how God knows created actions as contingencies. His *De causa Dei* is a compendious refutation of every imaginable species of reasoning that denies God certain, necessary knowledge of all created action, representing the high watermark of Augustinian determinism in pre-Reformation Western theology. Unless further manuscript discoveries are made, particularly of his commentary on the *Sentences*, it is unlikely that Bradwardine's theological position can be connected to his earlier mathematically oriented thinking. Bradwardine was a member of the influential circle of thinkers associated with the Bishop Richard de Bury of Durham and was closely associated with Edward III; Black Death limited the duration of his occupation of the see of Canterbury to little more than a month.

Thomas Bradwardine (c. 1300–1349) began his career as a theologian and natural philosopher at Merton college in the 1320s, and began service to Edward III in 1339 as a royal chaplain. He was elected Archbishop of Canterbury in August 1348, but because the election had bypassed Edward's permission, he had to stand aside and allow John Ufford to occupy the see at Canterbury. When Ufford died later that year, Bradwardine was elected again, and Edward appears to have allowed his chaplain to become Archbishop in July of 1349. Black Death had been devastating English society for several months, and it claimed Bradwardine only 38 days after his accession. Despite the fact that he likely had left Oxford toward the end of the 1330s, the immediate effects of his presence were felt well into the 1360s and 1370s, when Wyclif was active. Bradwardine was a member of the circle of Richard de Bury, Bishop of Durham, which was an influential group of scholars including Walter Burley, Richard Fitzralph, Robert Holcot, Walter Chatton, and Richard Kilvington.

Bradwardine's extant works are generally divided into two distinct groups: the mathematical/physical treatises associated with his time at Merton college, and two theological works concerning the problem of God's eternal knowledge and human freedom. The former group includes the treatises associated with the *Geometria speculativa*, *Arithmetica speculativa* (a textbook based on Boethius' *Arithmetica*), *De continuo* (a refutation of spatiotemporal atomism), *Ars memorativa*, *Insolubilia*, *De fallaciis*, and two sets of *Quaestiones* regarding problems in physics. The latter group includes *De futuris contingentibus* and *De causa Dei contra Pelagium*, as well as *Sermo Epinicius*, preached before Edward III following the battle of Nevill's Cross in 1346. His commentary on the *Sentences* survives in fragmentary form, as yet unpublished. A number of other works associated with Bradwardine remain in manuscript, awaiting further analysis.

## Mathematics and Physics

"Mathematics," Bradwardine wrote, "is the revelatrix of truth, has brought to life every hidden secret, and carries the key to all subtle letters." Bradwardine's *Geometria speculativa* shows his fascination with the foundations of geometric and mathematical theory, containing treatises on stellated polygons, isoperimetric figures, and solid geometry, each development of medieval commentaries on ancient mathematics, and his *De proportionibus*, his most important contribution to medieval scientific reasoning. *De proportionibus* attempts to improve Aristotelian mechanics by addressing mathematical inconsistencies that had begun to trouble medieval natural philosophers. The Mertonians William Heytesbury, Richard Swineshead, and John Dumbleton would make use of Bradwardine's study of the relations of quantities in their own speculative physics, as would Galileo in the seventeenth century. Particularly significant in the treatise is Bradwardine's attempt to explain the relation of variation in the velocities of a moving

thing to variation in the forces and resistances that affect velocity. The traditional understanding in Aristotelian physics relied on the axiom that motion occurs only when the motive force is greater than the resistance offered, so that velocity is explained as proportionate to the ratio of force to resistance. Bradwardine reasoned that if we begin with a motion in which the force is greater than the resistance, and if we continually double the resistance while holding the force constant, at some point the resistance will be greater than the force. The problem lies in the axiom of velocity being proportionate to the ratio of force to resistance; as the velocity decreases in proportion to the increase of resistance, there will still be a velocity assignable at the point that resistance is greater than force. This would mean there would be a measurable, albeit tiny, velocity assignable to a stationary object. Better, Bradwardine argued, to recognize that velocities vary arithmetically, while the ratios of force to resistance vary geometrically. The immediate significance of this realization of the need for geometric ratios in measuring velocity was the need for a more advanced mathematics that had been applied in kinematics. It had been thought that calculations based on the direct proportionality of quantities would serve, but Bradwardine's discovery demanded a return to ancient mathematics, where he recognized the basis for logarithmic reasoning. It quickly became apparent that the use of Bradwardine's logarithmic function in expressing the quantity defined by the relation of two other quantities was of great value not only in kinematics, but in a wide range of questions regarding quantitative and qualitative change. The formal method of logarithms would not appear until John Napier's work in 1614 provided the mathematical foundation for their uniform and widespread application in calculation.

### **De Causa Dei**

William Ockham had argued that statements of the form "X will occur at Time N" have a truth value contingent upon what will happen in the future, so knowing them must be a different sort of knowledge than knowing statements about the present or the past, for which the truth value is

already clear. Since this is a natural fact about such future contingent statements, God's knowledge, too, must be that "X will occur at Time N" is true contingent upon X's occurrence. The difference between our fallible and uncertain knowing and God's infallible and perfect knowledge is that, while for us knowing X or knowing not X involves reasoned recognition of the opposition of X and not X, and the steps involved in resolving which of the two opposites are the case, for God, knowing X or knowing not X entails no reasoned recognition of the opposition, and no reasoned resolution of whether X or not X is the case. Ockham's resolution of the puzzle was not necessarily a departure from earlier thinkers like Grosseteste or Peter Lombard, but his nuanced treatment of the relation of God's eternal knowledge and the contingency of created action suggested that we might be able to earn salvation on our own merit, without grace. In short, it was possible to interpret Ockham's approach as countenancing elements of Pelagianism. Bradwardine began to address the problem in the 1320s, in his *Sentence* commentary, and in *De futuris contingentibus*. Bradwardine's interest in the subject developed, and after he had become a member of Bury's circle, he compiled *De causa Dei*, a polemic refutation of "the Pelagians." This massive work is not constructed along a recognizably scholastic model, but appears instead to be a *Summa* encompassing all that Bradwardine understood to be involved in explaining grace, merit, human salvation, and God's knowing and willing. Each topic Bradwardine addresses finds its way back to God's unmediated causal influence over creation. At the heart of Bradwardine's theology is the fundamental truth that nothing occurs that is not willed by God. On the face of it, this seems so deterministic as to be fatalist. If all that happens is in accord with God's will, then the revealed certainty that some will be damned and others saved amounts to double predestination. Bradwardine's position was not so extreme. Even if God is coagent in every created action, including the evil that men do, He is neither responsible for evil nor is His foreknowledge the cause of man's damnation.

Bradwardine's position that God is co-agent in all human actions rules out Pelagianism, but it

also demands an account of how we, not God, are responsible for evil. This is particularly a problem if (a) God necessarily knows all that will occur in creation; (b) necessarily, all that God knows will occur, will occur; and (c) God's will and knowing are identical, then if God knows that a thing will occur, God necessarily wills that it occur. Bradwardine felt that *necessitas consequentis*, or absolute necessity, is commensurate with God's foreknowledge without leading to a fatalistic determinism. Talk of God knowing a thing before it happens, or of a thing being necessary because God knows it ahead of time, is confused. God is eternal, and eternity is not a mode in which "before" or "ahead of time" applies. Hence, if God eternally wills that man act freely in time, the freedom of human action is not limited by the necessity of the divine willing. Bradwardine balances God's eternal foreknowledge and human freedom by distinguishing between kinds of antecedent necessity. Bradwardine argues that some antecedent necessity is wholly absolute, but some is relative. Relative antecedent necessity can describe the secondary cause of an event, or it can describe the first cause. Peter may be free to choose to sin through an antecedent necessity relative by virtue of his being a member of the human species (a secondary cause of Peter's existence), or by virtue of God's willing (the primary cause of all created act). Peter's choice may be partially determined by being a member of the human species, but his biological form does not compel his choice. God's will is compulsory by virtue of its being the sufficient cause of every effect in creation, including human willing. Bradwardine believes he has preserved God's eternal foreknowledge by making relative antecedent necessity commensurate with *necessitas consequentis*. The statement "If God knows that man would sin, then man's sinning is necessary" is true, but escapes fatalism by decreeing that man's sinning is free by virtue of God's willing it to be so.

Relating the two sets of Bradwardine's bodies of work has been a matter of disagreement. Until recently, the theologically oriented analysis of *De causa Dei* has been understood to be a significant departure from Bradwardine's earlier work catalyzed by personal epiphany, an approach that allows

the reader the freedom to disregard the treatises on mathematics and kinematics. Dolnikowski has argued that at least one commonality, namely time, unites the two bodies of work. By understanding the medium of time as the focus of his study of velocity and the mathematics by which we measure movement through it, and applying it to the relation of extratemporal divine understanding of events occurring within it, she argues, we are much better able to understand the continuity of Bradwardine's philosophical theology.

## Cross-References

- ▶ [Future Contingents](#)
- ▶ [Insolubles](#)
- ▶ [John Dumbleton](#)
- ▶ [Modal Theories and Modal Logic](#)
- ▶ [Oxford Calculators](#)
- ▶ [Richard Fitzralph](#)
- ▶ [Richard Kilvington](#)
- ▶ [Richard Swineshead](#)
- ▶ [Robert Holcot](#)
- ▶ [Walter Burley](#)
- ▶ [Walter Chatton](#)
- ▶ [William Heytesbury](#)
- ▶ [William of Ockham](#)

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## Thomas Ebendorfer of Hasselbach

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### Abstract

Thomas Ebendorfer of Hasselbach (August 10, 1388 – January 12, 1464) was a secular theologian, diplomat, chronicler, preacher, professor, and rector of the University of Vienna. He was an extremely prolific writer and his works include: historical writings, biblical and

philosophical commentaries, theological writings, sermons, speeches, letters, and other diplomatic documents. His commentary on the *Sentences*, his major work of philosophy which remains largely unpublished, follows the path initiated at the end of the fourteenth century by Nicholas of Dinkelsbühl, in the effort of accommodating Parisian theology and philosophy to the Viennese intellectual milieu. However, Ebendorfer's thought departs from the previous "Vienna Group Commentary" in significant ways.

## Life

Thomas Ebendorfer was born in 1388, in the small village of Haselbach (Hallepach or Heiselbah) in Lower Austria. Ebendorfer had an eventful life and, as a member of the secular clergy, he was involved in various types of activities. A reconstruction of Ebendorfer's educational background is facilitated by the information provided by the registers of the Viennese University (for the Faculty of Arts, see AFA 1968, and for the Faculty of Theology, see ATF 1978). In 1406/1407, he began his studies at the Faculty of Arts within the Viennese University and incepted as Master of Arts in 1412. Soon he started studying theology at the same University and completed his bachelor lectures as biblical *cursor* during the biennium 1416–1418. He continued as *sententiarius* in 1420–1421. He responded, among others, under Peter Reicher of Pirchenwart in or after 1426, as a prerequisite for the licensing and inception in theology (see Courtenay 2011, p. 393). He was licensed in Theology not long after January 1428 and incepted in the same year. Ebendorfer had different administrative duties within the University: *librarius* in 1418, *thesaurarius* in 1419, *coadiutor* of the dean of the Faculty of Arts; he also served multiple times as a dean of the Faculty of Arts (1419, 1422) and of the Faculty of Theology (more than ten times, starting with 1428); more importantly, he was rector of the University of Vienna three times (1423, 1429, and 1445). In 1427, he became canon of St. Stephan from Vienna.

Throughout his life, Ebendorfer's concern for his country and for the University of Vienna seems to have been greater than that for the Church, which witnessed a major crisis at the time. Outside the University, he played an important role in supporting the interests and the welfare of the University. For instance, in 1451–1452, Ebendorfer made journeys to Naples and Rome, where he met Pope Nicholas V and obtained from him privileges for the University. He was involved in many diplomatic activities, especially in conciliar embassies serving under the Holy Roman Emperor Frederick III. When Ebendorfer was already one of the most respected professors of theology at Vienna, he was appointed head of a delegation sent by the University to participate at the Council of Basel (during 1432–1434). By that time, the University of Vienna had a strong conciliarist tradition, and its representatives to the Council of Constance (1414–1418), Nicholas of Dinkelsbühl and Peter Czech of Pulkau, had both been Ebendorfer's teachers.

In 1433, he was part of the delegation sent by the Council to Prague in order to negotiate with the Hussites, who sought to impose Utraquism, i. e., communion in both kinds to lay believers, but the negotiation attempts did not lead to any result. From 1440 to 1444, Ebendorfer participated at several imperial diets and spoke on behalf of Frederick III at Frankfurt, Nuremberg, and Basel. In 1441, he went to Mainz as spokesman of the emperor's envoys, where he proposed the formation of a new council for resolving the church conflict. The plan was accepted by Charles VII of France but rejected by the pope Eugenius IV and the German princes. Around the same time Ebendorfer quit his diplomatic position, he started composing historiographical works, at Frederick's orders (see below).

Ebendorfer personally knew Cusanus, who was also present at the Council of Basel, and he also probably studied Cusa's *De concordantia catholica*, a treatise in which the author stressed the importance of councils in acquiring reform and harmony between church and empire. But unlike Cusanus, who later changed his position and became a supporter of the papacy, Ebendorfer never renounced his endorsement for the council

authority. Even after 1442, when the University started to dissociate from the conciliarist movement, Ebendorfer remained a defender of the idea of conciliarism. His consistent support in this area, among other circumstances, eventually led to a separation between him and Frederick III, who began distrusting his former political adviser and ultimately sided with Eugenius IV.

Ebendorfer had also been a parish priest of Perchtoldsdorf (see the detailed contributions in Seidl 1988) and of Falkenstein, near Vienna. His many sermons deriving from his local preaching were well known and assured him a reputation in southern Germany (on his sermons, see below). He spent the last years of his life in Vienna, where he died on January 12, 1464, in the same year as Nicholas of Cusa and Pope Pius II.

## Works and Thought

Ebendorfer's large corpus of writings, numbering hundreds of texts, is overwhelming and still awaits a full evaluation. His works pertain to various genres: historical writings, biblical and philosophical commentaries, theological writings, sermons, speeches, letters, and other diplomatic documents. Several of Ebendorfer's Latin sermons were printed in Strasbourg in 1478 (see also Walsh 2000) and were partially translated into vernacular (see Kämmerer 2005).

Much of Ebendorfer's prolific historical writings have been edited within the series of *Monumenta Germaniae Historica: Diarium sive Tractatus cum Boemis*, dating from 1433 to 1436, which is a window into the negotiations between the councilors and the Hussites; *Chronica regum Romanorum*, which is an imperial history from the period of the Assyrian empire to the time of Frederick III; *Chronica Austriae*, which is a detailed history of Austria from its fabulous origins until 1463, and an important source for the Hussite revolution, in particular; *Tractatus de schismatibus*, where the author, according to Zimmerman, puts forward a profoundly religious conception of history, deploring the dark consequences of the schism; *Chronica pontificum Romanorum*, a papal history; *Catalogus*

*praesulum Laureacensium et Pataviensium*, a catalogue of the bishops of Lorch-Passau; *Historia Jerusalemimana* (or *De duobus passagiis christianorum principum*), written during 1453–1456, which is a history of the first and third crusade, based in part on the chronicle of Robert of Rheims.

Ebendorfer's philosophical and theological works still await critical editions and study in order to assess the importance and influence he had in Vienna, especially as a professor of theology. His commentary on Peter Lombard's *Sentences* has come down to us in several autograph manuscripts but remains largely unpublished. Among other unedited works, Ebendorfer also composed an commentary on Aristotle's *Ethics* I–V, dating from 1423, and a multivolume commentary on Isaiah, which he began in 1428. His importance as *magister* can be grasped through the words that belong to a later handwriting on one of the many manuscripts which have been donated by Ebendorfer himself: "egregius ac venerabilis vir et dominus olim magister Thomas de Haselpach, artium et theologiae professor eximius." (ms. Wien, ÖNB 4369, fol. i) Ebendorfer's private library is a large collection of manuscripts, ranging from biblical texts to commentaries of major theologians of the thirteenth century (Bonaventure, Thomas Aquinas, Duns Scotus, Henry of Ghent, Peter of Tarentaise, William of Moerbeke). For a general list of both his works, and those pertaining to his private collection, see Lhotsky (1957, pp. 59–112).

## Commentary on the *Sentences*

By studying Ebendorfer's all four *principia*, Courtenay has indicated that Ebendorfer lectured on the *Sentences* in an unusual order: Book II, III, IV, and I (see Courtenay 2015, p. 286). His commentary on Book II is found in the manuscript of the Österreichische Nationalbibliothek 4393 (ff. 9v–44r), and it is followed by a "Vienna Group Commentary" on the same Book (ff. 49r–252r), annotated by Ebendorfer (on the notion of the "Vienna Group Commentary,"

see Brînzei and Schabel 2015, pp. 198–218). Ebendorfer's own commentary, composed of thirteen short questions, seems to have been written to complement the other one (that he probably read as a *sententiarus*), since it is much shorter and it covers several distinctions which the latter lacks (such as distinctions 3–7, 9, 12–13, and others). The longest question from Ebendorfer's commentary on Book II is the one regarding the creation of the world and another philosophical question treats the issue of informed matter. He also discusses angelological themes, and even develops a question on Lucifer (18v–20r). Regarding Ebendorfer's commentary on Book III, manuscript ÖNB 4590 presents the same structure as the aforementioned one, and is indicative of the same practice, while most of his questions, out of a total of six (ff. 8v–22v), address issues of Christology. In manuscript ÖNB 4369, Ebendorfer characterizes his commentary as a *supplementum* (203r–223v) to the subsequent lecture on Book IV which he annotates in the margin (224r–405v). His *supplementum* to Book IV consists of seven questions on various sub-topics, starting with a question dealing with the problem of the communion under both kinds (*sub utraque specie*), which was a pressing issue of his time (see above).

Ebendorfer read Book I in the first half of 1421. Brînzei and Schabel have pointed out that Ebendorfer's commentary on the first book, dated to 1427, is to be found in the Viennese autograph manuscript ÖNB 4387 (see Brînzei and Schabel 2015). The two researchers have shown that the commentary on Book I found in ÖNB 4369 is merely Ebendorfer's personal and annotated copy of another *Sentences* commentary, attributed to George Wetzlar of Horaw, who lectured during 1412–1414 (see Brînzei and Schabel 2015, p. 211, and see also Schabel's edition of the second article of distinctions 40–41, dealing with the topic of predestination, in Brînzei and Schabel 2019). The same relationship between the two texts is also confirmed by our edition of the second question of the Prologue, dealing with the question whether theology is practical or speculative, as found in commentaries on the *Sentences* pertaining to various Viennese

University theologians (see the diplomatic edition in Curuț 2017).

Concerning Ebendorfer's doctrinal inclusion in the so-called Viennese Group Commentary, much work needs to be done in order to fully evaluate the originality of his thought, but recent investigations suggest a positive answer. Regarding the main question of the nature of theology, Ebendorfer is indeed visibly indebted to the Viennese traditional manner of conceiving theology as a practical science, which started with Nicholas of Dinkelsbühl, who followed the path of Gregory of Rimini. Between the two major alternative models for theology, speculative and practical, dating back to Thomas Aquinas and Bonaventure, respectively, the latter model has proven itself to be more influential, given not only its adaptation by many Viennese theologians, but also given Luther's later rejection of speculative theology, for whom true theology was practical.

However, regarding the topic of the subject of theology, Ebendorfer shows a significant departure from the previous Viennese positions which argued, again in the wake of Rimini, that the subject of theology is God under a limited aspect, namely as glorifier (*glorificator*), an opinion which can be traced back to Giles of Rome. In one of his marginal annotations to the second question of his copy of Horaw's Prologue (ÖNB 4369, 12r–21r), Ebendorfer defended the view according to which God is the subject of theology not in a strict sense but as considered absolutely (see Curuț 2017). We find Ebendorfer's same idea further developed in his later and more detailed treatment from his Prologue in manuscript ÖNB 4387 (fols. 3v–23r). Here, we see that his discussion of the subject of theology is heavily based on James of Eltville, a famous Cistercian of the fourteenth century, who borrowed in turn from James of Metz a threefold distinction between the ways in which God can be the subject of theology considered *absolute*. But while Eltville and Metz both agreed on understanding God as the absolute subject in a third way (i.e., as a substance lacking in accidents), Ebendorfer disagrees with their solution, arguing instead for understanding God as an absolute subject in the second way, namely

as a formal subject according to what is common to all of his attributes, just as the universal whole is common to all of his subjective parts. Thus, Ebendorfer's approach is particularly interesting, suggesting that his method of implicitly copying another text does not necessarily imply sharing the same doctrinal view and that his use of Eltville's text is also sometimes a formal one (on Eltville's influence on Ebendorfer, see Brînzei and Curuț 2018).

Ebendorfer's approach from his *Sentences* commentary is eclectic, hence the difficulty of ascribing it to a particular school of thought. For instance, in his prologue from ÖNB 4387, after putting forth a *conclusio responsalis*, stating that theology as a whole (*totalis theologia*) is a practical science, Ebendorfer ascribes this position to Scotus, Auriol, and Rimini. In another place from his prologue, he adds to one of his conclusions concerning the subject of theology (borrowed from Eltville's text) that it also expresses the intention of Thomas Aquinas, Peter of Tarentaise, and Duns Scotus. In the effort of detaching himself from the Viennese practice of composing a Group commentary, Ebendorfer not only argues for different doctrinal conclusions but also seems to aim at harmonizing different authorities. Although his commentary is to some degree influenced by Gregory of Rimini, often due to the influence of the texts pertaining to previous Viennese *sententiarum*, Ebendorfer also draws upon Thomas Aquinas, William Ockham, Duns Scotus, Peter Auriol, Landulph Caracciolo, Durand of St. Pourçain, Richard of Middleton, among other lesser known sources.

Despite having strong theological overtones, his commentary is still of philosophical interest. For example, in discussing distinction 35 of Book I, concerned with divine knowledge, Ebendorfer espoused a position according to which it can be successfully concluded by natural reason that God knows himself and everything else, both good and evil, and that God knows the creatures *in particulari et distincte* (ÖNB 4387, f. 243v). By adopting what is in fact Aquinas' stance on the matter, which Ebendorfer copies verbatim, he even reports Maimonides' opinion, namely that the

natural order of things reveal that they are purposely directed to an end, but in order for that end to direct all things to itself, it must know them in particular; thus God, who created every creature, knows every creature distinctly. A survey of this question reveals that, apart from Aquinas, Ebendorfer also had on his table the works of Giles of Rome, Durandus, Peter Auriol, Thomas Bradwardine, Gregory of Rimini, Alphonsus Toletanus, and others. Both of Ebendorfer's prologues to his *Sentences* commentary (from ÖNB 4369 and 4387) are currently being edited.

## Cross-References

- ▶ [Conciliarism](#)
- ▶ [Gregory of Rimini](#)
- ▶ [James of Metz](#)
- ▶ [John Duns Scotus](#)
- ▶ [Nicholas of Cusa](#)
- ▶ [Richard of Middleton](#)
- ▶ [Thomas Aquinas](#)

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## Thomas of Sutton

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### Abstract

Thomas of Sutton (Thomas Anglicus) O.P. (c. 1250–1315) was an early defender of Aquinas' doctrine at Oxford, where he spent most of his career engaged in debates with the greatest opponents of Aquinas' tenets, such as Duns Scotus and Henry of Ghent.

Thomas of Sutton, an Oxford Dominican around the turn of the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, was one of the earliest defenders of Aquinas' doctrine, when it was still regarded as innovative and highly controversial.



The earliest definite information we have about his life is that he was ordained deacon at Blythe (York) in 1274, from which we may guess that he was born around 1250. He became a friar at the Oxford convent by 1282, before which he had probably been a fellow of Merton College. It was also before entering the order that he wrote two short treatises defending the Thomistic position of the unity of substantial forms: *Contra pluralitatem formarum* and *De productione formae substantialis*. At Oxford, he was in close contact with two fellow Dominicans, Richard Knapwell and William Hothum, who were also busy defending Thomistic positions. Sutton incepted as master sometime between 1291 and 1300, and lectured at Oxford till his death after 1315.

Sutton's most significant works are his *Quaestiones ordinariae* and four sets of *Quodlibeta*, both existing in modern critical editions. But his smaller works were also influential and presented such authentic defenses of Aquinas' positions that some of them were attributed to Aquinas himself. However, all this is not to say that Sutton's work lacks originality. But his originality does not lie in proposing new, innovative positions. Rather, the most valuable aspect of his contribution is his ability to reduce disagreements over conclusions to subtle differences of interpretation of an apparently shared, common stock of principles, yielding a more profound understanding of these principles, as well as of the Thomistic positions themselves. Perhaps, this is the most transparent in Sutton's ability to reduce the differences over the issue of the plurality of substantial forms to different interpretations of metaphysical principles he shares with his opponent, Henry of Ghent, concerning the relationships between essence and existence in creatures, and the idea of creaturely participation in divine being. But similar observations would apply to Sutton's rejection of both Henry's and Scotus' conception of individuation, in favor of a Thomistic position, identifying the principle of individuation with designated matter, or to his subtle arguments concerning the central Thomistic thesis of the real distinction between the essence and existence of creatures, and the identity thereof in God.

## Cross-References

- ▶ Henry of Ghent
- ▶ John Duns Scotus
- ▶ Thomas Aquinas
- ▶ Thomism

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## Thomas of Vio (Cajetan)

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### Abstract

Thomas de Vio, also known as Thomas Cajetan, was one of the most important figures in the Thomist revival of the sixteenth century and in the development of Neo-Thomism in the late nineteenth and early twentieth Centuries. His lasting contributions were as a commentator on Thomas Aquinas's thought. He wrote an important commentary on Thomas's *On Being and Essence*, as well as the first commentary on the *Summa theologiae*. His commentaries have often been printed in editions of Thomas's works, including the influential Leonine edition, and many read and understand Thomas's writings through Cajetan's lens. Cajetan's systematization of Thomas's conception of analogical terms (*The Analogy of Names*) has also proved influential, even though many scholars consider it not actually reflective of Thomas's views and even as confused. Although Cajetan considered himself a Thomist and his philosophical reflections largely took the form of commentaries on Thomas Aquinas and Aristotle, he offered a number of novel, even anti-Thomist, positions. Included among these are his acceptance of a mitigated Averroism regarding our knowledge of the immortality of our personal souls, his analysis of analogical terms, and his conception of being (*esse*).

Thomas de Vio was born as Jacopo Vio in Gaeta in February 1468. He entered the Dominican

order in 1484 and adopted the name Tommaso out of respect for St. Thomas Aquinas, with whom he believed he had a special affinity because he was born only 40 km from Thomas's birthplace. He began his university studies in 1488, first at Naples and then at Bologna. In 1491 he moved to Padua where he was awarded a Master's in Theology in 1494. In 1493, he had begun lecturing on Peter Lombard's *Sentences*, and soon he was appointed to the chair of Thomist metaphysics in Padua, replacing Valentino da Camerino, who had recently resigned. At the time, Padua was a hotbed of an Averroist and naturalistic brand of Aristotelianism, which was to leave a discernable mark on Cajetan's thinking, as will be seen below.

It was during his year as professor of Thomist metaphysics in Padua that Cajetan lectured on Thomas Aquinas's *On Being and Essence*, which formed the basis for his commentary on it (1496). After this, Cajetan taught at various places across northern Italy, most notably Pavia and Milan. During this period of teaching, he composed several commentaries on Aristotle and Porphyry, as well as the anti-Averroist work *On the Infinity of the First Mover* (published in his *Opuscula omnia* in 1506). His famous treatise, *The Analogy of Names* (1498), also dates from this period, and it was around this time that he began working on his commentary Thomas Aquinas's *Summa theologiae* (published 1508–1523), the first ever complete commentary on the *Summa*.

In 1501, Cajetan was transferred to Rome to begin his long and distinguished career as a Dominican administrator and Church official. He was, by all accounts, an effective administrator. He was elevated to Master General of the Dominican order in 1508 and held that post for 10 years. During this period of his life, his intellectual activities turned toward ethical and ecclesiastical questions. A staunch advocate of papal authority, he is believed by many to have been largely responsible for the final breakup of the conciliar movement and the reassertion of the primacy of papal power. Those interested in political and moral philosophy will find his works from this period, when he was acting as a Church administrator, most interesting. Cajetan also played a significant role in organizing and orchestrating the Fifth Lateran Council

(1512–1517); the decree *Apostolici regiminis*, issued in the eighth session, is famous among philosophers for causing Pietro Pomponazzi much trouble and for being cited by Descartes in his dedicatory letter to the Sorbonne, which was included in the first edition of his *Meditations*. Interestingly, Cajetan did not agree with the decree's injunction that all Christian philosophers should teach that the soul is naturally immortal and refute arguments that it is not. He cast one of the two votes (out of 130) against this clause, which was indicative of the doubts he harbored that the soul's immortality was demonstrable by natural reason. During this period, he also continued working on his commentary on the *Summa*.

Cajetan was made a cardinal in 1517 and in 1518 was dispatched to Germany as the papal legate. He became embroiled in Pope Leo X's fight against Charles V's election as Holy Roman Emperor; but he was also charged with examining Luther and determining whether heresy proceedings against him ought to continue. Cajetan carefully studied Luther's writings before they met in Augsburg on October 12–14, 1518. He identified two errors in Luther and urged him to recant. The first concerned the sufficiency of faith for absolution and the second the basis for the Church's granting of indulgences. Luther, however, would not budge, and Cajetan had little choice but to recommend that the heresy proceeding against him should continue. When Cajetan returned to Rome in 1520, he helped to draw up the Church's official condemnations against Luther.

The remainder of Cajetan's life was dominated by battles against the Reformers and biblical exegesis. Between 1525 and his death in 1534 in Rome, he wrote against Zwingli, Luther, Melancthon, and Henry the VIII's attempts to have his marriage annulled. But most his intellectual efforts were funneled into biblical exposition. Although his exegesis was largely traditional in tone and content, he was concerned to avail himself of the latest fruits of the humanists' new philological and translational labors.

The philosophical impact of Cajetan's work was significant. It dominated Dominican, and to a large extent Catholic, thinking throughout the sixteenth

and seventeenth centuries. It was quite common for his commentary to be printed and bound with editions of Thomas Aquinas's *Summa* (and the same goes for other works by Thomas). Therefore, many people reading and studying Thomas's writings in Italy and Northern Europe during this period saw him through the lens of Cajetan. Indeed, it is said that during the Council of Trent, which established the Catholic Counter-Reformation, a copy of Thomas's works always sat on the table, and it is likely that this copy also contained Cajetan's commentary. Another indication of Cajetan's prominence lay in the hostility that non-Dominicans, like the Spanish Jesuit Francisco Suárez, showed for his work. Cajetan ranks along Durandus as the philosopher Suárez most frequently and most pointedly targeted in his *Metaphysical Disputations*. Finally, Cajetan's thought also exerted a significant influence on the Neo-Thomist movement of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The Leonine edition of Thomas Aquinas included Cajetan's commentaries, for instance. And for many of the Neo-Thomists, Cajetan was not only a reliable commentator on Thomas but also the first and foremost among them.

As a thinker, Cajetan was neither a dogmatist nor a reactionary. He tended to be conventional, if not somewhat conservative, but was largely a sympathetic and thoughtful intellectual who was not afraid to engage with and even adopt new ideas when the arguments required them. As a result, he is rightly considered a Thomist, even though there are several notable points on which his thoughts differ considerably from those of Thomas Aquinas. Sometimes these differences are due to expansions or developments of Thomas's ideas; other times, they are due to rejections and alterations of his ideas. Three differences are discussed below.

Like Thomas Aquinas, Cajetan was not an Averroist and wrote extensively against Averroism. Even so, several Averroist ideas worked their way into his thinking, especially regarding the difficult doctrine of the immortality of the individual soul. The position of Renaissance Averroism regarding the soul involved a nexus of issues. But at its core lay the denial of the personal immortality of the soul.

This denial, however, could be construed in several senses: ontological, epistemological, and interpretative ones. More extreme Averroists defended the thesis in an ontological sense. But even this could manifest itself in a variety of ways.

- That there exists only one intellect.
- That the one intellect is impersonal and immortal.
- That the intellect is not a substantial form.
- That the human intellect is only a bodily power.
- That the human intellect is naturally mortal.
- That the human intellect is naturally mortal but supernaturally immortal.
- That the human intellect is in some (proper) sense naturally mortal and in some (improper) sense naturally immortal.
- And so on.

Given such a variety of characterizations of the ontological sense of Averroism, anti-Averroists needed to address a wide variety of topics. First, they needed to defend the plurality of intellective souls. Second, they needed to defend the immortality of the many intellective souls. It was not necessary to establish that the intellective soul was immaterial in order to defend its immortality, although that was one way to do it. It was considered sufficient to defend Aristotle's thesis that the intellect had at least one power that did not require a corporeal organ. Finally, anti-Averroists needed to defend the claim that the immortality of the many intellective souls was natural to the soul.

Less extreme Averroists might contend that the thesis should be understood only in an epistemological sense. Thus, rather than asserting that the personal soul is not immortal, they would maintain that somethings about soul can be naturally demonstrated, but not its immortality. Thus, these more moderate Averroists might hold merely:

- That natural reason demonstrates that there exists only one intellect.
- That natural reason demonstrates that the one intellect is impersonal and immortal.
- That natural reason demonstrates that the intellect is not a substantial form.

- That natural reason demonstrates that the human intellect is only a bodily power.
- That natural reason demonstrates that the human intellect is naturally mortal.
- That natural reason demonstrates that the intellect is naturally mortal but only supernaturally immortal.
- That natural reason demonstrates that the human intellect is in some (proper) sense naturally mortal and in some (improper) sense naturally immortal.
- That it is not demonstrable that there is not only one intellect.
- That it is not demonstrable that there is not a single, impersonal and immortal intellect.
- That it is not demonstrable that the intellect is a substantial form.
- That it is not demonstrable that the human intellect is not merely a bodily power.
- That it is not demonstrable that the human intellect is not naturally mortal.
- That it is not demonstrable that the human intellect is not naturally mortal and only supernaturally immortal.
- That it is not demonstrable that the human intellect is in some (proper) sense naturally mortal and in some (improper) sense naturally immortal.
- And so on.

The reasons for resisting the assertion of any of the ontological senses of the Averroist thesis, even though natural reason demonstrates them, would have been largely theological: reason teaches *p* but faith (or the Church) teaches *not-p*, and assent ought to be regulated by faith or the Church whenever reason and faith conflict. To counter this more moderate epistemological version of Averroism, anti-Averroists needed to show that natural reason does not demonstrate any of the ontological senses of the Averroist thesis and, moreover, that their opposites are, in fact, demonstrable. This concern can be seen in the Fifth Lateran's Council's *Apostolici regiminis* decree that all Christian philosophers (and not only theologians) must prove the demonstrableness of the Church's teaching regarding the natural immortality of the personal soul.

Finally, an even more moderate Averroism entailed maintaining merely that Aristotle taught the Averroist thesis in any of the above ontological or epistemological senses. This was a time when the authority of Aristotle was still quite significant, and to claim that “Aristotle hath said it” was tantamount to claiming that natural reason unaided by revelation established it. Thus, Averroism in this weakest of senses was often seen as compatible with Averroism in the epistemological sense, if not equivalent, in the end, to Averroism in the epistemological sense.

The central claim in this debate over Averroism concerned the relationship between abstract thought and phantasms. If phantasms were necessary for abstract thought, as Aristotle suggested (Aristotle 1984), then it is impossible to conceive of an intellective power that does not make use of a corporeal organ. This follows because phantasms were widely acknowledged to be corporeal, or at least corporeally based, images and the best – indeed the only – candidate for a cognitive power that does not obviously involve a corporeal organ was abstract thought. This was the point around which Pomponazzi’s infamous defense of Averroism revolved.

During the controversy generated by Pomponazzi, some Dominicans (e.g., Francesco Silverstri, Bartolomeo Spina, and Crisotomo Javelli) blamed Cajetan for enabling Pomponazzi’s arguments. Cajetan did indeed adopt positions that were very similar to Pomponazzi’s. He accepted the claim that if cognition were not possible without phantasms, immortality would be impossible. He maintained, furthermore, that the intellect was in some sense naturally mortal and in some sense naturally immortal. He maintained that it was naturally mortal because it was a material form, which is in the body as a subject and consequently has its being bound up with the body’s; but he maintained that it was also naturally immortal because it was not a form educed from matter and consequently was able to operate independently of the body. This might seem like a small move, but because it was a move in a Platonic direction that give the human soul an angelic-like existence, it is an interesting precursor to the late sixteenth-century Jesuit teachings on the human

soul as separable substances and to the Cartesian doctrine of real distinctness. It should be noted that this position does not itself constitute a form of epistemological Averroism, even though it sounds a good deal like it, because it does not state that the soul is immortal only in some improper sense or that it is mortal properly speaking.

Cajetan’s slide toward a weak, epistemological form of Averroism revolves around the strand of mysterianism that pervades his thinking about soul’s immortality. As early as his *Commentary on Aristotle’s De anima* (1509), he accepted the Averroist interpretation of Aristotle because of *De anima* III.7, which, as explained above, was a form of interpretative Averroism that easily slid into epistemological Averroism. Doubts about the proofs of the soul’s natural immortality based on its immateriality seemed to nag Cajetan. Mention has already been made of his opposition to the teaching prescription in the Fifth Lateran Council’s *Apostolici regiminis*, which cannot be ascribed to anything other than such nagging doubts. These nagging doubts seemed to culminate late in his life when he declared the soul’s immortality to be a mystery and an article of faith analogous to the Trinity and the Incarnation, which clearly placed him among those who believe that the soul’s natural immortality is not rationally demonstrable.

Cajetan’s second point of divergence from the teachings of Thomas Aquinas concerned his understanding of being (*esse*). Cajetan argued that the being of essence (*esse essentiae* or *esse quidditativum*) was really distinct from the being of actual existence (*esse existentiae actualis* or just *esse existentiae*) rather than merely conceptually distinct. Both were necessary but independent components of creatures, angelic and mundane alike. Cajetan’s understanding of John Capreolus’s double meaning of *esse* appears to have deeply influenced Cajetan’s development of this distinction. His motivation for defending the reality of the distinction between the being of essence and the being of existence seems to have been Thomas Aquinas’s paradox about the duality of being: being appears to have both an essential and an accidental character. *Ens*, according to Thomas, is

not included in the genus of substance and all things, except God, are beings by virtue of having *ens* added to their natures – being thus seems to be accidental. Yet in adding *ens* to a nature, no new or additional nature is added to the nature – *ens* is, properly speaking, constituted by nothing other than the essence to which it is added. Furthermore, God himself is his own existence (*ipsum esse subsistens*), in Thomas’s view; his essence is his existence. So, existence appears to have the character of an essence, too. The tension lies in the character of a created essence – potentiality to exist is the difference between a created essence and the divine essence (which exists of necessity), yet a potentiality is itself something with a level or degree of being, which suggests that, like God, created essences necessarily have being of itself.

By developing his distinction between *esse essentiae* and *esse existentiae actualis*, Cajetan was able to walk a middle path to resolve this tension. In the ordinary case of material creatures, matter and form combine to produce the nature that has *esse essentiae*; in the case of angels and intellectual souls, God’s creation of the simple nature endows it with *esse essentiae*. This nature is a complete entity capable of receiving another type of being, *esse existentiae actualis*, which is the actualization of the potentiality created with the creaturely form. The key, however, is that no new thing is produced when a nature is given *esse existentiae actualis*. The entity that is the nature and that possesses *esse essentiae* has being already, but when it receives existence, it becomes a creature existing in the world of substance because it is given a new property. But in receiving existence, it was not receiving any new nature and was not being transformed in any way into a new kind of thing – it was simply receiving a new way of being and, as a result, it was being perfected in that its potentiality was being actualized. Thus, *esse existentiae actualis* is the being that properly speaking belongs to the category of substance; it is the being that marks things existing within creation. But *esse essentiae*, on the other hand, is the being that arises within each of the categories, the *id quod est* of a thing or entity, whether substantial or not. The upshot of Cajetan’s view here is that essences have a kind of

metaphysical priority over existence in the realm of being, and that even though in actual existence a thing is metaphysically constituted only by its essence, its actual existence descends onto it through its efficient cause. In this way, Cajetan is able to make sense of how there is something essential and something accidental about the character of being. Cajetan’s position on this very abstruse topic is subtle; nevertheless, it deserves to be taken seriously, not only as a way of resolving Thomas Aquinas’s paradox but also as an answer in its own right regarding the real metaphysics of existence and being.

Cajetan’s third and most significant, as well as influential, divergence from Thomas Aquinas concerns his analysis of analogical terms. A doctrine of analogy was the medieval means for addressing questions about polysemous words, that is, words which, despite having different meanings, are nonequivocal because those meanings are suitably related and share a common etymology. Cajetan’s short work, *The Analogy of Names* (*De nominum analogia*), was quite influential both in the sixteenth century and during the Neo-Thomist revival of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries (unfortunately so, according to Cajetan’s critics: compare McNerny 1992 and Ashworth 2008 with the glowing Forward and Introduction by Koren and Bushinski in Cajetan 1959). Regardless of how faithful it is to Thomas Aquinas’s scattered comments about analogical terms, it is indisputable that *The Analogy of Names* was a milestone in the evolution of philosophical thought regarding analogy.

Cajetan structured his analysis around a three-fold division of analogical names. First, he presented the analogy of inequality. This occurs when there is a common word for the analogous things and that common word is supported by a common notion, but the two analogous things partake in the nature corresponding to that notion unequally. The example used was the word “body” applied to the corruptible, terrestrial bodies and to the incorruptible, heavenly bodies. Both types of objects are rightly called bodies because they exist in three-dimensional space, but they partake of this corporeality unequally, since terrestrial bodies are corruptible because their



corporeality is constituted by their materiality whereas heavenly bodies, because they are not composed of matter, do not have corruptible corporeal natures. This sort of polysemy, Cajetan believed, applied to all genus terms, not just “body.” But this sort of analogy he dismissed as unimportant and improper.

The second sort of analogical term was the analogy of attribution. This occurs when there is a common word and the common word is supported by a common notion, but the analogous things are differently related to the common notion. “Health” was the example offered here. When applied to a human, it is applied most properly because it denotes a perfection obtaining within the human (the proper state of humoral balance). But when applied to medicine or urine, it is applied analogically, because even though both implicated the same notion of health as in the proper case, they implicated it not by denoting the perfection of health within their subjects but because their subjects “cause” health (medicine) or “signify” health (urine). Only the attribution of health to the human involves an intrinsic denomination; the other two analogous cases are analogous precisely because they involve an extrinsic denomination, that is, they denominate health not per se but because of the interplay between them and other things beyond them.

The third sort of analogical term, according to Cajetan, was the analogy of proportionality. This he subdivided further into metaphoric and proper senses of proportionality. Strictly speaking, only the later subdivision involved analogical terms in any genuine or proper sense. In this case, the analogical word and the notion supporting it are the same, yet their differences are their proportionalities. Cajetan’s thinking here is rooted in the mathematical understanding of proportionality. While the precise nature of what he had in mind is subject to debate, it does seem to require at least that an actual similarity should obtain between analogous things. In other words, the things denominated by the analogical terms both have to contain formally the analogical property to some degree.

Current critics have not been kind to Cajetan’s analysis of analogy. It has been attacked as an

inauthentic interpretation of Thomas Aquinas’s thinking about analogy. It has also been attacked as a representative example of the medieval tradition of thinking about analogy; but it has been attacked more fervently as a flawed and confused account.

Thomas de Vio (Cajetan) was an influential commentator on Thomas Aquinas, Aristotle, and Porphyry, as well as a significant thinker and philosopher in his own right. Understanding his distinctive contributions to logic and metaphysics is crucial to understanding the so-called Second and Third Thomisms, that is, the Thomist revival of the sixteenth century and the Neo-Thomist movement of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

## Cross-References

- ▶ [Essence and Existence](#)
- ▶ [Ibn Rushd, Muḥammad ibn Aḥmad al-Ḥafīd \(Averroes\)](#)
- ▶ [Thomas Aquinas](#)
- ▶ [Thomism](#)

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## Thomas Wylton

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### Abstract

Thomas Wylton was an English philosopher and theologian who was first active as a Master of Arts at Oxford (c. 1288–1304) and then at the Faculty of Theology of Paris (c. 1304–1322). His major extant works are a commentary on Aristotle's *De anima*, a commentary on Aristotle's *Physics*, and a *Quodlibet*. Wylton is a major exponent of Latin Averroism. He defends Averroes view on the material intellect, arguing that Averroes does not posit the material intellect as a substance separate from man but as the substantial form of man. He also maintains that Averroes can account for the union between intellect and man better than the Catholics. Wylton's interpretation of Averroes had a strong influence on John of Jandun. Although a comprehensive picture of Wylton's philosophical and theological thought has not yet been drawn, it has clearly

emerged that Wylton's ontology is strongly realist and influenced in part by that of Scotus. For example, Wylton maintains not only that a relation is a thing distinct from the *relata* but also that the distinction between the two *relata* and their existence are not necessary for the reality of the relation between them. Furthermore, he holds that it is necessary to posit successive things (typically, motion and time) as distinct from permanent things. Like Scotus, he maintains that divine attributes are formally distinct.

Thomas Wylton was Fellow of Merton College from about 1288 until 1301 and Master of Arts at Oxford until 1304. He then went to Paris to study theology and became master there in 1312. He taught theology in Paris probably until 1322. He was appointed chancellor of St Paul's Cathedral in London in 1320, although it is likely that he took this position only in 1322. The position of Chancellor was vacated in 1327, so Wylton must have died by that date.

Three major works by Wylton are extant: a question-style commentary on *De anima*, a question-style commentary on the *Physics*, and a *Quodlibet*. The two Aristotelian commentaries were most probably written by Wylton as Master of Arts in Oxford. The *Quodlibet* was most probably disputed in Paris in Advent 1315. In addition to these, we have several questions by Wylton on a large variety of philosophical and theological topics. Wylton also wrote a commentary on the *Sentences*, which has not yet been identified.

Wylton was a prominent and influential figure as a Master of theology at Paris. He had disputes with the most important among his contemporaries over a variety of controversial issues. For example, he debated with Peter Auriol on the nature of relations, on the problem of the infinite power of God, and on the nature of theology and virtue; with William Alnwick on the issue of the eternity of the world; with Henry of Harclay on the infinite; with Guy Terrena on the nature of the beatific act and on the problem of final causality; with Durand of St. Pourçain on the nature of

intellection. Wylton's treatment of future contingents had a strong influence on John Baconthorpe.

Wylton first became known to historians of medieval philosophy especially for being a major exponent of Parisian Averroism. In his *Quaestio disputata de anima intellectiva*, Wylton discusses the following problem about the catholic opinion on the intellective soul: on the assumption that the intellective soul is subsisting, created but incorruptible, and numerically distinct in distinct men, as the Catholics posit, can one establish with natural necessary arguments that the intellective soul is the form of the human body? The Catholic opinion does posit that the intellective soul is the form of the human body. Wylton accepts that the Catholic opinion is true but he also declares that he accepts its truth only by faith without being able to provide natural necessary arguments in favor of it. The problem with the Catholic opinion is the traditional one of the unity of body and soul, namely, that the intellective soul does not seem to be so intrinsically linked to the human body as it would be required by its status of substantial form of that body. In discussing this problem, Wylton compares the Catholic conception of the intellective soul and Averroes' conception of the material intellect and maintains that Averroes can offer an account of the union between intellect and body more satisfactory than that of the Catholics. Wylton defends this bold claim by offering an interpretation of Averroes' view according to which the ontological status of the material intellect of Averroes is essentially the same as that of the intellective soul of the Catholics: also the material intellect, as the intellective soul, is the (substantial) subsisting form of the human body and thus an intrinsic formal component of man. With this interpretation, Wylton departs from the common opinion about Averroes' view that posits that for Averroes the material intellect is a substance separate from man, while the only intrinsic components of man are the body and the sensitive soul and that man thinks in virtue of the union of the material intellect with man, which takes place through the phantasms present in man. In Wylton's view, this common opinion must be rejected because it makes Averroes' view contradictory. Wylton's

interpretation, however, is apparently in contrast with the major thesis of Averroes about the intellect that there is only one material intellect for all men. Wylton's claim that the material intellect is the substantial form of man combined with the thesis of the unity of the intellect implies that all men share the same substantial form. But this is a conclusion that not everyone is ready to accept. For it seems to imply realism about universals: the existence of universal natures as common components to individuals of the same kind. Wylton, however, is a realist about universals and formulates a realist solution to the one-many problem that arises from the unity of the intellect and ascribes this solution to Averroes. For Wylton, in positing that there is only one material intellect for all men, Averroes also makes the realist assumption that there is only one human nature in all men. Since the material intellect primarily is a perfection of human nature and only derivatively of this or that individual man, the unity of the intellect is not incompatible with its status of substantial form of man. Wylton uses this interpretation to substantiate his claim that Averroes can defend the unity between intellect and body better than the Catholics. His main point is that the intellective soul of the Catholics is separable, while the material intellect of Averroes is inseparable. In the Catholic view, the intellective soul of Socrates is primarily a perfection of Socrates and despite that, it exists as separate from Socrates after Socrates' death. The material intellect of Averroes, however, is not primarily a perfection of Socrates but of human nature, and the material intellect is not separable from human nature: human nature, unlike Socrates, is eternal as the material intellect is. Wylton's defense of Averroes had a strong impact on John of Jandun, the most eminent exponent of Latin Averroism.

Recent studies have shed light on other aspects of Wylton's thought, above all his realist ontological orientation. Investigations into his physical theories have revealed his realist opposition to Averroes concerning the ontological status of motion and of time. Wylton argues that motion and time are two distinct successive things, not reducible to permanent things. In particular, motion is a thing inhering in the mobile substance

during its change and distinct from the mobile substance itself and the formal determinations acquired and lost by it during a change; time is a quantity inhering in motion and in no way dependent on the human soul. Some of Wylton's views in natural philosophy have remarkable similarities with those of Walter Burley, who names Wylton as his master. Wylton's strong realism also appears in his view about relations. He holds that a relation is a real thing distinct from the things related (*relata*), for example, the relation of similarity with respect to whiteness between two white things is a thing distinct from the two white things and their whitenesses. He even maintains that the extramental existence and the distinction of the *relata* are not necessary conditions for the extramental reality of a relation. For example, in his view, the relation of lordship is real, but the *relata* are one and the same, that is, a creature. Furthermore, matter has real relation to nonexisting forms. Similarly, the relation of final causality between a final cause and its effect is real despite the fact that the final cause does not exist when this relation holds. Some aspects of Scotus' ontology had an influence on Wylton. For example, following Scotus, Wylton maintains that divine attributes are formally distinct. Wylton appears to be an original and complex philosopher, although a comprehensive picture of Wylton's philosophical and theological thought has not yet been drawn.

## Cross-References

- ▶ [Causality](#)
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- ▶ [William of Alnwick](#)

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## Thomism

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### Abstract

In a broad sense, Thomism denotes a form of philosophical and theological thought which draws its main inspiration from the teaching of Thomas Aquinas. Despite differences in context and emphasis, all forms of Thomism purport to follow Aquinas's doctrine in its principles or main conclusions. In its original scholastic form, Thomism represented the magisterial solution determined by Aquinas, whose adherents were normally, but not always, members of the Dominican order. The development of Thomism from the end of the thirteenth to the end of the sixteenth century can be traced in four main stages: (1) a first stage, roughly from Aquinas's death in 1274 to the end of the thirteenth century, is marked by the *Correctoria* controversy, as Dominicans undertook the defense of Thomist teaching in face of external opposition arising from Church authorities and the Franciscan order. (2) On a second stage, from the beginning of the fourteenth century to Aquinas's canonization in 1323, Thomist teaching is declared the official doctrine of the Dominican order in an effort to dissipate internal opposition and reaffirm its doctrinal credibility after the 1277 condemnation. Although Thomism is still a matter of interpretation, it is during this period that it begins to be established as a distinct philosophy. (3) On a third stage, from Aquinas's full rehabilitation in 1325 to the end of the fourteenth century, Thomist doctrine gains in normative value. Although opposition still persists, it purports to act as a theological authority within the Church at large. (4) Finally, after a period of relative recession as a result of Dominican unpopularity during the Immaculate Conception controversy, the fifteenth century witnesses a gradual revival of Thomism



extending well into the sixteenth. Commentaries on the *Summa* proliferate; Thomism becomes increasingly systematized and divorced from the dialectical character it owed to its scholastic origins.

### Corpus of the Article

In a broad sense, Thomism denotes a form of philosophical and theological thought which draws its main inspiration from the teaching of Thomas Aquinas. Despite differences in historical context and philosophical emphasis, all forms of Thomism purport to follow Aquinas's teaching in its principles, methodology, and conclusions in order to defend, develop, or comment on it. In its original form, Aquinas's teaching is embedded in a specific institutional milieu determined on the one hand by the University and on the other by the Dominican order. The schools modeled Thomism in a twofold way: through the reception of classical philosophy, especially Neoplatonism and Aristotle, and through their methodology, exemplified in the scholastic exercise of dialectical inquiry of authoritative sources toward the solution of doctrinal questions. In this context, Thomism represents the solution determined by Aquinas in opposition to other possible solutions advanced by other masters. Its adherents were normally, but not always, members of the Dominican order. Their institutional affiliation to Aquinas's doctrine did not exclude a selective use of Thomist sources, conflicting interpretations, or in some cases even the influence of rival forms of scholasticism, such as that represented by Duns Scotus.

The reception of Aquinas's teaching throughout the Middle Ages was thus subject to differences in emphasis and orientation which escape a systematic development. What follows is an attempt to trace the historical evolution of Aquinas's doctrine taking into account its multiple, and sometimes conflicting, expressions. The chief features of Thomist philosophy will be presented as they are brought to the foreground of the debate at each stage of its evolution.

The development of Thomism during the period running from the end of the thirteenth to the end of the sixteenth century can be traced in four main stages: (1) a first stage, roughly from Aquinas's death in 1274 to the end of the thirteenth century, is marked by the Dominican defense of Thomist teaching in face of external opposition arising from Church authorities and the Franciscan order; (2) on a second stage, from the beginning of the fourteenth century to Aquinas's canonization in 1323, Thomist teaching is increasingly institutionalized as it is declared the official doctrine of the Dominican order in an effort to dissipate internal opposition and reaffirm its doctrinal credibility after the 1277 condemnation; (3) on a third stage, from Aquinas's full rehabilitation in 1325 to the end of the fourteenth century, Thomist doctrine is promoted as a theological authority, despite the persistence of opposition in some quarters; (4) finally, after a period of relative recession as a result of Dominican unpopularity during the Immaculate Conception controversy, the fifteenth century witnesses a gradual revival of Thomism extending well into the sixteenth. Thomism becomes increasingly systematized and divorced from the dialectical character it owed to its scholastic origins.

1. A first manifestation of Thomism takes place toward the end of the 1270s and all throughout the 1280s, as a group of Oxford and Paris Dominicans rally in defense of the teachings of Thomas Aquinas. The ensuing controversy formed part of a wider conflict concerning the reception of Aristotle's natural philosophy, which had culminated in the 1277 condemnation issued by the bishop of Paris Stephen Tempier. Bishop Tempier and his commission of theologians were responding to a wave of "radical Aristotelianism" at the University of Paris, in which some philosophers (notably Siger of Brabant and Boethius of Dacia) were boasting an autonomous use of natural reason and propagating views not dissimilar to those of Averroes, Aristotle's Arabic commentator. Although not directly targeted, Aquinas's

teaching was indirectly compromised insofar as a number of the condemned errors bore manifest affinity with Thomist theses.

Soon after the condemnation, on 18 March 1277, Robert Kilwardby, archbishop of Canterbury and a Dominican, issued a prohibition at Oxford involving 30 suspect propositions in the domains of logic, grammar, and natural philosophy. The latter included the Thomist thesis of the unicity of the substantial form, only implicit in Tempier's condemnation. Against the established explanation of the gradual composition of the embryo, Aquinas's thesis advanced an interpretation of Aristotle's hylomorphic theory, whereby the generation of a substance takes place by the disappearance of a previous form and the succession of a radically new substantial form. In this view, it is not possible for a composite substance to coexist with other forms, on the principle that the *existence* of one composite is due to the presence of one *form*. Underlying this position is Aquinas's belief that in all corporeal beings, apart from composition of matter and form, there is composition of essence and existence (*esse*). *Esse* actualizes only one form, such that the composition of *esse* with several forms would necessarily entail several substantial forms and hence a plurality of actually existing beings. Consequently, in human beings, the vegetative and the sensitive souls must disappear at the arrival of the intellectual soul, divinely infused. Aquinas's ontology is thus incompatible with any model requiring the presence of previous forms within the composite. In this light, rather than an anti-Thomist bias, Kilwardby's intervention manifests the reaction of the scientific establishment, still attached to the old physics of the elements away from the new challenges of Aristotelian ontology.

Otherwise for the Franciscans, William of la Mare and John Pecham, for whom Aquinas's theory entailed serious theological dangers to, do notably with the numerical identity of Christ's body living and dead. Indeed, if the body is what it is wholly by virtue of the soul and matter has no disposition of its own, then, at the separation of body and soul, Christ's dead body would cease to

be identified with his living body. At the sight of such problems, William felt encouraged to issue a "corrective" of Aquinas's teaching. Composed toward 1278, the *Correctorium fratris Thomae* presents a list of 118 "erroneous and dangerous" propositions extracted from Aquinas's works. Among them, some 13 had already been condemned by Tempier in 1277 – a parallel which William hastens to point out in order to strengthen his case. William's *Correctorium* was endorsed by the 1282 Franciscan general chapter in Strasbourg, thus becoming the order's official view of Aquinas's doctrine. A further attack took place in 1286, launched by Kilwardby's successor to the archbishopric of Canterbury, the Franciscan John Pecham. An old adversary of Aquinas, Pecham ratified his predecessor's prohibition, this time *condemning* the 30 propositions that some Oxford masters, notably the young Dominican Richard Knapwell, had allegedly maintained in disobedience to Kilwardby's censure. This second assault, coming from the rival order and with all the ideological weight this involved, awakened a concerted movement within the Dominican order in defense of their most famous doctor.

The Dominican reaction manifested itself in two forms. On the one hand, in the legislation issued at subsequent general chapters, encouraging the support, defense, and promotion of Aquinas's doctrine (notably the capitular legislations of 1278, 1279, and 1286). Dominican defense was also expressed in literary form in a series of treatises devoted to the unicity of form theory and in the composition of polemical writings sarcastically entitled *Correctoria corruptorii*, in allusion to William's first attack. Young Dominicans, such as Thomas of Sutton, Richard Knapwell and Robert Orford at Oxford, and John of Paris and Giles of Lessines at Paris, devoted themselves to the defense of Aquinas's innovative theses, particularly the doctrine of the unicity of the substantial form, but also the related theses of the pure potentiality of matter, the spirituality of separate substances, the individuation by matter, and the real distinction between essence and existence. Non-Dominican masters were also involved in the controversy: the well-known

Augustinian theologian, Giles of Rome, suffered on his own count for having supported the Thomist theses, while the secular master Godfrey of Fontaines took his part in defending the credibility and intellectual competence of Aquinas.

For all its zeal, the allegiance to Aquinas's theses revealed by these early disputes does not seem to have gone beyond a literal affiliation to a particular way of "determining" a question which at best resulted in lucid clarifications of important theories. Moreover, not all Dominicans welcomed Aquinas's innovations (recall Kilwardby), and even if some of them had acted in the defensive, they seem to have been prompted mostly by *esprit de corps*. A case in point is William of Huthum, one of the earliest defenders of Aquinas and certainly the most prominent figure among them (he was provincial of the order in England in 1282 and again in 1290). Although William remained skeptical about the theological value of the unicity of form theory, presumably prompted by the need to safeguard his order's doctrinal reputation, he nevertheless pleaded a degree of intellectual freedom in matters which remained open to inquiry.

2. Fourteenth-century Thomism is characterized on the one hand by the increasing institutionalization of Aquinas's teaching within the Dominican order and on the other by the Dominican effort to reestablish its credibility after the 1277 condemnation. Aquinas's teaching became established as the order's official doctrinal line in 1309. Conformity with Thomist doctrine was reinforced in 1313 at the general chapter in Metz, promoting Thomism as the "common opinion," and again in 1316, encouraging tighter control of the content of lectures and writings issued within the order. These directives were in all likelihood issued in order to fight internal dissidence represented notably in the writings of James of Metz and Durand of St Pourçain. Heading the order's endeavor to enforce doctrinal uniformity in accordance to Aquinas's teaching were Hervaeus Natalis (d. 1323), master general of the order from 1318, and John of Naples, an active campaigner for Aquinas's canonization.

Apart from producing a defense of Aquinas's doctrine (*Defensio doctrinae fratris Thomae*, between 1307 and 1309), Hervaeus took personal care in correcting all forms of deviation (examples are his *Correctiones super dicta Durandi in Quol. Aven. I*, 1315 and *Responsio ad Jacobum Metensem*, 1310). With Hervaeus, John of Naples took a leading part in the commission examining Durand's work. A conscientious Thomist from his early years as master, John's efforts to reestablish Aquinas's doctrinal credibility are exemplified by a quodlibetal question concerning the canonical value of Tempier's 1277 condemnation (*Quodl. 6, 2: Utrum licite possit doceri Parisius doctrina fratris Thomae quoad omnes conclusiones ejus*). Other leading Dominicans who were active in the promotion of Aquinas's teaching at the time were Pierre de la Palud, John of Lausanne, and Gerard of Bologna.

Although their Thomism did not manifest itself in literal adherence to Aquinas's teaching, the concerted activity of Dominicans like Hervaeus and John of Naples was decisive for the development of Thomism into an established philosophy. The promotion of Thomism followed a twofold strategy: on the one hand, it attempted to assimilate Aquinas's doctrine to the "common opinion"; on the other, it sought to affiliate it to a classical philosophical tradition – mainly Neoplatonist and Aristotelian in origin – deemed integral to the good exercise of theology. On the first count, Franciscan intellectual achievements had much to contribute as Hervaeus ostensibly borrowed from Scotist insights (notably the notion of "formal distinction"). John, for his part, proposed enhanced interpretations of Aquinas's theses as he sought to chase away internal contradictions. By filing down ambiguities and incorporating alien insights, second-generation Thomists were endeavoring to invest Aquinas's teaching with the coherence and soundness that could merit the relative approval accorded to the common opinion. In this sense, it is no mean homage to the success of Thomism that Dante, writing his *Comedy* at around the same time, should have drawn

significant inspiration from Thomist teaching, to the point of attributing to Aquinas a privileged place in his Paradise.

On the second count, second-generation Thomists rallied themselves in the defense of those theses, of Neoplatonist and Aristotelian affinity, which seemed particularly exposed to the 1277 condemnation and its doctrinal priorities. The unifying strand in Tempier's otherwise unsystematic syllabus appeared to be the emphasis on God's absolute power, the notion of God as absolutely free and as infinitely superior to his creation. Yet, central Thomist tenets, notably the veto on multiplying angels within one and the same species on account of their immateriality, appeared to subordinate God's power to the natural laws of his creation. This impression was only reinforced by Aquinas's metaphysics of participation and the connected theory of the analogy of being, which purported to establish an essential continuity between the natural and the supernatural order. The Thomist understanding of universals and the resulting explanation of cognition as a process of abstraction appeared as yet another expression of a view which downplayed the plurality and contingency of creation in favor of its reduction to a set of rational principles. Moreover, Aquinas's conviction on the pertinence and salutary role of reason in the explanation of the natural order was easily affiliated, failing a more nuanced analysis, to the doctrine of the "double truth" and the radical separation of philosophy and theology. Finally, the Thomist emphasis on the intellect as controlling faculty over the will, an emphasis which informed Aquinas's explanation of moral action, contributed to the general impression of Thomist doctrine as running counter to the philosophical – mainly Franciscan – tendency imposing itself at the time which rather placed the accent on the will, on God's infinity, and on the contingency of creation. An illustrative example of the contrast between the Thomist outlook, much attached to Aristotelian philosophy, and the fourteenth-century emerging view is the much debated issue of sacramental causality. Governed by the Aristotelian thesis whereby the cause is efficacious by virtue of an infused quality inherent in it, Thomists maintained that the sacrament

produces its effect on account of a superadded virtue which is infused at the moment of the institution of the sacrament and which "disposes" the soul to receiving grace. In contrast to this view, Franciscan theologians and some non-Thomist Dominicans advanced a "contractual" explanation of causality whereby the efficacy of the sacrament rests on the "pact" *voluntarily* established between man and God at the institution of the sacrament. But Thomists' heavy reliance on Aristotle's view of causality and inherent value led them to dismiss contractual causality as tantamount to denying true causality to the sacraments and reduce them to nothing more than mere signs.

Still suffering the consequences of the 1277 condemnation, fourteenth-century Thomists would endeavor to disengage Aquinas's teaching from all kinds of philosophical necessitarianism while at the same time reassert the benefits of classical philosophy in the explanation of theological truths. Aquinas's later sobriquet of *Doctor angelicus* is highly illustrative of the kind of philosophical and theological tradition Thomists were keen to safeguard: with angels at its center as "mediating intelligences," the Thomist worldview would guarantee the essential continuity of the natural with the supernatural order and the intelligibility of God's plan.

Ecclesiastical intervention came in handy, as the doctrinal promotion of Thomism was crowned in 1323 with Aquinas's canonization by Pope John XXII. A first biography of Aquinas was written by William of Tocco for the occasion, while the pope commissioned the transcription of the *Summa* for the pontifical library. Aquinas's work was praised as a "miracle of doctrine," for the Dominican doctor had performed "as many miracles as he had written articles." Despite the repercussions of the 1277 condemnation, Aquinas's canonization revealed the papacy's strong reliance on the doctrinal uniformity of Thomism, deemed to bring stability at a time when the church was troubled by the quarrels over apostolic poverty with the Franciscans.

3. A direct consequence of Aquinas's canonization was his full rehabilitation in 1325, as the concerted action of the University of Paris and

Bishop Stephen Bourret brought about the official revocation of the 1277 condemnation “insofar as it touched on Aquinas’s doctrines.” That the condemnation was not revoked as a whole was all the more revealing of Aquinas’s selected status as a theological authority. Illustrative of this new stage of Thomist “orthodoxy” is the appearance of one last tract against Durand of St Pourçain, probably prompted by the persistence of his influence within the order. Written around the time the veto on Aquinas’s teaching was lifted and shortly after the canonization, Durandellus’s *Evidentiae contra Durandum* (1325) reflects the influence which the canonization exerted on the expansion and authority of Thomist teaching. The purpose of the *Evidentiae* is not so much to engage in criticism of Dominican dissidence but to present evidence of the soundness of Thomism by using Durand’s discredited theses as a critical vehicle. Whereas Hervaeus’s Thomism showed the resilience of times of controversy, the Thomist elements in the *Evidentiae* are presented in a way more suitable for commentary than interpretation. Durandellus makes a normative use of the Thomist corpus, as he adduces quotations from Aquinas’s works for the sake of proof in his arguments against Durand. The value of the *Evidentiae* thus resides in its being probably the first example we possess of Aquinas’s writings being treated as a *locus theologicus*, as obliged theological reference.

The rapid headway of Thomism did not exclude criticism from other quarters. The Immaculate Conception controversy is a case in point, as it saw the Dominicans temporarily expelled from the University of Paris. Following Aquinas’s teaching and in opposition to Franciscans, who followed Duns Scotus and most of the University establishment, Thomists maintained that Mary was conceived in the natural way and that as such she was not exempt from the transmission of original sin. Guiding the Thomist view was the need to safeguard the truth and the value of Christ’s universal redemption. The problem presented by a Thomist minority was not only

doctrinal but also institutional: since his canonization, Aquinas’s teaching had acquired normative value, and his opinion was supposed to call for obedience not only within the Dominican order but also within the Church at large. The doctrinal tension between Thomism and the University establishment is well illustrated by the case of the Spanish Dominican John Montson. In his inaugural lecture at Paris in 1387, Montson declared that Mary was conceived in sin and that the contrary view was heretical. Montson’s audacity deeply offended the magisterial opinion, which had reached a consensus in favor of the immaculist view. Far from retracting, Montson claimed Aquinas’s authority in order to justify his view. He was subsequently censured by the University and excommunicated by the bishop of Paris who, capitalizing on Montson’s blunder, prohibited any preaching or teaching against the immaculist view. The affair transcended University jurisdiction as Montson decided to bring his case to the Avignon pope, Clement VII. The pope readily supported Montson’s appeal, but the University delegation finally succeeded in obtaining Montson’s condemnation. Revealing of Aquinas’s theological ascendancy at Paris, the University’s authorities hastened to add that Montson’s condemnation was brought about “without prejudice to the reverence owed to saint Thomas and his doctrine.” For it is not the soundness of Aquinas’s doctrine which they have condemned and reprovved but Montson’s “distortion of it by altering its sense towards the contradiction of faith” (*Chartularium*, II pp. 497–98). Thomism had fallen victim to the political paradoxes of the Schism: while the University was keen to safeguard the authority of the Common Doctor as a way to reinforce its own magisterial authority, the Avignonese pope, at the mercy of French priorities, was compelled to condemn the Dominican destabilizer. The controversy was finally settled in 1439, when the Council of Basle affirmed the belief in the Immaculate Conception as pious opinion and in accordance with the Catholic faith. Although he was unable to present his case at the Council, the Spanish Dominican John of Torquemada had prepared a treatise on the matter arguing in favor of the Thomist thesis. In his hands,

Thomism was intended to serve as a stronghold for the pontifical faction against Conciliar views. Other unyielding Thomists continued to teach against the Immaculate Conception throughout the fifteenth and the beginning of the sixteenth century. A notable example is Vincent Bandelli, a Dominican from Lombardy and master general of the order in 1501. It is an eloquent comment not only to the normative weight Thomism had acquired within the order, but also to Dominicans' strong institutional attachment to Aquinas, that most of them continued to teach against the Immaculate Conception despite the University's official requirement to defend it and the Church's proclamation of its feast day in 1476.

4. At the beginning of the fifteenth century, with the Immaculate Conception controversy still impairing Dominican doctrinal credibility, the work of John Capreolus (c. 1380–1444), a native of Languedoc, was decisive in reviving the authority of Thomism. Written in four volumes, John's *Defensiones theologiae Divi Thomae* (1409–1432), constitutes a comprehensive defense of Thomism against critics from all quarters: Tempier's 1277 syllabus, William of la Mare, Henry of Ghent, Godfrey of Fontaines, Duns Scot, Peter Auriol, Durand of St Pourçain, William of Ockham, and Gregory of Rimini, to mention only the most notable. In responding to each objection, John offers a lucid interpretation of Aquinas's teaching as he both attempts to harmonize conflicting texts and reassesses alternative interpretations from previous Thomists such as Hervaeus Natalis and John of Naples. Among the vast material he considers, John devotes particular attention to Nominalism, especially the way in which this view was expressed in terministic logic. Not in vain called the "Prince of Thomists," John's seminal work sets the precedents for the great age of commentaries on Aquinas's *Summa* in the sixteenth century. Indeed, though Peter Lombard's *Sentences* remained the official text at University and in Dominican schools, Aquinas's *Summa* was gradually taking its place as the main theological reference.

Testifying to this is the flow of abbreviations, concordances, and indices of Aquinas's works composed at the time, as well as epitomes or compendia summarizing his thought for study purposes. The Thomist corpus was thus gradually coming to embody an intellectual tradition whose transmission had to be guaranteed. In this tradition, literal adherence to Aquinas's writings set the standards for true doctrine and philosophical soundness.

Marking the revival of scholasticism in the sixteenth century is Cajetan's (Thomas de Vio, 1469–1534) monumental commentary on Aquinas's *Summa*, composed between 1507 and 1522. Despite some divergences (he remains skeptical about Aquinas's demonstration of the immortality of the soul), Cajetan's commentary remains to this day a classical reference for Thomist scholars. Written precisely at the time when Luther was developing his theological ideas on justification, Cajetan's Thomism gains in topical significance if we take into account that he played an important part in mediating with Luther. Cajetan's embassy was bolstered a few years later by the Council of Trent (1545–1563), recognizing the substance of Thomist teaching as an expression of true doctrine. In 1567, 3 years after the Council's last session, Pius V promoted Aquinas to the rank of Doctor of the Church and ordered the first complete printed edition of his works.

Another famous commentator of Aquinas's *Summa* around the same period is John of St Thomas (1589–1644), a Spanish Dominican who, as his name intended to show, devoted himself to safeguarding the guiding principles and main conclusions of Aquinas's thought against more syncretistic forms of commentary, such as that practiced by the Spanish Jesuit Francisco Suárez (1548–1617). Suárez's first work, *De Verbo Incarnato* (1590), is a commentary on Aquinas's view of Redemption as it appears expounded in the third part of the *Summa*. Suárez attempts to reconcile the Thomist view with Duns Scotus's position, according to which the final cause of the Incarnation is not Redemption, as Aquinas sees it, but the manifestation of the perfection of God's creation. On this view, the



Incarnation would then have taken place even without the Fall. With Suárez, the tradition of interpretation of Aquinas's works begins to evolve into a vast philosophical synthesis which is more accurately described as Aristotelico-Thomistic. An illustrative example is his *Disputationes Meta-physicae*, in which he attempts to integrate Aristotle's teaching with that of Aquinas into a coherent body of knowledge. In contrast to the traditional scholastic commentaries, the aim is not to gloss Aristotle's work but rather to offer a systematic treatment independent of the letter and adapted to contemporary theologians. But reliance on Aquinas's work did not always go hand in hand with fidelity to his teaching, as Suárez was brought to question the Thomist view on grace and its relation to human freedom in a famous controversy which opposed Jesuits to Dominicans. Following the Molinist line (after the Jesuit theologian Luis de Molina) and hoping in that way to safeguard human free will, Suárez claims that what renders grace efficacious is not the divine gift itself, as Thomists maintain, but God's foreknowledge that man will freely cooperate with this gift in certain circumstances. This view was widely adopted by Jesuits and became the prevalent non-Thomist position on the issue.

The period immediately following Suárez witnesses the development of the *Summa* commentary into a literary genre in its own right. The *Cursus theologicus*, composed by the Carmelites of Salamanca between 1631 and 1701, is a noteworthy example. This monumental commentary on Aquinas's *Summa* was completed with the aim of forming a comprehensive corpus of sound theological teaching. The Salmanticenses' treatment of Thomism, one which reflects not institutional affiliation but a systematic philosophical approach, is revealing of the status Thomism had acquired at this time as a coherent body of doctrine setting the standard for the solution to major philosophical and theological questions. It is on this platform that the nineteenth-century Church will resort to Thomist doctrine as the official Catholic response to modern philosophy. The founding charter of Neo-Thomism, Leo XIII's bull *Aeternis Patris* (1879), thus inaugurates a

new epoch in the history of Thomism, one unsuspected by medieval minds.

## Cross-References

- ▶ [Aristotelianism in the Greek, Latin, Syriac, Arabic, and Hebrew Traditions](#)
- ▶ [Causality](#)
- ▶ [Durand of St. Pourçain](#)
- ▶ [Essence and Existence](#)
- ▶ [Form and Matter](#)
- ▶ [Giles of Rome, Political Thought](#)
- ▶ [Hervaeus Natalis](#)
- ▶ [Ibn Rushd \(Averroes\), Latin Translations of](#)
- ▶ [Intuitive and Abstractive Cognition](#)
- ▶ [James of Metz](#)
- ▶ [John Capreolus](#)
- ▶ [John Duns Scotus](#)
- ▶ [John of Paris](#)
- ▶ [John Pecham](#)
- ▶ [Natural Philosophy](#)
- ▶ [Parisian Condemnation of 1277](#)
- ▶ [Peter Auriol](#)
- ▶ [Robert Kilwardby](#)
- ▶ [Siger of Brabant](#)
- ▶ [Species: Sensible and Intelligible](#)
- ▶ [Thomas Aquinas](#)
- ▶ [Thomas of Sutton](#)
- ▶ [Thomas of Vio \(Cajetan\)](#)
- ▶ [Truth, Theories of](#)
- ▶ [Universals](#)
- ▶ [William of Ockham](#)

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## Thomism, Byzantine

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### Abstract

Shortly after Thomas Aquinas' death, his thought spread not only in Europe but also in the Christian East. This transmission was a side effect (or even part) of the missionary activity of the Dominicans in the East. From the beginning (c. 1300) up to the end of Byzantine Thomism, Aquinas was almost exclusively noted for his arguments on behalf of the *Filioque*. Yet Demetrios Kydones' translation of the *Summa contra Gentiles* in 1354 and Demetrios and Prochoros Kydones' translation of the *Summa theologiae* in the few subsequent years showed to the Byzantines that the range and the quality of Aquinas' thought were wider and higher than the Latins' use of his arguments in the discussions between the Roman See and the Byzantine Church allowed them to recognize. The reaction by the earliest Byzantine readers of Aquinas (Demetrios Kydones himself, John VI Kantakouzenos, and Neilos

Kabasilas) bears marks of a “culture shock.” Byzantines were particularly impressed by the apologetic skills of Aquinas, which they put in the service of their own discussions with Islam. Probably in this context, Demetrios Kydones translated Aquinas’ *De rationibus fidei* and *De articulis fidei*, too. At the purely philosophical level, Aquinas promoted Byzantine Aristotelianism. This was used by Nicholas Kabasilas in order to combat Gregory Palamas’ repudiation of human knowledge and by Prochoros Kydones in order to combat Gregory Palamas’ distinction between God’s “essence” and “energies.” It was also fervently embraced by George Scholarios (Gennadios II) in order to defeat George Gemistos’ (Plethon) paganism. Scholarios also contributed to the Byzantines’ knowledge of Aquinas’ commentaries on Aristotle’s writings by translating some of them (on the *De interpretatione*, *Posterior Analytics*, *De anima*, *Physics*, and *Metaphysics*) into Greek.

## Historical and Literary Facts

Byzantine Thomism, that is, the Greek translation, spread, and influence of several important writings of Thomas Aquinas (1225–1274) on Late Byzantine theological and philosophical thought (fourteenth to fifteenth century), forms the most important part of the spread of Aquinas’ thought in the Christian East. It is divided into three phases.

### From the Beginning of the Byzantines’ Acquaintance with Aquinas (c. 1300) Up to Demetrios Kydones’ Translation (1354) of the *Summa contra Gentiles*

This phase is obscure, because of the scarcity of the relevant evidence. The origins of Byzantine Thomism are connected with the history of the missionary activity of the Dominican friars in Byzantium from the last decades of the thirteenth century onward. In late 1299, the Dominican Guillaume Bernard de Gaillac arrived at Constantinople, where he learnt Greek and translated (not

earlier than 1305) into Greek some parts of Thomas’ works (probably *Summa theologiae* I, qu. 36, art. 2–4 and *Summa contra Gentiles* IV, 24–25, which touch upon the *Filioque*). A report of the Latins’ arguments for the *Filioque* by Manuel Moschopoulos (c. 1265–c. 1316) probably reflects this translation. In 1307, Guillaume and his company, expelled by the emperor Andronikos II (1282–1328), moved to Pera (by then a Genoese colony near the capital city of the Byzantine state); there, their convent became a channel of transmission of Scholastic theology, especially that of Aquinas, in Byzantium. Most probably, it was a member of this convent, Philip de Bindo Incontri (or Philip of Pera), who taught Demetrios Kydones (c. 1324–1397) Latin, by using Aquinas’ *Summa contra Gentiles* as a means of practicing translation from Latin into Greek.

### From 1354 to the end of the Fourteenth Century

Within less than a year, Demetrios Kydones produced a translation of the entire *Summa contra Gentiles*. The first readers of the translation, namely, the emperor, John VI Kantakouzenos and Kydones’ former teacher, Neilos Kabasilas, were startled by the apologetic skills of Aquinas. Soon afterward, Demetrios converted to Catholicism (1357) and, in collaboration with his younger brother Prochoros (c. 1330–c. 1371), carried out a translation of the *Summa theologiae*. He also translated Thomas’ *De rationibus fidei contra Saracenos, Graecos et Armenos ad cantorem Antiochenum*, and *De articulis fidei et Ecclesiae sacramentis ad archiepiscopum Panormitanum* (which were rendered into Greek for the second time by some other translators), as well as Chaps. 53–54 of Bernardus Guidonis’ (c. 1261–1331) *Vita sancti Thomae Aquinatis*, where a list of Aquinas’ writings is contained. In addition, Prochoros translated the *De potentia* and the *De spiritualibus creaturis*, the Prologue of Thomas’ *Commentary* on Aristotle’s *Metaphysics*, and some questions of the first book of Thomas’ *Commentary on the “Sentences.”*

### From the Third to the Sixth Decade of the Fifteenth Century

Another Latin-learned scholar, George Scholarios (Gennadios II) (c. 1400–1472 or shortly after), translated some other Thomistic works: the *De ente et essentia* (along with Armandus of Bellovisu's *Commentary* on it), the *Commentary on Aristotle's "De interpretatione,"* the *Commentary on Aristotle's "De anima,"* part of the *Commentary on Aristotle's "Physics,"* and Ps.-Thomas' *De fallaciis*. Scholarios' versions of Aquinas' *Commentary on Aristotle's "Posterior Analytics"* and *Metaphysics* are not extant. Besides, he elaborated, for personal use, a compendium of Demetrios Kydones' translation of the *Summa contra Gentiles* and of the I<sup>a</sup>, I<sup>a</sup> II<sup>ae</sup>, and II<sup>a</sup> II<sup>ae</sup> of the *Summa theologiae* (as well as two *Florilegia Thomistica*), which he constantly used in his writings instead of having recourse to the full texts themselves.

### Influence on Speculative Thought

Byzantine authors who benefited from the fact that some of Aquinas' writings became available in Greek are to be found not only among the pro-Latin circles (Demetrios Kydones, Manuel Kalekas, Bessarion, Andreas Chrysoberges, etc.) and among the circles of open-minded thinkers (such as Nicholas Kabasilas) who did not exhibit any hostility to the "Latins"; even professed anti-Latin authors (such as John VI Kantakouzenos, Joseph Bryennios, Makarios Makres, Manuel II Palaiologos, Markos Eugenikos, and Scholarios) did not deprive themselves of reading Aquinas (among other Christian Latin authors translated into Greek) and borrowing from him whatever they regarded useful. Even George Gemistos (Plethon) (c. 1360–1452 or 1454), a professedly anti-Christian author who, like most of his contemporary intellectuals, did not know Latin, was heavily influenced by the *Summae*; he not only integrated into his own writings some important Thomistic doctrines and arguments; he also composed a *florilegium* of *extracta* from the *Summae* for his own use, which testify to a careful reading of these works. In addition, his disciple with the

eclectic and independent mind, Cardinal Bessarion (1403–1472), elaborated an abridgment of the first seven "quaestiones" of the I<sup>a</sup> II<sup>ae</sup> and used extensively Aquinas' interpretation and Christian evaluation of Aristotle in Bk. III of his celebrated *In calumniatorem Platonis*.

This is a list of concrete cases of Thomas' influence on Late Byzantine philosophical thought:

1. Producing numbered arguments both for and against a statement on any topic, imitating the structure of Aquinas' "articuli." Some authors compounded some of their works after this pattern (see, e.g., Nicholas Kabasilas' *De rationis valore* and *Contra Pyrrhonem* and George Scholarios' *Against the Impasses Ignorantly Imputed by Plethon to Aristotle*).
2. Anti-Palamite ethical Aristotelianism. Against Gregory Palamas' repudiation of secular knowledge and philosophical thinking, Nicholas Kabasilas, based both on Aristotle's ethical writings and on Aquinas' *Summa theologiae*, defended human "reason" as a means of attaining truth and acting morally, that is, as a means of "perfection."
3. Anti-Palamite defense of the unity of God. Prochoros Kydones (*On the Essence and Energy of God*), John Kyparissiotis (c. 1310?–post-1377; *That It Is Impossible to Find The Difference Between Essence and Operation in the Case of God; An Introductory Exposition of Some Fundamental Theological Statements*), Manuel Calekas (mid-fourteenth century–1410; *On Essence and Energy; Principles of the Catholic Faith*), and Bessarion (*A Reply to the "Chapters" of Mark Eugenikos*) rejected the high degree of reality attributed by Gregory Palamas to the distinction between God's "essence" and "energies" by using, inter alia, Aquinas' doctrine of the coincidence of the absolute properties of God ("being-x") with His being (*esse*).
4. Thomistic Palamism. Several defenders of the aforesaid Palamite distinction, such as John VI Kantakouzenos (c. 1892–1393; *Third Letter to the Catholic Archbishop of Constantinople*

*Paul*), Manuel II Palaiologos (1350–1425; *On the Procession of the Holy Spirit*), and Mark Eugenikos (1394–1445; *On the Non-Composite Character of the Distinction between God's Essence and Energies*), described it as drawn ex parte *subjecti* by using the term *epinoia*, which, in Demetrios Kydones' translation of the *Summa contra Gentiles*, renders the Latin *intelligentia* and *intentio*. George Scholarios (*Against the Followers of Akindynos; On the Way God's Energies Are Distinguished From Each Other as Well as From God's Essence, to Which They Belong and in Which They Abide*; cf. his excursus within his translation of Armandus of Bellovisu's *Commentary* on Aquinas' *De ente et essentia*) offered the highest philosophical elaboration to this trend; according to him, Aquinas' *analogia entis* implies that the "divine names" not only differ really from each other according to their definition but also correspond to some "forms" actually existing in God, though in such a way that God's infinity renders their plurality harmless for His simplicity.

5. George Scholarios defended the rationality of Christian faith against Plethon's pagan attack on it by means of Aquinas' Christian Aristotelianism. Scholarios' counterattack regarded especially Plethon's doctrines of the plurality of divine beings as well as of "fate." Scholarios defended the Christian doctrines of one God and His Providence, which makes room for free will.

## Cross-References

- ▶ [Augustine in Byzantium](#)
- ▶ [Demetrios Kydones](#)
- ▶ [George Scholarios \(Gennadios II\)](#)
- ▶ [Nicholas Chamaëtos Kabasilas](#)
- ▶ [Prochoros Kydones](#)
- ▶ [Thomas Aquinas](#)
- ▶ [Thomism](#)

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## Time

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### Abstract

In both the Arabic and Latin traditions, medieval philosophers discussed time largely by responding to Aristotle's *Physics*. Though there are exceptions, like Abū Bakr al-Rāzī, most medieval philosophers agree with Aristotle's account and try to solve problems and objections that can be raised about it. Several such problems appear in both the Latin and Arabic traditions. For instance, how does time relate to eternity, and is eternity, properly speaking, timeless? Again, Aristotle relates time to motion; but can time in fact be understood as something real distinct from motion? If so, time and motion are two distinct extra-

mental things; if not, there is only a conceptual distinction between the two, so that they are essentially one and the same extra-mental thing viewed in different ways. Like motion, time is successive, and another problem that arises in both Arabic and Latin is how something can exist when its parts do not coexist simultaneously. Finally, Aristotle's assumption that there is only one time is seen as problematic, because of the ontological status of the attribute of motion that Aristotle identifies as time. In thirteenth-century Latin philosophy, various solutions are adopted to save the unity of time, the most influential being that of Averroes.

In Plato's *Timaeus* (37d), time is described as a "moving image of eternity." In Aristotle's *Physics*, it is described as the "number" or "measure" of motion and rest (220a24–5, 221b7–8). These two definitions already suggest the major themes encountered in medieval theories of time. Plato's contrast of time to eternity stands behind an influential late ancient view, found in Plotinus (see especially *Enneads* III.7), according to which eternity properly speaking is not infinite time, but rather timelessness. The idea of eternity as timelessness becomes a way of understanding God's eternity and already plays a role in late antique Christianity with Augustine (*Confessions*, Book XI) and Boethius (*Consolation of Philosophy*, Book V). On the other hand, late ancient Platonists like Plotinus did think the physical cosmos is everlasting, though not "eternal" in the sense of "timeless." They also believed this was the view of Plato himself, which allowed them to find agreement between Plato and Aristotle. Aristotle argued explicitly in the *Physics* and *On the Heavens* that motion is eternal. Because time is the measure of motion, it follows that time is endless.

Already before the medieval period, there were dissenters from Aristotle's picture of a God who causes everlasting motion, which is then measured by everlasting time. The most prominent critic was the Christian Philoponus, who argued against the Neoplatonist consensus that read Plato as endorsing the world's eternity. While this dispute did concern the nature of divine action, it also



involved more detailed questions about the nature of time. For instance, Aristotle had argued that the instant or “now” (*to nun*) is not really a constitutive part of time. Rather, time, like spatial extension, is divisible into indefinitely small continuous parts, whereas the instant has no extension at all. It is not a part of time, but a division between two extended parts of time: for example, the present instant is a division between the past and future. If this is right, then there can be no first “instant” for the world, because there would be no past from which to divide off the future time. Philoponus thus pointed out that Aristotle’s definition of the instant begs the question against proponents of the world’s temporal createdness. Aside from this question of creation, Aristotle’s conception of time and the instant seemed to pose other problems. For example, Augustine worries that if the present instant is unextended, and only that which is present exists “now,” then extended time will never exist.

These ancient discussions set the agenda for discussions of time in the Arabic tradition. Al-Kindī (d. c. 873) cites Aristotle’s definition of time in the midst of a discussion of whether the world is eternal (in the sense of everlasting). He accepts this definition but argues that it can be used as part of an argument *against* the world’s eternity. For time measures motion, and motion belongs to body. But every body is finite in quantity, and it is impossible for an infinite motion, and hence infinite time, to belong to a quantitatively finite thing. Al-Kindī is here exploiting not only the Aristotelian doctrine that time depends ultimately on body but also Aristotle’s denial of actual infinity. Al-Kindī follows Philoponus by further arguing that an infinity of past time would be an actual infinity and not a potential infinity as Aristotle had held. His main concern throughout these arguments, which appear in the second section of *On First Philosophy*, would seem to be ensuring that only God can be in any sense actually infinite. But al-Kindī probably holds that God was timeless and not everlasting, for he says in passing that God is the “cause of time.”

The slightly later Jewish philosopher Saadia Gaon (d. 942) uses similar arguments, also under

the influence of Philoponus, in his own discussion of the eternity of the world. But around the same time, a very different approach is taken by the doctor and philosopher Abū Bakr al-Rāzī (d. 925). As far as we can make out from the later sources that report al-Rāzī’s view, he recognizes not one, but two, sorts of time, which might be called “absolute” and “relative.” These are parallel to two sorts of space or more accurately “place.” Absolute place, which is compared to an empty vessel, is what bodies come to occupy when God forms the world. Relative place is like Aristotelian place: the confines of a determinate body that is already located in absolute space. Similarly, absolute time (which some sources reporting al-Rāzī’s doctrine refer to as “eternity”) is infinite, whereas the time relative to a given body or motion is what numbers its finite temporal career. This doctrine seems to be a correction of Aristotle: while “relative” time does supervene on the motions of bodies, al-Rāzī argues, “non-relative” time must first be present in order that motions may occur within it. Just as empty place or space is conceptually prior to the body that occupies it, so absolute time could exist even if there were no motion at all. He therefore makes time and place two of the five principles that must exist in order for a world to be generated. Notice that absolute time does not seem to be comparable to the Neoplatonists’ timeless eternity, of which relative time would be an image. Rather, absolute time is a fundamental part of the framework of the created universe. Al-Rāzī’s “correction” of Aristotle would solve several other problems associated with the supervenient conception of time. For instance, we need no longer worry about which motion, if any, is privileged in producing a single time that would coordinate all motions. (Alexander of Aphrodisias had proposed that the outermost celestial sphere should play this role, since its motion is fastest.) As we will see, this question of whether there is only one time was also taken up in the Latin tradition.

Where al-Rāzī subsumes Aristotle’s conception of relative time within a non-Aristotelian conception of absolute time, Avicenna (d. 1037) accepts the Aristotelian doctrine. But he also extends it in various ways. He agrees with the

Aristotelian position that time is indefinitely divisible and in this respect analogous to spatial extension. Time is disanalogous to spatial extension, however, in that the parts of time cannot exist together: this gives time its distinctive “before and after” character. He also agrees with Aristotle that the instant or “now” is a durationless division in the temporal continuum, rather than a kind of “time atom,” as may have been suggested by some atomist accounts in Islamic theology (*kalām*). Avicenna furthermore builds on Aristotle’s arguments against the first moment of time, as follows. If the world “begins,” this implies a “beforeness,” which cannot be reduced to the mere fact that without God’s creation the world does not exist: nonexistence could as easily come after the world ceases to exist. Rather, genuinely temporal “beforeness” is conceptually required for anything to begin. So, beginning implies prior time.

In his *Incoherence of the Philosophers*, al-Ġazālī (d. 1111) strenuously objects to Avicenna’s depiction of the universe as the eternal and necessary effect of God. It is not the eternity of the world as such that bothers al-Ġazālī; rather, he defends the possibility of the world’s beginning in order to uphold God’s complete freedom with respect to creation. While al-Ġazālī is happy to say with al-Kindī that time simply comes into existence when God creates the world, he also thinks that God could create a temporally bounded world after an infinity of “empty” time, if He so chose. Even if God’s will is itself eternal, God could eternally will that something happen at a predetermined later moment. Al-Ġazālī considers the objection that God, being perfectly rational, would not be able to choose between two equally good moments at which to create the world. After all, before the world exists, any two moments are indistinguishable, so God would have to choose the moment for the world’s creation arbitrarily. Al-Ġazālī retorts that such arbitrary choices are paradigm instances of freedom. In an inversion of the Aristotelians’ familiar analogies between space and time, he points out that nontemporal features of the physical cosmos must also be chosen arbitrarily. For instance, it would not make any difference if the cosmos were slightly smaller

or if the heavenly spheres rotated in the opposite direction.

An even more fundamental response to Avicenna comes from another Ash‘arite theologian, Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī (d.1210), not to be confused with the aforementioned Abū Bakr al-Rāzī, whose view seems to be echoed here. He argues that time is not, as Aristotle and Avicenna had argued, the measure of motion. Nor does it measure existence, as proposed by another influential post-Avicennan thinker, Abū l-Barākāt al-Baghdādī (d.1160s). Instead, time is self-subsistent and in itself provides a framework of priority and posteriority within which motions and other events can occur. To prove the reality of time, Fakhr al-Dīn appeals to an older theological theory according to which God institutes time to help coordinate events, so that we can for instance say “I will come to you when the sun rises.” Against dependence theories like those of Avicenna and al-Baghdādī, he points out that the time of two motions, or of two existences, can be simultaneous and an independent second-order time would be needed to coordinate these two first-order times.

In the Latin tradition, the most articulated speculations about time take place within the conceptual background of Aristotle’s philosophy of time. The *Physics*, the work containing the *ex professo* treatment of time by Aristotle (Book IV, 10–14), is first translated into Latin in the second quarter of the twelfth century and starts to circulate widely around the middle of the thirteenth century. The most eminent philosophers of the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries write commentaries on the *Physics* – e.g., Robert Grosseteste, Roger Bacon, Albert the Great, Thomas Aquinas, Giles of Rome, William of Ockham, Walter Burley, John Buridan, and John of Jandun. The *Physics* commentaries are the standard sources for the medieval reception of Aristotle’s theory of time, but important discussions are also found in theological works. While medieval Latin philosophers generally accept the main ideas of Aristotle’s theory, they also feel that it contains some open problems, which then become matter of debate. The main controversial issues are (1) the existence of time,

(2) the extra-mental reality of time and the relation of time to motion, and (3) the unity of time.

1. Aristotle presents an argument against the existence of time and leaves it without an explicit solution (*Physics* IV.10). The argument concludes that time does not exist, starting from the premise that no part of time exists. The parts of time are the past and the future, and neither the past nor the future exists. Only the present exists, but the present is an indivisible instant and not a part of time. It is clear that the argument relies on the following criterion of existence: for a divisible thing to exist, some of its parts must exist now or simultaneously (*simul*). In the Latin tradition, those things that satisfy this criterion of existence are called permanent entities (*permanentia*). A paradigm example of a permanent thing is a material substance. Thus, Aristotle's argument raises the question of whether permanent entities are the only class of existing things. The standard answer to this question is negative. The other relevant class of existing things is that of successive entities (*successiva*), which include not only time but also motion. Unlike permanent entities, successive entities are characterized by temporally extended parts, i.e., parts that do not exist simultaneously but follow one another in time. Medieval Latin philosophers not only point out that Aristotle's argument is not conclusive against the existence of time because it is based on a criterion of existence valid only for permanent things but also try to define a criterion for the existence of successive entities. There are two main solutions to this problem. (1) One posits that the existence of time is guaranteed by the existence of the present instant – similarly, the existence of a motion is guaranteed by the existence of its instantaneous present element (the *mutatum esse*). Although the instant is not a part of time but an indivisible element of it, it has two other properties that explain its role in the existence of time. One is that the instant is the common boundary at which the past and the future join; the other is that the instant is a persisting element in time flowing from the past to the future. (2) The other solution envisages a distinct mode of existence for motion and time taken as wholes, different from that of permanent entities. In one formulation of this distinction, the being of a successive thing is in *fieri* (in becoming), while that of permanent entities is in *factum esse* (in completed being). The distinction between permanent and successive entities is generally taken as primitive.
2. While the existence of motion and time as successive entities is variously explained but commonly accepted, a much more controversial issue is that of the relation between motion and time. The question is what kind of attribute of motion time is. Is time a real, that is, extra-mental, attribute of motion or a mind-dependent attribute resulting from our activity of measuring the duration of a motion? On another formulation, the question is whether there is a real distinction between time and motion, so that time and motion are two distinct extra-mental things, or rather only a conceptual distinction between the two, so that they are essentially one and the same extra-mental thing viewed in different ways. Aristotle himself raises this question, when he asks whether the existence of time depends on the human soul (*Physics* IV.14). He argues that time does not exist without the soul because time is a number and the existence of number depends on the soul, because it depends on the mental operation of counting. Aristotle's dependence claim was accepted and expanded by the Arabic commentator Averroes. He maintains that only motion exists outside the soul, in extra-mental reality, whereas time exists in the soul. He specifies that the relevant collection of which time is a number is that of the before and after in a motion (i.e., the collection of successive phases in a motion): time exists as a result of the action of the soul of numbering, i.e., discerning, the before and after in a motion.

Averroes' basic idea that time exists in the soul clearly expresses a reductive view of time that posits that in extra-mental reality there are

not two distinct things corresponding to time and motion respectively. Many thirteenth- and fourteenth-century Latin philosophers share Averroes' reductive view. An eminent example is William of Ockham, who claims that time is not an extra-mental thing distinct from motion. On the contrary, every extra-mental thing signified by the name "time" is also signified by the name "motion." Ockham specifies, however, that the names "motion" and "time" are not synonymous because they have different nominal definitions. In addition to the extra-mental things signified by the name "motion," the name "time" co-signifies the human soul that numbers the successive phases of a motion. Accordingly, for Ockham as for Averroes, what makes the difference between the notions of motion and time is the reference to a mental activity.

There was, however, also strong opposition to Averroes' reductive view. Many thirteenth-century commentators – for example, Roger Bacon, Albert the Great, William of Clifford, and many other anonymous English commentators – think that the claim that the existence of time depends on the soul is basically wrong. They argue that this claim derives from mistaken assumptions about the ontological status of number and that it conflicts with other basic properties that Aristotle ascribes to time. The thirteenth-century realists, however, while advocating that time is an extra-mental thing distinct from motion, do not provide very good arguments for this real distinction. Some fourteenth-century realists are more successful in this respect. For example, Walter Burley, Ockham's most influential opponent, argues that one needs to posit time as an extra-mental thing distinct from motion in order to account for the succession of past and future phases of a motion. His idea is that past and future and more generally temporal succession are found both in time and in every motion, but they belong to time primarily and to motion only secondarily, that is, in virtue of time. Thus what makes one phase of a motion past and another future is that one is in past time and the other in future time.

3. Aristotle claims that there is just one time (*Physics* IV.14). This claim, however, is

regarded as highly problematic because of the ontological status that Aristotle ascribes to time. Time is an attribute of motion so that motion is the subject of time; since there are many motions, it seems to follow that there are many times, as many as there are motions, given the principle that the identity and diversity of an attribute depends on that of its subject. The most influential position on the unity of time is that of Averroes. The Arabic commentator saves the unity of time by restricting the subject of time to one motion, the first motion. In his view, time is an accident of the first motion alone, although it functions as a non-inhering measure for all the other motions. Averroes' solution is adopted with some modifications by the major thirteenth-century philosophers, e.g., Albert the Great, Thomas Aquinas, and Giles of Rome. Alternative solutions, however, are also proposed. Bonaventure tries to explain the unity of time on the basis of the unity of matter, which is the principle of every motion: it is because there is just one matter underlying every motion that there is also just one time. Roger Bacon and Richard Rufus of Cornwall argue that all simultaneous motions, *qua* simultaneous, are indistinct and in some sense one, so that they form just one subject for time. Accordingly, since time belongs to all simultaneous motions insofar as they are simultaneous and hence one, the time of simultaneous motions is one. In the fourteenth century, the idea that there are many times is accepted. For example, Walter Burley posits that time is a successive quantity that every motion necessarily has so that there are necessarily many times as there are many motions, although he admits that only the first time, the time inhering in the first motion, has a privileged role in measuring the duration of all the other motions.

## Cross-References

- ▶ [Abū Bakr al-Rāzī, Muḥammad ibn Zakarīyā' \(Rhazes\)](#)
- ▶ [Albert the Great](#)

- ▶ Alexander of Aphrodisias and Arabic Aristotelianism
- ▶ al-Ġazālī, Abū Ḥāmid Muḥammad
- ▶ al-Kindī, Abū Yūsuf Ya'qūb ibn Ishāq
- ▶ Aristotelianism in the Greek, Latin, Syriac, Arabic, and Hebrew Traditions
- ▶ Augustine
- ▶ Boethius
- ▶ Bonaventure
- ▶ Form and Matter
- ▶ Giles of Rome, Political Thought
- ▶ Ibn Rushd, Muḥammad ibn Aḥmad al-Ḥafīd (Averroes)
- ▶ Ibn Sīnā, Abū 'Alī (Avicenna)
- ▶ John Buridan
- ▶ John of Jandun
- ▶ Natural Philosophy
- ▶ Natural Philosophy, Arabic
- ▶ Natural Philosophy, Jewish
- ▶ Philosophy, Arabic
- ▶ Realism
- ▶ Richard Rufus of Cornwall
- ▶ Robert Grosseteste
- ▶ Roger Bacon
- ▶ Saadia Gaon
- ▶ Thomas Aquinas
- ▶ Walter Burley
- ▶ William of Ockham

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## Toleration

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### Abstract

Although the idea of toleration (understood as forbearance of beliefs and practices different from one's own) is often supposed to be of modern invention, there were many medieval authors who proposed philosophical grounds for it. Broadly speaking, these medieval doctrines of tolerance may be classified according to a fourfold scheme: skepticism, functionalism, nationalism, and mysticism. Each of the medieval paths to toleration depended upon distinct philosophical principles, but all of them led to the conclusion that differing views about theological and religious truths could be permitted and discussed.

Toleration (or its cognate, tolerance) denotes the readiness of an individual or a community to permit the presence and/or expression of ideas, beliefs and practices differing from what is accepted by that individual or by the dominant part of the community. Tolerance demands forbearance only; it does not require approval or endorsement of the tolerated ideas, beliefs, and practices. A tolerant person respects differences between him/herself and other people; a tolerant community respects differences between groups and/or among individuals within the social totality. Toleration is thus antithetical to the persecution or repression (systematic or individualized) of ideas, beliefs, and practices that differ from one's own. Indeed, a tolerant person or society will protect the ability of such ideas, beliefs, and practices to persist even while acknowledging disagreement with them.

There is a widespread perception that the Middle Ages was not a time during which



toleration could be advocated, let alone flourish, due to the supposedly monolithic character of Roman Christianity. It is commonly supposed that medieval Europe was a “persecuting society,” systematically stamping out all forms of heresy and deviation (Moore 2006). Yet, as with so many generalizations about the Middle Ages, this one does not fully match the evidence. The research of political, ecclesiastical, and social historians has demonstrated repeatedly how tolerant practices and beliefs existed side-by-side with persecutorial urges: laypeople and churchmen alike pursued policies that protected suspected heretics, dissenters, and sexual and social “deviants” (Nederman and Laursen 1996; Bejczy 1997; Laursen and Nederman 1998; Laursen 1999). In turn, medieval authors of a philosophical bent adopted a range of intellectual frameworks that generated principles of tolerance. Specifically, it is possible to identify at least four strands of thought during the Middle Ages that endorsed robust accounts of toleration. These may be labeled skepticism, functionalism, nationalism, and mysticism.

It may be surprising to discover that a number of Latin thinkers – including John of Salisbury (1115/20–1180) and William of Ockham (c. 1285–1349) – self-consciously embraced versions of skeptical thought. John declared himself to be a proponent of the Ciceronian “New Academy,” which had promoted a moderately skeptical methodology of probabilism in matters of the truth. While John admitted that some matters were beyond doubt – the existence of God, for instance – he nonetheless advocated debate over a wide range of theological, metaphysical, and moral questions. For John, the human mind’s imperfection meant that rash enthusiasm for certain answers was bound to yield dogmatism rather than true understanding. Hence, he insisted that individuals should to reserve to themselves a wide freedom of judgment in the examination of truth, such that each by his right (*suo jure*) may defend whatever seems to him most probable. John even describes the process by which such probable truths are examined in as “the clash of ideas.” In sum, he offers a theory of toleration, based on his

readiness to accept that many knowledge claims are subject to legitimate doubt, that is not too far removed from the probabilism of another English philosopher also named John – John Stuart Mill.

In contrast with John, William of Ockham did not look back to ancient skepticism as a source of inspiration. Yet Ockham still advocated a method of philosophical and theological analysis that required suspension of coercive judgment in matters concerning heretical belief (Shogimen 2001). In William’s view, the onus for demonstrating that an individual’s belief stands in error pertains to the person who performs the correction. If an individual who upholds such supposed error clings to it because he does not grasp the manner of his own mistake, it is unwarranted for clerical authorities to punish him. In part, this is because prelates themselves are often ignorant and fallible in matters of faith. But more importantly, Ockham maintains that the only reason one may legitimately employ coercion is to correct a person who explicitly admits that his position is erroneous and still refuses to surrender it. The individual who cannot or does not acknowledge that he is in error because he does not accept the reasoning presented to him must be accorded patient forbearance, not persecuted. To do the latter is to misuse the corrective power granted to the church, according to Ockham.

A second strand of toleration theory arises from the emergence during the European Middle Ages of greater acceptance of the worthiness of guarding the bodily welfare of human beings than one finds in either ancient pagan or early Christian society. The dignity of labor, the morality of commerce, and the protection of the poor from extreme deprivation formed key themes of political, economic, and theological writings after about 1100. In turn, these ideas support the claim that respect must be accorded to all of the parts of society that contribute to the temporal maintenance of the community, a teaching that yielded a widespread functionalist approach to political order. Such functionalism might provide the foundations for a case on behalf of toleration, as in the writings of Marsiglio of Padua (1275/80–1342/43). According to Marsiglio, the material welfare and harmony of society was the

chief goal of the political community; and this was best achieved when all of the goods and services necessary for bodily human existence were exchanged in orderly fashion. Thus, those who adopted supposedly heretical views in matters of faith, while they could be detached from the spiritual community of the church, ought not to be excluded thereby from interactions with fellow citizens involving purely earthly needs. It remained beyond the power of clerics, in Marsiglio's view, to regulate the social and economic exchanges that were required or useful for maintaining the corporeal existence of the orthodox and the heterodox alike. Rather, only the temporal community as a whole enjoyed competence to determine how temporal human conducted should be governed. Religious dispute per se constituted an inappropriate basis for determining who deserved to be excluded from or punished by secular society.

Another theoretical framework that cradled a policy of toleration during the Latin Middle Ages was the growing acceptance of the divinely inspired naturalness of human diversity. In earlier Christian times, thinkers such as St. Augustine had castigated the signs of human difference – for example, the plurality of languages – by proclaiming them to be a token of God's punishment of mankind's wickedness. By contrast, many medieval Latin thinkers (under the influence of Aristotelian science as well as the realities of European sociopolitical organization) came to view differences of identity stemming from region or place of birth – denoted by terms such as *natio* and *gens* – as a wholly natural phenomenon, consonant with the divine plan for salvation. Diversity of climate, terrain, and physical resources quite reasonably produce divergent qualities of character, temperament, and social organization. These are not to be reviled or suppressed but respected as a feature of the wondrous pluralism of God's creation. Around 1400, Christine de Pizan (1365–1430) found in nationalism the building blocks of a cosmopolitan communalism that she employed to argue for tolerance as a by-product of organic political order (Forhan 2002). By the time Nicholas of Cusa (1401–1464) wrote *De pace fidei* in the

middle of the fifteenth century, “national” distinctions could be seen to support “a variety of rites” that nevertheless did not contradict the universal truths of religion. Indeed, Nicholas subscribed to the position that God would be worshipped more devoutly if each nation took local pride in the unique qualities of its own worship. That later expressions of nationalism have signaled chauvinism and intolerance should not deter us from recognizing that nationality and national self-consciousness can be a source of tolerant ideas as well. Inasmuch as human beings find reasons to value forms of natural diversity – whether those reasons are religious (as in the Middle Ages), aesthetic, or biological – the possibility of “nationalism” as a positive stimulus to tolerance exists.

Finally, the mystical dimensions of religious experience have often yielded the basis for the principled defense of toleration. Gustav Mensching argued for the presence of an “intrinsic,” as distinct from a “political” or a “rationalistic,” conception of tolerance located in the teachings of mystical religions (Mensching 1971). Mensching's main insight was that many mystics recognize the immanence and omnipresence of God in Being and thus assert the requirement that all that is must be respected and given its due, because in that way the Divine itself is worshiped. Mysticism posits truth, but a truth that is all-embracing and that may, in extreme cases, embrace all creation as ready for salvation. In Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite, for instance, the stages of mystical experience lead to the encounter with God in all things, which in turn are recognized to be God's appearances (*theophanias*). The journey to mystical insight entails a readiness to forbear differing or dissenting visions, since these, too, reflect elements of the divine cosmology. Such doctrines may be encountered throughout the Western Christian tradition (John Scotus Eriugena, Meister Eckhart, Jacob Boehme). Indeed, perhaps among the various possible foundations for toleration, mysticism had been the most widely embraced and propounded in the Middle Ages.

As should be evident, many of the intellectual and religious traditions typical of medieval

European thought provided building blocks for vital theories of toleration. The perception that the Christian Church was successful in the systematic suppression of ideas that did not conform to a narrow and unitary vision of orthodox is the product of ignorance. Indeed, figures whose doctrinal purity was beyond approach – for example, John of Salisbury, who was elevated to bishop of Chartres, and Nicholas of Cusa, a Roman cardinal who very nearly became pope – were among the most adamant advocates of tolerance during the Middle Ages. Defenses of toleration toward differences in human thought and belief were not, then, marginal, but a central feature of medieval philosophy as well as theology.

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## Translations from Greek into Arabic

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### Abstract

The Greek philosophical heritage has been transmitted uninterruptedly from late Antiquity onward in languages other than Greek: first, into Latin (from the fourth century CE onward), then, into Syriac and Armenian (respectively, from the sixth century to the tenth, and from the sixth century to the seventh), then again into Arabic, from the eighth century to the tenth. The earliest Graeco-Arabic translations of philosophical texts date from the Umayyad era, but the main stream belongs to the first two centuries of the 'Abbāsid Caliphate, and can be subdivided into three stages: first, some Aristotelian, Peripatetic, and Neoplatonic writings were translated, that set the agenda for Arabic-Islamic philosophy; then came the translation of the Aristotelian corpus almost in its entirety, accompanied by some commentaries and other works by Alexander of Aphrodisias, Porphyry, Themistius, and Philoponus; then again, in the second half of the tenth century, earlier Graeco-Syriac versions were translated into Arabic and earlier Arabic translations were revised; further commentaries on Aristotle were translated. Clearly recognized by Muslim

scholars of the classical age as ancient and non-Islamic in its origin, *falsafa* – the loan word for φιλοσοφία – became soon an intellectual option facing others in the cultivated Muslim milieu.

## The Stages of the Reception of Greek Philosophical Works

Once settled in Damascus, the first capital of the Islamic empire, the Umayyads (r. 661–750) developed a courtly civilization that, starting from the practical needs of a chancellery (*diwān*) written in Persian (*al-fārsiyya*) or in Byzantine Greek (*al-rūmiyya*) – the languages of the conquered countries – evolved soon toward the first assimilation of non-Islamic literature. In his *Kitāb al-Fihrist* (*Book of the Catalogue*: see Appendix) Ibn al-Nadīm records that the founder of the Umayyad dynasty Mu‘awiyya (r. 661–680), in his fondness for the sciences and especially for alchemy – called “the Art, *al-ṣina‘a*” – ordered a group of Greek philosophers from Egypt to translate for him the books on this subject matter from classical Greek (*al-yūnānī*) and Coptic. According to Ibn al-Nadīm, “This was the first translation in Islam from one language into another” (*K. al-Fihrist*, p. 242.8–242.11 Flügel, trans Dodge 1970:581). Among the topics that attracted the interest of the learned audience at the Caliphal court, stands out the encyclopedic literature best exemplified by the “mirrors for princes” (on this literary genre see O’Meara and Shamp 2006). Sālīm Abū l-‘Alā’, secretary to the Caliph Hishām b. ‘Abd al-Mālik (r. 724–743) patronized the translation of a collection of pseudo-Aristotelian letters on government (Grignaschi 1965–1966; Gutas 2006) that forms the core of the *Sirr al-asrār*, or *Secretum secretorum* (survey: Zonta 2003b; see also Grignaschi 1967, 1976; Manzalaoui 1974; van Bladel 2007; Maróth 2006 (review: Gutas 2009)). Cosmology and ethics, two of the topics touched upon in the “mirrors for princes,” seem to have attracted the interest of the Umayyad court: the earliest Arabic translation of two pseudo-Aristotelian writings on these matters, *De mundo*

and *De virtutibus et vitiis*, can be traced back to this period (see respectively the survey by Raven 2003 and Cacouros 2003).

With the so-called ‘Abbāsīd Revolution (on the ‘Abbāsīds see Young et al. 1990; Kennedy 2004) and the new interpretation of Islam which took the upper hand after the defeat of the Umayyads (750 CE), and was in a sense symbolized by the foundation of the new capital Baghdad (764 CE), the interest in Greek science and philosophy increased in the cultivated Muslim milieu. The first translations of the ‘Abbāsīd era stem, once again, from the Aristotelian tradition: a secretary to the Caliph al-Manṣūr (r. 754–775), Ibn al-Muqaffā‘ (d. 756), either translated a compendium of logical writings, or even compiled it. This work contains a summary of Porphyry’s *Isagoge*, and Aristotle’s *Cat.*, *De int.*, and *An. Pr.* (edition: Dānishpazūh 1978). The authorship of Ibn al-Muqaffā‘ has been challenged, however, and this work has been attributed to his son, Muḥammad ibn ‘Abdallāh al-Muqaffā‘, who was active under the reign of al-Ma‘mūn (Gabrieli 1932; Kraus 1934; on the contrary, Dānishpazūh 1978; Elamrani Jamal 1989 accept the father’s authorship). Whatever the case, the earliest circulation of Aristotelian works is reminiscent of the late Ancient pattern that consisted of opening the *Organon* with Porphyry’s *Isagoge*, a pattern apparent also in the Syriac logical tradition (see Hugonnard-Roche 1989). The so-called enlarged *Organon* of late Antiquity included also the *Rhetoric* and *Poetics*, and it comes as no surprise that the earliest Arabic translation of the *Rhetoric* seems to date from this era (Aouad 1989c). The *Kitāb al-Fihrist* (p. 249.18 Flügel, henceforth F) mentions also a translation of the *Topics*, made for the Caliph al-Mahdī (r. 775–785) by the Nestorian Patriarch Timothy I (Brock 1999; Berti 2009). The Christian learned communities of Syria, heirs to the Neoplatonized Aristotelianism of late antique Alexandria, did continue even after the Muslim conquest to translate and comment upon Greek secular works, especially in the field of Aristotelian logic: a fact that explains both the continuity between the Syriac and Arabic reception of the *Organon*, and the never-ceasing contribution given by the Christians of Syria to the

translations of scientific and philosophical works. In the ‘Abbāsīd era their contribution was decisive, as exemplified by the names of Ḥunayn b. Ishāq and his son Ishāq b. Ḥunayn (see below). Besides the logical writings, also the *Physics* was allegedly translated in the first decades of the ‘Abbāsīd Caliphate: the *K. al-Fihrist* (p. 244.5–244.6 F) records a translation, now lost, made for Hārūn al-Rashīd (r. 786–809). However, it was under the reign of al-Ma’mūn (r. 813–833) that the translations from Greek into Arabic became a relevant cultural phenomenon in urban Islamic society. A fierce supremacist of the Caliphate over the religious authorities (see Sourdel 1962; Crone and Hinds 1986; Cooperson 2005), al-Ma’mūn sided with the Mu’tazilite doctrine of the created Qur’ān, and initiated the *miḥna* (inquisition) in order to impose this doctrine; the definition of the Qur’ān as the *created* speech of God counted as the premise to the idea that the sacred Book was open to interpretation, especially for its antropomorphic descriptions of God’s nature and deeds. The elite of the learned men surrounding the Caliph, and the Caliph himself, would have extracted from these descriptions the *tawḥīd* – the doctrine of divine Uniqueness – in its purest form, reaching the idea of God as that transcendent One whose attributes are nothing if not images of a perfectly simple and immaterial principle, and whose deeds are nothing if not rationality and justice. Theories of this sort seem to form the theological background of what is nowadays called the “translation movement” (Gutas 1998). The Caliph himself features in the ancient sources as having instigated the translations from Greek: a dream, mentioned in various sources, stages Aristotle answering the questions addressed to him by al-Ma’mūn; Ibn al-Nadīm, one of these sources, tells in as many words that “this dream was one of the most definite reasons for the output of books” (p. 243.9 F, trans Dodge 1970:584). There is no scholarly consensus about the ultimate reasons for this forgery and its various versions (different interpretations have been advanced by Gutas 1998, 1999; van Koningsveld 1998), but the commitment of the Caliphal court to the assimilation of foreign sciences is beyond doubt, as shown inter alia by the fact that the

Caliphs al-Ma’mūn and al-Mu’taṣim are among the addressees of the works of al-Kindī, the first *ḥaylasūf* (φιλόσοφος). The latter was appointed tutor to Aḥmad, a son of al-Ma’mūn’s successor al-Mu’taṣim, and directed a circle of scholars and translators (see the entry on al-Kindī in this volume). Even though the princely library, the famous *Bayt al-ḥikma*, is no longer viewed as an academy for translations (see Pinto 1928; Eche 1967; Balty-Guesdon 1992; Micheau 1997; Gutas 1998, reflecting different interpretations), the sum of various bits of information elicits the view that the milieu in which both the translations and *falsafa* arose was the ‘Abbāsīd elite of the first decades of the ninth century: for a comprehensive view, see the all-embracing survey by Endress (1987 and 1992, 1997).

The translations done in the first decades of the ninth century, mostly – even though not exclusively – on the demand of al-Kindī, include works by Plato, Aristotle, Theophrastus, the Pseudo-Plutarch (i.e., Aetius), Nicomachus of Gerasa, Alexander of Aphrodisias, Plotinus, Proclus, John Philoponus, and Olympiodorus. As shown by Endress (1973), these translations share in the same syntactical and terminological features, and at times also in the same doctrinal adaptations of the original texts: a fact that has allowed Endress (1987 and 1992, 1997) to single out the existence of a group of translators and scholars gathered around al-Kindī. The translations of the so-called circle of al-Kindī (or belonging more in general to this stage) are the following.

#### **Plato (*Tim.*, *Symp.*, *Phaed.*, *Resp.*)**

The *K. al-Fihrist* (p. 246.15–246.16 F) mentions a translation of the *Timaeus* done by Ibn al-Biṭrīq, one of the translators of the “circle of al-Kindī.” In addition to the *Timaeus*, also the *Symposium*, *Phaedo*, and *Republic* were known to a certain extent: since two of them appear in the writings of al-Kindī himself, who had no Greek, this means that a translation of at least parts of these dialogues had been done, unless Kindī’s borrowings stem from a doxographical source. As for the *Symposium*, the section 178 A–212 C, that is, the speeches about love, is echoed in Kindī’s epistle *The Agreement of the Philosophers*

*Regarding the Signs of Passionate Love*, lost to us but quoted by Ibn Bakhtīshū, a physician of the eleventh century (Klein-Franke 1973; Gutas 1988). As for the *Republic*, al-Kindī was acquainted with the myth of Er (X, 614A–621D), whose reworking appears in his *Qawl fī l-naḥs al-mukhtaṣar min kitāb Aristū wa-Aflātūn wa-sā'ir al-falāsifa*, p. 279.3–279.13 Abū Rīda (see Furlani 1922; Walzer 1937; Genequand 1987–1988; Endress 1994). Finally, the pseudo-Aristotelian *Kitāb al-tuffāḥa (Liber de pomo)*, that can be traced back if not to al-Kindī (as surmised by Atiyeh 1966:158–159) at least to his milieu, presupposes that its author was acquainted with the *Phaedo* (Bielawski 1974; Aouad 1989a).

**Aristotle (*An. Pr.*, *Soph. el.*, *Phys.*, *De caelo*, *Meteor.*, *De gen. an.*, *De part. an.*, *Parva nat.*, *Metaph.*, *Paraphrasis of the De anima*)**

The translation of the *Prior Analytics* by Ibn al-Biṭrīq is neither extant nor even mentioned in the *K. al-Fihrist*, but Ibn Suwār alludes once to it in his “edition” of the *Organon* (see Endress 1997:58; and, for the so-called edition of the *Organon*, see the entry on Ibn Suwār in this volume). The *K. al-Fihrist* records a translation of the *Sophistici elenchi* done by ‘Abd al-Masīḥ ibn Nā‘ima al-Ḥimṣī, one of the translators of the “circle of al-Kindī” (p. 249.26–249.28 F; on the details about this translation, see Hugonnard-Roche 1989:526–528). To this early Aristotelian corpus in Arabic belongs also the *Physics*, which according to the *K. al-Fihrist* (p. 250.13–250.15 F) was translated by Qusṭā ibn Lūqā (see Gabrieli 1912), together with Philoponus’ and Alexander’s commentaries (see below for details). Other Aristotelian works translated by scholars of the entourage of al-Kindī include the *De caelo* and the *Meteorologica (De caelo: trans. Ibn al-Biṭrīq, mentioned in the K. al-Fihrist, p. 250.28 F; this translation is edited by Badawī 1961; see Endress 1966, 1995a; Hugonnard-Roche 2003a; Meteorologica: ed. Schoonheim 2000; see also Schoonheim 2003)*. The *De generatione animalium* and *De partibus animalium*, gathered under the general heading *Kitāb al-Ḥayawān (Book on Animals)*, were translated by Ibn

al-Biṭrīq (*K. al-Fihrist*, p. 251.26 F; both translations are edited: *De gen. an.*, Brugman and Drossaert Lulofs 1971; Kruk 2003:329, challenges Ibn al-Biṭrīq’s authorship; *De part. an.*, Kruk 1979; see also Kruk 2003). The *Parva naturalia* were translated under the heading *Kitāb al-ḥiss wa-l-maḥsūs (De sensu et sensato)*, but the translation includes also other pieces of the *Parva nat.* (see Daiber 1997:36–41; the edition, by R. Hansberger, is forthcoming). As for the *Metaphysics*, the *K. al-Fihrist* (p. 251.27–251.28 F) affirms that the translation was done by a certain Uṣṭāth for al-Kindī. This early translation has partly come down to us, thanks to Averroes’ Great Commentary (edition: Bouyges 1938–1952; surveys on the various translations of the *Metaphysics*: Peters 1968; Martin 1989; Martini Bonadeo 2003). In addition to Aristotle’s own works, also a paraphrasis of the *De anima* was translated by Ibn al-Biṭrīq (or “abbreviated,” according to the *K. al-Fihrist*, p. 251.16 F). The Greek original is lost, but the editor, R. Arnzen, has convincingly pointed to a Byzantine compilation drawing mostly from Philoponus’ commentary on the *De anima* (Arnzen 1998:80–139). This paraphrase is clearly acknowledged as being a commentary (*talkhīṣ*, p. 251.15 F), not Aristotle’s own work. In other cases, however, texts by philosophers no less different from Aristotle than Plotinus and Proclus have been attributed to Aristotle himself: these pseudepigrapha come from the “circle of al-Kindī” (see below, “Plotinus” and “Proclus”).

**Aetius**

The *Placita philosophorum (Συναγωγή τῶν ἀρεσκόντων)* of the Pseudo-Plutarch, an abridgment of the so-called *Vetusta placita* by Aetius (first century BCE to first century CE), were translated by Qusṭā ibn Lūqā. This work counts as the main source for the circulation in the Arabic-speaking world of the Greek cosmological doctrines from the Presocratics to Stoicism (edition: Daiber 1980; see also Daiber 1994; Gutas 1994).

**Nicomachus of Gerasa**

The Arabic translation of the *Introduction to Arithmetic* by the Bishop of Mosul Ḥabīb ibn Biḥrīz was reworked by al-Kindī himself (Endress 1997:55).



### Alexander of Aphrodisias

The first writings of Alexander translated into Arabic were some of his personal works, and two commentaries lost in Greek: on the *Physics*, and on the *De gen. et corr.* We are told in the *K. al-Fihrist* that Qusṭā ibn Lūqā, the translator of the *Placita philosophorum* (see above, “Aetius”) translated the first book of Alexander’s commentary on the *De gen. corr.* (p. 251.4 F); as for the commentary on the *Physics*, Qusṭā ibn Lūqā translated Aristotle’s text “with Alexander of Aphrodisias’ commentary” as for the “fourth book,” which is said to contain further subdivisions; Ibn al-Nadīm mentions also books V and VII, still under the heading of Aristotle’s text with Alexander’s commentary (see Lettinck 1994:3). Within the “circle of al-Kindī,” some of the so-called *Quaestiones* were translated, mostly of cosmological nature (see Fazzo and Wiesner 1993). In the Istanbul MS that contains the collection under scrutiny, Alexander’s *Quaest.* have been transmitted together with some propositions of Proclus’ *Elements of Theology*, under the general heading “What Alexander extracted from Aristotle’s book called *Theology*” (see van Ess 1966; Endress 1973). The Istanbul MS contains also two writings whose Greek antecedent is lost, and whose linguistic and doctrinal features are akin to the other translations of the “circle of al-Kindī”: *On Providence* and *On the Regimen of the Heavens* (both edited by Ruland 1976). Another cosmological writing is attributed to Alexander, which shares the features of this group of translations: a treatise (unknown in Greek) *On the First Cause, Its Effects and the Latter’s Movements* (edition: Endress 2002). Finally, the translation of Alexander’s question *On Colours*, while attributed to Ishāq b. Ḥunayn, has been connected to the productions of the “circle of al-Kindī” (edition: Gätje 1967).

### Hippolytus of Rome

Hippolytus’ *Refutatio omnium heresium* lies in the background of the *Kitāb Amūniyyus fī ārā’ al-falāsīfa* (*Ammonius’ Book on the Opinions of the Philosophers*). As shown by the editor of the Arabic text, U. Rudolph, Hippolytus’ survey of the Greek philosophical doctrines has been

adapted to the theological debates of ninth-century Baghdad; this adapted doxographical survey has been attributed to Ammonius, the commentator of Aristotle of sixth-century Alexandria (edition: Rudolph 1989).

### Plotinus

The so-called *Theology of Aristotle*, in fact a substantially reworked translation of *Enneads* IV–VI, counts in a sense as the pivot of this group of translations: in fact, the information given at the beginning of the text permits dating the translation and locating it precisely within the context of the “circle of al-Kindī.” The names of the translator and of the revisor of the translation are indicated: ‘Abd al-Masīḥ ibn Nā’ima al-Ḥimṣī, the translator; al-Kindī himself, the revisor; also the addressee of the revision is named: Aḥmad, son of the Caliph al-Mu’taṣim. The translation was then done during the reign of the latter, in the forties of the ninth century (for more details see the entry on Plotinus, Arabic in this volume).

### Proclus

The epoch-making book by Endress (1973) has shown that the translation of Proclus’ *Elements of Theology*, out of which the famous *Liber de causis* was created, was done within the “circle of al-Kindī.” To this early stage of the Graeco-Arabic transmission belongs also the earliest translation of the *Eighteen Arguments Against the Christians on the Eternity of the World* (for more details see the entry on Proclus, Arabic in this volume).

### John Philoponus

The *De aeternitate mundi contra Proclum* (i.e., Philoponus’ reply to Proclus’ *Arguments* just mentioned) was known to al-Kindī, as shown by Davidson (1987). However, an Arabic translation of this work had not yet been found, when Davidson wrote his book; Hasnaoui (1994) has shown that parts of the *De aet. mundi* in Arabic circulated under the name of Alexander of Aphrodisias. In addition to this, the *K. al-Fihrist* records Philoponus’ commentary on the *Physics*, translated partly by Ibn Nā’ima al-Ḥimṣī (books V–VIII), and partly by Qusṭā ibn Lūqā (books

I–IV, *K. al-Fihrist*, 250.18–250.20 F: see the entry on Philoponus, Arabic in this volume).

### Olympiodorus

According to the *K. al-Fihrist* (p. 251.5 F), a commentary on the *De gen. corr.* (unknown in Greek) was translated by Uṣṭāth, the translator of the *Metaphysics*.

Another set of translations of philosophical works, different in style and focused on Aristotle and his commentators, was produced by Ḥunayn b. Iṣḥāq and his associates. A quasi-contemporary of al-Kindī, Ḥunayn b. Iṣḥāq (d. 873) was a Christian Nestorian, a physician and scientist (see Bergsträsser 1913, 1925; Gabrieli 1924; Meyerhof 1926; Haddad 1974; Strohmaier 1990). Together with his son Iṣḥāq b. Ḥunayn (d. 911) and several translators associated with them in various ways (see Meyerhof 1926:702–713) Ḥunayn b. Iṣḥāq produced a new set of translations. Since his mother tongue was Syriac, some of these translations were into Syriac, and others into Arabic; often a work originally translated into Syriac was retranslated into Arabic, either in this same period – typically, a Syriac translation made by Ḥunayn was rendered into Arabic by his son Iṣḥāq – or even later on, in the second half of the tenth century. As a rule, the Syriac versions mentioned in the bio-bibliographical sources are lost, whereas the Arabic translations made out of them have come down to us. The learned al-Ṣafādī (d. 1363: see Rosenthal in *EL*<sup>2</sup>, VIII, cols 783–785) contrasts the word for word method of the early translations with the understanding of the sentence as a whole, typical of the translations of Ḥunayn and his associates (English trans of al-Ṣafādī’s passage by Rosenthal 1975:17). This remark counts as a witness of changing attitudes in the translation technique, that can be viewed partly as an internal evolution – comparable to the change from the *verbum de verbo* pattern of the Latin medieval translations to the Humanist rendering – partly as a reaction, on the part of scientists and scholars involved in the process of the assimilation of Greek learning, to the harsh criticisms against the new literary genre of the philosophical treatise, raised by belletrists like the famous al-Jāḥiẓ (d. 868) or Ibn Qutayba

(d. 890). Another element should be added to the picture of a changing landscape, if compared with al-Ma’mūn’s times: under al-Mutawakkil (r. 847–861), the Caliphate officially disavowed the Mu’tazilite doctrine and put an end to the *miḥna*, reinstating the doctrine of the *increated* Qur’ān as the official creed of the state (see Madelung 1974).

The translations produced by Ḥunayn and his associates include other works by Plato and especially Aristotle; Theophrastus; Galen; other works by Alexander of Aphrodisias; Porphyry; perhaps Iamblichus, and Themistius; finally, other works by Proclus, John Philoponus, and Olympiodorus.

### Plato (*Tim.*, *Leges*, *Resp.* [?], *Soph.* [?])

As we have seen before, a translation of the *Timaeus* had been done by Ibn al-Biṭṭīq, and Ibn al-Nadīm affirms that either Ḥunayn made another translation, or he revised Ibn al-Biṭṭīq’s one (p. 246.15–246.16 F). Neither has come down to us. Ḥunayn is credited also with the translation of the *Laws* (p. 246.5–246.6 F), but this translation is no longer extant: traces of it survive in al-Bīrūnī’s *India* (Gabrieli 1947). There is no scholarly consensus about al-Fārābī’s acquaintance with it: according to some, his compendium of the *Laws* (edition: Gabrieli 1952) was made on the basis of this translation, whereas other scholars think that al-Fārābī made use of the Arabic version of an epitome, possibly by Galen (see Parens 1995; Gutas 1997; Druart 1998; Harvey 2003). If one has to trust the *K. al-Fihrist*, Ḥunayn commented upon the *Republic* (p. 246.5 F), but no further details are given. A translation of the *Republic*, be it partial or integral, should have existed, because the Ikhwān al-Ṣafā’ and possibly al-Āmirī are acquainted with it; in addition, Averroes commented upon it (see the entry on Plato, Arabic in this volume). Finally, the *K. al-Fihrist* credits Iṣḥāq with the translation of a dialogue that might be the *Sophist* (the Arabic skeleton points to that), accompanied by a commentary of an author whose name might be read “al-Imqīdūrus” (Olympiodorus? Be this as it may, a commentary by Olympiodorus on the *Sophist* is unknown in Greek).

**Aristotle (*Cat., De int., An. pr., An. po., Top., Phys., De caelo, Meteor., De gen. corr., De an., Metaph., Eth. Nic.*)**

The translation of the *Categories* is attributed to Ḥunayn in the *K. al-Fihrist* (p. 248.20 F), but in the Paris MS that contains the Arabic *Organon* (see Hugonnard-Roche 1993) it is attributed to Ishāq (edition: Badawī 1980; see Elamrani Jamal 1989:510–512). The *De interpretatione* is an example of the translations into Syriac and Arabic mentioned above: it was translated by Ḥunayn into Syriac and by Ishāq into Arabic (p. 249.1 F; edition: Badawī 1980; see Hugonnard-Roche 1989:513–515). The *Prior Analytics* too were translated into Syriac, partly by Ḥunayn, partly by Ishāq (p. 249.6 F), but what has come down to us in the Paris MS mentioned above is the Arabic version of a certain Tadhārī (Theodorus), a scholar of the circle of Ḥunayn. As for the *Posterior Analytics*, the *K. al-Fihrist* (p. 249.11–249.12 F) mentions a translation into Syriac by Ḥunayn (partial) and Ishāq (complete), adding that this translation – lost to us – was the basis for the Arabic translation by Abū Bishr Mattā ibn Yūnus (edition: Badawī 1980; for the translations of Abū Bishr Mattā, see below). The same is true for the *Topics*: the Syriac translation by Ḥunayn, mentioned in the *K. al-Fihrist* (p. 249.15 F) did not survive, whereas the Arabic version made by two translators of this circle (Abū ‘Uthmān al-Dimashqī and Ibrāhīm ibn ‘Abdallāh) has come down to us (edition: Badawī 1980). Ishāq translated into Arabic the *Physics* (edition: Badawī 1984), and Ḥunayn, according to the testimony of the *K. al-Fihrist* (p. 250.28–250.29 F), corrected the translation of the *De caelo* by Yaḥyā ibn al-Biṭrīq. Ḥunayn also wrote a summary of the *Meteorology* (edition: Daiber 1975). The *De gen. corr.*, allegedly translated into Arabic in this period (see Rashed 2003), has come down to us only in part, together with Alexander’s commentary (translated by Abū Bishr Mattā: see below). As for the *De anima*, the translation that has come down to us (edition: Badawī 1954) is attributed to Ishāq, but it has convincingly been argued that it is not by him (see the *status quaestionis* by Elamrani Jamal 2003). Ishāq is credited also with a version of the *Metaphysics* (p. 251.26 F), which might be

either a fresh translation, or a revision of Uṣṭāth’s (there is no scholarly consensus on this point; see Mattock 1989; Martin 1989; Martini Bonadeo 2002, 2003; Bertolacci 2006). To this period belongs also the *Concise Exposition of Aristotle’s Metaphysics* by the astronomer, mathematician and philosopher Thābit ibn Qurra, actually focused only on chapters 6–9 of Book *Lambda* (edition: Reisman and Bertolacci 2009). Finally, the *K. al-Fihrist* (p. 252.2F) credits Ishāq with the translation of the *Nicomachean Ethics* (edition: Badawī 1978; Akasoy and Fidora 2005).

**Theophrastus**

To this period belongs the translation of the *De causis plantarum* and *De sensu et sensato* (*K. al-Fihrist*, p. 252.8–252.9F). Both translations are attributed to Ibrāhīm ibn Bakkūs (Rashed 2003:306–312; see the entry on Theophrastus, Arabic in this volume). Albeit attributed to Yaḥyā ibn ‘Adī in the *K. al-Fihrist* (see below), the manuscript tradition credits Ishāq b. Ḥunayn with the translation: see Alon (1985) and Gutas (2010).

**Tabula Cebetis**

This Neopythagorean writing (c. first-century BCE) was possibly translated in this period, because Miskawayh (d. 1030) made use of it: see Rosenthal (1978).

**Nicolaus Damascenus**

A compendium of Aristotle’s philosophy (edition: Drossaart Lulofs 1965) was translated into Syriac by Ḥunayn (Nicolaus Damascenus’ authorship of this work, unknown in Greek, has been challenged by Fazzo 2008). The *De plantis* was translated by Ḥunayn (edition: Drossaart Lulofs and Poortman 1989).

**Galen (Philosophical Works)**

As stated by Ḥunayn himself in the *Epistle* he wrote on his translations of Galen’s works (edition: Bergsträsser 1925), he translated into Syriac and Arabic a great amount of writings by Galen, mostly on medicine. As for the philosophical works, Ḥunayn translated the *De moribus* (see Klein-Franke 1979), and the Compendium of the

*Timaeus* (lost in Greek). According to its editors, P. Kraus and R. Walzer, Ḥunayn's translation was into Syriac, and the Arabic version that has come down to us (edition: Kraus and Walzer 1951) was made by one of Ḥunayn's pupils, 'Īsā b. Yaḥyā b. Ibrāhīm (Kraus and Walzer 1951:18–22). Ḥunayn himself says in his *Epistle* (p. 51.5–51.9 Bergsträsser) that he translated Galen's writing about the immobility of the First Mover (lost in Greek but mentioned in Galen's *De libris propriis*), first into Arabic, and then into Syriac; then again, the Syriac version was translated into Arabic (by the same 'Īsā b. Yaḥyā b. Ibrāhīm mentioned above), because Ḥunayn's Arabic version had been lost.

### Alexander of Aphrodisias

As we saw before, the writings by Alexander translated within the circle of al-Kindī were mostly devoted to cosmological topics. To Ḥunayn and his school we owe the translation of two writings on soul and its faculties, whose impact on subsequent Arabic philosophy has been momentous: the short *De intellectu*, translated by Ishāq (edition: Finnegan 1956; Badawī 1971), and the *De anima*, lost in Arabic, but partly preserved in Hebrew (translated into German by M. Steinschneider together with I. Bruns' edition of the Greek text, *Suppl. Ar.* II.1, 1887). Other personal works by Alexander can be traced back to this period: a couple of short writings on sense perception; several *Questions*, a treatise on the *differentia specifica*, another treatise on time (lost in Greek), and the treatise *On the Principles of the Universe* mentioned above (see Goulet and Aouad 1989). Among the commentaries, Ḥunayn translated into Syriac Alexander's *On the Metaphysics*, at least as far as Book *Lambda* is concerned: this translation is lost to us, but in his own Long Commentary on the *Metaphysics* Averroes quotes several passages from the Arabic translation, made by Abū Bishr Mattā on the basis of Ḥunayn's Syriac version (*K. al-Fihrist*, p. 251.29 F; edition of the Arabic fragments: Freudenthal 1885; on the translation by Abū Bishr Mattā, see below). Thanks to the quotations in Averroes' commentary, parts of Alexander's genuine exegesis of Book *Lambda* can be

recovered (it should be recalled that only books *Alpha* to *Delta* are by Alexander, in the Greek text transmitted under his name). To Ishāq the *K. al-Fihrist* (p. 249.24 F) attributes also the translation of Alexander's commentary on the *Topics*.

### Porphyrus

Abū 'Uthmān al-Dimashqī, the translator of the *Topics*, translated also the *Isagoge* (edition: Badawī 1980). A translation of Porphyry's commentary on the *Categories* is mentioned in the *K. al-Fihrist* (p. 248.20 F), as well as that of the commentaries on the *Physics* (p. 250.21–250.22 F) and the *Nicomachean Ethics*, made by Ishāq (p. 252.2 F). The three works are lost in Greek (see the entry on Porphyry, Arabic in this volume).

### Iamblichus (?)

A commentary on the *Golden Verses*, unknown in Greek, is attributed to Iamblichus in the Arabic tradition; the Arabic translation can be traced back to this period (edition: Daiber 1995).

### Themistius

Ishāq b. Ḥunayn translated Themistius' paraphrase of the *De anima* (edition: Lyons 1973). An epistle on government in Arabic translation is extant (edition: Salīm Sālim 1970), as well as a treatise, unknown in Greek, on the reduction of the syllogistic figures (edition: Badawī 1947). Finally, Ibn al-Nadīm mentions a commentary (*tafsīr*) by Themistius on the *Nicomachean Ethics* (*K. al-akhlāq*), in Syriac, extant in the "manuscript" of Ishāq (see the entry on Themistius, Arabic in this volume).

### Proclus

The *Eighteen Arguments Against the Christians on the Eternity of the World* were translated again by Ishāq. Nine of them have been found (edition: Badawī 1955), including the first argument, lost in Greek (see Anawati 1956; Badawī 1968:72–73). To this period might be traced back tentatively also the translation of two other writings by Proclus, lost in Greek: the monograph *On the Immortality of the Soul*, and the final part of the commentary on the *Timaeus* (see the entry on Proclus, Arabic in this volume).

### John Philoponus

Two writings lost in Greek – one of them fragmentarily transmitted in Greek, while the other is unknown – have been translated in this period. The first writing is a treatise against Aristotle's doctrine of the eternity of the cosmos, whose Greek fragments are preserved through Simplicius' quotations (see Wildberg 1987) and whose Arabic version is edited (Mahdi 1972); the second is a short treatise on the contingent nature of the physical world (edition: Troupeau 1984) (see the entry on Philoponus, Arabic in this volume).

### Olympiodorus

A commentary on Aristotle's *Meteorologica* attributed to "Olympiodorus" in a MS housed in Tashkent (edition: Badawī 1971) was translated by Ḥunayn and corrected by Ishāq. This is the information given in the Tashkent MS, but in the *K. al-Fihrist* the translation is attributed to Abū Bishr Mattā ibn Yūnus (see below). Be this as it may, the work edited by Badawī is different from Olympiodorus' commentary which is extant in Greek.

### The Last Stream

The last stream of translations of Greek philosophical works can be located toward the middle of the tenth century, and took place in an intellectual climate different from that of the early 'Abbāsīd Caliphate on several counts. First, the broader context of Muslim urban society, especially in the capital Baghdad, had changed: even though the 'Abbāsīds were officially still in power, their leadership was on the decline and the empire was de facto dismembered: in 945, a new dynasty entered Baghdad from northern Iran, the Buyids, of Shī'ite allegiance (see Kraemer 1992). Second, the Ash'arite *kalām* (named after Abū Ḥasan al-Ash'arite, d. 935) had supplanted Mu'tazilism in Sunni theology (see the entry *Kalām* in this volume), establishing the tenet that God's nature and decrees cannot be scrutinized by man's reason, to the point that the Ash'arite theologians (*mutakallimūn*) maintained that God could without contradiction punish those who did obey all his commands. Third, the various

linguistic and religious sciences, mostly grammar and law (not to mention the *ḥadīth* literature) had reached such a high level of refinement, that their specialists considered the foreign sciences and their literary genre – the philosophical treatise – as intruders whose pretensions were not supported by an adequate command of true knowledge. This is apparent in the famous argument that occurred at the court of the Buyid vizier Ibn al-Furāt, between Abū Bishr Mattā (d. 940), the head of the Aristotelian circle of Baghdad, and Abū Sa'īd al-Sīrāfī (d. 979), the most illustrious belletrist of his time and the commentator of Sibawayh's *Kitāb*, the authoritative textbook of Arabic grammar. The focus of the argument was about the claim for the universality of Aristotelian logic on the one hand, and the impossibility to go beyond the limits of every natural language, on the other. Should logic prevail over grammar, as contended by Abū Bishr Mattā, translations would be possible and welcomed; should the linguistic boundaries be insurmountable, as contended by Abū Sa'īd al-Sīrāfī, the assimilation of Greek thought would be pointless (see Elamrani Jamal 1983; Endress 1986; Ouyang 1997:23–54). The literate and philosopher al-Tawḥīdī, to whom we owe the record of the dispute, depicts Abū Sa'īd al-Sīrāfī as gaining the upper hand, and it has convincingly been argued that al-Fārābī's philosophy of language, as well as his endeavor to build up a systematic structure of knowledge, counts as an attempt at providing the philosophic community with an adequate reply to this defeat (see Martini Bonadeo 2008). To this picture another element should be added, namely the increasing concentration of the philosophical studies on the interpretation of the Aristotelian corpus. The Baghdad philosophers devoted themselves to the scholastic practice of searching and studying ancient commentaries, analyzing Aristotle's texts and commenting upon them. Two outstanding examples of this practice are the "Organon of Baghdad" (see Hugonnard-Roche 1993) and a MS of Aristotle's *Physics* housed in Leiden that, like the "Organon of Baghdad," bears the traces of a detailed analysis based on both Greek and Arabic commentaries (see Giannakis 1993).



The translations produced by the Baghdad Aristotelians of the tenth century include, in addition to a single work by Plato and several works by Aristotle, writings by Theophrastus, Nicolaus Damascenus, Alexander of Aphrodisias, Themistius, possibly Proclus, Simplicius, and Olympiodorus.

### Plato

Yaḥyā ibn ‘Adī is credited in the *K. al-Fihrist* (p. 246.5 F) with the translation of Plato’s *Laws*. This translation is lost.

### Aristotle (*An. po., Soph. el., Topics, Rhetoric, Poetics, De caelo, De gen. et corr., De sensu et sensato, Book Lambda of the Metaphysics with some commentaries*)

As we have seen before, Ḥunayn b. Isḥāq translated into Syriac the *Posterior Analytics*: on the basis of this translation, Abū Bishr Mattā produced the Arabic version that has come down to us (edition: Badawī 1980). In addition to the old translation of the *Sophistici elenchi* done by ‘Abd al-Masīḥ ibn Nā‘ima al-Ḥimṣī within the “circle of al-Kindī” (see above), two other Arabic versions of this Aristotelian work are extant, that can be traced back to the circle of Baghdad directed by Abū Bishr Mattā. The information given by Ibn al-Nadīm in the *K. al-Fihrist* does not match the account provided by Ibn Suwār, the “editor” of the so-called *Organon* of Baghdad (see the details in Hugonnard-Roche 1989:526–528; see also the entry on Ibn Suwār in this volume). For the purposes of the present survey, it will suffice to say that both Abū Bishr Mattā and Yaḥyā ibn ‘Adī did deal with the *Soph. el.*, either by translating it or by correcting previous translations. As for the *Topics*, Yaḥyā ibn ‘Adī made an Arabic version on the basis of Isḥāq’s Syriac text: this translation, mentioned in the *K. al-Fihrist* (p. 249.15–249.16 F), is quoted in the marginal notes of the “*Organon* of Baghdad” (see Endress 1977:26). A pupil of Yaḥyā ibn ‘Adī, Ibn al-Samḥ (see the entry on Ibn al-Samḥ in this volume) corrected the old version of the *Rhetoric*, dating from the early ‘Abbāsīd age (edition: Lyons 1982; see Aouad 1989c:457). Abū Bishr Mattā translated into Arabic the *Poetics*, possibly from the Syriac version

made by Ḥunayn: this translation is edited (Tkatsch 1928), and the mention of a translation by Yaḥyā ibn ‘Adī in the *K. al-Fihrist* (p. 250.4–250.5 F) possibly points to Yaḥyā’s correction of Abū Bishr Mattā’s translation (Hugonnard-Roche 2003b:211). A partial translation of the *De caelo* is attributed to Abū Bishr Mattā (p. 250.29 F). As we have seen before, Ḥunayn corrected the old version by Ibn al-Biṭrīq, and one of the three Arabic translations that are extant in the MSS might be the correction, either by Ḥunayn or by Abū Bishr Mattā, of the old version (one of the three versions is edited: Badawī 1961). The reference work on the Arabic *De caelo* is Endress (1966); see also the up-to-date *status quaestionis* by Hugonnard-Roche (2003a). Abū Bishr Mattā is credited also with the translation of the *De gen. corr.* (p. 251.4 F), but this information might point to the lemmas of the commentary by Alexander of Aphrodisias (see below, and Rashed 2003:305). As for the *De sensu et sensato*, the wording of Ibn al-Nadīm is controversial and points either to Abū Bishr Mattā, or to another translator, Abū ‘Amr al-Ṭabarī, a pupil of Yaḥyā ibn ‘Adī (see Hasnaoui 1996). Abū Bishr Mattā was particularly interested in Book *Lambda* of Aristotle’s *Metaphysics*: the *K. al-Fihrist* credits him with the translation of this book, accompanied by the commentaries of Alexander of Aphrodisias and Themistius (p. 251.28–251.30; see below). Among the pseudo-Aristotelian works translated by the scholars of this group, there is the Arabic version from Syriac of the *De virt. et vit.* (edition: Kellermann-Rost 1961) and *Economics* (see Zonta 2003a:249), as well as the Arabic version of a compendium of the *Nicomachean Ethics*, known as *Summa Alexandrinorum* (see Dunlop 1974, 1976).

### Theophrastus

The *K. al-Fihrist* attributes to Yaḥyā ibn ‘Adī the translation of the *Metaphysics* (p. 252.11 F; edition: Alon 1985; Gutas 2010). According to Endress (1974:498), the translation from Syriac into Arabic of the *Signs of High* (*K. al-Āthār al-‘ulwiyya*), attributed to Ibn Suwār in the *K. al-Fihrist* (p. 265.9 F) points to Theophrastus’



*Meteorology*; on the Syriac and Arabic versions of this work, see Daiber (1992).

### Nicolaus Damascenus

The *K. al-Fihrist* (p. 264.26 F) credits ‘Īsā ibn Zur‘a, one of the pupils of Yaḥyā ibn ‘Adī, with the Arabic translation of the Syriac version of the compendium of Aristotle’s philosophy (see the entry on Ibn Zur‘a in this volume).

### Alexander of Aphrodisias

Yaḥyā ibn ‘Adī was acquainted with Alexander’s commentary on the *Categories*. This work is lost in Greek, but Ibn al-Nadīm says in the *K. al-Fihrist* (p. 248.23–248.25) that Yaḥyā ibn ‘Adī suspected that a commentary ascribed to Iamblichus was in fact by Alexander, because of the expression “Alexander said” he read in it. In addition, Ibn al-Nadīm reports a saying by Abū Sulaymān al-Sijistānī, a pupil of Yaḥyā ibn ‘Adī, according to whom the latter translated the *Categories* together with Alexander’s commentary, a work of three hundred leaves. This passage in the *K. al-Fihrist* is somehow controversial (see the note by A. Müller to the edition Flügel, vol II, p 114, and the different renderings by Endress 1977:25; Gutas 2007:22). The *K. al-Fihrist* (p. 250.7 F) credits Abū Rawḥ al-Šābī with the translation of Alexander’s commentary on the *Physics*, lost in Greek: Yaḥyā ibn ‘Adī corrected this translation. Also, a translation by Abū Bishr Mattā of part of the first book of Alexander’s commentary on the *De caelo* (lost in Greek) is mentioned in the *K. al-Fihrist* (p. 250.29–250.30 F); a correction by Yaḥyā ibn ‘Adī is mentioned (p. 264.1–264.2 F; see Hugonnard-Roche 2003a:287). Another commentary by Alexander of Aphrodisias lost in Greek, but known to the Baghdad Aristotelians, was that on the *De gen. et corr.* It was allegedly translated by Abū Bishr Mattā in its entirety, whereas the ancient translation by Qusṭā ibn Lūqā was limited to the first book (*K. al-Fihrist*, p. 251.4 F; see above for the translation by Qusṭā ibn Lūqā). Mattā’s translation has not come down to us; however, parts of Alexander’s commentary on the *De gen. et corr.* have been recovered in Arabic translation, and the

terminology and style point to him, both for Aristotle’s lemmas and Alexander’s commentary (see Serra 1997; Gannagé 2005). As we have seen before, Alexander’s commentary on Book *Lambda* of the *Metaphysics* was translated into Syriac by Hunayn b. Isḥāq; this translation was in turn translated into Arabic by Abū Bishr Mattā (see above for details). Finally, Alexander’s *De providentia*, lost in Greek and translated for the first time within the circle of al-Kindī, was translated again by Abū Bishr Mattā (edition: Ruland 1976; see also Thillet 2003).

### Themistius

Abū Bishr Mattā translated Themistius’ paraphrase of the *An. po.* (*K. al-Fihrist*, p. 251.28 F; the Arabic version is lost, but it was known to Averroes and formed the basis of the medieval Latin translation). Abū Bishr Mattā also translated the paraphrase of the *De caelo*, lost in Greek (p. 250.30 F), as well as that of Book *Lambda*, lost in Greek too (French translation: Brague 1999). Also the paraphrase of the *Physics* was known: a Syriac translation is mentioned (*K. al-Fihrist*, p. 250.22–250.23 F), and Themistius’ exegeses are recorded here and there in the Leiden MS of the *Physics* (see above). (For all this, see the entry on Themistius, Arabic in this volume.)

### Proclus

Yaḥyā ibn ‘Adī was acquainted with Proclus’ *De decem dub. circa providentiam* (see Endress 1973:30). Even though this does not imply that he provided a translation, Yaḥyā’s quotations are worth noting as a witness of some sort of circulation in the Arab-speaking world of this work, which is lost in Greek. Later on, a scholar belonging to this current of thought, Abū l-Faraj ibn al-Ṭayyib (see the entry on Ibn al-Ṭayyib in this volume) dealt with a commentary on the *Golden Verses*, allegedly by Proclus (see Linley 1984), as well as with the *Tabula Cebetis* (see above).

### Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite

An Arabic translation of the pseudo-Dionysian corpus was done in the eleventh century (see Treiger 2005).

### Simplicius

The translation of the commentary on the *Categories* is mentioned (*K. al-Fihrist*, p. 248.21–248.22 F) in a somehow confused relationship with the work of a certain “Theon,” which is said to be extant in Syriac and Arabic (see Gutas 2007:22).

### Olympiodorus

The *K. al-Fihrist* (p. 251.5 F) credits Abū Bishr Mattā with the translation of Olympiodorus’ commentaries on the *De gen. et corr.* (p. 251.5 F) and *Meteorologica* (p. 251.8 F).

## The Works Translated: An Overview

The knowledge of Presocratic philosophy has been only indirect in the Arab world: the doctrines of the early cosmologists were known through the doxographies of the Hellenistic and Imperial ages, whereas the “Pythagorean” doctrines were known either through the Neopythagorean writings like the *Tabula cebetis*, or through the Neoplatonic accounts, often presenting Pythagoras as a forerunner of the doctrines held in late Platonism. The knowledge of Plato’s doctrines was based more on accounts by later philosophers, on surveys, and on spurious collections of “sayings,” than on a direct acquaintance with the corpus of the dialogues. Still, some of them were known to a certain extent: *Timaeus*, *Symposium*, *Phaedo*, *Republic*, *Leges*. As for Aristotle, the entire corpus was known, with the exception of the *Politics* and the *Constitution of the Athenians*. Among the pseudo-epigrapha, a prominent place is due to the pseudo-*Theology of Aristotle*, produced within the “circle of al-Kindī” out of Plotinus’ *Enneads*, and to the *Liber de causis*, produced within the same circle out of Proclus’ *Elements of Theology*. The early school of Aristotle was also known to a certain extent: some Theophrastus was translated, and his teaching was also indirectly known through the translation of Aetius’ *Placita philosophorum*, which ultimately traces back to Theophrastus’ collection of the Φυσικῶν δόξαι. Also the Aristotelianism before Alexander of Aphrodisias had some sort of circulation in Syriac and Arabic,

through Nicolaus Damascenus. The philosophy of the Imperial age was widely known, both in Syriac and Arabic: the doxographical traditions, some Plutarch of Chaeronaea (in Syriac), Galen, Nicomachus of Gerasa, and Alexander of Aphrodisias – the latter significantly moulding the reception of Aristotle’s own works – feature in all the stages of the assimilation of Greek learning. A pivotal role was played by Neoplatonism, both in setting the agenda of the Arabic–Islamic philosophy and in shaping the main frame of *falsafa* as a systematic knowledge, through the reception of the late Ancient scholastic pattern. Plotinus’ and Proclus’ doctrines gained wide currency under Aristotle’s name (see Rosenthal 1974); Porphyry, Iamblichus, Themistius, Philoponus, Simplicius, and Olympiodorus circulated among the learned interested in the Greek philosophical heritage.

## Cross-References

- ▶ [Abū Bishr Mattā ibn Yūnus](#)
- ▶ [Abū Sulaymān al-Sijistānī al-Mantiqī](#)
- ▶ [Alchemy in the Arab World](#)
- ▶ [Alexander of Aphrodisias and Arabic Aristotelianism](#)
- ▶ [Alexandrian Tradition into Arabic: Medicine](#)
- ▶ [Alexandrian Tradition into Arabic: Philosophy](#)
- ▶ [al-‘Āmirī, Abū l-Ḥasan](#)
- ▶ [Arabic Texts: Philosophy, Latin Translations of](#)
- ▶ [Aristotle, Arabic](#)
- ▶ [Doxographies, Graeco-Arabic](#)
- ▶ [Ethics](#)
- ▶ [al-Fārābī, Abū Naṣr](#)
- ▶ [Galen, Arabic](#)
- ▶ [Ibn Rushd, Muḥammad ibn Aḥmad al-Ḥafīd \(Averroes\)](#)
- ▶ [Ibn al-Samḥ](#)
- ▶ [Ibn Sīnā, Abū ‘Alī \(Avicenna\)](#)
- ▶ [Ibn Suwār \(Ibn al-Khammār\)](#)
- ▶ [Ikhwān al-Ṣafā’, Encyclopedia of](#)
- ▶ [Kalām](#)
- ▶ [al-Kindī, Abū Yūsuf Ya‘qūb ibn Ishāq](#)
- ▶ [Logic in the Arabic and Islamic World](#)
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- ▶ [Philosophy, Arabic](#)
- ▶ [Plato, Arabic](#)
- ▶ [Plotinus, Arabic](#)
- ▶ [Political Philosophy, Arabic](#)
- ▶ [Porphyry, Arabic](#)
- ▶ [Presocratics in the Arab World](#)
- ▶ [Proclus, Arabic](#)
- ▶ [Qusṭa ibn Lūqā](#)
- ▶ [al-Tawḥīdī, Abū Ḥayyān](#)
- ▶ [Thābit ibn Qurra](#)
- ▶ [Themistius, Arabic](#)
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- ▶ [Translations from Greek into Syriac](#)

## Appendix: The *Kitāb al-Fihrist*

The first of a series of Arab bio-bibliographies that reach out to the seventeenth century, the *Kitāb al-Fihrist* is an outstanding testimony of the intellectual life in tenth century Baghdad. Its author, Abū l-Faraj Muḥammad ibn Iṣḥāq al-Warraḡ al-Baġdādī ibn al-Nadīm al-Mawṣilī (d. 990), known as Ibn al-Nadīm (“son of the boon companion”) and boon companion himself, was in touch with scholars in the capital and abroad: among them, the belletrist al-Marzubānī (d. 994), Abū Sulaymān al-Sijistānī, Yaḥyā ibn ‘Adī, and Ibn Suwār. Starting from the catalog of his father’s bookshop (see Endress 1987:451 for al-Tawḥīdī’s account of the bookshop quarter in Baghdad), Ibn al-Nadīm restlessly searched for information about books and learned men both of the past and of his own time, visiting Bassora, Kufa, Mosul and possibly Aleppo, so that his *Catalogue* became “an encyclopaedia of medieval Islamic culture” (Dodge 1970:xix). Of Shī‘ite allegiance (see Stewart 2009), Ibn al-Nadīm organized his work according to a systematic account of the sciences, including language and the Holy Scriptures (the Torah, the Gospel, other holy books, and the Qur‘ān: chapter I); grammar (the schools of Bassora and Kufa: chapter II); history, genealogy, government literature, court literature (chapter III); poetry (pre-Islam and Umayyad

poetry; poetry of the ‘Abbāsīd age: chapter IV); religious sects (Mu‘tazilites, Shī‘ites, and other: chapter V); Law (Sunni schools of law, legal authorities of the Shī‘a: chapter VI); *falsafa* (Greek philosophers, Arab philosophers, mathematics and astronomy, medicine: chapter VII); stories and fables (chapter VIII); non-Islamic sects and religions (the Ṣābians, Manicheism, other sects, religions and further information on India and China: chapter IX). An autograph of this monumental work was housed in the Caliph’s library at Baghdad: the famous geographer and biographer Yāqūt (d. 1229) claims he made use of the *K. al-Fihrist* in the handwriting of Ibn al-Nadīm himself, shortly before the Mongol sacking of Baghdad (1258), that put an end to the ‘Abbāsīd Caliphate. In the sacking, the library was destroyed, and the autograph of the *K. al-Fihrist* with it. Luckily, other copies survived elsewhere. Other biobibliographical surveys, working on the basis of the *K. al-Fihrist* throughout the centuries, have added further materials to it: the *History of the Learned Men* (*Ta‘rikh al-ḥukamā’*) by Ibn al-Qifī (d. 1248), the *Sources of Information on the Classes of Physicians* (*‘Uyūn al-anbā’ fī ṭabaqāt al-aṭibbā’*) by Ibn Abī Uṣaybi‘a (d. 1270), and the *Clarification of the Doubts About the Names of Books and Subdivisions* (*Kashf al-Zunūn ‘an asāmī l-kutub wa-l-funūn*) by Ḥajjī Khalīfa (Katib Celebi, d. 1658), that in its turn served as a basis for d’Herbélot’s *Bibliothèque orientale* (1697). Edited in 1881 on the basis of the defective MSS housed in Paris, Istanbul, Vienna and Leiden by Gustav Flügel, and in 1971 by Rīḍa Tajaddud on the basis of other, more complete MSS (Dublin and Istanbul), the *K. al-Fihrist* has been translated into English by Bayard Dodge in 1970.

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## Translations from Greek into Syriac

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### Abstract

As for the philosophical and scientific texts are concerned, we can observe three periods of the translation activity from Greek into Syriac: the first (second–fifth century) is characterized by the interest in popular philosophy of ethical content and gnomic form; in the second, (sixth century) the translations focus on the Aristotelian logic and physics; the third one (seventh–ninth century) is still focused on Aristotle but is marked by a change in the translation style, from a more periphrastic to a

more literal one. Short information about the key figures (Sergius of Resh‘aynā, Athanasius of Baladh, James of Edessa, George of the Arabs, and Ḥunayn b. Ishāq) is given.

As it is impossible to outline a complete overview of the Syriac translation activity throughout the centuries, we will limit ourselves to the philosophical texts and to some scientific literature, excluding the biblical, patristic, or narrative texts.

### First Period: The So-Called Popular Philosophy

Greek philosophy had its first impact on Syriac culture already by the second century, in the form of little texts, often of gnomic form and ethical content, and often transmitted in little collections (see Bettiolo 2003; Brock 2003). It is commonly believed that they were composed by and for a cultivated and not necessarily Christian milieu, a urban – mainly Edessene – audience located in Mesopotamia between the second and the fifth century, although it is impossible to reach a more detailed description of the circumstances of these earlier translations. To this period belong the translations of some Pythagorean sayings (Levi della Vida 1910; Possekel 1998), of collections of sentences by the Pseudo-Menander (Bettiolo 2003) and by a Pseudo-Plato, of a “Socratic” dialogue, of two of Plutarch’s *moralia*, and of one of Isocrates’ orations. Works by Lucian of Samosata and by the fourth century rhetor Themistius are also preserved (all the texts above edited in De Lagarde 1858; Sachau 1870).

### Second Period

Philosophy made its real entrance in the Syriac-speaking cultivated world only at the beginning of the sixth century, with the first translations of Aristotle’s logical and physical works (overview in Brock 1993) along with commentaries on them. Plato was never translated into Syriac. The *Categories* were translated (Gottheil 1892–1893; see

the study of all the extant Syriac versions by Georr 1948), presumably in the first half of the century, by an anonymous translator, and have been commented at length by Sergius of Resh‘aynā (d. 536), who nevertheless did not know the translation just mentioned. Porphyry’s *Isagoge* as well was translated by an anonymous author in the first half of the sixth century (Freimann 1897; Brock 1988). The same Sergius wrote a short introduction to the whole logical œuvre of Aristotle (partial translation in Hugonnard-Roche 2004). He also translated two other works of the Aristotelian tradition: the pseudo-Aristotelian treatise *De mundo* (De Lagarde 1858; Ryssel 1880–1881), and perhaps Alexander of Aphrodisias’ *On the Principles of the Universe*. Sergius is most of all famous for his translation into Syriac of the pseudo-Dionysian *Corpus*, and for having introduced Galen into Syriac: the ninth-century doctor and translator Ḥunayn b. Ishāq informs us that he had translated some 30 works of Galen’s: four fragments, three of which attributed to him by Sachau (1870), have come down to us: from the *Ars medica*, from the *De alimentorum facultatibus*, and from the *De simplicium medicamentorum temperamentis et facultatibus*. A short treatise on the influence of the moon, based on the *De diebus decretoriis* was edited by Merx (1885).

Two other logical texts from the *Organon* are preserved in anonymous translations: the *De interpretatione* (for the text see Hoffmann 1869) and the *Prior Analytics* until I, 7: for these works, scholars could not give a precise date, so that at present it is not possible to determine their context. We also have a version of Theophrastus’ *Meteorology* (Daiber 1992; Wagner and Steinmetz 1964).

### Third Period

Between the seventh and the eighth century, after the Muslim conquest, the West Syrian monastic cenacle of Qenneshre, on the western bank of the Euphrates, produced a great amount of philosophical and scientific work, both in the form of



translations and commentaries. It is in these works that we can clearly detect the main change of the Syriac translation technique analyzed by Brock (1979, 1983, 2004): from a periphrastic style to a more literal one, with a much more abundant presence of Greek borrowings in the new translations (for Greek loanwords in Syriac, see Brock 1975, 1996; Schall 1960).

The initiator of Qenneshre's flourishing period was Severus Sebokht (d. 666/7). He is well-known for a wide scientific production, but not for translations. His main disciples and successors were Athanasius of Baladh (d. 687), James of Edessa (d. 708), and George of the Arabs (d. 724). Athanasius revised in 645 the first anonymous translation of the *Isagoge*, edited by Freimann (1897); other translations by him of Aristotelian texts are lost, but we know that he translated the *Prior* and the *Posterior Analytics*, the *Topics* and the *Sophistici elenchi*: that is to say that he is the only Syriac scholar of the first millennium who, as far as we know, translated the entire *Organon* which, as an heritage of the Alexandrian commentary tradition, was neither usually translated nor commented upon beyond the *Prior Analytics*. James of Edessa, for example, did not go beyond the *An.pr.*; he revised the sixth-century anonymous translation of the *Categories* (Schüler 1897), translated the *De interpretatione* (even if this translation is attributed to the sixth century Syriac philosopher Probus in the manuscript which transmits it), and the *Prior Analytics*. George of the Arabs translated the same three works in a more literal way (Furlani 1925). In the same monastery a certain Phokas substantially revised Sergius' version of the Dionysian *Corpus*, which he translated together with John of Scythopolis' *scholia* (Van Esbroeck 1997). After George, almost nothing has survived of the Syriac translations. The most important translator, both into Syriac and Arabic, under the 'Abbāsids is H-unayn b. Iṣḥāq (ninth century), but it is difficult to single out any fragments of his Syriac translations. We know about them from a letter that he wrote in 856, where he displays the list of his Syriac translations of Galen's works. He retranslated many of Galen's works into Syriac,

because of his severe judgment on many of Sergius' translations (Brock 2004). We know that he also produced new versions of the *Categories* and the *De interpretatione*, but they are no longer extant.

To the third era of the Syriac translations probably belongs also the version of Nemesius of Emesa's *De natura hominis*, which is known only from fragments quoted by eighth and ninth century authors, and for linguistic reasons should not be dated before the seventh century.

## Cross-References

- ▶ [Sergius of Resh'aynā](#)
- ▶ [Translations from Greek into Arabic](#)

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## Trinitarian Logic

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### Abstract

Two Trinitarian fallacies were discussed or at least mentioned by practically all theologians and logicians from John Duns Scotus to the sixteenth century. One of these was an expository syllogism: This God is the Father; this God is the Son; therefore, the Father is the Son. This was regarded as a fallacy because the premises were *prima facie* true and the conclusion false. There was another similar example in which the corresponding premises were universal propositions arranged in accordance with the first mood of the first figure, the so-called Barbara. The reason for the extreme popularity of these two examples was that they were associated with two basic principles of syllogistic logic. Some theologians argued that Trinitarian problems showed that a special *logica fidei* was needed to improve the traditional logic, which was not universally valid. The more influential approach was the view that these and some analogous examples of Platonic ideas and their instantiations demonstrated how the fine structure of syllogistic premises should be explicated in order to avoid logical difficulties. It was thought that when this was done, the logical problems in arguments involving Trinitarian premises disappeared. Medieval logicians found an analysis which became very influential; the theological background of this innovation explains why logicians continued to quote the above fallacies in discussing the principles of logic. The basis of the new analysis was Abelard's suggestion that the copula of an affirmative proposition indicates that the terms apply to the same logical subject – this is the kernel of the identity theory of

predication, the details of which were particularly developed in discussing the kinds of sameness relevant in explaining how Trinitarian persons, being distinct from each other, are the same as one and the same God.

In dealing with the question of how predication should be understood in logic, Peter Abelard regarded the so-called identity theory as one possibility, the copula of a sentence like “An A is B” indicating that the terms “A” and “B” are said of the same subject. He applied this non-Aristotelian idea to the analysis of Trinitarian problem cases. Two of these were dealt with by practically all medieval and early modern logicians. The first was the so-called expository syllogism:

- (A) The divine essence is the Father  
The divine essence is the Son;  
therefore, the Son is the Father.

This was regarded as a fallacy because the premises were seemingly true and the conclusion false. There was another similar example in which the corresponding premises were universal propositions arranged in accordance with the first mood of the first figure syllogism:

- (B) Every divine essence is the Father  
Every Son is the divine essence;  
therefore, every Son is the Father.

In his discussion of an example similar to (A), Abelard states that the standard logical reading of “The divine essence is the Father” is that that which is the divine essence is the Father. This extensional sameness Abelard calls *idem quod* sameness or the sameness of being (*identitas essentiae*). The conclusion is not logically problematic when it is understood in this way; the same is both the Father and the Son. It would be problematic only when read in the sense of intensional sameness which Abelard calls *idem qui* sameness or sameness of property (*identitas proprietatis*), the Father and the Son being simply the same, without any difference.

Abelard’s nontheological examples of extensional singular sameness show similarities with

those employed in contemporary discussions of the question of material constitution. In Abelard’s terminology, when *a* and *b* are essentially identical, they are numerically the same particular being. Things can be the same in this way without exhibiting all the same properties or attributes. Referring to a waxen image, Abelard says that the lump of wax and the waxen image are essentially the same, even though they have different properties; for example, the image is made from wax but the lump of wax is not. Abelard did not develop any metaphysics of the Trinity on the basis of this and similar examples, which were meant to demonstrate the distinction between various notions of identity. Regarding God as metaphysically simple, without any complexities associated with the possession of parts, forms, or properties, Abelard preferred to speak about Trinitarian persons as different on the basis of what was proper to them, believing that he had found a powerful logical analysis of Trinitarian propositions which showed that, while metaphysically problematic, they did not give rise to any obvious logical inconsistency. The idea of numerical or essential sameness of things with different properties was the influential part of Abelard’s theory and came to be employed in various ways in medieval theology.

The reason for the extreme popularity of the two Trinitarian fallacies mentioned above was that they were associated with two basic principles of syllogistic logic. The validity of the first figure syllogistic moods was explained by the *dici de omni et nullo* in the thirteenth-century logic. These immediately evident principles expressed the transitivity of inclusion in first figure moods and were seemingly denied in (B). The expository syllogism as it was used and formulated by Ockham and Buridan was a syllogistic mood with singular premises. While some authors regarded the expository syllogism as another immediately evident principle, there were others who wanted to reduce it to the *dici de omni et nullo*. (A), an alleged violation of a valid expository syllogism, became part of this controversy.

Some fourteenth-century theologians argued that (A) and (B) show that a special *logica fidei* is needed to improve the traditional logic, which is not universally valid. The more influential approach was that these examples suggested how the fine structure of syllogistic premises should be explicated in order to make logic universally valid. It was argued that the logical problems with Trinitarian and some analogous Christological premises largely disappeared when this was done.

William Ockham argued that since the middle term of an expository syllogism could not be one and three, the expository syllogism should not be applied to Trinitarian examples with a middle term that signified the essence. Ockham's position was that theological doctrines associated with the Trinity or the Hypostatic Union involved concepts, the meaning of which was not sufficiently clear to humans who, for this reason, should not apply logic to these doctrines, except in certain unproblematic cases. This did not restrict the universal validity of logic in his view.

While Ockham's position found some followers, Adam Wodeham's approach became more influential. He argued that singular propositions should be universalized in logic and consequently reduced the expository syllogism to the *dici de omni et nullo*. As for (B), he stated that the universal premise should be read as "Anything which is A is B." "Every A is B" is ambiguous because it may be taken to mean that A as a single common nature is numerically the same as those which are B. This is not a "sufficiently universal" syllogistic proposition that meets the requirements of the *dici de omni et nullo*, as the phrase "which is A" explains. "Every essence is the Father" is true on the former reading but false on the latter, since the persons, while numerically the same as the essence, are numerically distinct from each other. Singular theological propositions should be universalized in this way in expository syllogisms. This solved most of the logical problems, since universalized doctrinal formulations were often false because of the intransitivity of the numerical identity in the Trinity of three incommunicable supposita (persons) each of these numerically the same as the communicable essence. Ockham mentioned the same analysis

of universal premises, but as distinct from Wodeham, he did not reduce expository syllogism to the *dici de omni et nullo*.

Wodeham's analysis was based on the identity theory of predication, which became usual among fourteenth-century logicians. In explicating the basic logical form of a logical premise, Wodeham paid attention to the additional problem that among things of which A is correctly said there may be things which the term A supposits for as well as things which are numerically same as these, although A does not supposit for them; therefore "which is A" should be understood as "which is the same as that which is A" and similarly with the predicate term. In order to avoid the impression that these are merely ad hoc theological considerations, Wodeham argues that similar ideas could be applied to the Platonic ontology of real common entities.

Some elements of this analysis of (A) and (B) were often mentioned in late medieval and early modern logical treatises as examples of how singular and universal propositions should be explicated in logic. These matters were also discussed by Leibniz. The new formulations were often associated with the identity theory of predication which Paul of Venice later referred to as *praedicatio identica*, but this expression had other meanings as well, for example, in John Duns Scotus who applied it to sameness without formal identity in the Trinity.

## Cross-References

- ▶ [Adam Wodeham](#)
- ▶ [John Duns Scotus](#)
- ▶ [Peter Abelard](#)
- ▶ [Syllogism, Theories of](#)
- ▶ [Trinity](#)

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## Trinity

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### Abstract

The teaching that there are three persons in God is a fundamental Christian doctrine. It is taught in the Scriptures, especially, but not exclusively, in John's Gospel, where we learn

that the Word who is God became flesh and where Christ, the Word-made-flesh, speaks of sending "to you from the Father the Spirit of truth who comes from the Father." Early Church councils established the basic doctrine that the three persons of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit are one substance. Later theologians, especially Sts. Augustine and Thomas Aquinas, attempted to find and explore analogies that might bring greater understanding to this central article of the Christian Creed.

The term "Trinity" is the theological expression for one of the chief mysteries of the Christian faith. It refers to the three persons that are united in the one God. "Trinity" could be considered a summary expression for "three-in-one." The thirteenth-century theologian Thomas Aquinas spoke of some truths of the Christian faith as natural and some as supernatural. The former are truths that can be discovered by human reason and in fact have been discovered by some philosophers who have examined reality more deeply. Such thinkers have proved the existence of God and argued that God is one, and attempted to demonstrate other necessary attributes that could be predicated rightly of God. Supernatural truths are beliefs that are not discoverable by human efforts but are only known through God's biblical revelation. Examples of supernatural truths are the Incarnation (that God became man, uniting Himself to a human nature in the person of Jesus Christ) and the Trinity (that God, though one God, is three persons – Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.).

The "three-in-one" character of God is taught in the Christian scriptures and is affirmed by the earliest Apostolic Fathers. However, the main focus of authors of the early Apostolic age, such as Clement of Rome and Ignatius of Antioch, was on Christ himself, not on wrestling with problems of how Christ as the Son of God related to his heavenly Father. Such questions arose with the next generation of the Fathers, the Apologists, who had to confront the many unsatisfactory attempts at reconciling the New Testament revelation of Christ as the Son of God and the inherited

view that God is one. One faulty type of explanation is found in the modalism of Sabellius and Praxeas. For Sabellius, God is one, but he manifests himself in different ways in the story of man's redemption and salvation. For Praxeas, there is one God who exists in such a way that when Christ suffered it was the Father, who alone is God, that suffered. Another unsuccessful effort to reconcile the divinity of Christ with the oneness of God is found in subordinationist explanation that portrayed God the Father as a monarch at the expense of Christ's true divinity. The Word "through whom all things were made" and the Word who "was made flesh," according to John's Gospel, is not for subordinationists an eternal Word, but is tied to the temporal and contingent character of creation and the Incarnation.

The challenge to Patristic Apologists was to find more faithful ways of reconciling the unicity of God and the divinity of Christ. In the Latin world, Tertullian, in chapter II of his treatise *Against Praxeas*, attacked him for "thinking that one cannot believe in One Only God in any other way than by saying that the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit are the very selfsame Person." Tertullian puts his own position in positive terms by appealing to the rule of faith: "All are of One by unity of substance; while the mystery of the dispensation is still guarded, which distributes the Unity into a Trinity, placing in their order the three persons: the Father, the Son, and Holy Spirit." With Tertullian we find the vocabulary of *Trinity*, *substance*, and *person*, key terms in later doctrinal discussions of the triune God. However, the precise meaning of a term like "substance" is lacking in Tertullian's works and would need later clarification. In the Greek world, St. Justin, in his *Dialogue with Trypho*, not only declared that Christ was the Son of God in the sense of the eternal Son of God; but also tried to explain how this was the case. In this effort he was followed by Athenagoras and also by Theophilus, who, in his *Letter to Autolycus* (II, 22) offered the following analogy: "For before anything came into being He had Him" (i.e., the *Logos*) as counselor, being His own mind and thought.

Other Fathers searched for greater understanding of the inner relationship of the Father and the Son by pursuing clues in the words of Christ himself. Christ

had spoken of coming forth or proceeding from the Father (John 8:42). He also spoke of sending "to you from the Father, the Spirit of truth who comes from the Father" (John 15:24). In efforts to grasp the meaning of these expressions of "coming forth" and "coming from" later Greek and Latin Fathers examined how they might better understand a divine coming forth or procession. When we hear the words "father" and "son" we might well imagine that in some way a son comes from or proceeds from his father. Still, a human father and his son are distinct substances. How can we understand that the divine Son proceeds from the Father and yet is the same substance as the Father? Origen, in his *On the Principles* (I, 2, 4), was well aware of the limits of our analogies concerning God's inner nature. Still he attempted to portray in some small way the nature of the generation of the Son:

► For we must of necessity hold that there is something exceptional and worthy of God which does not admit of any comparison at all, not merely in things, but which cannot even be conceived by thought or discovered by perception, so that a human mind should be able to apprehend how the unbegotten God is made the Father of the only-begotten Son: because His generation is as eternal and everlasting as the brilliancy which is produced from the sun. For it is not by receiving the breath of life that He is made a Son, by any outward act, but by His own nature.

Elsewhere, Origen speaks of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit as three *hypostases* or "persons" and affirms that they are *homoousios* or "of the same substance." Despite these contributions of Origen, there were also ambiguities in other parts of his writings. He referred to the Father as God (*ho theos*) and the Son as a second God (*deuteros theos*). He also spoke of the Son as God insofar as He contemplates the Father, but that he is no longer God when he ceases to gaze at the Father. Some of these observations fed the subordinationist theses of Arius, who declared that there was a time when the *Logos* did not exist, thus making Him a demi-god between the Father and the created world. Despite the ambiguities of

Origen's position, the First Nicean Council borrowed Origen's term *homoousios*, that is "of the same substance," to underscore the truly divine nature of the Son. The conciliar Creed thus declares that the Son "is begotten, not made, one in being with the Father."

Debate did not end at this point, especially over *homoousios*: some asked if "of the same substance" or "one in being" referred to a numerical sameness or oneness or a generic similarity. St. Athanasius fought the subordinationists who portrayed the Holy Spirit as holding a rank inferior to the Father and the Son. Basing themselves on the assumption that the mission of the Holy Spirit in the economy of salvation is to sanctify, the post-Nicean subordinationists argued that the Spirit was only a creature bringing salvation to men. Athanasius pushed further, declaring that the Spirit's role in salvation was to bring both sanctification and deification to men, and that He could not bring deification unless He were God. Still, Athanasius was not clear on the distinction between *ousia* (substance) and *hypostasis* (person). It was the Cappadocian Fathers, Sts. Basil, Gregory of Nyssa, and Gregory of Nazianzen, who distinguished clearly the unique divine *ousia* or substance and the three *hypostases* or persons, by insisting on the real distinction between the three persons. Thereafter, the Nicean declaration concerning *homoousios* ("of the same substance") gained greater currency, and at the second ecumenical council, held at Constantinople in 381, the application of the basic dogma concerning the Father and the Son was extended to the Holy Spirit.

The "three-in-one" formulation of these councils established the basic doctrine of the Christian Church: the three persons of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are one substance. Beyond their role in establishing this basic doctrine, the Cappadocian Fathers also developed a theology for defending and bringing greater understanding of its truth. St. Basil attempted to provide an explanation for the distinction of persons by presenting actions by which each person was God: "paternity," "filiation," and "sanctification." Gregory of Nazianzen described the three persons by using the verbal forms: "being unbegotten," "being begotten," and "proceeding." St. Augustine, following Sts.

Hilary and Ambrose in the Latin world, likewise developed a rich theology of the Trinity, especially in his work entitled *The Trinity*. The first part of this book provides the Scriptural bases for the doctrine of the Trinity. The second part presents the official Christian teaching and refutes the heresies that oppose this teaching. After establishing these points, Augustine then attempts to find analogies to foster our understanding of this teaching, mainly concentrating on the words of Genesis 1:26, which portrays man as created in the image of God. If man is an image of God, it must be in his soul that he can be an image of such a spiritual being. For Augustine, this image is found in man's memory, intelligence, and will, and as he examines them, he arrives at the knowledge of his unique soul that through memory remembers, through intelligence knows and through will loves. Augustine thereby comes to a rich knowledge of his multifaceted self; but at a still deeper level he also comes to realize that these acts tell us something of the source and foundation of his soul and its three activities: the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit of whom he is but an image.

St. Thomas Aquinas, in the thirteenth century, attempted to deepen and unite many of Augustine's insights that were based on man's interior life into a more ontological synthesis. He brought out the difference between divine processions and human processions by trying to explain the difference between a transient procession (where a distinct substance comes forth) and an immanent procession (where a different Person, the Son, comes forth, who is yet identical in substance with the Father). In the human world, when we think of a father as a father and the son as a son, we know that we are thinking of them not just as men (something absolute in themselves), but we are also thinking of them as related to one another. Technically speaking, we would say that "father" and "son" express relations. Yet, normally, such relations exist between things that are in themselves absolute distinct substances. The challenge to Christian theologians like Aquinas, in their efforts to offer some limited understanding of how the Father as Father, the Son as Son, and the Holy Spirit as proceeding from the Father



and the Son or from the Father through the Son are all the one God, is to explain how relations in the triune God are not accidental relations between distinct substances but subsistent relations, that is, relations of such a character that it is by being the Father that the Father is God and by being the Son that the Son is the same God, and it is in being the Holy Spirit that the Holy Spirit is God. These theological approaches of Augustine and Aquinas, like those of Basil and Gregory of Nazianzen, were the chief analogical routes followed by medieval theologians to bring some understanding to the teaching of the Church that God is “three-in-one.”

## Cross-References

- ▶ [Augustine](#)
- ▶ [Church Fathers](#)
- ▶ [Thomas Aquinas](#)

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## Truth, Theories of

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### Abstract

This entry surveys five influential medieval theories of truth, paying particular attention to the bearers of truth within each theory as well as to their emphasis, whether metaphysical or semantic. (1) Anselm's notion of truth is characterized by the concept of rectitude: something is true if it is/does what it ought to be/do, that is, if it conforms to God's design for it (2) Abelard's theory of truth revolves around the notion of the *dicta* of propositions, i.e., what is said by propositions. *Dicta* are the actual truth-bearers for Abelard. (3) Thomas Aquinas defends an approach to truth based on the notion of adequation of intellect and object. The fit can occur in both directions: an object can conform to the concept of it in its creator's intellect, and a concept can conform to the object insofar as it represents it accurately in the knower's intellect. (4) Theories of truth based on the concept of supposition provide recursive definitions of the truth of propositions based on the supposition of their terms, and reject any metaphysical import concerning the notion of truth. (5) Theories of truth emerging from fourteenth century treatises on *insolubilia* start out with a fundamentally Aristotelian definition of a true proposition as a proposition signifying as things are, which is then modified so as to introduce quantification over the signification of a proposition.

The notion of truth was of crucial importance for medieval philosophers, as could be expected given their keen interest in logic and semantics, on the one hand, and in metaphysics and philosophical theology on the other. (Naturally, there is a strong medieval tradition dealing with a biblical

notion of truth. Here, however, we will focus on philosophically inclined theories of truth, even though the line between theology and philosophy is a very thin one in the medieval context.) But to attain an accurate understanding of medieval theories of truth, it is important to realize that the class of such theories is more heterogeneous than the class formed by modern theories of truth. For example, we philosophers of the early twenty-first century (in particular those working within the analytic tradition) are accustomed to viewing truth essentially as an attribute of complex linguistic entities. Now, when examining medieval theories of truth, the modern philosopher may be surprised by the wide variety of entities that can receive the attribute “true” – truth-bearers for short: propositions (in the Latin sense of *propositio*, i.e., roughly what is now known as a declarative sentence, a statement, but which can be spoken, written, or mental), as to be expected, but also objects, mental judgments, actions, and even God.

A general characteristic of these theories (in fact, of medieval logical theories in general) is the influential position occupied by the Aristotelian corpus, in particular discussions from the *Categories* and *De interpretatione* (in first instance) and the *Metaphysics* (which only became widely read halfway the thirteenth century, see Dod 1982). Also influential was the neoplatonic-Augustinian conception of truth which equated truth to being: “The true is that which is” (Augustine, *Soliloquia* II, 5, quoted in Aertsen 1992:160). These two radically different sources of inspiration may explain the heterogeneity of medieval theories of truth, which will be illustrated here by the analysis of five representative medieval approaches to truth.

To help us understand the different theories in their diversity, a few distinctions may come in handy. First, among the different medieval theories, one encounters two basic kinds of entities to which truth is attributed – two kinds of truth-bearers: linguistic and mental entities, and objects in extra-mental reality. Indeed, the attribution of truth to objects is one of the distinctive features of some medieval theories of truth (known as objectual (Künne 2003:3.1.2) or ontological

(Wippel 1989:295) truth in the literature). But all medieval theories recognize spoken, written, and mental propositions and judgments as bearers of truth as well (known as propositional (Künne 2003:3.1.2) or logical (Wippel 1989:295) truth in the literature).

Secondly, let us distinguish between metaphysical and semantic approaches to truth, a distinction pertaining to *emphasis*. The metaphysical approach is characterized by the focus upon the properties and states of things that make truth-bearers true. By contrast, the semantic approach is characterized by minimal or no focus on what must obtain in reality for an entity to be deemed true; rather, semantic theories of truth concentrate on properties of the linguistic entity in question, in particular its signification or the supposition of its terms, in order to determine its truth-value. In other words, what makes a proposition true within the semantic approach are primarily properties of the proposition itself, and not the state of things in reality.

Notice that one should not conflate the metaphysical approach with correspondence theories of truth, which are characterized by the idea that truth is a relational property involving a relation (often of likeness) of a given entity to some portion of reality. Indeed, there are semantic theories of truth that are also fundamentally based on correspondence. To illustrate the difference between metaphysical and semantic approaches, consider two correspondentist definitions of the truth of propositions:

1. A proposition is true iff things are as it signifies them to be.
2. A proposition is true iff it signifies things to be as they are.

In (1), the truth of a proposition depends on properties of things, and its signification is, as it were, taken for granted (it is not under scrutiny); therefore, (1) characterizes a metaphysical approach to truth. By contrast, in (2) the truth of a proposition depends on a feature of the proposition itself, its signification, and the state of things is in turn taken for granted; (2) is thus a semantic definition of truth.

But, to be sure, not all medieval theories of truth are based on correspondence; those articulated on the basis of the notion of supposition, for example, are not. In the latter case, truth is not a relational property but rather a monadic property of truth-bearers.

Notice also that, with respect to the first distinction, a semantic theory of truth will only have linguistic entities as its truth-bearers. A metaphysical theory of truth may recognize nonlinguistic as well as linguistic entities as its truth-bearers; but a theory of truth whose truth-bearers are exclusively propositions, but which focuses on what must obtain in reality for propositions to be true and not on their semantic properties is also, according to this distinction, a metaphysical theory of truth (in what follows, I do not treat such theories, but one could find examples thereof among fourteenth-century realists such as Walter Burley and John Wycliff; see Cesalli 2007). It is not the nature of truth-bearers that makes a theory semantic or metaphysical, but rather the nature of their causes of truth, i.e., whether semantic or metaphysical facts.

## Anselm of Canterbury

Anselm's theory of truth, presented chiefly in his *De veritate*, illustrates remarkably well the heterogeneity of medieval theories of truth. Anselm analyzes the notion of truth under several different facets, as applying to different kinds of entities; but ultimately, only God is the real Truth for Anselm, and all other truths emanate from Him. As such, his theory is representative of the neoplatonic-Augustinian approach, which emphasizes the truth existing in things but ultimately emanating from God (see Hopkins 2003:148) for the influence of Augustine over Anselm's notion of truth).

The core of his conception of truth is the notion of rectitude (see Visser and Williams 2004); something is true if it does what it ought to do, that is, if it conforms to God's design for it. As such, it can apply to literally all of God's creation: a friend is a true friend if she does what

a friend is expected to do (to be supportive, loyal, etc.); an action is a true action if it fulfils its purpose; and so forth. Anselm's notion can be schematically formulated as follows: an entity A is true iff it corresponds to God's concept of A. Notice that truth is a relational property for Anselm, but the second *relatum* is not a portion of reality as in standard correspondence theories of truth; rather, it is a divine concept, while the first *relatum* (the truth-bearer) is any object of God's creation, linguistic as well as non-linguistic entities.

In *De veritate*, which is written in the form of a dialogue between Teacher and Student, Anselm starts by examining the truth of propositions, as this is (he recognizes) the most commonsensical use of the notion of truth (chap. 2). He presents what we could call a correspondence notion of truth for propositions: they are true if they state that what-is is and that what-is-not is not (a terminology borrowed from Visser and Williams 2004); but for Anselm this position is not a primary thesis. It is derived from the notion of truth as rectitude applied to a fundamental aspect of propositions: their purpose is to state that what-is is and that what-is-not is not, and therefore if they fulfill this purpose (if they do their job), then they are true. The same holds with respect to thoughts: "for the power of thinking that something is or is not was given to us in order that we might think that what-is is and what-is-not is not." (*De ver.* 3). Similarly, truth with respect to will (*De ver.* 4) and actions (*De ver.* 5) is defined as rectitude, as willing and doing what one ought to.

As for the truth in the being of things (*De ver.* 7), Anselm's conception of truth is clearly teleological. Every entity in God's creation has a purpose according to His design, and if it fulfills this purpose, then it is true. But given God's omnipotence, all things are (presumably) as He intends them to be, and thus "whatever is, is right" (Visser and Williams 2004:211). Here it becomes patent that, according to Anselm (following Augustine), truth equals to being.

And thus, just as much as God is the cause of all being, all truth comes from God and He is the supreme Truth. However, rectitude does

not apply to Him in the same way as it applies to His creation, since He “owes nothing to anything.” In other words (and this is something of a paradox, which Anselm deals with in *De ver.* 13), truth properly speaking pertains only to God, even though truth in God does not correspond to rectitude, as it does in His creation.

One of the upshots of Anselm’s conception of truth is that he is able to account, in a unified way, for uses of the predicate “true” that are often neglected by more restrictive theories of truth, such as in “true friend,” “true world,” etc. This also reveals the essentially metaphysical character of Anselm’s theory: what makes something true are properties and states of things (the very things which are said to be true, insofar as they conform to God’s design for them), and not semantic properties of linguistic entities (even when propositions are truth-bearers).

## Peter Abelard

Contrasting with Anselm’s patently metaphysical approach to truth, Abelard’s is resolutely semantic: he focuses on a semantic property of propositions, namely the content they express. (Abelard will of course often use the term “truth” in his theological writings as well, but we will not deal with this material here.) His approach is representative of approaches to truth inspired by the *logica vetus* material (on the *Logica vetus* vs. *Logica modernorum* distinction, see entry on Logic in this volume); he develops it in different parts of his *Logica “ingredientibus,”* in particular in the parts corresponding to his commentaries on Aristotle’s *De interpretatione* and on Boethius’ *De topicis differentiis* (Abelard’s considerations on truth are in fact scattered throughout his writings and thus not systematically presented). Abelard’s discussions of the concept of truth are embedded in his general analysis of the semantics of propositions. Indeed, one of the most debated but still mysterious aspects of Abelard’s semantics, the famous *dicta* (the contents of propositions), is at the heart of the issue of truth.

Abelard’s very criterion of what is to count as a proposition (following Boethius and Aristotle) is

based on the concept(s) of truth (and falsity): a proposition is what signifies the true or the false (*significare verum vel falsum*) (*LI De in.* 3.01.100). Notice that, according to this definition, a proposition is not true or false, but it *signifies* the true or the false. This implies that, for Abelard, propositions are not the primary truth-bearers, but rather that they signify something which in turn is a truth-bearer properly speaking. What would that be? Abelard states that truth and falsity can be understood in three ways: as applying to statements (propositions); as applying to the understanding provoked by a statement; and as applying to what is said to be the case by a statement, its *dictum* (*LI Top.* 225, 22–29). He then goes on to argue that understandings cannot be truth-bearers properly speaking because incomplete expressions may have the same understandings as complete statements (for example, “A man runs” and “A running man” share the same understanding), but incomplete expressions cannot signify the true or the false, since they are not propositions (see Jacobi et al. 1996:32).

That this is so also transpires from Abelard’s analysis of what differentiates propositions from other (complete) speech-acts such as questions, orders, wishes, etc. These different expressions can have the same intelligible content, but only propositions signify the true or the false, because only they consist in an evaluative judgment concerning truth and falsity (*LI De in.* 3.01.100). Indeed, according to Abelard, a proposition P corresponds to the assertion that P is true (cf. Jacobi 2004:146); in other words, he may be seen as maintaining the schema “P  $\Leftrightarrow$  It is true that P.” In Latin, such impersonal propositions (the right-hand side of the schema) are usually formulated with the “accusative-infinitive” nominalized form of the embedded proposition (for example, *Verum est Socratem currere*). The nominalized form asserts precisely the content of the proposition, that is, its *dictum*. A *dictum* is “that which is said by the proposition” (*LI De in.* 3.04.26), that is, its content plus the assertion that what it signifies does obtain in reality. Therefore, for Abelard, *dicta* are the ultimate bearers of truth and falsity, since it is to them that the terms “true” and “false” are related by means of such propositions

of the form “It is true that P.” Propositions are true or false derivatively, insofar as they state true or false *dicta* (cf. Nuchelmans 1973:9.4.3). Abelard’s notion of truth is thus essentially semantic: it is a semantic property of a proposition, i.e., the *dictum*/content that it expresses, that makes it true or false.

Notice that this view implies a deflationist notion of truth: to assert the truth of a proposition is equivalent to simply asserting the proposition itself. From the truth of a proposition one cannot draw major metaphysical conclusions: if “a man is white” is true, one can merely conclude that there is a thing which is a man and is also white (*LI Cat.* 59–60) (see also King 2004:4). But Abelard can also be seen as holding a correspondence theory of truth when he glosses the sentence “It is true that Socrates is a man and not a stone” as “It is the case in reality (*in re*) that [Socrates] is a man and not a stone” (*LI De in.* 3.04.26) (see also *LI De in.* 3.01.100).

In short, the distinguishing characteristic of Abelard’s theory of truth is the crucial role played by *dicta*. But *dicta* are neither linguistic entities nor real things in reality, and thus Abelard’s truth-bearers seem to fit neither of the two main kinds of truth-bearers mentioned above. Some (e.g., Nuchelmans 1973:9.4.2) view Abelard’s *dicta* as states of affairs; others (e.g., King 2004:4) take literally his claim that *dicta* are nothing at all. They stand to propositions in the same relation as things to their names, and yet they are not actual things. But the fact that their ontological status is debatable must not overshadow their central role in Abelard’s theory of truth and his semantics in general.

## Thomas Aquinas

Aquinas’ main discussions of the notion of truth are to be found in his commentary to Peter Lombard’s *Sentences*, in his *Quaestiones disputatae de veritate* and in his *Summa theologiae* (*ST*) I<sup>a</sup>, question 16 (for the sake of coherence, here we shall focus on this latter text; for the different stages of development of Aquinas’ notion of truth, see Wippel 1989). His concept of truth can

be seen as reconciling two important trends (see Wippel 1989:295 and Aertsen 1992), the neoplatonic-Augustinian conception attributing truth to things, and the Aristotelian conception (stemming from the *Metaphysics*) that attributes truth to the intellect and emphasizes truth as likeness.

Aquinas’ notion of truth is based on the concept of *adequatio*: truth is adequation of intellect and object. The etymology of adequation is related to that of equal, and indeed the idea here is that of quasi-equality between intellect and object. Adequation in this sense corresponds to identity of forms: truth occurs when the object and the concept in question share the same form. Truth is thus again viewed as a relational property, as in modern correspondence theories of truth, but this time it involves concepts and objects instead of propositions and facts as its *relata*. Aquinas does discuss the truth of propositions as well (in *ST* I<sup>a</sup> q. 16 a. 8 ad 3), but their truth is derivative from truth in the intellect.

This relation of adequation is established by an act of the intellect, and can be established in two directions: an object is true if it conforms to the relevant concept, whereas a concept is true if it conforms to the relevant object (see Kühne 2003:104). (Notice that, for Anselm, only the direction of adequation from object to (divine) concept characterizes the notion of truth.) These two directions are exactly what Aquinas needs to reconcile the two radically different approaches to truth that he takes as his starting point, namely truth of the intellect and truth of a thing; see Aertsen (1992:163/4).

Aquinas maintains that “truth resides primarily in the intellect, and secondarily in things according as they are related to the intellect as their principle” (*ST* I<sup>a</sup> q. 16 a. 1 co.), so concepts are in fact the primary bearers of truth for him. An object can be said to be true by analogy, insofar as it is related to a true concept (i.e., one that conforms to the object); but an object is also true if it conforms to the design of the intellect behind its creation. Natural things are true insofar as they conform to the forms they have in the divine intellect. Similarly, artifacts are true if conformity occurs with the form they have (the original

concept) in a human intellect (such as the relation of the plan of a house made by an architect and the house actually built). In both directions, properties of things define the truth of an entity (be it a concept or an object); Aquinas' notion of truth is thus fundamentally metaphysical. Moreover, Aquinas develops his notion of truth against the background of his doctrine of transcendentals (see entry in this on Transcendentals): truth and being are ultimately convertible (Aertsen 1992: sect. 6).

There are two kinds of truths, the immutable truth of God and the finite truth of humans (*ST* cf. I<sup>a</sup> q. 16 a. 8 co.). In the case of the finite truth of humans, the truth of concepts insofar as they represent objects corresponds to the direction of adequation from concepts to objects. By means of an act of predication (composition, in case of an affirmation, or division, in the case of a negation), a certain property is attributed to an object by the intellect; if the object is indeed such-and-such, then the concept representing it can be said to be true: “the being of the thing, not its truth, is the cause of truth in the intellect” (*ST* I<sup>a</sup> q. 16 a. 1 ad 3). This kind of truth is referred to by Aquinas as accidental truth (*per accidens*), which is the truth pertaining to the knower who knows an object but upon whom the object does not depend (see Aertsen 1992:162). It is opposed to the essential truth (*per se*) of the divine intellect that designs and represents all natural things (since God is their creator) and of the human intellect with respect to artifacts (cf. *ST* I<sup>a</sup> q. 16 a. 1 co.). Obviously, given God's perfection, adequation of concepts in the divine intellect to things in an accidental way simply does not occur. Only essential truth pertains to the divine intellect, and accidental truth is proper to finite human knowers.

Indeed, God is ultimately Truth itself for Aquinas (I<sup>a</sup> q. 16 a. 5 co.): truth is adequation of intellect and being, and in God this adequation occurs “to the greatest degree.” In God there is total coincidence of intellect and being, as the forms present in the divine intellect are the very causes of the forms present in each object of His creation. “His being is not only conformed to His intellect, but it is the very act of His intellect; and His act of understanding is the measure and cause of every other being and of every other intellect”.

## Theories of Truth Based on the Notion of Supposition

Contrasting with Aquinas' metaphysical approach to truth and stemming from entirely different sources, the thirteenth century witnessed, within the terminist tradition (represented by Peter of Spain, William of Sherwood, etc.), the emergence of a new and subsequently very influential approach to truth founded on the notion of supposition. It is perhaps the best example in the history of philosophy of a theory of truth that is genuinely not based on correspondence.

The notion of supposition was developed within the general framework of medieval properties of terms (see Read (2006) and the entry on Supposition Theory in this volume). In the thirteenth century, supposition was one among other equally important properties of terms, but in the fourteenth century it came to occupy a privileged position. In particular, it was used for the analysis of the truth-conditions of the basic types of categorical propositions (the A, E, I, and O Aristotelian logical forms). This approach had among its proponents Ockham (in the first chapters of the second part of his *Summa logicae*) and Buridan (e.g. in the first chapters of his *Treatise on Consequences*). Its main idea is that an affirmative proposition is true iff there is identity between the *supposita* of the subject and of the predicate, while a negative proposition is true if this does not occur (the *supposita* are the entities which a given term in a proposition supposits or stands for). But this general principle must be refined by means of truth-conditional clauses for propositions of different logical categories:

- “Every A is B” is true iff “the predicate supposits for all those things that the subject supposits for, so that it is truly predicated of them” (Ockham 1998:96).
- “No A is B” is true if the predicate supposits for none of the things that the subject supposits for, or if the subject does not supposit for anything.
- “Some A is B” is true iff “the subject and predicate supposit for some same thing” (Ockham 1998:92).



- “Some A is not B” is true if “the subject supposit for something that the predicate does not supposit for” (Ockham 1998:92), or if the subject does not supposit for anything.

Notice that negative propositions have two causes of truth, as Ockham puts it: either if there is no co-supposition of their terms in the appropriate case (universal or particular), or if the subject does not supposit for anything at all, then the proposition is true, since in the latter case the absence of co-supposition obtains trivially. Moreover, the same procedure can be applied *mutatis mutandis* to propositions whose verb is tensed or accompanied by a modality (see chaps. 7, 9, and 10 of part II of Ockham’s *Summa logicae*).

These definitions can also be formulated as recursive definitions of truth-conditions on the basis of the truth of more fundamental propositions, namely, singular propositions whose subject is a demonstrative and whose predicate is one of the terms of the proposition whose truth-conditions are being established. This is because for a term A to supposit for something amounts to the truth of a singular proposition “This is A,” where “This” supposit for the thing in question, and so does “A”.

A problem for Ockham’s account is the threat of circularity: while the truth of propositions, including singular propositions with demonstratives as their subjects, is defined in terms of the supposition of their terms in the first chapters of part II of the *Summa logicae*, elsewhere the supposition of terms is in turn defined in terms of the truth of such singular propositions. It is clear that one of the two notions, either supposition or the truth of singular demonstrative propositions, must be taken as primitive if the theory is to avoid circularity.

Besides the technical aspect of formulating precise truth-conditions for different logical forms of propositions, Ockham’s theory of truth is also a rejection of a metaphysical approach in favor of a semantic approach to truth (see Perler 1992: chaps 1 and 2, Moody 1953: chap. III and Dutilh Novaes forthcoming). The fundamental cause of truth of propositions is a semantic property of their terms, namely their supposition, and

not actual properties of the objects in question. Ockham stresses this idea in several passages, for example in.

- Thus, for the truth of ‘This is an angel’ it is not required that the common term ‘angel’ be really identical with what is posited as the subject, or that it be really in that subject, or anything of this sort. Rather, it is sufficient and necessary that the subject and predicate supposit for the same thing (Ockham 1998:86).

Another significant aspect of Ockham’s account of truth is that truth-bearers are the actually formed propositions of a language, be they spoken, written, or mental; he (as well as Buridan) is what we could call an inscriptionalist with respect to truth-bearers. Truth is a monadic predicate attributed to them, and this attribution is formulated with the special *dictum* construction: a proposition whose subject is the nominalized form of the proposition to which truth is attributed (terms in the accusative case and verb in the infinitive mode) and the predicate is the term for true, “*verum*” – for example, *Socratem esse hominem est verum*. So truth is nothing more than a predicate of propositions, namely those that are true, and this in turn depends solely on the supposition of their terms.

In sum, theories of truth based on the concept of supposition, Ockham’s in particular, have the distinctive trait of rejecting metaphysical foundations for truth; the burden here is to be borne exclusively by semantic properties. Moreover, in contrast with Anselm and Aquinas, truth is attributed exclusively to complex linguistic and, more importantly, mental entities. Indeed, the primary bearers of truth-value for Ockham as well as for Buridan are mental propositions; spoken and written propositions are only derivatively true, insofar as they are related to true mental propositions.

### Semantic Theories of Truth in the Fourteenth Century: *Insolubilia*

Developing parallel to, and sometimes overlapping with, uses of the notion of supposition in

accounts of truth, there is a very rich tradition of theories of truth in the fourteenth century to be found in treatises on *Insolubilia*, that is, treatises on paradoxes. They are semantic correspondence theories of truth, and thus illustrate that correspondence theories of truth need not be metaphysical (in the sense presented here).

A watershed is widely recognized to be Thomas Bradwardine's treatise, written in the first half of the 1320s. Until then, the most popular solutions to such paradoxes had little to offer as theories of truth: the *restringentes* approach, for example, consisted only in a ban or restriction to self-reference in general, and for propositions containing the predicate "true" in particular. By contrast, the apparatus presented by Bradwardine in his *Insolubilia* is the germinal state of a full-fledged theory of truth. Bradwardine's starting point is the Aristotelian formula *propositio vera est oratio significans sicut est*, that is, a correspondence view on truth with a semantic emphasis on the signification of the proposition – the second *relatum* of the relation of correspondence is minimally referred to as *sicut est* with no further elaboration on what must obtain in reality for a proposition to be true. The truth of a proposition depends primarily on its signification, not on how things are.

In order to prove that Liar propositions and other paradoxical propositions are false, Bradwardine modifies this formula and posits that "A true proposition is an utterance signifying only [*tantum*] as things are" (first definition in chap. 6, 6.2 in Read's edition and translation). He then goes on to prove that a Liar proposition says (at least) two things, namely, that it is false and that it is true. Since both things cannot obtain, he concludes that a Liar proposition does not signify *only* as things are; it signifies partially as things are (that it is false), but since it also signifies something that does not obtain (that it is true), it is not a true proposition (see Read 2002).

This definition of truth implies a few important assumptions: propositions may (in fact typically do) signify several things, and true propositions are only those whose total signification obtains, that is, if each and every thing that a proposition signifies is the case. It is thus what we could call a

quantificational definition of truth, and truth is associated with universal quantification (see Dutilh Novaes 2008). Accordingly, a proposition is false if it fails to comply with the peak of success associated with a true proposition, that is, if at least one of the things it says is false. Therefore, while truth is associated with universal quantification, falsity is associated with existential quantification.

A variation of this approach to truth can be found in Buridan's treatment of insolubles. While his main theory of truth is based on the concept of supposition, following the same lines of Ockham's theory, Buridan recognizes that, in the case of Liar propositions, the co-suppositional criterion is not sufficient to determine their truth-value (cf. *Sophismata* ch. 8, 7th sophism). In such cases, not only the proposition itself must satisfy the co-suppositional criterion to be true, but also all of its implications. But since Buridan thinks that all propositions virtually imply their own truth, Liar propositions imply that they are true and that they are not true, and thus cannot satisfy the criterion for truth and are simply false (see Read 2002, Klima 2004 and Dutilh Novaes forthcoming for details).

In Albert of Saxony, writing shortly after Buridan, one finds a hybrid of the quantificational and the supposition approaches to truth. Albert's first definition is a reformulation of Bradwardine's definition of truth: "A true proposition is one which, in whatever way [*qualitercumque*] it signifies, so it is" (in Pozzi 1978:316). It replaces the term *tantum* in Bradwardine's definition by one which is even more explicit with respect to the universal quantification implied in the definition, *qualitercumque* (also to be found in Buridan's treatise on consequences (TC) to define the truth and the modality of propositions; however, he adds that this is just a way of speaking (TC, 21), a shorthand way to refer to the different truth-conditions of propositions on the basis of the supposition of their terms, which he discusses earlier in the text.). Albert then goes on to add a few theses equating the truth or falsity of propositions to the co-supposition (or lack thereof) of their terms. From these definitions and suppositions he then draws the conclusion (third thesis)

that all propositions signify their own truth. So with Albert (as with Buridan) we have something of a forerunner of one of the directions of the Tarskian T-convention: here the relation between a proposition and the assertion of its truth is that of signification, while with Buridan it is a relation of (virtual) implication.

## Conclusion

At the end of the fourteenth century, Paul of Venice composed a treatise on the truth and falsity of propositions (*Tractatus de veritate et falsitate propositionis*) that summarizes (by means of a long list of alternative definitions of truth) the two main approaches to truth in the fourteenth century, the one based on supposition and the one based on the signification of propositions. (Another interesting fourteenth-century approach to truth, not discussed here for reasons of space, can be found in the tradition of the theories of *probationes terminorum*, exemplified by Richard Billingham's *Speculum puerorum*.) It is significant that, while in the first half of the fourteenth century one does not find treatises explicitly on the truth of propositions (discussions on truth were then to be found in treatises on the properties of terms and on insolubles), toward the end of the century such treatises started to appear. Also significant is that in the fourteenth century one does not encounter the attribution of truth to non-linguistic objects, as with Anselm and Aquinas. Truth is then seen as an attribute exclusively of propositions (written, spoken, or mental), and the titles of such treatises invariably feature the genitive *propositionis* applied to *De veritate* (while both Anselm and Aquinas wrote treatises entitled "*De veritate*" *tout court*).

## Cross-References

- ▶ [Albert of Saxony](#)
- ▶ [Anselm of Canterbury](#)
- ▶ [Aristotelianism in the Greek, Latin, Syriac, Arabic, and Hebrew Traditions](#)
- ▶ [Future contingents](#)
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- ▶ [Thomas Aquinas](#)
- ▶ [Thomas Bradwardine](#)
- ▶ [William of Ockham](#)

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## al-Ṭūsī, Naṣīr al-Dīn

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### Abstract

Naṣīr al-Dīn Muḥammad ibn Muḥammad al-Ṭūsī was born in 1201 in Ṭūs, in Khorasan, within a family of Twelver Shī'ite allegiance. Philosopher, theologian, and author of about 150 works, he was considered a “third master,” after Aristotle and al-Fārābī. He was educated in Ṭūs and then he completed his education in

Nīshāpūr, a highly reputed cultural center of his times, in Iraq and in Mosul. His studies included Arabic, logic, metaphysics, mathematics, medicine, law, religion, and natural sciences. Because of the Mongol invasion, he took refuge in Qūhistān's fortresses, under the protection of the governor Naṣīr al-Dīn Muḥtashim. He then rapidly converted to the Ismā'īlī faith and completed his main philosophical treatises, among which was his commentary to Avicenna's *Ishārāt*.

After Alamūt's fall, Ṭūsī became vizier of Hūlāgū, the Mongol commander. Thanks to Hūlāgū's patronage, Ṭūsī established in Maragha the largest astronomical observatory of the times. He died in Baghdad in 1274 and was buried next to the seventh Shī'ite Imam in a site near the city.

Naṣīr al-Dīn al-Ṭūsī is considered one of the most important figures of Islamic thinking. He was one of the most prolific scholars of the thirteenth century, and left his mark on most literary and scientific disciplines.

### al-Ṭūsī, Naṣīr al-Dīn (Ṭūs 1201- Baghdad 1274)

Naṣīr al-Dīn al-Ṭūsī, also known as *khwāja*, is one of the most important figures in Islamic intellectual history. A philosopher, theologian, mathematician, and astronomer, he was honored with the title of "third teacher," after Aristotle and al-Fārābī.

He was educated at Ṭūs, in Khorasan, by his father, Muḥammad ibn al-Ḥasan, a famous jurist of the Twelve Imam school of Shī'ism, with whom he was initiated in religious and intellectual sciences. Ṭūsī devoted himself to the study of Arabic language and grammar, to the reading of the Qur'ān to *ḥadīth*, and Shī'ite jurisprudence. With his maternal uncle he studied logic, natural philosophy, and metaphysics, and during the same period he was also taught algebra and geometry. Between 1213 and 1221, to complete his training, he moved to Nīshāpūr, where he earned an excellent reputation as a scholar. His most important teachers were Farīd al-Dīn al-Dāmād, with whom

he studied the philosophy of Avicenna, and Quṭb al-Dīn al-Miṣrī, a disciple of Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī, with whom he studied medicine. Subsequently, Ṭūsī went to Irāq and studied jurisprudence with the Shī'ite scholar Mu'īn al-Dīn Sālim ibn Badrān al-Māzinī; later on, he studied at Mosul with Kamāl al-Dīn ibn Yūnus, with whom he improved his mathematical knowledge. Because of the Mongol invasion, which occurred while Ṭūsī was completing his studies, he was forced to accept an invitation from the Ismā'īlī governor of Qūhistān, Naṣīr al-Dīn 'Abd al-Raḥīm ibn Abī Maṣṣūr (or Naṣīr al-Dīn Muḥtashim), who presided over the business of the community of the Nizarites. Ṭūsī moved to the Ismā'īlī court, in Sartakht, in one of the mountain fortresses in Qūhistān, around 1232–1233. He mentions Naṣīr al-Dīn 'Abd al-Raḥīm as a benevolent governor, at whose court many learned men took refuge. There Ṭūsī received great honors, though the difficult situation prevented him from traveling.

In about 1234, he was called to the court of the Ismā'īlī prince 'Alā al-Dīn Muḥammad, who had heard of his fame as a scholar. Accompanied by Naṣīr al-Dīn 'Abd al-Raḥīm, Ṭūsī went to the fortress of Maymūn Diz; it was in those years that he turned to the Ismā'īlī faith. Although the period that he spent at the courts was intellectually fruitful, Ṭūsī did not fully enjoy his situation, and in the last pages of his commentary on Avicenna's *Ishārāt*, titled *Sharkh al-Ishārāt*, he recounts the difficulties in which he was forced to write his works. During the 20 years he spent in the various courts, Ṭūsī wrote some of his most important texts on ethics, logic, sciences, and mathematics. Among the works commissioned by Naṣīr al-Dīn 'Abd al-Raḥīm he did a translation into Persian of 'Ayn al-Quyāt al-Hamadānī's *Zubdat al-ḥaqā'iq*, and a Persian translation with comments on the *Kitāb al-ṭahāra* by Abū 'Alī Aḥmad Miskawayh al-Rāzī, titled *Akhlāq-i Nāsirī*. Moreover, for his master's son, Mu'īn al-Dīn, he wrote the *Risāla al-Mu'īniyya* on astronomy, with a Persian commentary. The *Akhlāq-i Muḥtashamī*, the *Asās al-iqtibās*, his pioneering work of Avicennian logic in Persian, and his famous commentary on Avicenna's *Ishārāt wa-l-tanbīhāt* date also from this period.

In 1246, after completing the original version of *Akhlāq-i Nāṣiri*, Ṭūsī wrote an autobiography titled *Sayr wa-sulūk*, in which he described his education and how he came to profess Ismāʿīlī esoteric philosophy. In this period, Ṭūsī was living in Alamūt, the fortress of the Assassins. The attribution of some Ismāʿīlī texts has been the object of much scholarly controversy, though the paternity of *Rawḍat al-taslīm* (commonly called *Taṣawwurāt*), the greatest Ismāʿīlī work of the late Alamūt period, has been ascertained.

During Ṭūsī's stay in Qūhistān, the Mongol commander Hūlāgū was sent by his brother Maṅgū Khān to defeat the Ismāʿīlīs. In 1255, Hūlāgū invaded Persia and in 1256 he defeated the Ismāʿīlī governor Rukn al-Dīn Khurshā, conquering the Alamūt fort. Ṭūsī's role in persuading the Ismāʿīlī governor to surrender peacefully to Hūlāgū made him particularly noble in the eyes of the Mongol warrior. Since then, the philosopher was at the service of the great Mongol commander. It is not clear whether Ṭūsī betrayed the Ismāʿīlī cause or used his role to save the texts at the Alamūt library before the Mongol invasion.

In 1257 Ṭūsī left Qazwīn in the retinue of Hūlāgū to go first to Hamadān and then, in 1258, to Baghdad. Ṭūsī followed Hūlāgū during his expeditions and probably played an active role in the surrender of the 'Abbāsīd Caliph. During the conquest of Baghdad, it is recounted that Ṭūsī succeeded in saving the lives of many Muslim scholars who resided in the city.

Ṭūsī remained in Baghdad with Hūlāgū, helped him to consolidate his power, and convinced him, thanks to the commander's interest in astronomy, to build an observatory at Maragha. The observatory welcomed many scientists, and adjacent to it a library was also built, housing thousand of volumes. In those years Ṭūsī went to Ḥilla, the great Shīʿite teaching center in Iraq, where he met the famous Shīʿite jurist Muḥaqqiq-i Ḥillī and other important theologians and jurists. Then he traveled to Khorasan, where the great philosopher Quṭb al-Dīn al-Shīrāzī joined him.

After Hūlāgū's death, Ṭūsī became a vizier and probably also the personal physician of Hūlāgū's son, Abaqā' Khan, the new Mongol leader. In

1273, during an official journey of Abaqā' Khan to Baghdad, Ṭūsī fell ill and died in 1274. His body was buried at Kāzīmāyn, near the grave of the seventh Shīʿite Imam, Musā al-Kāzīm.

There has been a long debate about whether Ṭūsī became an Ismāʿīlī for reasons of patronage. Twelver Shīʿite authors reject any Ismāʿīlī connection for Ṭūsī, other scholars have indeed postulated the possibility of Ṭūsī's Ismāʿīlī faith and some have condemned him.

## A Philosopher and a Theologian

Ṭūsī's most representative philosophical text in defense of the Peripatetic tradition is the commentary on Avicenna's *Ishārāt*, completed in 1246 and written at the request of the Ismāʿīlī governor Naṣīr al-Dīn 'Abd al-Raḥīm. Ṭūsī's main purpose is to present Avicenna's principal philosophical theories and to defend them against Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī's criticisms. At times, Ṭūsī takes a stand against Avicenna, defending positions similar to those of Suhrawardī, Abū l-Barakāt al-Baḡdādī, and some of the Muslim theologians. Some divergences between Ṭūsī and Avicenna concern the nature of God's knowledge, the number of the spheres, the independent existence of the intellect, the pre-eternity of the physical world, the nature of the body, and the nature of faith. The text, rather than an exposition of his own thought, is a clarifying exegesis of Peripatetic philosophy and was commented on by 'Allāma al-Ḥillī, Quṭb al-Dīn Muḥammad al-Rāzī, Ḥāshim al-Dīn Ḥusayn al-Hamadānī, Aqā Ḥusayn Khwānsārī, and others. A significant passage concerns the discussion of a mystical tale by Avicenna, *Salāmān and Absāl*.

Ṭūsī's most important logical text, finished in 1244, is *Asās al-iqtibās*, written in Persian and on the lines of Avicenna's *K. al-Shifā'*. A contemporary of Ṭūsī, Rukn al-Dīn Muḥammad ibn 'Alī al-Fārsī al-Astarābādī, translated it into Arabic. *Asās al-iqtibās* has been defined the most significant contribution to writings on logic in the thirteenth century. The philosopher wrote other logical texts, among them *Tajrīd al-manṭiq* in Arabic, commented on by 'Allāma Ḥillī.



Ṭūsī's ontology, from which his theology emerges, is mainly grounded in that of Avicenna: every being is necessary or contingent; if it is necessary it cannot not be, that is, it is "Necessary Being" (*wājib al-wujūd*). *Tajrīd al-'aqā'id*, also known as *Tajrīd al-i'tiqād*, is Ṭūsī's fundamental theological work. The text deals with the general principles of Shī'ite theology, the Principle and its attributes, the prophecy, the Imamate, and the resurrection. *Tajrīd al-i'tiqād* became the reference text of Shī'ism for many generations and was commented on many times.

*I'tiqādiyya* is a short treatise on the principal Shī'ite dogmas and concerns what believers deem indubitable. A faithful Shī'ite first of all believes that there is no other god than God and that Muḥammad is his messenger. Further, the believer has to accept the divine attributes and to believe in the Day of Judgment and in Heaven. All these principles are found in the Qur'ān, and therefore need no proof. Other theological texts have been attributed to Ṭūsī: *al-I'tiqādāt*, *Ithbāt-i wājib*, and *al-Fuṣūl al-nāṣiriyya*. The latter two were written in Persian for a readership that did not know Arabic. Ṭūsī also wrote other shorter theological texts, among them *Ithbāt waḥdat Allāh jalla jalāluhu*, on the oneness of God. The Principle is one, it cannot be many and cannot be contingent, because every contingent being possesses a cause.

Ṭūsī's ethical writings are mainly based on two sources, the Greek one and the pre-Islamic Persian one, as well as drawing on the Qur'ān and the *ḥadīth* sources. Ṭūsī's two most significant ethical texts are *Akhāq-i muḥtashamī* and *Akhlāq-i naṣirī*. The sources of the first are Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics* and al-Fārābī's *al-Madīna al-fāḍila*, as well as the pre-Islamic sources, but the main text on which Ṭūsī drew was undoubtedly the *Tahdhīb al-akhlāq* by Miskawayh. *Akhāq-i muḥtashamī* was written in honor of Naṣīr al-Dīn 'Abd al-Raḥīm, who decided the outlines of the work and planned its general scheme. Originally, Naṣīr al-Dīn himself intended to write it, but administrative commitments prevented him from doing so. The purpose of the text is to define some ethical principles that can be followed by every upright and just person, and it is divided into 40 chapters containing quotations

from the Qur'ān and sayings of the Prophet and Shī'ite Imams. The text deals with religion, the need for knowledge of God, and the topics related to ethical behavior. Ṭūsī also devotes a chapter to denunciation of the lower world and all its material aims. Every chapter ends with quotations attributed to various Greek philosophers.

The other important ethical text by Ṭūsī is *Akhlāq-i naṣirī*. The first part of it was written when the philosopher was still at the court of Naṣīr al-Dīn 'Abd al-Raḥīm. When the Ismā'īlīs were defeated by the Mongols and Ṭūsī went into Hūlāgū's service, he revised the text, changed the introduction and the conclusions, and eliminated all Ismā'īlīs references. Some scholars account for Ṭūsī's choice by attributing it to purely political circumstances. The text consists of an introduction, three treatises, and a conclusion. The introduction enumerates the divisions of philosophy that Islam had adopted from Aristotle. Philosophy is divided into two categories: theoretical and practical, and the first one includes three parts: metaphysics, mathematics, and natural sciences. Metaphysics consists of the science of divinity and the first philosophy. It pertains to the knowledge of God, intellects, souls, theology, and deals with the general principles that govern the universe. God is independent of logical proofs, He is necessary and His existence is postulated, not proved, because proof implies comprehension of the thing to be proved.

Ṭūsī in his *Taṣawwurat* criticizes the doctrine of *creatio ex nihilo*, and agrees with Avicenna that from one proceeds only one, as well as with the emanation of the world. However, in a later work, *Fuṣūl*, Ṭūsī supports the doctrine of *creatio ex nihilo* and attacks the foundations of emanation, because the reflection of the first Intellect already implies plurality, and this in turn implies the ontological difference between God and the first Intellect.

The section of the *Akhlāq-i naṣirī* on mathematics is divided into four parts: geometry, arithmetic, astronomy, and music. Natural sciences are divided into eight parts and deal with the knowledge of time, space, movement, the infinite, the elements, the earth and climate, botany, biology, mineralogy, and psychology. Among the minor

subdivisions of the sciences there are also medicine, astronomy, and agriculture. Ṭūsī attributes an independent status to logic within theoretical philosophy: logic is considered as a science and an instrument for acquiring other forms of knowledge.

*Akhlāq-i naṣīrī*'s practical philosophy deals with the things that concern human beings as individuals and things that concern human beings as members of a society, and includes ethics, domestic politics, and foreign politics. Ethics is divided into two sections: principles and objectives. The fundamental subject of the first part is the human soul, from which good and wicked deeds originate. The second chapter deals with the subject of proving the existence of the soul, its substantiality, its simplicity, and incorporeality. The soul is also defined as rational: it survives the death of the body, considered only as an instrument; body is divided into vegetable, animal, and human, and each of these has its respective powers. Only the human soul has the rational power. The seventh and last chapter of this section is devoted to the definitions of good and happiness as ultimate objectives of the human soul. Ṭūsī refers to Pythagoras, Socrates, Plato, Aristotle, Porphyry, and Avicenna.

In the second section of the *Akhlāq-i naṣīrī*'s ethics, Ṭūsī discusses the objectives of this branch of philosophy and affirms that the disposition of an individual can be modified through education. Three types of virtue exist that man can attain, each corresponding to one of the three souls. From the rational soul derive knowledge and philosophy; from the wild soul, patience and courage; from the animal soul, pity and magnanimity. When these virtues are integrated, the fourth virtue is attained, justice. Following Aristotle's distinction in the soul, Ṭūsī deduces justice from practical reason, but unlike Aristotle, he ranks benevolence higher than justice and love higher than benevolence. The causes of moral disease are the following: excess, defect, perversion of reason, anger, or desire. The last stage of happiness attained by man is of three types: spiritual, physical, and collective. Love and friendship constitute the vital principles of Ṭūsī's moral theory.

In a later work, *Awṣāf al-ashrāf*, he writes of asceticism as a stage in mystical life and classifies mysticism into six progressive stages. Among Ṭūsī's writings on ethics there is also a translation of al-Muqaffa's *al-Adab al-wajiz li-l-walad al-ṣagīr*, an admonitory text devoted to his children, regarding the need to obey God.

*Akhlāq-i naṣīrī*'s politics consists of domestic science and national politics. The first part is based on Avicenna's interpretation of Aristotle's *Oeconomica* and is divided into five chapters. Ṭūsī begins the treatise by stressing the importance of the family and defines a good home as a perfect relationship existing between husband and wife, parents and children, master and servant. Subsequently, the author deals with the career, the financial part, and the role of the wife, who safeguards wealth and procreates. In the chapter on the upbringing of children he stresses that young girls should not learn to read and write, but rather should learn to act in a praiseworthy way and become good wives and mothers. The last chapter deals with the way to behave toward servants and slaves, considered extensions of man's arms and eyes; he lists three categories of them. The final part is devoted to the character stereotypes of the Arabs, Persians, and Turks.

The section on the politics of cities, divided into eight chapters, argues that human society requires civilization. Administration of justice is the function of a government, which must be headed by a just king, the vicegerent of God upon earth. The third chapter of politics deals with the two kinds of human society: utopia and the anti-utopia. Utopia is one, but there are three kinds of anti-utopia: the city of the ignorants, the city of the corrupt, and the city of the misguided. The last chapters are devoted to friendship, and to the principles of the relationship with members of various social classes and groups. The conclusion of the book consists of a series of short aphorisms that Ṭūsī attributes to Plato.

In the treatise on poetics, *Mi'yār al-ash'ār*, the nature of poetry and metrics is examined. Poetry is identified as discourse (*kalām*) that is at the same time imaginative and rhythmic. Imagination is a constitutive part of it and is defined as the power of words to influence the soul, while rhythm is a

unique configuration of movements and pauses and is considered instrumental. In poetics, Ṭūsī also discusses the difference between Arabic and Persian prosody.

There are also some Persian and Arabic letters that Ṭūsī exchanged with Ṣadr al-Dīn al-Qūnawī. He expressed his great admiration for Ṭūsī and his desire to have regular correspondence with him. Qūnawī sent a copy of one of his writings and asked Ṭūsī to read and comment the result of his discussions with some of his philosopher friends.

Although the majority of Ṭūsī's writings are in Arabic, a significant number were written in Persian. He wrote in Persian on theoretical and practical philosophy, astronomy, mathematics, natural sciences, poetics, and history. Like Avicenna, Ṭūsī persianized the Arabic prose by assimilating it into a fluent Persian diction, following the model of Suhrawardī.

He encouraged others to write in this language. His disciple Quṭb al-Dīn al-Shīrāzī wrote in Persian his *Durra al-tāj*, an encyclopedic summary of philosophical and theological topics.

## A Mathematician and an Astronomer

Ṭūsī's production also embraced all the mathematical sciences of antiquity: arithmetic, geometry, astronomy, astrology, and optics.

His innovation concern the rewriting of some Arabic masterpieces. Ṭūsī rewrote them on the basis of the most ancient translations, choosing the terms best suited to rendering the meaning more comprehensible. He avoided repetitions of some concepts, elaborated them using contemporary terms, and explained them. These recensions became hybrids and were identified with the name of *tahārīr*. Ṭūsī dealt with all the translated texts that were available to him and revised the Arabic translations of Euclid, Aristarchus, Theodosius, Apollonius, Archimedes, Menelaus, Ptolemy, and many others.

Ṭūsī's main contribution to the mathematical sciences was in trigonometry. In his *Shakl al-qitā'*, on the basis of the works of Abū l-Wafā', Maṣṣūr ibn 'Irāq and al-Bīrūnī, Ṭūsī developed trigonometry without using Menelaus'

theorem or astronomy. For the first time he gave the field of trigonometry an independent identity, deciding to devote a special treatise to the innovations that he had met in his various recensions and offering a complete picture of the subject.

In his *Jawāmi' al-ḥisāb*, completed in 1246, he described the arithmetical operations in a simple way accessible to a wide audience, combining the Greek method with the Indian one. He introduced a new method for the extraction of roots, a method that had been used by Chinese mathematicians, but was new to him. A part of *Jawāmi' al-ḥisāb* is devoted to what he called "the arithmetic of the astrologers." In the section, he explained that arithmetical operations could be used on sexagesimal entities such as signs, degrees, minutes, and seconds.

In the field of geometry, Ṭūsī followed al-Khayyām and in his *al-Risāla al-shafi'iyya* he examined Euclid's fifth postulation, proving that the theory was a failure.

Ṭūsī's astronomic production encompassed all forms of knowledge of his day. When he dealt with the recension of the *Almagest* in 1247, Ṭūsī denounced the Ptolemaic theory of latitudinal movement of the planets and introduced a form of mathematical theorem, known as the "Ṭūsī couple." The "couple" produces a linear movement as a result of the two circular movements.

In about 1260, he wrote the famous *Tadhkira*, in which he improved the research he had previously done. In a chapter in the text he proved the theorem of the "couple" and for the first time a solution was expounded for the movement of the planets. This theory could be extended beyond the latitudinal theory of planets preserving uniform circular motion, and it became the fundamental heritage for later astronomers in the Islamic world.

Hūlāgū's generosity and interest allowed Ṭūsī to devote himself for 30 years to the study of astronomy and to build the famous observatory at Maragha. The most important and best-known work that was produced by the leading lights at the observatory was *Zīj-i ilkhānī*, originally written in Persian and then translated into Arabic and other languages. Parts of the text were also translated into Byzantine Greek during the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries.

In the field of mineralogy, Ṭūsī wrote the *Tanksūkh-nāma* in Persian, based on Islamic sources such as the works of Jābir ibn Ḥayyān, al-Kindī, Muḥammad ibn Zakariyyā' al-Rāzī, 'Uṭārid ibn Muḥammad, and al-Bīrūnī. The text deals with the four elements and their combinations and a fifth quality is introduced, called temperament or turn of mind, which can accept the forms of the different species. The text also deals with the theories of vapors, sunrays, colors, precious stones, metals, and perfumes.

Ṭūsī also wrote some works on medicine, along the lines laid down by Avicenna. Among other works, he wrote the *Qawānīn al-ṭibb* and a commentary on Avicenna's *Canon*. Ṭūsī's medical point of view was mainly philosophical and his main contribution concerned psychosomatic medicine, which he discusses in his ethical writings, above all in *Akhlāq-i naṣīrī*.

Ṭūsī's scientific and philosophical contribution was formidable and innovative. Thanks to him, Maragha became the principal center of production of the "new astronomy." Unfortunately, many texts by Ṭūsī have not yet been edited and therefore are not accessible to contemporary scholarship.

## Cross-References

- ▶ [Abū l-Barakāt al-Bağdādī](#)
- ▶ [Aristotle, Arabic](#)
- ▶ [Being](#)
- ▶ [Ethics, Arabic](#)
- ▶ [al-Fārābī, Abū Naṣīr](#)
- ▶ [Happiness](#)
- ▶ [Ibn Sīnā, Abū 'Alī \(Avicenna\)](#)
- ▶ [Ismā'īlī Philosophical Tradition](#)
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- ▶ [Natural Philosophy, Arabic](#)
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- ▶ [Philosophy, Arabic](#)
- ▶ [Political Philosophy, Arabic](#)

- ▶ [al-Rāzī, Fakhr al-Dīn](#)
- ▶ [al-Suhrawardī, Shihāb al-Dīn Yaḥyā al-Maqtūl](#)

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## Tyranny

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### Abstract

Tyrannical government posed an important problem for political philosophers throughout the Middle Ages. The concept of tyranny was an invention of ancient Greece, but the terminology was passed along via Roman sources and Latin translations to medieval thinkers, who developed an extensive analysis and critique of tyrannical rule. However, not all authors wholly condemned the tyrant. Some argued that tyranny was an appropriate form of government in cases where a populace was otherwise incapable of accepting virtuous rulers. Thus, tyranny proved to be a somewhat elastic concept.

Tyranny – the corrupt form of rule by a single man – and how to respond to it formed prominent theme of pre-Christian Greco-Roman political thought. Moreover, discussions of tyrannical government abounded during the Latin Middle Ages. Two sources were especially important in the process of transmission from pagan antiquity to the medieval West. One of them, St. Gregory the Great (Pope Gregory I, c. 540–604), in his *Moralia*, explained tyranny as a term that could potentially apply to any person who pridefully exercised power. Gregory is quite clear that tyranny is a consequence of the condition of one's soul, pertaining to one's relationship to God. The political or public figure, to whom the word "tyrant" is usually applied, is but a single species of a genus of human beings who seek power in order to oppress their fellows. Gregory also asserts that political tyrants, no less than kings, possess their authority at the command of God and perform a divine function, punishing a people for its wickedness. Thus, in his view, the tyrant is not to be resisted or even criticized but must rather be endured as a divine penalty until such time as

God Himself chooses to withdraw His punishment. Second, Isidore of Seville (fl. late sixth–early seventh centuries), in his *Etymologies*, drew a sharp distinction between kingship as the ideal form of government and tyranny as the worst. Though Isidore shows awareness that the term derives from the Greeks and that the early Romans employed it as an equivalent to kingship, he denies any identification of the tyrant with the king. Isidore juxtaposes the tyrant to the true king, who loves justice and seeks what is right or best for his people. The corrupt character of tyranny stems from its incompatibility with the very goals of social order: to realize the harmony and common good of the people in a manner consonant with justice. By privileging his personal passions and desires, the tyrant makes his subjects the servants of his every whim. No rule of law – such as one observes in kingly regimes – is possible under tyranny, because the will of the ruler *is* the law.

The wide diffusion of Gregory's and Isidore's writings in later centuries meant that subsequent political thinkers treated tyranny as the quintessential imperfect regime. In the ninth century, for instance, Hincmar of Rheims (c.805–881) built an entire treatise around the differences between tyranny and kingship. But by far the most extensive discussion of tyrannical government may be found in the *Policraticus* of John of Salisbury (1115/20–1180), completed in 1159. Time and again over the course of the treatise's eight books, John emphasizes the sources and consequences of tyranny, and he raises the critical issue of whether and how a subject population might extract itself from the clutches of a tyrant. The closing chapters of the final book constitute a tract on the foundations and dimensions of, and appropriate responses to, tyranny. John identifies the following characteristics as constitutive of the tyrannical regime: the tyrant is violently oppressive; he opposes justice; he cancels the laws and enslaves the people; he is an image of the devil and of depravity; and, although he serves God, he may be killed if the fact divinely ordained. While most of these features were shared by medieval authors adopting the Gregorian/Isidorian position, the latter assertion that the tyrant may properly be slain is more unusual and has been hailed as one of

his most important (if controversial) contributions to Latin political thought.

John's work extends the tyrannical temperament to the entire composition of the community. In the fifth and sixth books of the *Policraticus*, John famously described the well-ordered communal whole by analogy to the various parts of the human body. John returns to the organic theme in his discussion of tyranny in Book 8. He labels the unjust, tyrannical community "the republic of the impious." Such a body distinguishes itself by the fact that all its sections partake of the same tyrannical properties, a clear echo of St. Gregory's teaching. While John does not discuss the operation of this tyrannical community in great detail, it is clear that he sees a direct correlation between the goals and values of the leading office and those of the other parts of the sociopolitical totality. Where the common utility animates the rightly arranged civil organism, self-interest pervades the deformed body. In John's vision, the tyrannical ruler could never succeed unless he enjoyed widespread approval and cooperation from the other parts of the community over whom he exercises his violent domination.

The conception of tyranny transmitted by Gregory and Isidore was supplemented during the thirteenth century by the appearance in Latin translation of the major works of Aristotle's social thought, namely, the *Nicomachean Ethics* (during the mid-1240s) and the *Politics* (around 1260). Both works include considerable discussion of tyranny as one, but not the only, form of corrupt rule (alongside oligarchy and democracy). Thomas Aquinas (c.1225–1274) was perhaps the first important medieval thinker to develop an Aristotelian approach to tyrannical government alongside the insights of Gregory and Isidore. In the chapters of a book usually known by the title *De regno (On Kingship)* that is commonly (though somewhat controversially) ascribed to him, Aquinas engages in an interesting fusion of Aristotelian and traditional Christian language. Unsurprisingly, he explains that tyrannical government is directed not toward the common good, but instead the private interests of the ruler, and thus is unjust. This follows Aristotle's view quite precisely. Yet Aquinas also recasts Aristotle's important elements of Aristotle's description of

the imperfect constitutions. Specifically, he treats oligarchy and democracy – the corrupt rule of the one and the many respectively – as alternate forms of tyranny, sharing their operative features with the tyrannical regime. Aquinas adapts the discourse of oppression, so that oligarchy and democracy become simply collective tyrannies rather than corrupt systems structured according to their own unique misunderstandings about justice as in Aristotle's analysis.

In a later chapter of *De regno*, Aquinas engages in a tyrannology that touches on the other imperfect regimes only inasmuch as they are instructive for the understanding of the evils of the tyrant and the perfection of the king. Accepting Aristotle's ranking of the best and worst systems within both ideal and corrupt constitutions, Aquinas sets out to excoriate the tyrant. The tyrant appears to constitute such an evil for the community that one might infer that a society would gladly accept democracy or oligarchy over tyranny. But the force of his case is merely rhetorical. Aquinas points out that there are gradations even within forms of tyranny and that there is less evil to be found in tyrannical government than in corrupt government exercised by a group of people. He reasons that the corruption engendered by oligarchy or democracy leads to internal dissention within the community, which is ultimately more harmful than the rule of a single evil man. Likewise, Aquinas observes, the historical study of tyrannical regimes demonstrates that they are more likely to arise from societies in which a multitude rules than in which a monarchy has previously existed. In sum, Aquinas wishes no one to conclude that he has afforded any grounds to prefer democracy and oligarchy to the government of kings, even "moderate" tyrants.

Thinkers who followed Aquinas, many of whom were his students and associates at the University of Paris, often extended the lines of his thought. For instance, Ptolemy of Lucca's (c.1236–1327) appends to *De regno* (which halts abruptly near the beginning of the second book) a treatise named *De regimine principum*. Ptolemy's continuations, which is nearly three times as long as the portion attributed to Aquinas, moves the argument away from an examination of kingship and into a sustained defense of "political rule" or

mixed polity as the best system of government. Ptolemy frames his support of such republican rule through sustained consideration of tyranny's relation to well-ordered constitutions. He steps beyond both Isidore and Aristotle while extending Aquinas's forbearance of tyranny in a striking way. Ptolemy subscribes to a quasi-sociological view of good government that enjoyed some currency among the scholastics, according to which different populations are better suited (by environmental circumstance or temperament) to specific types of rule, even, in some cases, tyrannical rule. In Book 3, Ptolemy asserts the expediency of tyranny in cases where a populace is incapable of benefiting from good government. Indeed, such tyrannies are termed "the instruments of divine justice" by him. Certainly, other Latin Christian authors, at least as far back as Gregory, had held that tyrants might be divine instruments for the infliction of punishments upon wicked peoples. But Ptolemy's view concentrates on utility rather than God's judgment. In a similar passage in Book 4, he appears to posit a distinction between legitimate and unjustified exercise of tyranny. The former occurs in regions where the people are "servile by nature"; he cites the examples of Italian provinces such as Sicily, Sardinia, and Corsica. By contrast, illegitimate tyranny occurs when territories that are suited to freedom are compelled to submit to a single unjust ruler; he refers to the central and northern Italian provinces as illustrations. The intriguing conclusion is that, depending upon context, tyranny is not always evil. As a regime, it may in principle remain corrupt, but as a last-ditch means of imposing peace and order in an otherwise anarchic situation, it may be the best, rather than the worst, of constitutions. Neither Gregory nor Isidore would have been likely to endorse this position; Aristotle, although he may have accepted monarchies that share some characteristics of tyranny in non-European cases, was careful in the *Politics* to explain how and why such resemblances did not lead true kings into tyranny.

Although many later medieval theorists (such as Marsiglio of Padua and William of Ockham) continued to accept the terms of Aristotle's condemnations of tyranny, the fourteenth century also

witnessed a discernable perpetuation of the more flexible attitude evinced by Ptolemy (and, to some extent, Aquinas). Bartolus of Sassoferrato (1313–1357) and Coluccio Salutati (1331–1406) pioneered a specialized genre of political treatise *de tyrannia*, in which the merits of tyrannical government were debated. Not all of those who engaged in this conversation were prepared to condemn tyranny out of hand. Bartolus, for instance, remarks that tyrannical behavior often occurs even in governments that are generally devoted to the common good. Salutati is even more adamant that tyrannical regimes may at times be defended, pointing to Julius Caesar as the archetypical case. Clearly, then, some authors found repetition of conventional ideas about tyranny without critical reflection to be profoundly unsatisfying; others were perhaps propelled by political circumstances to modify accepted teachings concerning the tyrant.

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## Ulrich of Strasbourg

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### Abstract

The German Dominican Ulrich of Strasbourg (1220–1277) was a pupil of Albertus Magnus in Cologne, a lecturer in theology at the monastery of Strasbourg, and a prior of the German Dominican province. He wrote the *De summo bono*, a voluminous theological-philosophical *summa* composed between 1262 and 1272. Long considered to have been a fervent disciple of Albertus Magnus and the compiler of a work based largely on his teacher's doctrine, Ulrich has instead been shown, through recent studies and the critical edition of his work, to have been an autonomous thinker who developed on his maestro's ideas in a personal way, often subtly diverging from them. He placed Albertus Magnus's doctrines, including the more strictly philosophical ones such as the theory of the divine intellect, into a theological framework, in keeping with his aim of highlighting possible concordism between philosophy and theology. The *De summo bono* was widely circulated, and its reception followed two distinct lines of thought: a speculative one, particularly with the fourteenth-century brothers of the Cologne *studium*

(Dietrich of Freiberg, Berthold of Moosburg and perhaps Meister Eckhart) and the fifteenth-century “Albertists” of Cologne, and another moral-pastoral one that originated with John of Freiburg, a pupil of Ulrich's, and spread through the German-Polish area until the fifteenth century.

Ulrich Engelbrecht (the family name, according to ancient historiographers) was born around 1220. He entered the Dominican order in 1245, studied under Albertus Magnus probably in Cologne, and later became a lecturer in theology at the monastery of Strasbourg. In 1272, he was elected provincial prior of the German Dominicans. Five years later, he was relieved of this duty in order to continue his theology studies in Paris, where he was to fill the role of *bacalarius sententiarum*, the obligatory step toward becoming a master of theology. However, once in Paris, Ulrich died just before beginning lessons. Thus the German Dominicans lost their opportunity to see one of their representatives in the chair reserved for “foreign” – i.e., non-Parisian s professors.

The earliest testimony of Ulrich's activity and scientific profile is offered by one of his pupils, John of Freiburg (1250–1314) who, in the preface to the *Summa confessorum*, describes his teacher as a man of science and of action. So, although his premature death kept him from earning the title of *magister theologiae*, Ulrich had a reputation as a wise man, as well as an astute administrator of the

German province (*Teutonia*) of the Dominican order. The work that consolidated his fame was the *De summo bono*, a voluminous theological-philosophical *summa* composed between 1262 and 1272. In addition, we have 27 letters, conserved in a codex in Berlin, mainly concerning administrative and disciplinary provisions, and a sermon in vernacular on *John* 20.29. According to historical catalogue sources, Ulrich also wrote comments on Aristotle's *Sentences* and *Meteorology*, both lost.

The *De summo bono*, as the title indicates, deals with the supreme Good and is divided into six books using the following structure: (I) preliminary questions regarding the supreme Good or theology; (II) the essence of the supreme Good; (III) Divine Persons; (IV) the Father and creation; (V) the Son and the Incarnation; and (VI) the Holy Spirit, grace, and virtues. As Ulrich indicated in the preamble to the work, the *summa* was intended to contain seventh and eighth books as well, regarding the sacraments and beatitude, respectively. However, these books appear in no known codex and were probably never written. The sixth book ends abruptly without providing an *explicit*, leaving the treatise on virtues incomplete.

The critical edition of the *De summo bono*, having arrived at its seventh volume and almost fully realized, demonstrates that Ulrich was a significant scientific figure and that his imposing *summa* was something new in the literary panorama of his day. Unlike Albertus Magnus and Thomas Aquinas, Ulrich chose to draw up a systematic treatise rather than adopt the scholastic method of contrasting *pro* and *contra* arguments. His book is configured as a work for consultation, to be kept in the monastery library and used for monastery-based teaching. In the *De summo bono*, the influence of the teaching of Albertus Magnus is evident, as Ulrich makes constant and attentive use of it, especially the *Metaphysica*, the *De causis et processu universitatis*, and the *De intellectu et intelligibili*. Ulrich has thus been defined as "Albertus Magnus' favorite pupil" (Théry 1922) and "co-founder of Rhenish theology" (de Libera 1984),

underlining the relationship that ties him to his teacher. But these labels run the risk of reducing his ideas to a mere re-proposal of Albertus Magnus's doctrines, and of characterizing Ulrich as an unoriginal author. In reality, as the most recent studies on Ulrich demonstrate (Beccarisi 2006; Palazzo 2005, 2006), he was an independent thinker who frequently and subtly diverged from his teacher's ideas. He did not share Albertus Magnus' methodological decision to make theology and philosophy two separate sciences, each with specific methods and objects. In fact, Ulrich championed concordism between theology and philosophy: philosophical speculation thus became the basis and presupposition of theological research. His concordistic approach manifested itself in his attempt to minimize the differences between Platonic and Aristotelian thinkers. According to Ulrich, peripatetic philosophy is subordinate to Platonic philosophy because the field of action of the former is limited to empirical-scientific consideration of the universe, while that of the latter concerns knowledge of divine properties and of God. Thus Ulrich twisted the meaning of the famous page written by Albertus Magnus (*Metaphysica* XI 3 7) that contrasted the "way of Aristotle" with the "way of Plato" and clearly showed his Platonic inclination, although he cites Aristotle liberally and acknowledges the fundamental role of his authority.

One of the principle doctrines Ulrich examines in his *summa* is the theory of the divine intellect. This is one of the most characteristic philosophical doctrines of Albertist teaching, but Ulrich places it in the declaredly theological framework of the *De summo bono*. Ulrich's reflection on man springs from the hermetic assumption drawn from the first chapter of Albertus Magnus' *Metaphysica*: "man is the link between God and the world." Man is such because he has within him something earthly, i.e., the body, and something divine, i.e., the intellect. Man's intellect is divine because "God is intellect" (*De summo bono* II 4 1 4; II 3 5 5; IV 1 2 7); therefore, man, by nature, resembles God. This innate faculty of man, which philosophical tradition calls the *intellectus agens*

(active intellect) and theological tradition calls “the image of God,” allows man to intellectually become one with God. Thus Ulrich underlines the purely natural aspect of the intellect, which is the principle of the nobility of the soul for reasons of a physical nature, independent from grace and from Revelation. The process that leads man to contemplative beatitude is also natural: the human intellect intellectually ascends by successive stages of knowledge until it becomes “divine intellect,” the activity of which is the contemplation of God and of separate substances. Beatitude lies in this cognitive union with God.

The theory of intellectual knowledge of God, which for Albertus Magnus was valid only in a strictly philosophical realm, in the *De summo bono* assume an absolute validity on a par with knowledge by faith. The doctrine of contemplative beatitude played an important role in the historical development of so-called “German mysticism” and demonstrates that Ulrich’s mysticism can be defined as “philosophical” (Sturlese 1996), even though the theologian overlays theological and philosophical arguments in his texts and frames the doctrine of the divine intellect in the mystical theology of Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite.

The doctrine of the divine intellect is also found in the ethics section of the *De summo bono*, that is, the sixth, still unpublished book, where Ulrich explains that the divine component present in man, the active intellect, being separate and free from material nature, gives man control over his own actions and is thus the instigator of the entire process of the production of virtue (Zavattero 2008). Just as through the act of cognition man is capable of intellectually knowing God, independent of grace and Revelation, by means of the process of perfecting the intellect, so he is capable in practice of producing his own natural moral excellence, without the intervention of any principle extrinsic to the soul (God or fate). That is, man brings what is inherent in his nature to perfection through the act of reason, which informs all moral acts.

Studies on reactions to the *De summo bono* show that Ulrich’s ideas were utilized not only

by his confreres from the Cologne *studium* (Dietrich of Freiberg, Berthold of Moosburg and perhaps Eckhart), but also played a decisive role in the formation of the fifteenth-century line of thought known as “Albertism,” which referred back to the doctrine of Albertus Magnus. Heymericus of Campo, the most important representative of Albertism in Cologne, explicitly cited Ulrich’s *summa* in his works. Additionally, circulation of the *De summo bono* at the University of Cologne in the fifteenth century is documented by the fact that at least five of the twenty-six surviving manuscripts of the *summa* belonged to scholars who taught and studied there. Even Denys the Carthusian, a student and later professor of arts in Cologne, was a scrupulous and devoted reader of Ulrich, as demonstrated by the frequent citations from the *De summo bono*, especially in his *Commentary on the Sentences* (Palazzo 2004a, 2006).

In addition to this reception, which indicates a speculative interest in Ulrich’s doctrines, there was another one that privileged the doctrines of moral theology, pastoral care, and penitential law contained in the sixth book of the *summa* (Palazzo 2008). These doctrines, collected in manuals for confessors, like the *Summa confessorum* by John of Freiburg, and disseminated in vernacular, were widely circulated in German-Polish areas in the late Middle Ages (thirteenth to fifteenth centuries). Their reputation extended beyond the bounds of the university and academic world, as they concerned above all parish priest directly involved in pastoral activities and the ministry of confession.

## Cross-References

- ▶ [Albertism](#)
- ▶ [Berthold of Moosburg](#)
- ▶ [Denys the Carthusian](#)
- ▶ [Dietrich of Freiberg](#)
- ▶ [Heymeric of Camp](#)
- ▶ [Meister Eckhart](#)
- ▶ [Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite](#)
- ▶ [Thomas Aquinas](#)



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## Universals

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### Abstract

Medieval discussions of universals are some of the most sophisticated and sustained discussions in the history of this topic. This article focuses on medieval discussions of the ontological status of universals. Speculations about the existence of universal things were prompted by what was said (and what was not said) in ancient Greek treatises on logic and metaphysics. Throughout the medieval period,

philosophers divided roughly into those who believed that there was some mind-independent reality that was common to many particulars (i.e., realism) and those who believed that universality was a mind-dependent property (i.e., anti-realism or nominalism). Anti-realists critiqued contemporary versions of realism. Realists responded to the anti-realists with ever more sophisticated accounts of the real basis for predication and classification.

## Preliminaries

Although it is quite common for scholars to refer to “the” problem of universals, this way of speaking is deceptive. There are in fact a cluster of problems in the fields of logic, philosophy of language, epistemology, and metaphysics. Medieval philosophers speculated about universals in all these contexts. This article will focus primarily, but not exclusively, upon the ontological problems associated with universals. (For a survey of medieval discussions of universals with an emphasis on the semantic and epistemological aspects, consult Klima 2008.)

Medieval philosophers developed their theories of universals in light of developments in late ancient philosophy. One important locus for the discussion of the nature and existence of universals was Aristotle’s *Categories*. In this work, Aristotle distinguished between two types of predication: “being said of some subject” or “being in some subject.” The items that are neither said of some subject nor are in some subject were interpreted to be individual substances. Everything else is predicated (Gr. *kategorēisthai*) of these individuals or the properties of these individuals. Aristotle’s analysis of the phrase “x is said of y,” together with his claim in *De Interpretatione* that the universal is that which is predicable of many (7, 17<sup>a</sup>39–40), suggested to late ancient commentators that those items that were said of something were universals.

Late ancient commentators wondered what the subject matter of the *Categories* was. Were the predicables things, words, or concepts? In

general, it was felt that since the *Categories* was a logical work, the treatise was primarily about words. But these words were meaningful; they somehow stood for or referred to things and the properties of things. The simplest way for a universal term to signify would be for it to signify a universal thing. Thus, for many interpreters, Aristotle’s logic implied the existence of universal things.

In his “Introduction” (*Isagoge*) to Aristotle’s logic, Porphyry claimed that there were five basic types of universal predications: the genus, the species, the *differentia*, the *proprium*, and the accident. But Porphyry famously refused to determine whether universality applies to anything besides words. He began his *Isagoge* by announcing that he would not address three questions, since they belonged to a deeper inquiry (1.9–14, [trans. Spade 1994, p. 1]). First, he would not consider whether universals “subsist” – that is, exist outside the mind – or whether they only manifest in bare conceptions. Second, he would not consider whether they are corporeal or incorporeal, if they subsist. Third, he would not consider whether they exist separately or subsist only in perceptible things.

Many medieval discussions of universals can be found in commentaries on Porphyry’s opening remarks. The Greek Neoplatonic commentators often used this text as an appropriate place to elaborate a threefold classification of the universal: (1) the universal before the many, (2) the universal in the many, and (3) the universal after the many. Latin-speaking philosophers prior to the end of the twelfth century did not know this classification of the universal. However, it was known in the medieval Arabic world, and the scheme was picked up by many later Latin-speaking philosophers.

In the medieval tradition, the universals before the many were identified with the Divine Ideas in God’s mind. They were the archetypes from which God created everything. No medieval philosopher denied the existence of the Divine Ideas. Hence, medieval philosophers never defended certain forms of anti-realism. Specifically, no medieval philosopher would deny that abstract objects exist, and even thoroughgoing non-

realists such as Abelard and Ockham believed in the existence of at least some forms, although these forms would be particulars or, as present-day philosophers would say, tropes.

The universals after the many were concepts in the human mind, often formed by a process of abstraction. Most medieval philosophers believed that these items were universals properly speaking, since they could be associated with many things.

From the ontological perspective, the main dispute among medieval philosophers was whether there is any mind-independent thing or reality that is common to many individuals – that is, whether there are any universals in re. For something to be a universal in re, it would seem that it must be present simultaneously and as a whole in each of many individuals in such a way that it contributes to the substance of each individual (cf. Boethius, *In Isag. 2nd ed.*, I, 10, 161.16–19). Adam and Eve would not share a universal, essential constituent if they merely shared portions of that constituent in the way that they might share a cake, or if they shared all of it in the way that two people can each wholly own a horse (as when the first sells the horse to the other), or if they both participated in all of it as spectators each take in the whole play. But is it possible for any thing to be essentially and entirely present in many individuals at the same time? Many medieval philosophers – even many who are traditionally labeled “realists” – thought that this could not happen.

## Boethius

In his second greater commentary on Porphyry’s *Isagoge*, Boethius developed a series of intriguing arguments in favor of the conclusion that universals do not exist outside the mind (*In Isag. 2nd ed.*, I, 10–11, 159–167, [trans. Spade 1994, pp. 21–23]; cf. King 2011; Spade 1996). The main thrust of these arguments was that something exists outside the mind only if it is a unity; yet, it is impossible for something to be one and also wholly present in each of its instantiations in such a

manner that it contributes to each individual’s substance. Hence, universals cannot subsist.

Boethius, then, posed a dilemma for the anti-realist, who believes that universals do not exist outside the mind. We surely have concepts that are universal. In particular, we believe that the concept human applies to Adam and Eve and that this is true because Adam and Eve are naturally similar to one another and to all other humans. But if Adam and Eve have no thing in common, then these attributions and classifications do not represent the world as it truly is. In short, if there are no universal things, then our concepts appear to be empty and false.

Boethius offered a solution that he attributed to the third-century Aristotelian philosopher Alexander of Aphrodisias. The mind is capable of considering things in a manner different from that in which they exist. In particular, the mind is able to consider and compare the features of concrete particulars without reference to the particular, even though these features cannot actually be separated from the particulars. By abstracting features in this manner, the mind is able to construct universal concepts. Hence, while universals do not exist in things as something common to many, the concept of a universal – since it is abstracted from things in the right way – can be truthfully attributed to many things. It is not clear that Boethius’ Alexandrian solution resolved his original problem, for it is unclear what the mind abstracts from individuals. Nevertheless, the notion that the mind contributed universality to whatever it is that is abstracted from many individuals would be very popular in succeeding generations.

## Realism, Vocalism, and “Nominalism”

In the eleventh and twelfth centuries, the Latin-speaking world possessed a limited set of source material. For most of this period, philosophers possessed Aristotle’s *Categories* and *De Interpretatione*, Porphyry’s *Isagoge*, and Boethius’ commentaries on these works. These texts were supplemented by Boethius’ introductory

handbooks on logic, his five short theological treatises, and a few other minor sources of logic and metaphysics from other later Roman authors. It is little wonder that philosophy in this period focused heavily upon logic. And, indeed, it was in treatments of logic that we find the most sustained early medieval discussions of universals.

There was a lively debate in the later part of the eleventh century (if not earlier) over the subject matter of logic (cf. Marenbon 2004, pp. 28–30). Some thought that logic dealt with things (*res*); others argued that logic is about utterances (*voces*). It is not clear that the early advocates of the *in voce* approach to logic inferred any metaphysical theses from their stance, let alone the specific thesis that universals are merely words. (For that matter, the *in re* approach to logic did not commit one to the existence of universal things.) The thesis that only utterances are universal has been attributed to a few shadowy figures from the last decades of the eleventh century, most notoriously Roscelin; yet, so little of Roscelin's work survives that it is difficult to determine what he really believed (Picavet 1911; Kluge 1976; Jolivet 1992, pp. 114–128). We do know that Roscelin's brilliant pupil, Peter Abelard, developed a series of remarkable arguments against all the main "realist" positions of his day (*Logica ingredientibus* I, 10.8–16.18, [trans. Spade 1994, pp. 29–37]; *Logica "nostrorum"* 515.10–521.17; cf. Tweedale 1976, pp. 95–129; King 2004, pp. 66–72). Abelard concluded from these investigations that universality belonged to words alone.

A word of caution is in order. A "realist" in Abelard's sense of the word is not necessarily committed to the existence of a thing that is entirely present in many individuals simultaneously. Abelard applies the label "realist" to any position that identifies the universal with a real thing (*res*), including theories that identify the universal with an individual or with a collection of individuals. For this reason, Abelard will call some theories "realist," which a contemporary metaphysician might prefer to call "anti-realist" or "nominalist."

According to Abelard, the dominant realist theories of his day were "material essence"

realism and several theories that defined universals in terms of "indifference."

Material essence realism was the view that universal forms constituted the material essence of individual things. The generic form animal and the differentia irrational constituted the material essence of Brownie the donkey. The very same animal and rational constituted the material essence of Socrates. Socrates and Plato shared the very same material essence (animal + rational or human) but were differentiated by accidental forms.

As for the indifference theories, one version claimed that the universal thing is the mereological sum (*collectio*) of all those individuals that are indifferent to one another in some respect (Freddoso 1978; Henry 1984, pp. 235–259). A second version was the identity theory, which asserted that the universal is identical to the individual insofar as that individual is indifferent from other individuals in some respect. A third version, status realism, held that individuals are indifferent in some respect because they share a status, that is, they agree in being  $\varphi$ .

Abelard reported that his old teacher William of Champeaux initially subscribed to material essence realism. Abelard's criticisms of the theory forced William to give up material essence realism and propose, instead, the identity theory. As Abelard tells the tale, he reduced William's second theory to absurdity, and having been humiliated twice in a row, William gave up the teaching of logic altogether. But others were apparently persuaded that some version of the indifference theory was correct. We possess a treatise, possibly by Walter of Mortagne or one of his students, which defends status realism (Dijs 1990, pp. 93–113). And it seems that several philosophers were attracted to revised versions of the *collectio* theory. For example, Gilbert of Poitiers and his followers associated the universal with a group of absolutely similar individual forms (Häring 1966, pp. 269 and 312; cf. Martin 1983, pp. xli–xlii). More strikingly, the anonymous author of *De generibus et speciebus* defended a sophisticated version of the *collectio* theory, in part by responding to some of Abelard's objections (although he does not explicitly mention Abelard) (§§ 85–143).

Abelard also tried to distance himself from Roscelin's position, which he deemed to be too crude, by drawing a distinction between an utterance (*vox*) and a word (*sermo*). The utterance is the physical air insofar as it is merely considered as that which is emitted from the mouth. A *vox* could not possess the property of universality. The word is that same air insofar as it is the bearer of meaning. Many words can have the property of universality, for they are predicable of many words.

Abelard felt compelled to account for the semantic properties of words. In particular, he tried to account for how an utterance acquired a meaning (and hence, became a word), and more specifically, how some utterances acquired the property of being predicable of many. As it turned out, universality was not a matter of convention; it had its foundation in nature. Every substance and every form is particular, but there is a sense in which some things are naturally indifferent to one another. Abelard even claimed that Socrates and Plato share a status, that is, they agree in that they are both human, but in contrast to what he identified as status realism, Abelard insisted that a status is not in any way a *res* (*Log. ingr.* I, 20.7–9).

## Ibn Sīnā

Whereas early Latin-speaking philosophers possessed an impoverished collection of resources, philosophers in the Arabic-speaking world had at their disposal the full Aristotelian corpus as well as select Neoplatonic works, all of this being the fruits of an enormous translation project from the Greek originals into Arabic in the eighth and ninth centuries. Not surprisingly, Arabic theories of universals had a broadly Aristotelian character. Nevertheless, many of the Arabic philosophers made some creative refinements to the Aristotelian framework. Perhaps the most significant of these was the theory developed by Ibn Sīnā, known to the Latin-speaking world as Avicenna.

A distinction between essence and existence had been drawn prior to Ibn Sīnā. But in contrast to many of his predecessors, this distinction became a fundamental feature of Ibn Sīnā's

metaphysical system. In everything other than God, there is a distinction between that thing's essence, or nature, and its existence. Ibn Sīnā adamantly denied Platonism, and hence, he did not think of essences as separable and potentially uninstantiated forms. An essence was always instantiated, either as a notion in the mind or as a constituent of a concrete individual thing. Nevertheless, one could consider an essence in itself and separately from its existence. When considered as such, one considered only that essence's definition and not any of the features that come with the essence when it exists. The things that one must bracket include all the necessary concomitants of existence, including being one and being many, and universality and particularity. Hence, for Ibn Sīnā, an essence such as horseness inasmuch as it is horseness is neither particular nor universal, and it is neither one nor many (*al-Shifā'*: *al-Ilāhiyyāt* (the *Metaphysics*), bk. V, ch. 1, § 4).

Ibn Sīnā used an ingenious argument to establish this claim about essences (*al-Shifā'*: *al-Manṭiq* (*Logic*): *al-Madkhal* (*Isagoge*), bk. I, ch. 12; translation in Marmura 1979). If an essence were universal, then universality would be part of the definition of that essence. Let us, for example, suppose that humanity is a universal. But if universality were part of the definition of humanity, then if anything were human, that thing would necessarily be universal. Given that Adam is human, it would follow of necessity that Adam is universal. But that is false. So, essences are not in and of themselves universal. But neither are they particular. For if humanity itself was particular, then humanity could only be this individual, say, Adam, and no other individual could be a human. Therefore, horseness, humanity, and animality in and of themselves are neither universal nor particular. Universality is an accident of horseness when horseness exists in the mind. Particularity is an accident of horseness when horseness exists in an individual that is a horse.

The universal horse is never in many concrete individuals. Nevertheless, the essence horseness can be said to be "in" individual horses given that horseness is a constituent of the particular horse

form that is in an individual horse (*al-Ilāhiyyāt*, V, 1, § 20). Thus, even though there is no thing that is wholly shared by many concrete individuals, there is a common, and objective, feature of reality that determines that each individually existing horse is a horse.

## Realism in the Scholastic Period

Ibn Sīnā's notion of the nature considered in itself had a tremendous influence on western medieval philosophers, once his works were translated into Latin in the latter half of the twelfth century. The notion of a neutral nature helped Scholastic philosophers to avoid the commitment to a thing that is itself numerically one but simultaneously present in many individuals; yet, in the same stroke, it allowed them to locate some extramental basis for predication and classification.

The theories that thirteenth-century philosophers developed in response to the newly translated works of Aristotle and Ibn Sīnā are often referred to as versions of "moderate" realism. Moderate realism is routinely contrasted with "extremes" forms of realism. Medieval philosophers mostly knew of Plato's ideas secondhand. As they understood him, Plato believed that universal forms could exist separately from all particulars and from all minds. Scholastic philosophers roundly rejected this form of Platonism.

There was one troubling feature of Ibn Sīnā's notion of a nature in itself. Ibn Sīnā seemed to grant the nature in itself some measure of being (*esse*), yet he denied that the nature had any degree of unity. But it was a commonplace in Scholastic philosophy that something has being only insofar as it has unity. In other words, unity was considered to be a necessary concomitant of *esse*. Scholastic philosophers were, therefore, presented with a choice: either remove all *esse* from the nature as such, or grant that the nature as such has some measure of *esse* and, thus, some degree of unity (Owens 1957, p. 4).

Thomas Aquinas chose the first of these options (*De ente et essentia*, ch. 3; cf. Owens 1957, pp. 5–7). The nature in itself had no being at all. It only had being in the mind, where it was

truly universal, or in individuals, where it was a particular nature. Thus, if we were to take Adam and Eve and really strip away (not abstract with the mind) their matter, their accidents, their substantial forms, and their individual *esse*, we would find neither one nature nor two natures; we would find no nature at all. Nevertheless, in a very real sense, it is the same nature in numerically distinct individuals, and it is the same nature in the individual and in the mind. As one commentator puts it, numerically distinct individuals have the same nature because they are "numerically distinct realizations of the same information-content" (Klima 2008, §7). It is the same nature in the mind and in the individual because the mind is grasping the same information content that is realized in the external world. To see what Aquinas is after, consider Klima's analogy. There is no universal *Moby Dick* in addition to all the individual copies of *Moby Dick*. Nevertheless, it is true that all the copies of *Moby Dick* are the same book, because they share the same information. And if one were to memorize a copy of *Moby Dick* verbatim, it would be true that one's physical copy and one's mental copy are the same book.

John Duns Scotus chose the second option (see *Ord.* II, d. 3, pars 1, q. 1, [Spade 1994, pp. 57–68]; cf. Owens 1957, pp. 7–13). The nature in itself had some measure of being, and hence, it had some degree of real unity. But whereas an individual has numerical unity, the nature has a real but less than numerical unity. The nature must have real unity, for if its unity were merely a product of the mind, then our natural inclination to group Adam and Eve together and call them both human would have no foundation in the order of things. The unity of the nature as such must be less than numerical, for if the nature were itself numerically one, then it would be this particular nature or that one. But if it were, say, Adam's nature and Eve were also human, then Eve would in fact be Adam as well. Scotus knew that his brand of realism depends upon the intelligibility of a mode of unity that is real but less than numerical. Hence, he provided a series of arguments for the claim that there are real but less than numerical unities (*op. cit.*, [Spade 1994, pp. 59–63]).



## Moderate Realism and Individuation

Given that the nature was the principle of commonality between individuals, there was a need to locate the principle that made individuals numerically distinct instances of the same kind. The realists of the Scholastic period proposed a number of principles of individuation (see the articles on various thinkers in Gracia 1994). Some Scholastic philosophers thought that matter was the principle of individuation. Aquinas proposed that it was not prime matter, but “designated” matter that individuated material substances (*De ente et essentia*, ch. 2). Others, such as Bonaventure, argued that it was the actual combination of matter and form that individuated substances. Duns Scotus argued that none of these principles would do. What was needed was a positive individual differentia, or haecceity, which was only “formally,” not really, distinct from the common nature (*Ord.* I, d. 3, pars 1, q. 6, [Spade 1994, pp. 101–107]).

## Ockham

William of Ockham insisted that no universal exists outside the mind. In his lecture on the *Sentences* of Peter Lombard, Ockham presented his most thorough and sustained treatment of the subject (*Ordinatio* I, d. 2, qq. 4–7). Ockham engaged several realist positions, moving in descending order from what we might consider to be the most realist position – namely, that the universal is truly something outside the soul and really distinct from particulars (q. 4) – to the least realist position – namely, that the same thing under one concept is universal and under another concept is singular (q. 7).

Ockham singled out Scotus’ position for special consideration, painstakingly presenting Scotus’ views prior to attacking them (q. 6; cf. *Summa logicae* I, 16). Ockham pursued two strategies when attacking Scotus’ position. First, he attacked the notion of formal distinction, for if he could show that the formal distinction

was incoherent, then Scotus would be forced back into a version of realism that Ockham thought he had already dismantled. Second, Ockham argued that even if one granted for the sake of argument that created things can be formally distinct, Scotus’ position was internally inconsistent.

Ockham concluded from this sequence of attacks that “no thing outside the soul is universal, either through itself or through anything real or rational added on, no matter how it is considered or understood” (*Ord.* I, d. 2, q. 7, pp. 248–249, [Spade 1994, p. 204]). There were universals, but these universals were found only in the soul. In particular, Ockham thought that some mental terms (i.e., concepts) are signs for several things, and hence, universal. Uttered words (*voces*), which are conventional signs referring back to concepts, are derivatively universal (*Summa logicae* I, 14). Ockham changed his mind about whether any thing corresponded to these concepts (see Adams 1987, vol. 1, pp. 71–107). At first, it seems, he identified the mental word with a thing or quality in the mind. But he abandoned this theory for, first, the *factum* theory, and finally, for the thesis that concepts are identical to mental acts, and not things.

Like all anti-realists in the medieval period, Ockham was eager to avoid the accusation that if there are no universals, then the way that we think about the world has no basis in reality. No matter what ontology of concepts he embraced, Ockham maintained that the universal concept was itself singular but “naturally” capable of being a sign for many. Signification was ultimately based on real relations between things. Ockham did not think that a commitment to real relations forced him back into a realist position, for these real relations were themselves not things (Adams 1987, vol. 1, pp. 111–121).

## Realism Resurgent

It was not clear that Ockham had considered all possible realist positions. Moreover, even if he

had done so, some commentators have argued that many of Ockham's arguments failed to show any contradiction or outright falsehood. At best these arguments showed that some forms of realism had unexpected consequences (see, e.g., Adams 1987, vol. 1, pp. 31–38).

Walter Burley agreed with Ockham that the only distinction that can hold between two created things is a real distinction. Hence, universals are really distinct from particulars. Burley also asserted that the whole universal exists in each of its particulars but that this does not imply that the universal is numerically multiplied by its existence in numerically distinct particulars (Adams 1982, pp. 422–423). Ockham thought that the latter thesis implied that the universal that is in particulars is numerically one. But how can one thing exist in many numerically distinct individuals without being divided into many? Furthermore, if all of human were in Adam, then if Adam were annihilated (i.e., every part of Adam utterly ceased to exist), human also would be annihilated. But Burley never claimed that the universal that is in the particulars is itself numerically one, he merely denied that it was numerically many. Moreover, he replied, no particular has anything but particulars for its parts. Accordingly, human is not a “part” of Adam, and the annihilation of Adam would not entail the annihilation of human (*Tractatus de universalibus*, pp. 32–36; cf. Adams 1982, pp. 424–426).

Many realists considered Burley's position to be too “extravagant.” For one thing, Burley seemed to be multiplying entities at an alarming rate. For example, Burley thought that there was both an individual form, which is a part of the individual, and a universal form. But what is the relation between the individual form and the universal (see Boh in Gracia 1994, pp. 351–356)? Moreover, to many, Burley appeared to be flirting with Platonism (Conti 2008, p. 386). If the universal is really distinct from particulars, then it seems possible that God could create a universal that exists separately from all particulars.

A number of later realists reacted to Burley's extravagance by returning either to a broadly Thomist position or to a broadly Scotist position (Conti 2008, pp. 386–403). Dominicans such as Franciscus de Prato and Stephanus de Reate insisted that universal forms have no being outside of the being of their individual instances and that real identity comes in degrees. The limit case of real identity is being “convertibly,” or entirely, the same. A universal and one of its individuals is really identical, but not entirely identical (Conti 2008, pp. 387–388). Wyclif and the so-called Oxford realists defended the view that the universal is formally, and not really distinct from the particular (see, e.g., Wyclif, *Tractatus de universalibus* cap. 4, p. 87).

## Cross-References

- ▶ [Boethius](#)
- ▶ [Categories](#)
- ▶ [Essence and Existence](#)
- ▶ [Ibn Sīnā, Abū 'Alī \(Avicenna\)](#)
- ▶ [John Duns Scotus](#)
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- ▶ [Walter Burley](#)
- ▶ [William of Champeaux](#)
- ▶ [William of Ockham](#)

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## Universities and Philosophy

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### Abstract

During the period from 1200 to 1500, philosophy was to a large extent located at the Arts faculties of the various universities, of which there were more than 50 by the beginning of the Modern Age. Its main concern was the reading of Aristotle, whose works were commented upon according to analogous procedures at each of the universities. These similarities facilitated the exchange of students and masters, who through the influx of new ideas, stimulated debates about the interpretation of Aristotle's texts as well as the implications of his thought. Time and again, questions about the relationship between philosophy and theology led to serious conflicts, which had important consequences for the teaching of philosophy at the universities, most significantly exemplified by the *Wegestreit* in the late-medieval period.

### The Faculty of Arts

Since their emergence around 1200, the universities had formed the most important centers of philosophy, where philosophers met and practiced until the end of the Middle Ages. Philosophy's proper place was the Arts faculty, one of the four faculties that comprised the typical medieval university, along with Theology, Medicine, and Law – although not every university had all four. Philosophical subjects or subjects with a philosophical relevance were also discussed at the other faculties, especially in the faculty of Theology, but it must be emphasized that the medievals themselves opted for a division of their universities into independent faculties, each possessing its own statutes, curriculum, and administration.

Despite their widespread use in the Middle Ages, the titles Arts faculty (*facultas artium*) and Liberal Arts faculty (*facultas artium liberalium*) are misleading, as the syllabus at these faculties had almost nothing to do with the traditional program of the seven liberal arts. Of these liberal arts, only logic and to a lesser extent grammar still played a prominent role in the educational system of the Arts faculty. Other main components of the syllabus, however, such as physics and metaphysics, were not considered liberal arts, as Albert the Great had argued and whose position on the matter was accepted and reiterated over the years. Nevertheless, the designation Liberal Arts faculty was used throughout the medieval period, mainly to stress the propaedeutic role of philosophy in relation to the other academic disciplines. In this sense, for example, the statutes of the Arts faculty of Freiburg im Breisgau maintained that the Arts faculty is the “devout nurse” (*pia nutrix*) of the higher faculties. It was only in the sixteenth century that the term philosophy became itself part of the denomination, in combinations like *facultas artium seu philosophiae*, or even replaced it, as in *facultas philosophica*, which was used in 1560 in Ingolstadt.

### The Basic Texts

The practice of philosophy at medieval universities was intimately connected to its teaching program, the keystone of which was a standard set of texts that were read and commented upon in the classroom. These texts also determined the division of subjects treated at the Arts faculty. In their classes, masters did not so much discuss general philosophical topics, like epistemology or philosophy of science, as they read and commented upon standard books such as Aristotle's *Physics* or *Metaphysics*, which were discussed again and again over many years, each time by new masters. They did not always read the complete works, but only significant parts of them, and here again standard practices were followed. As a rule, for example, the first book of Aristotle's *On the Soul* was left out, as well as the thirteenth and fourteenth books of his *Metaphysics*.

It was around the middle of the thirteenth century that the *corpus aristotelicum* became the root of the syllabus. Of course each master had his own focus when reading the texts. For example, in the fourteenth century much more stress was placed on methodological issues than in the thirteenth and fifteenth centuries. However, the starting point for their philosophical reflections was always the same. Apart from the works of Aristotle, a number of others' texts were commented upon, such as those of classical authors like Boethius and Euclid, and those of medievals like Albert the Great and Marsilius of Inghen. However, precisely which and how many of these texts were taught varied in the syllabi of the different universities.

Because teaching focused on standard texts, these were instrumental in determining the issues to be dealt with by the master. Thus, it could happen that one and the same subject would be treated in different classes by different masters, depending on the texts being read and the interests of the master. For example, the nature of universals was not only dealt with in commentaries on the opening of Porphyry's *Isagoge*, which was the *locus classicus*, but also in those on the first book of the *Physics*, where Aristotle said that man first has general knowledge and only afterward particular, as well as in those on second book of *De anima*, in which Aristotle argued that universals are the object of the intellect and particulars that of the senses.

This is not as chaotic as it may seem at first glance, since the structure of the *corpus aristotelicum* was stable, remaining the same over the years at all universities. For modern research this has the advantage that it is relatively easy to locate and identify the topics that were discussed in the different commentaries on Aristotle and to make comparisons between commentaries written at different universities at different times.

## The Teaching Program

In general, the teaching program for philosophy was constructed as follows. During the first stage,

primarily the logical works of the *corpus aristotelicum* were studied, then the physical works, followed by the *Metaphysics* and finally the *Ethics*. Additional works in the field of grammar, logic, rhetoric, mathematics, or astronomy were included, but played a less central role.

The program was divided into three consecutive stages. The first stage lasted from the beginning of study until achievement of the first academic grade, that of bachelor. During this time, study consisted primarily of the logical and some parts of the physical works of Aristotle. The student at this stage was called *scolaris*. Once he passed his first exam, which happened generally after 2–3 years of study, he was called *baccalareus* and prepared himself for the next exam, that of the licentiate. During this period he principally followed courses on the remainder of the physical works, the *Metaphysics* and the *Ethics*. This phase lasted longer, sometimes up to 5 years. After he had been awarded his licentiate, the student then applied for the title of master, which was normally awarded within the year. The master's title granted him the *ius ubique docendi*, that is, right to teach at all universities, although in practice this was not always accepted. At the end of the Middle Ages, for instance, when the Arts faculties were divided into a *via moderna* and *via antiqua*, some universities that followed only the *via moderna* refused to accept masters who had been educated in the *via antiqua*.

## Commentary, Exercises, and Disputations

The process of studying and discussing the texts of the syllabus was threefold: ordinary lectures on the texts presented by the master, exercises to deepen the students' knowledge of those texts, and disputations on their content. Lectures normally took place in the morning. The text was read aloud by the master, who also explained the division of the text and its content. This was done either in a cursory fashion, with the master sticking close to the text, or more extensively, using the text as a starting point for questions that he then discussed with the students. Most commentaries

that have come down to us in manuscripts or early printed editions only partially reflect what was actually taught in the classroom, having been adapted for publication by the master. Occasionally, lecture notes written by students survived, and these present a different, far less structured picture. Apart from these, statutes, protocols, colophons, and illuminations also help to reconstruct the teaching situation at the Arts faculties.

After lectures, students attended exercises in the afternoon in which the same texts presented earlier that day were dealt with once more. These exercises were given by masters, although not necessarily by the same ones who had given the morning lecture on the subject. Some information about the form of these exercises can be drawn from the statutes of the various Arts faculties; however, their actual content remains unclear. It is possible that the *exercitia*, *puncta*, and *reparationes* which have survived in a number of late-medieval manuscripts are the product of such exercises.

Finally, disputations played an important role in the educational program, and were considered necessary for sharpening the minds of students and masters. To be sure, these disputations cannot be compared to those in the Theology faculties, which had a much more solemn character; nevertheless, they played a similarly central role. In the late-medieval period, an ordinary disputation was held once a week under the presidency of one of the masters, who posed questions to the bachelors and other masters, against whose solutions he then argued. In addition to this, short, daily disputations were held in the colleges. All those living in the college were required to be present, masters as well as students. The subjects of the ordinary disputations varied, yet basically took their starting point from those texts read in the lectures and exercises. The daily disputations primarily treated logical subjects.

### Colleges and *Bursae*

Since at least the fourteenth century, it was typical for students to live together with masters in colleges or *bursae*, which were owned and run by the

latter. In these colleges, not only disputations, but also exercises were held. Toward the end of the Middle Ages, a substantial part of the educational program was delivered in the colleges, including, most importantly, some of the ordinary lectures. This shift had enormous impact on the schooling of students. The increased closeness of the master–student relationship facilitated the emergence of different schools of thought, each expressing the preferences of their respective master. An example of great historical import is Cologne, founded in 1388, where attached to the Arts faculty were a number of *bursae*, each with their own reading of the *corpus aristotelicum*. The *thomistae* at the *bursa montana* commented upon Aristotle on the basis of the works of Thomas Aquinas, whereas the *albertistae* at the *bursa laurentiana* preferred the commentaries of Albert the Great. School traditions linked to institutions closely connected to the Arts faculty are a phenomenon typical of the fifteenth century, which does not appear in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries.

### The *Wegestreit*

Also characteristic of the late-medieval period is the so-called *Wegestreit*: the debate between the *via antiqua* and *via moderna* which took shape in the second decade of the fifteenth century and determined the educational program at many universities until the beginning of the sixteenth century. The bone of contention was the correct interpretation of Aristotle – whether it was that exemplified by Thomas Aquinas, Albert the Great, and John Duns Scotus (the *via antiqua*), or that exemplified by William of Ockham, John Buridan, and Marsilius of Inghen (the *via moderna*). That the debate became so intense was due largely to the fact that it bore upon the relationship between philosophy and theology. According to representatives of the *via antiqua*, there is a necessary connection between the two, most significantly demonstrated by Thomas Aquinas, and therefore Aristotle must be interpreted in a way that does not conflict with Christian Faith. Defenders of the *via moderna*



denied this and referred, for example, to Marsilius of Inghen, who had argued that for Aristotle the human soul is mortal and creation from nothing an impossibility, and therefore that Aristotle's thought cannot be completely reconciled with Revelation.

At many universities, masters and students of both "ways" lived in different colleges. Consequently, the same texts of Aristotle were read at the same time by two different masters, each according to their own *via*. Exams were also held separately, so as to avoid students being failed because they did not respond to the question in an appropriate way. This situation interfered with the operation of the Arts faculty in many ways, and the protocols of the various Arts faculties testify to the plethora of difficulties that emerged from this state of affairs. Only toward the beginning of the sixteenth century did circumstances eventually change.

### Channels of Exchange

The number of Arts faculties grew continually from the thirteenth century onward, with peaks in the second half of the fourteenth century (Prague, Vienna, Erfurt, Heidelberg, Cologne) and the second half of the fifteenth century (Greifswald, Uppsala, Tübingen, Freiburg, Basel). There was a significant exchange of teachers and students between these institutions. Some students were attracted by the presence of a particular master to take their degree at a foreign university, as was the case when Marsilius of Inghen taught at Paris in the early 1360s. Others followed their master when he moved from one place to another, as when Heymeric of Camp arrived in Cologne in 1422. Naturally, these academic peregrinations were closely tied to political circumstances. The Hundred Years' War, which began in the 1330s, impeded exchange between England and Paris, and this had an immediate impact on academic debates on the continent. The imbroglio of the Schism in 1378, which in Paris subjected those who opposed the University's official support of Clemens VII to boycotts, forced in particular German masters to

leave the city and seek academic positions elsewhere. Some of these played a significant role at the newly established German universities, such as Marsilius of Inghen, who was rector of the University of Paris in 1367 and 1371, but left the city in 1378 to become the first rector of the University of Heidelberg in 1386.

When designing their statutes, the Arts faculties of the newly erected universities often used Paris as a model, as well as Vienna, though to a lesser degree. Consequently, the structures of the different Arts faculties were more or less similar, making the exchange of students and masters easier. Some faculties drew their masters from privileged universities, as in Leuven professors from Cologne were preferred. In the early years of Freiburg University, a significant number of masters came from Heidelberg, which had an immediate effect on the way Aristotle was read there, since these masters were trained in the *via moderna*.

It goes without saying that the movements of masters and students facilitated the exchange of ideas and thus substantially enhanced the level of academic debate with a constant influx of new ideas. For example, the views of the Parisian master Henry of Ghent were already discussed at a very early stage in England, where they had a substantial impact on John Duns Scotus. The exchange of manuscripts also played an important role. Not only did the universities and faculties possess significant collections, but individuals as well. As is apparent from university documents and private letters, manuscripts were often borrowed to be read or copied, sometimes over a period of several years.

### Controversies

Within the limits of this article, it is hardly possible to provide an accurate account of those controversies that were central to the philosophical debates held at medieval universities. Generally, they belonged to the fields of logic (universals, signification, supposition); natural philosophy (motion, time, infinity); metaphysics (substance, being, first cause); and ethics (virtues, happiness,

friendship). The bottom line was the correct interpretation of Aristotle, whose writings stood at the center of the educational program; yet, this did not in any way prevent original thought. Even Ockham, whose views were rejected by some contemporaries as new inventions, repeatedly stressed that what he said was precisely that which Aristotle expressed in his writings. And although Aristotle himself was sometimes attacked, especially by theologians (some of whom, such as Francis of Meyronnes in his commentary on the *Sentences*, called him the worst metaphysician), he nonetheless remained the virtually undisputed starting point of philosophical reflection at medieval universities.

Significantly, Aristotle was considered the best example of what human beings are able to achieve through the use of natural reason alone, that is, without the aid of Christian Revelation. This led to repeated conflicts with representatives of the Theology faculty and even the Church, when philosophers underlined in their classes that Aristotle, and thus natural reason, came to conclusions opposed to those of Christian Faith. Landmarks were the Condemnation of 1277, when Bishop Stephen Tempier banned a number of philosophical theses discussed in the Arts faculty at Paris, and the aforementioned late-medieval *Wegestreit*.

## Conclusion

In the eyes of many sixteenth-century intellectuals, the debates at late-medieval universities had demonstrated that philosophy practiced in this way could hardly attain its goal, namely, to find the truth, but would always dissolve into endless battles between schools. This belief had a twofold effect on the practice of philosophy. On the one hand, at some universities an effort was made to produce new teaching materials, designed to represent a common view acceptable to all parties, as for example those made by Johannes Eck at the request of the University of Ingolstadt. On the other hand, philosophical movements outside the universities began to gain influence during this time, questioning scholastic philosophy

on the whole and paving the way for future philosophers like Hobbes, Descartes, and Spinoza, who had no university affiliation. To be sure, universities in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries continued to play a significant role in the production of philosophical texts. But in contrast to the Middle Ages, crucial developments took place increasingly outside the lecture halls.

## Cross-References

- ▶ [Aristotelianism in the Greek, Latin, Syriac, Arabic, and Hebrew Traditions](#)
- ▶ [Categories, Commentaries on Aristotle's](#)
- ▶ [De caelo, Commentaries on Aristotle's](#)
- ▶ [De generatione et corruptione, Commentaries on Aristotle's](#)
- ▶ [Nicomachean Ethics, Commentaries on Aristotle's](#)
- ▶ [Parisian Condemnation of 1277](#)
- ▶ [Posterior Analytics, Commentaries on Aristotle's](#)

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# V

## Virtue and Vice

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### Abstract

From the twelfth century, a philosophical notion of virtue as a humanly acquired *habitus* coexisted in medieval moral thought with a religious notion of virtue as a divine gift. The most widespread catalogue of moral virtues was the Platonic quartet of the four cardinal virtues, which medieval authors sought to reconcile with Aristotle's scheme of five intellectals and 11 moral virtues. In theology, the cardinal virtues figured next to virtues of a biblical origin; from the twelfth century, the three theological and the four cardinal virtues were combined as the seven principal virtues of Christendom. Different classifications ("contrary" or "remedial" virtues; the fourfold hierarchy of Macrobius; monastic, economical, political virtues) existed as well.

Vice was mostly defined in theology as the absence of virtue, while philosophers followed Aristotle in locating virtue as a mean between two opposite "vices," one representing an excess, the other a lack of the virtuous quality in question. The most frequently employed catalogue of vices is the scheme of the capital vices or deadly sins,

which originated as an octad in ancient monasticism and was transformed to a septenary by Gregory the Great. Typically, the scheme of the deadly sins appears in monastic, spiritual, and pastoral literature rather than in learned theology, which usually takes its point of departure in the seven principal virtues and contrasts each of them with a variety of vices.

The extent to which a philosophical virtue theory was able to detach itself in the Middle Ages from theology is disputed in scholarship. Many moral philosophers shared religious concerns with theologians. In addition, the moral psychology underlying medieval virtue theory is essentially Christian in character, as it rests on the notion of fallen human nature.

Medieval moral writing, which ranges from academic speculation to all kinds of pastoral and educational literature, centers for a great part around the concepts of virtue and vice (Bloomfield et al. 1979; Newhauser 1993; Newhauser and Bejczy 2008). Virtue and vice were both philosophically as well as religiously defined in medieval thought. From the twelfth century in particular, the relation between the philosophical and religious aspects of both concepts occasioned continuous debate.

Classical antiquity provided the Middle Ages with various philosophical notions of virtue. Peripatetic and Stoic philosophy essentially conceives of virtue as a rational perfection of man's natural capacity for the good. According to Aristotle, virtue is a steadfast *habitus* formed through

continuous application; human beings have an inborn aptitude for the good, which they are able to follow and develop through their own effort. Cicero defines virtue as a *habitus* of the mind in agreement with nature and reason (*animi habitus naturae modo atque rationi consentaneus*; *De inventione* 2.53.159), while Boethius speaks of a *habitus* of the well-ordered mind (*habitus mentis bene constitutae*; *De differentiis topicis* 2). Neoplatonism rather sees human virtue as modeled on the *virtutes exemplares* inherent in the mind of God, a theory chiefly known to the Middle Ages from Macrobius' commentary on the *Somnium Scipionis*.

For patristic authors, however, true virtue is unthinkable outside a Christian context. Goodness has its unique source in God, and any conception of virtue unrelated to God is therefore false. Ambrose, Jerome, and Augustine accordingly reject the notion of virtue as a humanly acquired attitude and redefine it as a divine gift enabling believers to live in union with God – if not perfectly in this life, at least in the next. Virtue thus becomes the exclusive property of Christians, as categories of a religiously conceived goodness culminating in celestial beatitude. Later patristic writers (Julian Pomerius, Gregory the Great) corroborate the Christian character of the virtues while stressing their importance for the active life. Enabling Christians to achieve moral acts and thereby to gain merit, the virtues serve as divine instruments, which secure morality in the here and now and salvation in the hereafter. Until the twelfth century, this line of interpretation dominated moral writing. Meanwhile, Carolingian authors (Alcuin, Hrabanus Maurus) gave the virtues a central role in moral education. They advocated the virtues to their audience as means to live by God's will, stressed the need to propagate them among all Christian believers, and moreover viewed the virtues as necessary tools in the struggle against sin. Quite apart from this tradition, Martin of Braga (d. 579/580) devoted a treatise to the cardinal virtues, which is entirely Stoic in character and probably epitomizes a lost work of Seneca. His *Formula vitae honestae* is the most frequently copied work on the virtues

from the Middle Ages and was usually attributed by its medieval readers to Seneca himself.

In the twelfth century, classical moral philosophy was studied with renewed interest and for the first time since the patristic age, the virtues gave rise to intense debate. Whereas intellectuals such as Peter Abelard and John of Salisbury thought the classical teachings on the virtues highly instructive for Christians, religious authors such as Bernard of Clairvaux refused to recognize the existence of moral goodness outside the faith and took efforts to vindicate the Christian character of virtue. On a doctrinal level, the rediscovery of classical moral thought forced theologians to reflect on the interaction of nature and grace in matters of morality. Most twelfth-century masters stuck to the idea that even if humans possess a natural inclination to goodness, the formation of virtue is dependent on divine grace. Peter Lombard accordingly defines virtue as “a good quality of the mind by which one lives rightly, that nobody uses badly, and that God alone works in man” (*Sententiae* II.27.1 § 1: *bona qualitas mentis, qua recte vivitur et qua nullus male utitur, quam Deus solus in homine operatur*). The generation of Parisian theologians active after the Lombard's death, however (Peter the Chanter, Alan of Lille, Stephen Langton, and others), formally acknowledged the existence of humanly acquired virtues (*virtutes politicae, virtutes civiles*) that enable a moral order in the present life, especially in the social and political atmosphere, next to virtues informed by divine grace and procuring salvation (*virtutes catholicae*). Their acknowledgment of naturally acquired virtues facilitated the reception of Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics* in the thirteenth century. In effect, most thirteenth-century theologians recognize moral virtue on three levels. First, moral virtues exist as habits acquired through human effort and procuring happiness in the present life, in agreement with Aristotle's teachings (*virtus acquisita, virtus consuetudinalis*). Second, charity can transform the acquired virtues into gratuitous virtues (Bonaventure, William of Ockham), or at least provide the acts produced by the acquired virtues with a salvific effect (Thomas Aquinas, John Duns Scotus). Third, Christians possess

moral virtues as qualities directly infused by divine grace (*virtus infusa*); scholastic theologians frequently claim that the Lombard's definition pertains to the latter type of virtue only. From the late thirteenth century, however, the threefold recognition of moral virtue was disputed from two different sides. On the one hand, some theologians (Henry of Ghent, Godfrey of Fontaines, and John Duns Scotus) denied the existence of the infused moral virtues. In their view, the acquired virtues already procure salvation in combination with charity, so that the infused moral virtues are superfluous (Lottin 1948–1960: vol. 3). On the other hand, the existence of acquired moral virtues came under attack from the mid-fourteenth century, when a group of masters associated with the “Augustinian revival” in theology (Gregory of Rimini, Hugolin of Orivieto, Thomas Bradwardine) returned to Augustine's position that morality and virtue entirely depend on grace. Without God's special assistance, humans are incapable according to these theologians to do any good. Their views had a remarkable influence on some early Italian humanists (Francis Petrarch, Coluccio Salutati, Lorenzo Valla; Trinkaus 1970), although Aristotelian, Stoic, Neoplatonic, and even Epicurean views of virtue are strongly represented in fifteenth-century humanism, too (Kraye 1988; Lines 2002).

In contrast to virtue, vice is, as a human inclination to evil caused by the Fall, primarily a theological concept. Yet classical moral philosophy does oppose the virtues to specific moral imperfections. Aristotle famously conceives of virtue as a mean between an excess and a lack of the virtuous quality in question (locating fortitude, for instance, between rashness and cowardice); in medieval philosophy, both sorts of moral defects are usually called vices (*vitia*). Stoicism rather contrasts the virtues – in particular the four cardinal virtues of the mind – with the four passions, or affects, of the body: desire or hope, fear, joy, and sadness. Although some patristic and early medieval authors lent support to this theory, others (Lactantius, Julian Pomerius, and Isidore of Seville) rejected it, claiming instead that the four passions are morally neutral forces, which can be transformed into either virtues or vices by the free

will. In the High and late Middle Ages, this last line of thought prevailed.

In theology, vice and sin were defined from patristic times as the absence of virtue rather than as realities in themselves. Augustine's dictum *non est substantia peccatum* (*De natura et gratia* 20.22) was repeated by many medieval authors and entered into Peter Lombard's *Sententiae* (II.35.4.1). The denial of the real existence of the vices coheres with the idea, fundamental to Christian metaphysics, that evil does not exist in its own right. What humans conceive as evil is merely the corruption or the absence of the good, as the Lombard insists in his discussion of vice and sin (*Sententiae* II.34.4.2). Consequently, vice is not a bad quality, but the absence of a good quality. Still, a number of medieval theologians (Alan of Lille, Thomas Aquinas, and Durand of Saint Pourçain) and philosophers (Radulphus Brito, James of Douai, in their commentaries on the *Nicomachean Ethics*) argue that vice is not mere *privatio virtutis*, but a positive defect or *habitus malus* which moves the moral agent in a way contrary to virtue. The Franciscan friar David of Augsburg (d. 1272) even goes so far as to claim in his highly influential *De exterioris et interioris hominis compositione* (3.28.3) that virtue is the absence of vice, thus turning the orthodox view on the matter upside down.

Due to the diverse conceptualizations of virtue and vice, various classifications of virtues and vices coexist in medieval moral thought. The most widespread catalogue of moral virtues is the Platonic quartet of the cardinal virtues (prudence, justice, fortitude, and temperance); the term “cardinal virtues” was actually coined by Ambrose of Milan. The cardinal virtues were known to the Middle Ages from Stoic and Neoplatonic sources and traditionally served as mother concepts in a genealogy of virtues. Aristotle, however, presents a different catalogue in his *Nicomachean Ethics*, distinguishing five intellectual virtues, which order reason itself (*scientia*, *sapientia*, *ars*, *intelligentia*, *prudencia*), from eleven moral virtues, which have the affective life as their object (*fortitude*, *temperantia*, *liberalitas*, *magnificentia*, *magnanimitas*, an unnamed virtue pertaining to moderate honor,



*mansuetudo*, *amicitia* or *affabilitas*, *veritas*, *eutrapelia*, *iustitia*). Aristotle's medieval readers took efforts to reconcile both classifications: first, by arguing that prudence is also a moral virtue, or occupies a middle position between the moral and intellectual virtues; second, by claiming that prudence, justice, fortitude, and temperance are the four principal virtues even in Aristotle's system, while in their Stoic conception they are conditions of virtue rather than virtues themselves (Bejczy 2008). In theology, the cardinal virtues were accepted from patristic times, but moral and spiritual qualities of biblical origin likewise counted as virtues – the three theological virtues (faith, hope, charity), the seven gifts of the Holy Spirit, the macarisms (the mental preparations for the beatitudes: poorness of spirit, meekness, etc.), the beatitudes themselves, and individual concepts such as humility, wisdom, and patience. Only from the twelfth century were the three theological and the four cardinal virtues combined as the seven principal virtues of Christendom. Finally, in pastoral theology in particular, one frequently encounters schemes of seven or eight virtues conceived as direct counterparts of the seven or eight deadly sins. These are known as “remedial” or “contrary” virtues in scholarship.

Virtues were also classified according to their degree of intensity and their social impact. According to Macrobius, the cardinal virtues exist at four different levels. As political virtues, they regulate earthly concerns; as purgatorial virtues, they help humans to detach themselves from these concerns; as virtues of the purged mind, they define the contemplative life; as exemplary virtues, they reside in the mind of God. This fourfold distinction was commonly accepted from the late twelfth century. Yet from the late thirteenth century, scholastic masters also accepted a threefold distinction into monastic, economical, and political virtues as pertaining to individual, familiar, and political life, respectively. While Macrobius' hierarchy is based on the Platonic view that virtues become more perfect as they better assure individual contemplation, the threefold distinction accepted in the thirteenth century rather rests on Aristotle's assumption that virtues are better as they better secure the common good.

Political virtues hence rank lowest in the first hierarchy, but highest in the second. Nevertheless, Albert the Great and Giles of Rome associated Macrobius' hierarchy with varying degrees of virtue derived by them from book vii of the *Nicomachean Ethics* (Bejczy 2007).

The most frequently employed catalogue of vices is the scheme of the capital vices or deadly sins, which has its origin in fourth-century hermetic monasticism. Evagrius Ponticus formulated a series of eight “evil thoughts” by which the devil attempted to distract monks from a life devoted to God. The arrangement of Evagrius passed to the West by John Cassian and exerted considerable influence on early medieval Irish and Anglo-Saxon penitentials. Gregory the Great transformed the scheme into a septenary of *principalia vitia*: vainglory, envy, wrath, sadness, avarice, gluttony, and lust, all originating from the root vice of pride. Later medieval authors usually took vainglory and pride together as a single vice and replaced sadness with sloth; the ensuing list of seven deadly sins has remained intact until present times (Bloomfield 1952; Newhauser 1993; Casagrande and Vecchio 2000). Typically, the scheme of the deadly sins (a designation which became common in the thirteenth century) appears in monastic, spiritual, and pastoral literature rather than in learned theology, which usually takes its point of departure in the virtues. The scheme is absent, for instance, in the work of Bernard of Clairvaux, while the *Secunda secundae* of Thomas Aquinas (the part of the *Summa theologiae* concerned with moral theology) basically consists of an exposition on the seven principal virtues and the many vices opposed to each of them. In the prologue of the *Secunda secundae*, Aquinas points out that moral theology amounts to a discussion of virtue, and that a theological discussion of virtue amounts to a discussion of the three theological and four cardinal virtues. Following a similar logic, John Duns Scotus even explicitly rejects the scheme of the deadly sins. In his view, a catalogue of principal vices may well be construed, but such a catalogue should consist of vices opposed to either the theological and cardinal virtues or the Ten Commandments. In the latter case, one should postulate the

existence of ten principal vices; in the former case, there are seven, but not the seven accepted ones, as the septenary of Gregory the Great does not contain disbelief (the opposite of faith) and despair (the opposite of hope). In either case, the current scheme of the deadly sins is deficient. Theological attempts to construe alternative schemes of principal vices are few, however; yet from the twelfth century in particular, one occasionally finds lists of four main vices devised as counterparts of the cardinal virtues and sometimes actually called *vitia cardinalia* (Bejczy [forthcoming](#)).

The common view that confronting the seven capital vices with the seven principal virtues became the typical stratagem of moral literature from the late twelfth century thus needs revision. Such a confrontation is staged for the first time in two works ascribed to a twelfth-century Benedictine monk of Hirsau called Conrad by posterity: *De fructu carnis et spiritus* and *Speculum virginum*. Both works oppose the seven principal virtues, which have humility as their root, to the seven principal vices rooted in pride, and depict this opposition in the form of trees of virtues and vices. Conrad's definitions were occasionally copied in moral literature, while his trees stand at the base of an iconographical tradition of its own. Theologians, however, more frequently contrasted the principal virtues with a variety of vices, while most pastoral authors opposed the principal virtues to the remedial or contrary virtues. Meanwhile, philosophers who based their theories on the *Nicomachean Ethics* followed Aristotle in locating the virtues between pairs of opposed defects.

Much recent scholarship discusses the extent to which a philosophical virtue theory was able to detach itself in the Middle Ages from theology. On the one hand, humanly acquired virtues were recognized from the twelfth century, while commentators on the *Nicomachean Ethics* claimed from the thirteenth century to discuss Aristotle's ethical system on its own merits (Wieland [1981](#); Müller [2001](#); Bejczy [2005](#)). On the other hand, the recognition of acquired virtue, as well as the rejection of infused moral virtues from about the 1300s, were primarily theological affairs, while

many commentators of Aristotle betray theological and religious concerns. Theologians and philosophers usually agree that even acquired virtue has its first origin in God, as the ultimate source of all goodness. Moreover, many of them believe that acquired virtue is conducive to supernatural ends, assuming that it has a civilizing effect which prepares the human mind for accepting the gifts of God. According to a famous thirteenth-century distinction, the acquired virtues bring humans *ad finem*, while the gratuitous virtues bring them *in finem* (Philip the Chancellor, who introduced this distinction, rather applied it to the cardinal and theological virtues, respectively, which in his view were probably both infused). In addition, the moral psychology underlying medieval virtue theory is unmistakably Christian in character. Virtue is, in the medieval conception, not just a realization of a natural aptitude for the good, but a victory over the defects, which are attached to human nature since the Fall. The Fall entailed a corruption of the will, and it is only by redirecting his will to the good that postlapsarian man can hope to live in virtue. Virtue and morality hence essentially reside in the will rather than in reason, as ancient moral philosophy assumes; a will which is autonomous from reason and even, paradoxically, from virtue itself. From about the 1300s, theologians and philosophers admit that the will does not really need virtuous habits in order to act morally, while some masters even suggest that virtue, as a steadfast habit, undermines the will's autonomy and thus hinders rather than furthers moral choice (Kent [1995](#)). Another consequence of the account of the Fall is the idea that virtue and morality concern every human individual in the same way, regardless of sex and rank, and pertain to his or her individual good. The egalitarian aspect of medieval virtue theory, as well as its focus on the individual good, contrast with Aristotle's premise that virtue primarily relates to free, male citizens with sufficient fortune and talent to operate successfully in the public atmosphere. Medieval masters, including commentators on the *Nicomachean Ethics*, usually argue that virtue is equally accessible to men and women, rich and poor, and aim at achieving individual perfection rather than promoting the

common good. Magnificence and magnanimity, for instance, which Aristotle reserves for the elite, can be possessed as interior *habitus* even by the poor, as Thomas Aquinas insists, despite the absence of corresponding exterior acts. Gerard Odonis and John Buridan reject this theory, but then they both view magnificence and magnanimity as secondary virtues, in contrast to the cardinal virtues which are necessary for moral perfection and accessible to everyone. Also, late medieval masters generally claim, in contrast to Aristotle, that the virtues of rulers and those of the ruled are essentially one (Lambertini 2008).

## Cross-References

- ▶ [Alan of Lille](#)
- ▶ [Albert the Great](#)
- ▶ [Augustine](#)
- ▶ [Bernard of Clairvaux](#)
- ▶ [Boethius](#)
- ▶ [Bonaventure](#)
- ▶ [Durand of St. Pourçain](#)
- ▶ [Ethics](#)
- ▶ [Gerald Odonis](#)
- ▶ [Giles of Rome, Political Thought](#)
- ▶ [Godfrey of Fontaines](#)
- ▶ [Gregory of Rimini](#)
- ▶ [Happiness](#)
- ▶ [Henry of Ghent](#)
- ▶ [Isidore of Seville](#)
- ▶ [John Buridan](#)
- ▶ [John Duns Scotus](#)
- ▶ [John of Salisbury](#)
- ▶ [Lorenzo Valla](#)
- ▶ [Nicomachean Ethics, Commentaries on Aristotle's](#)
- ▶ [Peter Abelard](#)
- ▶ [Peter Lombard](#)
- ▶ [Petrarch](#)
- ▶ [Philip the Chancellor](#)
- ▶ [Radulphus Brito](#)
- ▶ [Stephen Langton](#)
- ▶ [Thomas Aquinas](#)
- ▶ [Thomas Bradwardine](#)
- ▶ [Will, Weakness of](#)
- ▶ [William of Ockham](#)

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## Vital du Four

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### Abstract

Vital du Four (lat. *Vitalis de Furno*) was a prominent French Franciscan friar active from the last decade of the thirteenth century to the first quarter of the fourteenth century. He studied theology at the University of Paris and later on taught in Montpellier and Toulouse. Philosophically, he opposed Peter John Olivi's views about the active nature of the human cognitive faculties, and stressed the necessity of the senses in forming intellectual knowledge. He posited sensible and intelligible species as a medium in the cognitive process, but he nevertheless allowed for the intellectual cognition of singulars.

He was provincial minister of Aquitaine in 1309 and was created cardinal bishop in the see of Albano in 1321. He took part in the Conventual side of the Franciscan Order against the spiritual factions. In the last part of his life, he fought strongly against Pope John XXII's ruling on Christ's poverty.

His large output of works includes university treatises (on physics, metaphysics, and psychology, readings on the *Sentences*, disputed and quodlibetal questions), a treatise on medicine, sermons, biblical commentaries, polemical and doctrinal writings.

### Life

Vital du Four (lat. *Vitalis de Furno*) was born in Bazas in Aquitaine around 1260. The town, now of the Gironde department, lies 60 km southeast of Bordeaux and was at that time a bishopric. Vital entered the Franciscan order when he was still young, if we are to trust his own testimony in a letter addressed in 1313 to the general chapter in Barcelona. By the second half of the thirteenth century, however, a novice was allowed to enter a Franciscan convent when he was as young as 12 years old. He must have been a brilliant student, as he entered the lectorate program at the *studium* of Paris. A note, at the beginning of Vital's commentary on the fourth book of Peter Lombard's *Sentences*, mentions that the work is a *reportatio* of Vital's lectures delivered in Montpellier, and that Vital himself had documented in it the lectures of master Jacques de Quesnoy (Jacobus de Carceto), a friar who had the regency in Paris in the last decade of the thirteenth century. Another Franciscan master, Raymond Rigaut (Raymundus Rigaldi), taught in Paris in 1287–1289 and may have been another of Vital's teachers, since Vital's *Quodlibet I* shares with Rigaut's *Quodlibet VIII* the same rare stylistic feature of a prologue. However, it is unlikely that Vital remained in Paris long enough to meet the requirements for the doctoral degree.

From another note in the same commentary on the *Sentences* we also learn that by 1295 he was *lector* in the Montpellier *studium generale* of the Order, where Olivi also had taught from 1279 to 1282. Vital's appointment as lector in this city should probably be placed around 1292. At that time Montpellier was part of the crown of Aragon, and was a great center of learning and had a long tradition of medical studies. Here Vital engaged in a disputation with Louis of Anjou, who had just

been released from captivity in Catalonia (November 1295) and still had to enter the Order of the Friars Minor.

In 1297, Vital moved to the Franciscan *studium* of Toulouse, again in the capacity of *lector*. He appears to have spent 10 years in Toulouse, obtaining eventually the title of Master of Theology. Vital opposed vigorously Olivi's views of psychology in several questions disputed in Montpellier and Toulouse. Olivi himself responded to the *impugnaciones* of his brother. Vital did not limit his activity only to scholarly matters in the *studium*, since he is mentioned in a 1328 papal bull issued by John XXII as a very effective preacher, capable of publicly converting a group of women in Toulouse known to lead a loose life.

His life of teaching duties lasted 15–20 years. In 1307, Vital left the schools to be appointed provincial minister of Aquitaine. Possibly due to an acquaintance with Pope Clement V, he was created cardinal priest of S. Silvestro e Martino ai Monti in the consistory of December 23, 1312, and finally cardinal bishop in the see of Albano on June 14, 1321.

Under the papacy of Clement V, Vital contributed to the struggle of the Conventual party of the Order against the French and Italian spiritual factions. In August 1311, he took part in the response against the thesis regarding *usus pauper* advanced in Ubertino da Casale's *Rotulus*, and in 1312 he refuted Bonagrazia da Bergamo. However, he was probably regarded by both sides as a moderate, since the general Michael of Cesena invited him to give the opening sermon at the Order's general chapter of Marseille in 1319. Michael also remembers in the *Appellatio in forma maiori* the verbal abuse meted out by John XXII against Vital's views on Christ's poverty, an encounter that took place at the Avignon curia around 1321. Later on, Vital produced three answers to John XXII's bull *Cum inter nonnullos* (issued in November 1323), where the Franciscan doctrine of the poverty of Christ was condemned as erroneous and heretical. On this occasion, Vital attacked the position of the Dominican John of

Naples, who had been a regent master in Paris in 1315 and afterward *lector* in Naples.

Vital died in Avignon on August 16, 1327. He was buried in the church of the convent of S. Francis in Avignon.

## Works

Vital's output was large. As a *lector* in the Franciscan schools he commented on the *Sentences*, although only a *reportatio* of his lectures on the fourth book has been found. He held disputations on psychology, epistemology, and metaphysics, and his three *Quodlibeta* attest to his standing in the Franciscan educational system. He also wrote sermons, biblical commentaries, polemical and doctrinal works. An encyclopedic treatise on medicine is attributed to him. Besides his scholarly production, as provincial minister and cardinal he contributed to the ecclesiastical literature of the Order.

His scholarly works survive mainly in four manuscripts: Rome Vat. Lat. 1095, Todi Bibl. com. 95, Rome Vat. Borghese 192, Rome S. Isidore 1/15. The list of Vital's work is given in Delorme, 1947.

1. *Memorialia quaestionum*, Todi 95, ff. 8a–13d, 22a–24b (abbreviated questions of the English friar Joannes de Persora, of Vital himself and of Peter John Olivi).
2. *Quodlibet I* (18 questions): Todi 95, ff. 12d, 14a–18a. All three *Quodlibeta* in Delorme, 1947.
3. *Quaestiones disputate de rerum principio*, S. Isidore 1/15, ff. 1r–35r. A late hand attributed these questions to John Duns Scotus. They have been edited in the Wadding edition of Scotus' works: Lyon, 1639, t. III; Paris, 1891, t. VI, 267–346.
4. *Quaestiones breves de rerum principio*, Todi 95, ff. 18a–22a. Ed. Delorme F, Sophia 10 (1942), 290–327.
5. *Quaestio de productione creaturarum*, Todi 95, ff. 24b–27c.

6. *De anima et eius potentiis*, S. Isidore 1/15, ff. 35r–95r; Todi 95, 27r–51b. In the Wadding edition of Scotus' works: Lyon, 1639, t. III; Paris, 1891, t. VI, 346–493.
7. *Quaestiones super IV libro sententiarum reportatae in Montepessulano*, Rome, Vat. Lat. 1095, ff. 1–66.
8. *Quodlibet II* (14 questions): Todi 95, ff. 51b–58b.
9. *Quaestiones de cognitione* (8 questions), Todi 95, ff. 58b–89a; S. Isidore 1/15, ff. 95r–125r (incomplete). Ed. Delorme (1927).
10. *Quodlibet III* (14 questions): Todi 95, ff. 89b–104d.
11. *Quaestiones de numeris, tempore et instanti* (9 questions), S. Isidore 1/15, ff. 126r–201r; Borghese 192, ff. 93r–129r. In the Wadding edition of Scotus' works: Lyon, 1639, t. III; Paris, 1891, t. VI, 555–710.
12. *Abbreviatura qq. 28 G. de Fontibus*, S. Isidore 1/15, ff. 203r–205r (incomplete); Borghese 192, ff. 130r–145v.
13. *Comm. super librum de sex principiis*, ed. Gondras AJ. AHLMA 50 (1975), 196–317.
14. Treatise *Pro conservanda sanitate tuendaque prospera valetudine, ad totius humani corporis morbos et aegritudines salutarium remedium curacionumque liber utilis*, [Apud Ivonem Schoeffer] Mainz 1531 (an encyclopedia of medical knowledge with 343 separate entries).
15. *Speculum morale totius sacrae scripturae*, ed. Lyon 1513; Venice 1594 (a moralizing exposition of the Old and New Testament, written in Toulouse around 1305).
16. *Super Apocalypsim*, Venice 1600, Paris 1647, Trento 1773 (in *Supplementum operum omnium S. Bonaventurae*. II, 5).

## Doctrine

In general, Vital's teaching is an attempt to make a synthesis of many positions in late thirteenth-

century theology, epistemology, and psychology. His teaching, however, was often derived from the doctrines of different authors and did not show originality and strict consistency. His opposition to Olivi, and more generally his tendency to defend the most common views of his time, puts him outside the movement of renewal of Franciscan thought at the turn of the century. In his discussions of human cognition, he often summarizes to a great length John Pecham, Matthew of Aquasparta, and Roger Marston. Vital shares Henry of Ghent's view on the intentional distinction of essence and existence, but his discussion lacks the depth of Henry's metaphysics. Giles of Rome influenced Vital and also the less known Jacques de Quesnoy and Raymond Rigaut.

In considering intellectual cognition, Vital holds that it is possible for humans to intellectually grasp singular things. In the cognitive process leading to the acquisition by the knower of the nature of an object, the knowledge of an object in its singularity depends in first place on the perceptive sense-data attesting the *hic et nunc* of the object and its accidents. Most medieval thinkers, however, agreed with Augustine's principle that the senses cannot provide knowledge in a proper and true sense. Henry of Ghent, for instance, claimed that a true and "sincere" knowledge only stems from the intellect's judgment of the sense-data, and concerns the essence of things, insofar as the intellect, by a divine illumination, discovers these essences by comparing a thing to its divine *exemplar*, that is, the eternal idea of the thing in the mind of God. Thus, the senses allow only knowledge in an imprecise and generic way.

Vital responds to Henry that the intellect "terminates" its cognitive action regarding singulars in sense organs, even though this action is incorporeal and independent from senses, and corporeal only in a certain regard. Furthermore, he draws a distinction between, on the one hand, the singular object as something actually existing *hic et nunc*, which is the primary object of the senses, and, on the other, the singular conceived



as a different “grade” of the specific nature of an individual with respect to another individual of the same species. This singular cannot be grasped by the senses but only by the intellect. Two apples taken from the same orchard may look and taste the same to the senses, and only intellectual cognition can tell them apart (*Quaestiones de cognitione*, q. 1, ed. Delorme, 163–164).

The inclusion of sensitive cognition in the cognitive process does allow for a role of the *species* as a medium of knowledge. The *Species* inform the intellect in the understanding of both singulars and universals. The species are not *impressae* upon the intellect by the sensitive powers, but rather “collected” by the intellect: (a) from sensing a singular, in order to understand an object in its actual existence, and to maintain the species after the act of sensation (*species sensibilis*); (b) from the very *species sensibilis*, thus producing absolute knowledge of the singular, with no regard to its actual existence (*species intelligibilis rei singularis*); (c) from memory and the imaginative power, whenever there is no sensitive act toward a singular; (d) from these three kinds of *species* the intellect can finally collect a species of a universal, that is, the consideration of an object in its universality (*Quaestiones de cognitione*, q. 2, ed. Delorme, 210–211).

## Cross-References

- ▶ [Giles of Rome, Political Thought](#)
- ▶ [Henry of Ghent](#)
- ▶ [John Pecham](#)
- ▶ [Matthew of Aquasparta](#)
- ▶ [Peter John Olivi](#)
- ▶ [Peter Lombard](#)
- ▶ [Roger Marston](#)

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## Walter Burley

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### Abstract

Walter Burley (ca. 1275 – after 1344), known as *doctor planus et perspicuus*, was one of the most eminent logicians and natural philosophers of the first half of the fourteenth century and the chief polemist of William Ockham. Of his almost 80 works composed over a period of some 40 years from his studies in Oxford to the final days of his intellectual activity (about 60 of them have survived), most are devoted to logic and natural philosophy, the remaining ones, to theology and practical philosophy. In logic, he was the champion of *via antiqua*, defending realist views against the criticism of Ockham. In philosophy of nature, his favorite problem was change. Apart from local motion, he was interested in the issues related to substantial, qualitative, and quantitative change, called generation, alteration, and growth, respectively. Some of his ideas underwent changes and refinements in discussions with his colleagues in Oxford, Paris, and elsewhere, others formed a solid core relatively early and were repeated in consecutive works or were simply taken for granted.

## Biographical Information

Walter Burley was born in a village of Burley (today part of greater Leeds) in Yorkshire between 1274 and 1276. Nothing is known about his life before 1301, when he had already been a graduate in Philosophy at Oxford University. As a Master of Arts, Burley became a fellow of Merton College and was a Regent Master in the Faculty of Liberal Arts until 1306 or 1307. His earliest works (questions to book III of *De anima*, probably the only surviving work from his student times, early versions of commentaries on *Ars Vetus*, *Posterior Analytics*, *De Sophisticis Elenchis*, logical treatises, commentaries on *De generatione et corruptione*, *Parva naturalia*, and the early version of commentary on *Physics*) come from that period. In 1308, Burley went to Paris to study theology. While studying theology he continued his interest in logic and philosophy of nature: the first version of *De puritate artis logicae*, his comprehensive treatise on the subject, as well some commentaries on logical works of Aristotle testify to his intellectual maturity as much as three treatises on accidental change, known as *Tractatus primus*, *Tractatus secundus*, and *De formis*, and the questions to *Physics*. Ironically, his main theological work, the commentary on the *Sentences*, is now lost. Still as a student of theology, before 1319, he disputed *de quolibet* in Toulouse: the topic was the first and last instant of change (*De primo et ultimo instanti*).

In 1324, Burley received the title of Master of Theology (he had already been a priest since 1321) and remained in Paris as a professor and fellow of College de Sorbonne for three more years. In late 1326, he started a diplomatic career: over a period of almost 20 years he served as an envoy for the king of England Edward III. He visited the papal curia in Avignon several times; he also traveled to Germany and Italy. His diplomatic and ecclesiastical career was supported by Richard de Bury, later bishop of Durham and Chancellor of England. At bishop's court Burley met a group of learned men, some of whom (John Maudit, Thomas Bradwardine) he had known from Oxford. The intellectual atmosphere inspired him to return to philosophy: he completed the final versions of his commentaries on *Physics* (started in Paris) and *Ars Vetus*, revised *De puritate artis logicae* to respond to Ockham's arguments from *Summa logicae*, and composed commentaries on Aristotle's *Ethics* and *Politics* as well as a new treatise *De universalibus*. His last work was probably a quodlibetal question in philosophy of nature he discussed in Bologna in 1341. The date of his death is unknown: last information about him comes from 1344 but he may have lived until the Black Death reached England in 1348.

## Thought

Burley's contribution to philosophy is most visible in two disciplines: logic and philosophy of nature. He is not a deliberate innovator. He tries to give a precise and penetrating (*planus et perspicuus*, hence his nickname) explanation of the teaching of Aristotle and other authorities, which would be in agreement with the common opinion of scholars (*communis opinio doctorum*). It is seldom that he opposes the prevalent views or proposes a new solution. Still, in both fields he is able to leave a visible mark of his talent. In logic, his *De suppositionibus*, giving an overview of the theory of supposition, helped to revive interest in it not only in William Ockham; his *De obligationibus*, *De exclusivis*, *De exceptivis*, and other treatises similarly set standards for

respective parts of logical theory. His main logical work *De puritate artis logicae* was intended to be a comprehensive study of the whole discipline: Burley did not complete his project in the original version, now known as *Tractatus brevior* but returned to it later and revised it in *Tractatus longior*. The two versions of *De puritate* contain a thorough though not uniform presentation of types of logical argumentation: in *Tractatus brevior* he divides them into enthymematic consequences, conditional syllogistic consequences, and hypothetical unconditional consequences; in *Tractatus longior*, written with a clear polemical intention against Ockham, he refined his original division of consequences into absolute and as-of-now ones, further dividing the former category into natural and accidental ones (the criterion being whether the antecedent includes the consequent), and introducing three other divisions.

As a realist, he believes that logic is nothing but an analysis of general structures of reality. Aristotle's categories show an order that things bear in themselves (first intentions) and that is only secondarily reflected by our ways of speaking about things (second intentions); therefore, logic and ontology are inseparable. The opposition to Ockham's nominalism is best visible in his views on supposition: for Burley, the word "man" in the proposition "Man is the noblest creature" is in the simple supposition because it signifies some thing, i.e., a species, for Ockham, it is not because it signifies a mental intention rather than a true thing. Burley's realism does not go as far as Scotus'; however, he agrees with the Subtle Doctor that both common nature and individual difference really exist, but he denies that they differ only formally. Burley tries to avoid the subtleties of *formalitates* and claims that the differences between universals are real. Moreover, common nature is not contracted by the individual difference, as was the opinion of Scotus, but remains in an individual in its totality. This assumption allows Burley to analyze the divisions of a universal, looking for something general in various items of minor generality. Though he upholds the real difference between universals, he denies it – contrary to Giles of Rome – between essence and existence.

In philosophy of nature, Burley's interests were truly focused on the problems of duration and change. He analyzed it on various levels of abstraction, starting from particular classes of things and actions observed in the world. Some of his opinions were modified in successive works, of which the most important are the three versions of his *Physics* commentary, the commentary on *De generatione et corruptione* and three Parisian treatises on change. The constant part of Burley's views on elementary and organic change can be summarized as follows. Prime matter, devoid of definite dimensions, is first informed by primary qualities, which – working in pairs – constitute the forms of first bodies, i.e., the elements. Heat is the first among equals in primary qualities. Its activity causes both generation and corruption; it is necessary for life but brings about death too. These various forms of action are related to various types of heat: celestial, elementary, and animal. The three types do not differ from one another in their natures; on the contrary, they share the same nature and the observable differences between them are attributed to intensity in action, which in turn is dependent on the source of heat. Elements, constituted by heat and the remaining three primary qualities serve as material for all bodies of sublunary world in such a way that every body is a mixture of all elements, which are virtually present in it (an idea borrowed from Thomas Aquinas), and their qualities concur to produce a mixed quality, characteristic for a particular body.

The bodies of inanimate beings, such as minerals, are constituted from elements under the influence of celestial heat. In animate beings, the process is more complex, for it requires concurrence of three parties: the form of a generated being, say an animal, comes in semen from the male parent, matter is provided by the female parent, and solar heat is a necessary condition for creation of a new life. Semen is a form that exists only during the process of generation passing the nature to the newly formed being; in the same vein, an embryo remains a *quasi* part of a mother until a vegetative soul is formed in it.

Animate beings need food both for preservation of life and growth. In the process of nutrition,

the form of food is destroyed in such a way that animal heat digests the humidity of the food, which brings about the destruction of its substantial form. The matter is then immediately informed by the substantial form of the animal. The nutrient substance thus produced, *spiritus*, is then transported by blood to all parts of the body. Subsequent physiological processes are dependent on the quantity of digested food. If it is sufficient, an animal preserves its life in its perfection or, if it has not reached its perfection yet, it grows. If it is insufficient, animal's heat starts digesting its own humidity, which causes shrinking of the body and may bring about death. If it is superfluous, an animal not only preserves its form (regardless of the stage of its development) but puts on weight: this is a process in which the excess food is converted into new parts of the body. It is different from growth, in which no new parts are produced. Both putting up weight and growth produce a secondary change in the extension of a body, which occupies larger space as a result of each. Unlike the former two processes, the change in extension is continuous, for space is infinitely divisible but bodies are composed of *minima naturalia*, since flesh or bones cannot be divided infinitely without losing their properties. Apart from extension (covering a larger space), qualities of a body may also possess their intension (greater or smaller degree in which the quality exists).

It is to the problem of intension and remission of forms that Burley devoted most time and attention in his physical works, presenting several complementary solutions. He is best known for a "succession of forms" theory, first applied by Godfrey of Fontaines to explain augmentation and diminution. In his early commentaries on the *De generatione et corruptione* and *Physics*, Burley saw a qualitative change as a process occurring between specifically contrary forms within the same genus. He noticed that the process can be broken down into infinite individual instantaneous stages, in each of which a quality has a new form of greater or smaller intensity. In *De primo et ultimo instanti*, he presented an explanation of differences between two modes of understanding qualities undergoing change of intensity: one,

seen as a process, and another, seen as an instant. The fullest and most original exposition of Burley's views on the problem of change can be found in the *Tractatus primus*. He claims there that also the termini of qualitative change belong to the same species (so, effectively, a qualitative change is between a form and a lack thereof). This allows him to use effectively the concept of latitude of forms to explain the process. The criticism drawn by his original theory made Burley revisit the issue of qualitative change several more times. In his *Tractatus secundus* and, later, in *De formis*, he gradually gave up some parts of his solution, and finally, in his Bolognese quodlibet, accepted a Scotist view on the issue, which saw intension or remission as addition or subtraction of individual degrees of a form, merged into it.

In his theory of local motion, Burley accepts the prevalent Aristotelian division into "permanent beings" and "successive beings," the former being objects, the latter, motions. Permanent beings have their first instants, but not last ones, successive beings have neither. This distinction allows Burley and other realists to analyze motion in separation from objects in motion. For Ockham, who recognized only substances and qualities as things, motion was not separable from its object and thus was understood only as *forma fluens*, disregarding the other aspect of motion distinguished by Avicenna, *fluxus formae*, i.e., flux of form, belonging to the category of relation. For Burley both aspects of motion had to be taken into account in order to give an adequate description of it.

Practical philosophy attracted Burley's interest relatively late and his contributions to that field are the smallest despite the size of his works devoted to it. Although it was not uncommon for him to follow some authority in his works in logic and – more often – in natural philosophy (for instance, Averroes), the commentaries on *Nicomachean Ethics* and *Politics* exhibit extraordinary dependence on the commentaries by Thomas Aquinas and Peter of Auvergne, respectively. Burley does not add to their opinions much beside references to English cultural context.

Burley's intellectual activity brought him renown of his contemporary and later philosophers. A good measure of this respect is the number of works mistakenly attributed to him, of which two, *Auctoritates Aristotelis* and *De vitis et moribus philosophorum*, were very popular until the end of the Middle Ages. Problems with attribution of some known works and possibility of discovering or identifying some new ones make the list of his works still open for change.

## Cross-References

- ▶ [Emotions](#)
- ▶ [Giles of Rome, Political Thought](#)
- ▶ [Godfrey of Fontaines](#)
- ▶ [Ibn Rushd \(Averroes\), Latin Translations of](#)
- ▶ [John Duns Scotus](#)
- ▶ [Realism](#)
- ▶ [Supposition Theory](#)
- ▶ [Thomas Aquinas](#)
- ▶ [William of Ockham](#)

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## Walter Chatton

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### Abstract

Walter Chatton (c. 1290–1343) was an important fourteenth-century English philosopher and theologian. He was a follower of Duns

Scotus and a relentless critic of William of Ockham and Peter Auriol. Because complete critical editions of Chatton's writings have only recently become available, the recovery of his thought is still in the beginning stages. Nevertheless, it is already clear that Chatton made significant contributions to number of areas in medieval philosophy and theology. These include his development and defense of an "anti-razor" principle in ontology, his contributions to fourteenth-century debates about intuitive cognition, his one-level account of consciousness, and his influential criticisms of Ockham's theory of concepts and judgment.

Walter Chatton was born (c. 1290) in the village of Chatton in the northern part of (modern) England. He entered the Franciscan Order at a young age, most likely received his philosophical education in the north, and was then sent to Oxford to study theology. At Oxford, Chatton encountered the teaching of William of Ockham (d. 1347) who at the time (c. 1317–1319) was delivering his lectures on the *Sentences* of Peter Lombard. This encounter was to shape much of Chatton's subsequent philosophical thinking. Chatton, while highly critical of his older colleague, was also enormously influenced by him. Indeed, Chatton often takes up precisely the issues Ockham treats, and, likewise, the terminology and conceptual apparatus in which he frames them, only to reject Ockham's conclusions – typically in favor of Scotus'. Ockham's influence is particularly pronounced in Chatton's *Sentences* commentaries, both the *Reportatio* and the later *Lectura* (including the separately edited *Collatio et Prologus*), but it is also present to a lesser degree in his (as yet unedited) *Quodlibeta*. Chatton's training at Oxford was completed in 1330, when he attained the status of Franciscan regent master. The rest of his career (c. 1333–1343) was spent in Avignon, where, among other things, he served as advisor to Pope Benedict XII. Chatton died at Avignon in late 1343 or perhaps early 1344.

Scholarship on Chatton's philosophy is nascent, but growing. To date, the aspects of

his thought that have received the most scholarly attention include his treatment of issues in ontology, philosophy of mind and cognitive psychology, will, and moral philosophy.

## Ontology

When it comes to questions of ontology, Chatton's leanings are Scotistic. Indeed, his treatment of issues in ontology often consists in his defending hallmark Scotistic doctrines against criticism – usually, against objections raised by Ockham and Peter Auriol (d. 1322). For example, Chatton adopts Scotus' views about universals as well as his theory of individuation; accordingly, Chatton labors to defend the Scotistic doctrines of common nature and haecceitas. (Chatton does not actually use the term haecceitas, however; instead, following Scotus' own usage in the *Ordinatio*, he uses *individualis differentias*.) Again, Chatton follows Scotus – and opposes Ockham – in arguing for the reality of ten (irreducibly) distinct classes of entity corresponding to each of Aristotle's ten categories. In this connection, he gives special attention to defending the reality of both quantity (as something distinct from substance and quality) and relation (as something distinct from absolute entities).

Although the sorts of ontological views Chatton adopts are not particularly original, his defense of such views is often subtle and innovative. One particularly notable example is his development and application of a certain meta-ontological principle to derive a number of realist metaphysical commitments. The principle, which Chatton himself refers to simply as “my rule” (*mea regula*) or “my principle” (*mea propositio*), has come to be known in the literature as “Chatton's anti-razor” – a label indicative of his use of it as a foil for Ockham's famous razor principle. Chatton deploys the anti-razor in a variety of contexts, and its precise formulation varies and develops across these contexts, but the following can be taken as representative: “where an affirmative proposition is made true by things (*res*), if fewer things (uniformly present, without anything else) cannot suffice [for that proposition's being

true], one must posit more” (*Collatio et Prologus*, 33). Chatton's anti-razor amounts to a kind of truth-maker principle. The idea behind the principle is just this: truth depends on being – that is, on what entities or things exist. So stated, the principle may appear uncontroversial, but the particular way in which Chatton elaborated and applied the principle was both innovative and contentious.

A case in point is Chatton's development of the anti-razor in the context of defending realism about relations. In *Rep. I*, d.30, q.1, for example, Chatton argues in favor of the existence of irreducibly real relations – that is, for the existence of a distinct class of entities answering not only to the Aristotelian category of Relation but also to other relational categories such as Action and Passion. In this context, Chatton is especially concerned to defend the reality and irreducibility of causal relations (i.e., relations of action and passion). His strategy is straightforward: he considers cases of true relational statements (e.g., “Socrates generates Plato,” “Heat produces heat,” “This hand moves a stick,” etc.) and argues that in each case the existence of merely absolute (or non-relational) entities – regardless of the number or type invoked – “will not suffice” for the truth of such statements. And, as his discussion makes explicit, he thinks an entity suffices for the truth of a given statement just in case its existence *necessitates* the statement's truth. Citing his “rule,” Chatton then concludes that “it is, therefore, necessary to posit relational accidents.”

What is most significant about Chatton's reliance on this principle is the way in which it renders explicit a certain methodological approach to questions of ontological commitment. According to this approach, one's ontological commitments extend to all and only those entities whose existence is sufficient for the truth of a given set of truths. To be sure, there is nothing particularly novel in Chatton's adopting this sort of “truth-maker” approach to matters of ontology. Indeed, it is plausible to suppose many medieval philosophers tacitly assumed such an approach. But Chatton's explicit formulation and defense of the principle proved controversial and, as a result, his treatment of it brought new

attention to questions about the methodological assumptions guiding metaphysical speculation.

For example, as we have just seen, Chatton's way of formulating the principle places particular emphasis on the criterion of sufficiency as the basis for truth-making. This approach suggests that, for him, the truth-maker for a given statement can simply be identified with that entity (or those entities) whose existence necessitates that statement's truth. So formulated, however, Chatton's principle gave rise to a number of objections and counter-examples. Thus, at *Quodlibet* I.5, Ockham explicitly argues against Chatton's principle, offering a counter-example (one involving God's creation of an angel) designed to show that an entity's being sufficient for the truth of some statement is not necessary for making it true. By contrast, Ockham argues that the truth-maker for a given statement is "sometimes sufficient to make the sentence true, but sometimes not." And, some years later, Adam Wodeham (d. 1358), Chatton's slightly junior confrere, uses roughly the same example to argue that necessitation is not a sufficient condition on truth-making either. Yet, even if Chatton's principle was not immediately adopted as a means for identifying a statement's truth-makers (and, hence, as a guide to ontological commitment), his articulation and defense of it seems to have had the effect of focusing attention on what exactly truth-making involves.

### **Philosophy of Mind and Cognitive Psychology**

Chatton treats a wide range of issues in philosophy of mind and philosophical psychology. As elsewhere, his views here are almost always Scotistic in inspiration and developed in direct response to Ockham (and, often, Auriol as well). For example, Chatton upholds the Scotistic line on the unicity of the soul in human beings against Ockham, who argues for a real distinction between sensory and intellectual souls. Again, he follows Scotus in arguing that, pace Ockham, there is a formal distinction (i.e., formal non-identity) between both the soul and its powers as

well as among the powers themselves. Finally, like Scotus and unlike Ockham, Chatton holds that cognition involves the multiplication of species from the object, through the sense faculties, to the intellect. Indeed, in response to Ockham's radical and wholesale elimination of species (both sensible and intelligible, as well as in medio), Chatton develops a fairly systematic defense of species as necessary for both sensory and intellectual cognition.

Chatton's account of cognition includes an extended discussion of the nature of intuitive cognition, which we can think of as approximating our contemporary notion of perception. One of Chatton's contributions here is to focus the debate on questions about the certainty of intuitive cognition. Thus, Chatton considers and rejects Auriol's theory, which leaves open the possibility that intuitive cognition could occur naturally in the absence of its object, on the grounds that such a view utterly vitiates the "certitude" of knowledge grounded in the senses. Given this, it is all the more interesting that Chatton sides with Ockham (and against Scotus) in allowing the possibility God could cause an intuitive cognition of a nonexistent object, but then resists Ockham's further contention that such a case would not result in deception or error. Chatton insists that it surely would. His stance on these various issues is interesting insofar as it indicates, on the one hand, a special concern to safeguard the epistemic security of sensory intuition, and yet, on the other, resistance to any notion of its being infallible.

Like many of his contemporaries, Chatton restricts intuitive cognition to the senses and, thus, resists the introduction of intuitive cognition at the level of intellect. In rejecting intellectual intuitive cognition, he is essentially rejecting the idea (and plausibly so) that we possess (at least in this life) a nonsensory mode of perception-like awareness. In taking this position, however, Chatton departs from Ockham (and also, perhaps, Scotus), who argues for intellectual intuitive cognition largely on the grounds that it provides the best explanation for consciousness and self-knowledge. Indeed, on Ockham's view, consciousness turns out to be a kind of higher-order (intellectual) perception of one's lower-order

states. Against this sort of view, Chatton argues that it both (a) entails commitment to an infinite regress in higher-order intuitive states, and (b) that appeal to higher-order states does not, in fact, explain the phenomena in question – namely, subjective awareness of one’s own states. On Chatton’s view, by contrast, any conscious experience – my perception of a rock, say – involves two components: first, an awareness of some object (the rock, in this case); and, second, a subjective or first-personal awareness of the experience (namely, a perceptual experience) as something I am undergoing. According to Chatton, therefore, consciousness is an internal feature of first-order mental states themselves. On his view, self-knowledge can be explained without the introduction of any higher-order states, not to say higher-order states of intellectual intuitive cognition.

As the foregoing suggests, Chatton made a number of important contributions to medieval debates about the nature and mechanisms of cognition. Although scholars are not yet in a position to assess the precise extent of Chatton’s influence on subsequent thinkers in this regard, it is clear that he exercised a great deal of influence on Ockham. Indeed, on a number of issues, Chatton’s objections were felt by Ockham to be sufficiently forceful as to require substantial modifications to his views. The best-documented case of such influence concerns Ockham’s developing views of concepts.

In his early writings, Ockham presupposes a kind of act-object analysis of thought (i.e., of intellectual cognition). On this analysis, concepts turn out to be thought-objects distinct from but dependent on the mental acts directed at them. Because concepts, on this view, are mind-dependent objects. Ockham often refers to them as “ficta” (i.e., “mentally-fashioned entities”). Chatton vigorously attacked Ockham’s early view on the grounds that such ficta are (a) ontologically superfluous, since mental acts themselves can function as mental representations, and (b) epistemologically problematic, since they stand in the way of the mind’s direct cognitive access to reality. On Chatton’s alternative, “mental-act”, analysis of thought, concepts are

not construed as intentional objects of acts of thinking, but rather as the act of thinking itself. Ockham eventually accepts these criticisms and, likewise, Chatton’s own analysis of concepts. He does not, however, arrive at Chatton’s view all at once. On the contrary, he initially remains neutral between the fictum-theory and the mental-act theory. It turns out, however, that Chatton also plays a crucial role in pushing Ockham from this intermediate position to a wholesale rejection of the fictum-theory. He does so by calling attention to a number of related difficulties in Ockham’s theory of judgment – in particular, in his account of the objects of knowledge (*scientia*). The details are complicated, but the end result is that these criticisms lead Ockham to recognize systematic advantages of Chatton’s analysis of intellectual cognition generally. In his most mature writings, therefore, Ockham not only wholeheartedly endorses the mental-act theory of concepts but even rejects his own earlier account of objects of judgment in favor of a view that comes quite close to Chatton’s own.

## Will and Moral Philosophy

In his later writings, Chatton turns increasingly to topics in moral philosophy. By contrast with his views in ontology and cognitive psychology, however, very little is known about his ethics or his views about freedom and moral responsibility. It seems clear that Chatton takes the divine will as the ultimate source of morality and holds that God’s will is most clearly revealed in the commands found in Scripture. Accordingly, his discussions of questions of sin, merit, and moral responsibility often focus on the *de facto* order of creation, and on laws, precepts, and regulations derived from Scripture. Again, it would seem that he accepts a broadly Scotistic picture of the will and human freedom and so accepts a libertarian and voluntarist conception of the will’s freedom. Beyond such generalizations, however, our understanding of his views on these topics is limited.

Chatton takes particular interest in questions about how to reconcile human freedom with divine foreknowledge. He devotes considerable

attention to puzzles about future contingents – in particular, to questions about whether God’s knowledge and willing of future events is consistent with their contingency (and, hence, with human freedom). His own response to these puzzles is as complex as it is controversial: he offers a novel analysis of sentences attributing knowledge of future events to God (thus, he takes claims like “God knows that a will occur” to be equivalent to the conjunction of the following claims: “God knows a” and “‘a is occurring’ will be true”), he invokes a distinction between the determinately and indeterminately true and false (claiming, for example, that no future tense proposition is determinately true), and, finally, he defends a controversial analysis of the objects of God’s knowledge and will (on his view, the objects of knowledge and divine will are not propositions, but rather are the individual entities (*res*) represented by propositions).

Chatton’s commitment to a voluntarist conception of the will leads him, much as it led Scotus, to reject the traditional Aristotelian account of unity of the virtues. In particular, Chatton rejects the view that the possession of prudence is a sufficient condition for possessing moral virtue. Because moral virtues are habits of willing, and because the will does not necessarily will in accordance with the judgments of practical reason, it follows that even where prudence is generated through the dictates of right reason, moral virtue may, nevertheless, be lacking. Chatton also rejects any strong connection between the virtues of temperance, fortitude, and justice. While, he at times, emphasizes the cooperation of such virtues in the production of a single virtuous act, he nevertheless holds that one can possess (or acquire) one virtue in the absence of the others.

Finally, Chatton maintains that the object of moral appraisal is not only an agent’s interior character and intentions in acting but also the actions themselves. In taking this position, Chatton opposes Ockham who is an internalist regarding moral evaluation. On Ockham’s view, it is only factors internal to agency – namely, acts of willing – that are morally significant. Hence, anything external to agency, such as exterior acts

and their consequences, are indifferent – neither good nor bad. Chatton offers a number of arguments against Ockham’s view, some of which are grounded in theological considerations (e.g., he argues that Ockham cannot account for the moral significance of Christ’s exterior act of dying on the cross), whereas others are grounded in difficulties internal to the theory itself (e.g., he finds Ockham’s way of individuating acts of will implausible).

## Conclusion

Chatton is best known today for his criticisms of and influence on Ockham’s philosophy. In fact, the relationship between these thinkers is such that scholars have often had to turn to Chatton’s work to fully understand the development and shape of Ockham’s views. (The relative dating of Ockham’s writings, for example, is established by reference to the three-stage development in his theory of concepts, a development, which as explained above, is due to Chatton’s influence.) For this same reason, the areas of Chatton’s philosophical thought that have received the most attention correspond to those aspects of Ockham’s thought that have most attracted scholarly interest – namely, issues in metaphysics, cognitive psychology, and, to a lesser extent, questions about the will and moral responsibility.

There are, however, a number of other areas to which Chatton makes significant contributions. In natural philosophy, for example, he is among the few medieval proponents of indivisibilism (i.e., the view that continua are literally composed of indivisible elements). Again, he treats at some length the distinction between permanent and successive entities and offers an important defense, against Ockham, of the coherence of the notion of a successive entity (*entia successiva*). Chatton also seems to have played a significant role in a number of fourteenth-century debates in philosophical theology, including how to reconcile the Christine doctrine of the Trinity with Aristotelian syllogistic logic and

the nature of sacramental efficacy (the latter of which was recalled and cited some 200 years later at the Council of Trent). Finally, like Ockham, Chatton wrote extensively on questions surrounding the debate over Franciscan poverty. In this connection, his work includes treatment of issues central to medieval discussions in political philosophy.

It will be some time yet before any systematic presentation or evaluation of Chatton's philosophical oeuvre can be undertaken. There is, nevertheless, good reason to expect that the recent publication of critical editions of Chatton's *Sentences* commentaries (the *Reportatio* appeared in 2002–2005, the *Lectura* in 2007–2009) together with increased scholarly interest in the fourteenth century will significantly advance both the recovery of his thought and our understanding of his place in the broader development of late medieval philosophy.

## Cross-References

- ▶ [Adam Wodeham](#)
- ▶ [Atomism](#)
- ▶ [Categories](#)
- ▶ [Certainty](#)
- ▶ [Consciousness](#)
- ▶ [Ethics](#)
- ▶ [Future Contingents](#)
- ▶ [Intuitive and Abstractive Cognition](#)
- ▶ [John Duns Scotus](#)
- ▶ [Mental Word/Concepts](#)
- ▶ [Peter Auriol](#)
- ▶ [Political Philosophy](#)
- ▶ [Species: Sensible and Intelligible](#)
- ▶ [Trinitarian Logic](#)
- ▶ [William of Ockham](#)

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## Walter of Bruges

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Walter of Bruges (c. 1222–1307) was a pupil of Bonaventure and occupied with promoting Augustine at a time when Aristotle was getting more and more influential.

## Cross-References

► [Bonaventure](#)

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## War (Just War, Holy War)

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### Abstract

This article surveys medieval discussion of “just war” and “holy war.” While a strong division between these is a modern development, the terminology does reflect distinctive trajectories of interpretation present in the earliest of medieval commentators on war. This article begins with Christian texts and then analyzes analogous writings by Jews and Muslims. In these texts we see both just war and holy war trajectories, and begin to understand how it came to be that late medieval and early modern authors like Alberico Gentili or Francisco de Vitoria could make strong distinctions between the two conceptions, to the end that difference in religion, considered in and of itself, ought never constitute a just cause of war.

## Early Developments

When Augustine wrote *The City of God*, he built on several centuries of discussion regarding the status of war and of military service among Christians. For example, Tertullian (d. 220) wrote that Christ had “unbelted” every soldier, and that Christians participating in the Roman army would in all likelihood find it impossible to retain their faith. In a slightly different vein, Origen of Alexandria (d. 254) responded to charges of Christian irresponsibility, arguing that believers who refused induction into the military nevertheless provided valuable service by praying that God send the heavenly hosts to fight against those invisible, yet powerful forces assisting the emperor's enemies. More generally, authors like Lactantius (d. 320) decried the wastefulness and tragedy of war.

At the same time, the Roman army included Christians, at least from the late second century

forward. And once the status of Christianity began to change in the early part of the fourth century, even an author like Lactantius changed his tune, saying that some wars, at least, might be legitimate from a Christian point of view. By the time of Ambrose, bishop of Milan (d. 397), a Christian leader could see his authority as complementary to that of the state. Even the partly legendary refusal of communion to the Emperor Theodosius following the massacre of 7000 in Thessalonica –punishment decreed by the emperor for the murder of a Roman commander in that city – should be seen in this regard. Ambrose understood his role as bishop to include the giving of moral advice, and even the imposition of moral discipline, just as he saw the duty of the emperor and other officials as a matter of carrying out the guidance provided by the church.

As Ambrose's *De officiis* indicates, Christian discourse on war in this period could be cast as a transformation of the Roman *bellum iustum*. Indeed, the very title of Ambrose's work suggests this, as it reflects his use of Cicero's similarly named treatise. In Cicero's account, the Roman way of war suggests that military force is governed by norms of justice. For example, war must be declared by publicly authorized officials; it cannot be a matter of private or personal revenge. Then, too, resort to war should take place only when disputes cannot be resolved through discussion. The justification for going to war involves securing the peace of Roman society. When fighting, soldiers should conduct themselves with honor. When war is over, the victors should be magnanimous to the vanquished, since the point is to persuade the enemy not to repeat its offense, and to deter others from similarly threatening the peace of the Roman state. Ambrose took these notions of public, honorable, and thus just war, and connected them with Christian notions of neighbor-love and obedience to God. With respect to the former, the bishop's argument was that the command to love one's neighbor as oneself might in certain contexts be fulfilled by protecting the weak from aggressors. Indeed, Ambrose took the example of Moses in Exodus 2:11–15 as an indication that anyone who is able to prevent an injury, but fails to do so, might be judged as

complicit in injustice. Defense of a neighbor is distinguished from defense of oneself, however. The latter might be judged as an expression of inordinate self-love and a denial of faith in the providence of God. But the former is required, as a matter of obedience to God's command. In that connection, too, Ambrose found a way of tying Christian notions of war to the fighting described in Joshua and other books of the Old Testament. For Ambrose, war commanded by God is a distinct species of just war. In some particulars (e.g., the total destruction of the enemy described in Joshua), such war differs from the more ordinary fighting by which military action relates to purposes of state. Nevertheless, in its moral species, war commanded by God should be seen as a type of *bellum iustum*; in fact, it is the prototype of such fighting, since God, the author of justice, can never command believers to do an unjust act.

Augustine built on these insights of Ambrose, which explains his response to Faustus, or more generally to the challenge presented by those who saw in the Old Testament a contradiction to the New Testament. As Augustine had it, the fighting of the people of Israel was an expression of obedience rather than of brutality. In commanding such wars, God assigned punishments that were just. The real evil of war, after all, is not that some people are killed, since all mortals must die. Rather, the desire to inflict harm or to dominate others exemplifies aspects of war, as more generally of human behavior, that should be condemned.

For Augustine, war is related to the condition of fallen and therefore sinful humanity. In one sense, war results from sin. Hence, aggressive fighting is an expression of evils like those already mentioned. In another sense, however, war provides a remedy for sin. In fighting just wars, a wise person does what is necessary, even if in some sense the conditions that impose and legitimate his or her actions are regrettable. It is important, of course, that in waging war the wise person resist sinful dispositions. Thus, just wars are characterized by limits. Authorized by public authorities, such wars are not an occasion for private vengeance. Fought for legitimate public purposes, they are not to be waged for purposes of

aggrandizement. Soldiers must punish aggressors, and in turn must take care to distinguish the innocent from the guilty. And, while a number of tactics involving (ostensible) deception (ambush, for example) are legitimate, one must never violate a promise to one's enemy, or engage in massacre.

As with Ambrose, Augustine's writing suggests that *bellum iustum* is a category that includes wars of several types. Most significantly, the category includes wars undertaken by God's command, as well as at the command of legitimate (i.e., public) authority. With respect to the latter, the limits and norms connected with honor and neighbor-love apply. With respect to the former, the command of God may direct fighting in ways that seem to violate such limits. The qualification is important, however. Fighting commanded by God may, as in the book of Joshua, appear to violate the limits of justice. Nevertheless, it does not or cannot do so, since by definition God is just, and God's commands are correspondingly expressive or even constitutive of justice. Faced with this proviso, some interpreters have wondered whether Augustine considered such a command an actual possibility, or whether his comments on this matter are rather dictated by theological interests. That is certainly an interesting, if eminently controversial question. As further developments would show, however, the notion that *bellum iustum* might include wars authorized by God, or derivatively, by religious authorities, came to be an important feature of Christian reasoning about military force.

### The "Classic" Formulation

Many scholars describe Augustine as the "father" of Christian just war thinking. Given his great legacy in this, as in other areas of political thought, there is some reason for such a characterization. Nevertheless, as noted above, Augustine's notions of war build on several centuries of development. In particular, Ambrose's combination of biblical and Roman ideas of *bellum iustum* provides a context in which Augustine's ideas make sense.

Also, Augustine never provides a succinct, systematic statement of just war criteria. Instead, his judgments are sprinkled throughout his works, especially *The City of God*. A far more systematic statement is found in the *Summa theologiae* of Thomas Aquinas (d. 1274). At IIaIIae, q. 40, Thomas asks whether it is always a sin to wage war. In response, he writes that there are three things required for a war to be just. First, the war must be commanded by a prince who possesses the authority to make war. Second, the war must be fought for a just cause; showing his debt to Augustine, Thomas indicates that this usually implies a war fought to avenge injuries, for example, when a state deserves to be punished for failing to restore things unjustly taken or to right wrongs done by its people. The third requirement is right intention, and again Thomas quotes Augustine with respect to those evil dispositions, which may be described as the "real" evils associated with war.

As noted, Thomas built on Augustine. He references a number of other sources, however, and thus points to the continuing development of Christian just war thinking.

By Thomas' time, the efforts of ecclesiastical and political leaders to limit war by such conventions as the Peace of God and the Truce of God (tenth and eleventh centuries) were well-entrenched. In particular, the former forbade direct and intentional attacks on specific targets. These included churches, as well as certain classes of people whose age, gender, or vocation would normally identify them as nonparticipants in fighting. The latter tried to prohibit fighting on specific days, at least among Christians. The influence of both efforts are evident in Thomas, as he addresses questions regarding the participation of clergy in fighting (he says it is not normally allowed, because it does not fit with their vocation) and of the possibility that fighting may be prohibited in certain times and places.

Most notably, though, Thomas' statement of just war criteria presupposes developments in canon law. The influence of Gratian's *Decretum* (mid-twelfth century), as well as of the various commentators on that work and on the *Decretals*, is particularly evident in the first of Thomas'

concerns. From the late ninth century, the collapse of the Carolingian Empire provided a context in which various authorities competed for power, and in which the incidence of fighting among Christians became a cause of concern. As the canon lawyers (and Thomas) had it, only a prince possessed *competence de guerre*; and a prince, in their vocabulary, meant a ruler whose control of a particular territory indicated that he had no superior. Such a ruler could be recognized by the Pope, who as the vicar of Christ was responsible for the moral and spiritual welfare of Christians. When Urban II appealed to Christians in 1095 to join in a Crusade against the Seljuk Turks, he did so particularly with reference to those princes whose sphere of power qualified them as authorities, in Thomas' sense.

Right authority thus constituted the most important area in which Thomas' statement indicates the influence of canon law. As with the canonists, however, the summary of Thomas leaves a certain ambiguity. If those who possess authority with respect to war do so in part because of ecclesiastical recognition, where does authority actually rest? Is it with those secular authorities described as princes? Or with the Pope, who recognizes and, in the instance of the Crusades, summons the princes to organize their armies for a particular fight? In dealing with the topic of war, Thomas seems to say that the princes possess authority for war and that ecclesiastical authorities only direct and exhort them in the exercise of that authority. And yet, the authority of the church does involve an evaluation of the legitimacy of secular rulers. Particularly with respect to fighting against the Turks, or to Christendom's internal fight against heretics, the Pope's authority seems paramount. As succeeding generations would have it, the "just war" allowed for a distinction between two sorts of causes, and the role of secular and ecclesiastical authorities differed as one considered this distinction. Thus, secular authorities might authorize fighting for the common good, construed in terms of recovery of territory or goods taken through aggression. By contrast, fighting for a religious cause – here, Thomas' reference to Augustine's notion that the "injury" justifying war might involve punishment for

wrongs done could be extended to include idolatry and other matters of religion – should be authorized by the Pope, and Christian rulers did their duty by responding to his call.

Interestingly, Thomas' own position on the war against the Turks shows considerable nuance. He is not convinced that fighting Muslims in order to punish their religious errors is justified, and seems to prefer to refer such fighting to notions of a right of passage. All people, including Christians making pilgrimage to Jerusalem, have a right to travel peacefully. If Muslim authorities restrict that right, there may be a just cause of war against them. Such a cause might even justify taking back the lands conquered by Muslims, a rationale further supported by the notion that territory taken by aggression may be recovered through military force. Even here, though, Thomas' argument shows nuance, since he wonders whether retaking territory after a long occupation may not upset established patterns of living, and thus do more harm than good.

Where Thomas does suggest that religion presents a just cause of war is in matters of heresy and blasphemy. It is not right to fight against unbelievers, for example Jews, in order to compel their faith. But it is right to fight against those who claim to be Christians, but dissent from the teaching of the church. The latter case involves the breaking of a contract with God; it is the church's right and duty to punish such wrongdoing, and to provide an example to others who might be tempted to part ways with the church.

In all these matters, Thomas and others involved in the just war discussion addressed issues which vexed morally sensitive souls throughout the Middle Ages. Augustine's writings on the Donatist controversy provided an early example of the tensions built into the connection of just war with wars fought on behalf of religion. Given instances in which the latter could be connected with disproportionate force, or even with massacre, the notion of fighting for religious causes was gradually separated from the more clearly political causes for which secular rulers possessed authority. At the close of our period, Francisco de Vitoria could evaluate the claim of the Spanish emperor with respect to fighting

against the indigenous peoples of the New World in such a way as to suggest that difference of religion, in and of itself, could never provide a just cause of war. Nor could the emperor authorize fighting based on a claim that dominion over the natives' lands had been granted him by the Pope. The Pope's authority with respect to the New World extended only to the matter of sending missionaries who would preach the Gospel. Should the natives refuse passage to these envoys, and particularly if they should kill or otherwise harm them, then a limited use of military force might be justified. But just wars have to do with limited, political causes, and secular authorities show their good intention by understanding that limited causes require limits on means – in other words, the conduct of war provides an important measure of the justice of the various sides.

## Judaism and Islam

Development of a Christian idea of *bellum iustum*, including distinctions between just war and holy war, was a matter of utmost import for the history of Europe and of the Americas. In the process, Christian writers made use of many non-Christian sources. The legacy of Rome, Greek philosophical and historical writing, and the knightly or chivalric code all provided material, which Christians connected with a reading of the Bible.

As well, the existence of Judaism and Islam played a part in Christian just war discourse, though not so much in the way of providing source material or precedents. The persistence and, in the case of Islam, the power of non-Christian religious communities pressed just war thinkers to answer significant questions. Should war be used to spread the Christian faith? Under what conditions could an alternative religious community become an enemy? For what purposes could a war between Christians and Jews or Muslims be fought?

From the standpoint of Christian just war thinking, Jews were identified as a persistent, though for the most part nonthreatening religious

minority. The task of Christians was to govern those Jewish communities living under Christian rule. Thomas Aquinas illustrates well the ambiguity of this position. Christians should think, he wrote, of the persistence of Jews and their erroneous practices as the result of God's providence. Their position should be regulated in ways designed to reinforce the costs of error, and correlative of the impending triumph of Christ. Jews might be invited to receive the Gospel. But they ought not to be coerced, at least if that involves the use of military force. The payment of special taxes, the imposition of restrictions on freedom of movement and association, and the like were acceptable to Thomas. War within Christendom should be reserved for heretics and apostates, however.

That said, it is of interest to historians that Jewish tradition developed its own "just war tradition" in the period of our interest. Following the failure of wars of liberation against Rome in 70 and again in 130–135 CE, rabbinic authorities interpreted the Hebrew Bible in a way that radically delimited the right of Jews to resort to military force for political and/or religious purposes. For reasons connected to purposes of communal discipline, God had decreed that the people of Israel be governed by others, and anyone who raised the sword by organizing a revolt should be judged as controverting the purposes of God. The Talmudic tract called *Sotah* articulated this judgment, even as it noted that biblical tradition indicated God's authorization for two types of wars. The one, *milhemet mitzvah* or "obligatory" war involved fighting commanded by God, as in the book of Joshua or more generally, against the mythic enemy identified as Amalek. In terms of means, the obligatory war is total war, according to the rules recorded in Deuteronomy 20. The other, *milhemet rashut* or "permitted" war, identified with the wars of King David and other exemplary rulers, suggests a war for political purposes, for example the expansion of Israel's territory and/or the enhancement of its security. In its means, this type of war is more limited, again as indicated by the provisions for war against cities

“far away” in Deuteronomy 20. The Talmud, in the portions called Mishna and Gemara (usually dated c. 200 and 500 CE, respectively) recorded rabbinic commentary suggesting that the ruler of a Jewish state should gain the approval of the Sanhedrin or council of 70 prior to initiating a “permitted” war.

In *Mishneh Torah*, the great medieval scholar Moses Maimonides (d. 1204) systematized these and other rabbinic judgments. In discussing the laws pertaining to kings and wars, Maimonides restates the distinction between obligatory and permitted wars, and notes that these are valid for any King of Israel. Maimonides, born in Spain at a time when Christians were making progress toward retaking the peninsula from Muslims, migrated to Egypt and thus produced most of his work in a context dominated by Islam. It is not clear whether and how Maimonides thought these judgments might be implemented, though it is of interest that his comments, along with the views presented by Nachmanides (d. 1270), provide material for Jewish debate over the military and political policies of present-day Israel.

By contrast with authorities like Maimonides, Muslim scholars dealt with questions of war in connection with rule over vast expanses of territory. Following the rapid conquest of much of the Middle East and North Africa, members of the religious class (*al-‘ulamā’*) articulated a set of judgments indicating that diplomatic and military activity designed to spread the blessings of Islamic government should be viewed as consistent with the program of the Prophet Muhammad (d. 632). According to this view, Muhammad’s early career in Mecca, the city of his birth, involved a divine restriction, in that he had only received the order to preach. Around the time of the migration to Medina (622 CE), the Prophet and his followers received first the permission to fight (cf. Qur’ān 22: 39–41), and then in successive revelations the command obligating them to do so. Before his death, Muhammad declared that Arabia was now under the control of Islam, and according to tradition, sent letters to the ruler of the Byzantine, Sasanian, and ‘Abbāsīd Empires

inviting them to accept Islam, to pay tribute to the Islamic state, or to make themselves ready to fight. As many Muslims understood it, such actions of the Prophet constituted a standing order for the faithful to struggle by means of the sword, as well as by teaching and preaching, so as to bring the world into a pattern consistent with God’s will or to “make God’s cause succeed” (Qur’ān 8: 39).

Muslim thinking about war thus tied fighting to the example of the Prophet, and similarly restricted its means according to reports of orders Muhammad gave to his army. These include restrictions on targeting (women, children, the very old, members of religious classes, and others are classified as noncombatants and thus are not to be the direct target of attacks), as well as exhortations to keep pledges and in general to fight in ways worthy of the title *mujāhid* (one who struggles, particularly by fighting in approved wars).

By the mid-ninth and tenth centuries, texts presenting the judgments of well-known scholars like Malik ibn ‘Atta (d. 795), al-Shaybani (d. 804), and al-Shafi‘i (d. 820) provided material studied by members of the learned class. These included a set of “judgments pertaining to armed struggle” or *ahkām al-jihād*, which were regarded as establishing precedents that could be extended so as to provide guidance for contemporary questions. The general character of such judgments provides a remarkable parallel with Christian just war thinking. Thus, Muslim authorities indicate that legitimate war requires authorization by a competent authority, must be fought for an approved cause, and must be conducted with right intention. The first requirement is usually taken to mean the head of state or his designee, albeit in consultation with recognized religious scholars. The second has to do with the establishment or extension of Islamic authority, or in some circumstances with its maintenance or defense. The third requires that Muslim military policy and the conduct of Muslim armies follow the orders of the Prophet. As Muslim just war thinking developed, these came to be associated not only with avoidance of direct or intentional harm to noncombatants, but also with a discussion



about certain weapons and tactics. The use of hurling machines in siege warfare might be approved, for example; but the use of fire was more problematic.

One of the more interesting developments in Muslim discussion related to the problem of rebellion. In general, the idea of Muslims fighting Muslims was seen as problematic; as well, there are many sayings attributed to Muhammad designed to discourage Muslims from revolt, even in the context of unjust rule. Nevertheless, the subset of just war judgments indicated by the term *aḥkām al-buġāt* or “judgments pertaining to rebels” indicates that political authorities faced with a revolt orchestrated by a group with a clearly Islamic intention must tread lightly. Their goal should be reconciliation, in the manner suggested by Qurʾān 49:10.

Three further items deserve mention: first, the texts in which authorities speak about the justification and conduct of war make a rigorous distinction between fighting intended to extend or defend Islamic territory, and the use of force with respect to faith. Here, as in the Christian case, forced conversions violate the rule of faith, though heretics, apostates, and religious minorities (*ahl al-dhimma* or “protected” people) who are recalcitrant may be fought. Second, a minority view, represented by the various Shīʿite groups, argued that most of the fighting by which Islam expanded had been illegitimate, since these wars did not take place under the leadership of a divinely appointed imam or religious-political authority. Third, during the period of the Crusades, the notion of fighting as an “individual duty” came to the fore. This notion, which received further development in the writings of Ibn Taymiyya (d. 1328) in connection with the advance of the Mongols, suggested that when the Muslims of a particular region (e.g., Syro-Palestine during the eleventh and twelfth centuries) proved unable to defend themselves, the rulers of neighboring Muslim territories should send armies to help. It is this judgment which, by an interesting twist, would come to be developed in the nineteenth and subsequent centuries in

connection with a variety of Muslim resistance movements.

## Concluding Remarks

The medieval development of religious thinking about war thus presents important background for contemporary discussions of justice and war. By the end of the period, Christian authors made a strong distinction between just war, construed as war fought for approved political and moral purposes, and holy war, understood to be war fought because of difference in religion. Just war came to be approved, while holy war stood within the class of prohibited acts. Jews and Muslims, by contrast, did not make this distinction. While Muslims thought of war for the sake of conversion as wrong, the idea that the phrases “legitimate state” and “Islamic state” are two ways of saying the same thing persisted. Thus, wars fought for the establishment or defense of Islamic territory remained within the category “just war,” and one might speak of an enemy in terms of religious identity, particularly in the case of Christian encroachment upon lands controlled by Islam. And Jews, who would not organize armies until the mid-late twentieth century, maintained a way of speaking about wars commanded by God and wars authorized by state authority that suggested a religious base for distinctions between just and unjust wars.

More generally, advocates of all traditions spoke about war as a rule-governed activity. Even in cases where authors noted the approval of fighting involving something approaching total destruction, their argument focused on the command of God. And, in more ordinary settings, restrictions on the conduct of war are consistent: one must avoid direct targeting of noncombatants, and one must avoid the use of means that cause disproportionate damage to enemy property and life.

Finally, one should note a series of developments in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries that would presage a more modern and alternative way

of speaking about war, in terms of reasons of state. By the time of Grotius (d. 1645), Hobbes (d. 1679), and Locke (d. 1704), new forms of politics, and with these, new understandings of political authority, were shaping just war discourse. The old tradition needed to be recast. And so, it seems, is ever the case.

## Cross-References

- ▶ [Augustine](#)
- ▶ [Canon Law](#)
- ▶ [Church Fathers](#)
- ▶ [Cicero in Political Philosophy](#)
- ▶ [Civil \(Roman\) Law](#)
- ▶ [Francisco de Vitoria](#)
- ▶ [Moses Maimonides](#)
- ▶ [Philosophy, Jewish](#)
- ▶ [Political Philosophy](#)
- ▶ [Political Philosophy, Arabic](#)
- ▶ [Political Philosophy, Byzantine](#)
- ▶ [Reason of State](#)
- ▶ [Thomas Aquinas, Political Thought](#)

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## Will

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### Abstract

The notion of the will or *voluntas* was central both to medieval psychology and ethics. As the will was commonly conceived, it was through the choices of their will that an individual exercised freedom in the performance of action, and in well or ill-directed love determined their ethical relation to God and neighbor; and it was through the persistence of their will along with their intellect that an individual survived bodily death to live out in eternity the consequences of choices of the will made by them in this life.

Medieval theories of the will developed out of both the Christian and pagan thought of late antiquity. The foremost influence on medieval Latin philosophy was St. Augustine, but his own thought was already marked by the influence of pagan philosophy, especially that of Stoicism. Stoic thought had developed far more clearly than Aristotelianism (which in the Hellenistic period Stoicism came in turn to influence) a general theory of the actions of rational beings as involving the exercise of a capacity for internal action of choice or decision – conceived by Stoics

as *sunkatathesis* or practical assent – which preceded and explained the external actions decided upon. And this conception of the exercise of an inner agency of the will as a general constituent of human action was a constant feature of the action theory of medieval and early modern scholasticism. Indeed, it was fundamental to its moral thought.

Theories of the will of the high and latter middle ages were strongly marked by the rediscovery of Aristotle, and in particular by the discussion of mind and action to be found in the *Nicomachean Ethics*. But Aristotle's texts were assimilated into the existing Stoic–Augustinian conception of the will. *Prohairesis* or rational choice or decision was for Aristotle himself a motivating element in only some intentional human action, being absent from the motivation of akratic action; and the status of *prohairesis* as an action itself was not emphasized. By contrast, the term generally used to translate *prohairesis* in Latin thought, *electio*, denoted a decision or choice that was viewed on most theories, including those of Aquinas or Scotus in the high middle ages down to Suárez in the sixteenth century, as the primary form taken by all intentional human action.

Medieval theories of the will are often divided between intellectualists and voluntarists: intellectualists such as Aquinas emphasizing a dependence of the operation of the will on that of the intellect, and voluntarists such as Henry of Ghent, Scotus, or Ockham emphasizing the will's independence of the intellect. These debates were real, but were generally carried out within a more fundamental consensus about the nature of will and its fundamental role in action.

For all these thinkers, the will was our capacity for choice and decision, providing motivation for actions chosen or decided upon. It was responsive to the deliberation and judgment of our intellect or understanding about how we should act, and in the extent of this responsiveness it was distinguished from the nonrational corporeally based motivations or passions of the sensitive appetite (*appetitus sensitivus*) that were common to us and the animals. Deliberate human actions were generally seen as occurring first and foremost as

decisions or choices of the will, all else that we did intentionally being willed effects of these decisions and choices of the will. It was through the will that all such actions were performed and freedom or control over those actions was exercised.

Hence, the will was generally conceived as a rational appetite (*appetitus rationalis*) or rational motivating power, closely linked with the intellect. Both faculties were supposed to exist together in beings capable of reason, and so were to be found in humans and angels and, in a quite different way befitting his infinite nature, in God; but were not to be found in nonrational animals. Unlike other corporeally based psychological capacities, such as the senses and imagination, the will, like the intellect, was generally held to be an immaterial faculty, operating independently of any bodily organ and surviving bodily death. This immateriality was connected with its status, shared with the intellect, as a rational or intellectual faculty, involving a grasp of concepts in their generality. For such a grasp was widely thought to exceed the capacities of any bodily organ.

Why was the will generally seen by medieval thinkers as a primary locus of human action? Such a conception of action became much more controversial in the seventeenth century, where the opposition to medieval psychology mounted by Thomas Hobbes included an attack on the existence of a freedom or agency of the will. For Hobbes, the will was neither a distinctively rational faculty, being simply a general corporeally based capacity for motivation that is common to us and the animals; nor was it a locus of action, being entirely passive, our actions occurring only as the subsequent willed effects of its exercise. It is no coincidence that such an attack on the agency of the will should have been accompanied by an attack on its status as a distinctively rational or reason-involving faculty. For central to medieval theories of the will was a generally accepted theory of deliberate or fully intentional human action as a mode of exercising rationality at the point of the will.

This conception of action was practical reason-based: to perform a deliberate or intentional action

was to exercise a capacity to respond to and apply an intellectually presented practical reason. The intellect was directed at truth and seen as our capacity to reason and thereby arrive at belief or knowledge; in exercising the intellect to deliberate practically, about how to act, we arrived at conclusions about how we should act. Actions in their primary form were seen as occurring as the exercise of a capacity to respond to such deliberations not simply at the level of belief or knowledge, but at the level of motivation, through a faculty directed at goodness or some other practical value (such as, for Scotists, justice) as presented by the intellect. So in concluding by the intellect that, say, it is good that we should give alms, we could also respond to the goodness of that option by exercising the will to decide and become motivated to give alms. And that response was, by its very nature, a deliberate or intentional action.

This conception of action was common ground between intellectualists and voluntarists about the will. Thus, Aquinas understood the will in intellectualist terms, as dependent on the intellect in its function: acts of will stood as matter to the form provided by judgments of the practical intellect, the act of *electio* being informed by a judgment that the act chosen should be performed. Thus, actions of the will were described by Aquinas as cognitively informed inclinations. But we find the same conception of action in a more voluntarist thinker such as Scotus. Though for Scotus actions of the will were undetermined by practical judgments of the intellect, their status as actions was still understood by him in the same practical reason-based terms. He gave a widely discussed definition of intentional action or *praxis* as the act of a faculty that has at least the function, which in cases of irrationality may not be fulfilled, of responding to and being guided by judgments of the intellect – a faculty that he identified as the will.

Actions were generally viewed as taking two forms: *actus elicit* or *interni*, elicited or internal actions of the will itself, in which we perform actions of *electio* or decision and choice; and then through the effect of these *actus elicit*, further *actus imperati* or *externi*, commanded external actions involving faculties or capacities

outside the will, in which we acted as decided on or chosen. The conception of action as a mode of responding to reason in the intellect applied directly only to the will itself. For as we have noted, the dignity and nature of reason was generally seen as precluding the material embodiment of faculties directly responsive to reason. Hence, the status of commanded actions chosen or decided upon through the will, actions that occurred outside the will itself and which, in the case of actions such as hand raisings and the like, were located in corporeal motive capacities, was explained indirectly, in terms of their being willed effects of actions of the will. The status of the will as the primary locus of action was then a direct consequence of its being the only capacity to which the dominant practical reason-based conception of action could directly apply.

This conception of action as a mode of exercising rationality through the will could not apply to nonrational animals, who were supposed to lack wills and merely possessed passions of the sensitive appetite. But notice that the influence of the practical reason-based conception shaped even the theory of animal action. For although nothing exactly like human action might take place in animals, still something quite like it did take place in what Aquinas termed “imperfectly voluntary” form. And the principal case of imperfectly voluntary animal action, as thinkers such as Aquinas and Suárez agreed, was to be found, not in bodily motions, but in the prior passions that motivated these motions. The closest analogue of human actions in animals were not cases of animal bodily motion, but rather animal passions. For in responding appetitively to particular goods presented through the imagination, animals were approximating as closely as they could to the responses to an intellectually presented good made by human wills.

The debate between intellectualists and voluntarists did not involve any fundamental difference about the nature of agency. It did however reflect important differences about the nature of freedom and about how freedom is based in the will. In Thomism, the freedom of the will was explained in terms of the nature of its object as presented by the intellect. Freedom as a power to do or not to do

was explained in terms of the will, a faculty oriented toward the agent's good as happiness, being presented by the intellect with a range of imperfect, finite goods as options. So while freedom was a characteristic of the will, Aquinas taught that its root was to be found in reason. And the will's status as an intellectual or rational faculty at all was derivative, owing to its acts being informed by those of the intellect. The state of *beatitudo* or happiness, which was the destiny of the saved in heaven, was primarily a state of the intellect as involved in the beatific vision or contemplation of God.

Whereas for Scotus, the will's freedom depended on a duality in its proper object – as consisting both in the good of the agent and in justice. But the nature of freedom was not exhausted by the nature of will's intellectually presented object. Freedom was understood by Scotus to consist in a power of the will to determine itself; and the presence of this power was only revealed to us in our experience of our own choices. Moreover, the will determined its actions as an efficient cause of them, judgments of the intellect serving only as secondary, partial, or nondetermining efficient causes. Indeed, appealing to the characterization of rational power by Aristotle in *Metaphysics Book IX* as involving a potential to opposites, in Scotus' view, thanks to the possibility of freedom, it was the will rather than the intellect that was the truly rational power. And it was the will rather than the intellect that was the primary source of the happiness of heaven, as the faculty by which we direct ourselves to God in love of him.

Besides its central role in action, the will was also fundamental to the medieval Christian understanding of love. The central demand of the New Law presented by Christ was that people love God and love their neighbor as bearing the image of God. And, following Augustine, it was generally held that the love required by the law actually existed in the will. Not only was the will taken to be a locus of action, it was also taken to be a seat of affect and emotion.

In exercising the will, we favor or incline ourselves toward something. But we might favor or incline ourselves toward a person rather than an

action. For the object of the will might be, not an action, but a substance. In which case, the will's exercise toward its object could amount to love of a person. And so it was taken to be by Augustine, who took the orientation of our will to determine the direction of our love, and by later authors. In fact, corresponding to nonrational emotions felt in the sensitive appetite, passions properly so called, there were generally supposed to be corresponding rational emotions of the rational appetite or will.

In so far too as the will was a locus of agency, the identification of the will as the seat of love allowed the accommodation of a generally held view of law. What law required of us and made obligatory, it was generally thought, is action or refraining from action. That is, law served to govern agency as something over which we possess *dominium* or control provided by our freedom. But if what the law required of us is first and foremost properly directed love, then it was important that love take the form of a kind of free action. And if love of something was an orientation of the will toward it, and to direct one's will toward something was to perform a free action, then this demand could be met. The law could both govern action and directly require of us that we love. The emotion of love was therefore widely broken down into an action, what the law could and did directly require of us that we perform, and a *habitus* or disposition – a character of the soul that was not itself an action, and not directly obligatory under law, but by which we came to perform the obligatory action more readily and easily.

Included among *habitus* were the virtues and vices. And there was much dispute about the location of the moral virtues. Justice was generally agreed to be a virtue or disposition of the will; but what of courage and temperance? Aquinas held these to be virtues of the sensitive appetite, defective passions being the main obstacle to the performance of courageous and temperate actions. But Scotus and his followers put all the moral virtues in the will. For a moral virtue, properly speaking, must be a disposition of that faculty by which, morally, we act well or badly; and the will, precisely because possessing a freedom of

alternatives or opposites, was the more in need of virtues to dispose it toward morally good action and away from evil.

In fact, it was generally held that by virtue of its imposing obligations on external actions, the natural law directly addressed the will and imposed obligations too on our decisions: that, as Aquinas made clear (in Aquinas 1948:1.2, q100 a9), under natural law we were bound to will obligatory external actions, and bound not to will prohibited ones, so that the existence of an obligation to give alms implied a corresponding obligation to decide and intend to give alms. Behind this lay a conception of obligation, not simply as a kind of command – though obligations might be imposed through commands – but as a mode of justificatory support or, to use a term from Suárez, a *vis directiva* or justificatory force.

The force of a justification is the kind of justificatory support provided for what it justifies – the support we refer to when we say that an argument has “great force.” And in the practical sphere, the force of any justification must apply not only to the external actions justified or supported, but also to the will itself. If a justification for an action such as giving alms is to move someone to act, it must equally justify and support not only giving alms but their first deciding to give alms. Otherwise, the agent would remain quite unmoved by the justification for alms giving since they would lack any justification for deciding to act as it directed them. But practical justifications must be able to move us to act. They must justify the decisions and motivations that are involved in our responding to them. The assumption that obligations applying to external actions also apply to decisions of the will themselves is, then, a direct consequence of a conception of obligation as a mode of justificatory support or force. And again, in so far as obligation was also conceived as directive of action, so this conception of obligation required that the will be a locus of agency. Hence, scholastic moral theory was committed to the will’s being a locus of action in two ways: by its conception of what the moral law required as being, first and foremost, a will-based emotion of love; and then by its conception of obligation as a *vis directiva* or mode of justificatory support.

## Cross-References

- ▶ Emotions
- ▶ Henry of Ghent
- ▶ John Duns Scotus
- ▶ Virtue and Vice
- ▶ William of Ockham

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## Will, Weakness of

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### Abstract

Weakness of will, taken broadly, characterizes actions performed against one's better judgment or against one's resolve. The Aristotelian concept of *akrasia* (incontinence) denotes the special case of weakness of will due to passions. Prior to the reception of Aristotle's teaching on *akrasia*, the medievals saw weakness of will predominantly as a volitional rather than a cognitive deficiency. The early

phase of the reception of Aristotle's teaching on *akrasia* (from Albert the Great to Henry of Ghent) focused on the voluntary character of incontinence by investigating the will's control of the passions and of the momentary corruption of the incontinent's moral convictions. With notable exceptions, in the later period, interest in Aristotle's account of *akrasia* waned, and the focus shifted more exclusively toward the interaction of intellect and will. Aristotle considered incontinent action to be contrary to the individual's choice, whereas Christian thinkers agreed that incontinent action is freely chosen. Christian thinkers disagreed, however, on whether it is possible to act contrary to one's better judgment while one is still fully aware of this judgment (synchronic or clear-eyed weakness of will) or only when this conviction is momentarily obscured or not properly applied to the specific situation (diachronic weakness of will).

## Historical and Systematic Development of the Concept

Medieval thinkers rarely employed the term "weakness of will" (*infirmitas voluntatis* or its cognates). Yet the phenomenon of intentionally acting against one's better judgment or against one's resolve, which in contemporary philosophy is called "weakness of will," was the object of lively discussion. Historically, the mid-thirteenth century is a watershed for treatments of weakness of will in the Latin West, for only in 1246/1247 was Aristotle's discussion of *akrasia* translated into Latin. The term *akrasia* was translated as *incontinentia* (incontinence). Prior to the reception of Aristotle, weakness of will was mainly discussed under two headings: acting against one's conscience and sinning from weakness.

Earlier medieval thinkers tended to explain weakness of will as a volitional rather than a cognitive deficiency. For Anselm of Canterbury, the weak-willed abandon their initial desire for the moral action: in other words, they do not persistently will (*pervelle*) what they initially intended. Yet such weakness of will is not due to intellectual failure or impulsive passions, but rather due to a

deficient and voluntary act of the will. Peter Abelard distinguishes two kinds of weakness of will: on the one hand, the free consent to follow sensory desires rather than the rational will, so that one does not will what one judges best; on the other hand, the abandonment of one's initial will, so that one does not do what one had intended to do. Bernard of Clairvaux envisages a cognitive dimension in what he explicitly calls "weakness of will" (*infirmetas voluntatis*). The weak-willed are self-deceived about their order of preferences. While they think they want to avoid sinning, they actually prefer sinning to enduring that which a moral decision would entail. Yet even Bernard explains the failure of the weak-willed in terms of a volitional rather than a cognitive defect (for Anselm, Abelard, and Bernard, see the chapters by Goebel, Müller, and Trottmann in Hoffmann et al. (2006); see also Müller (2009: 381–495)).

Albert the Great is the first Latin author to comment on Aristotle's treatment of *akrasia*. Aristotle, sharing the Socratic presupposition that one cannot do evil in full awareness that the action is evil, was more concerned with explaining how *akrasia* is possible than with its voluntary character. He argues that because of vehement passions, the incontinent fail to apply their general, habitual moral knowledge to the particular situation they are in (*Nicomachean Ethics* 7.3). Albert and later Christian authors, by contrast, are more concerned with showing that the incontinent freely choose to act incontinently and are fully responsible for their action. According to Aristotle, choice is the result of practical deliberation. Thus, failure to act according to one's better knowledge means acting against one's choice. Hence the incontinent do not act from choice. In the Augustinian tradition, of which Albert is an heir, choice may or may not conform with practical reason. Albert explains *akrasia* in Aristotelian terms: the incontinent act contrary to their choice, because due to the onslaught of passions, they are momentarily unaware that their particular action conflicts with their general moral beliefs. Yet Albert explains the incontinent's cognitive failure in Augustinian terms: by their own free will, they allowed themselves to be unaware that their action is not choiceworthy (Saarinen 1994: 100–118).

Thomas Aquinas and Henry of Ghent, who wrote in the two decades after Aquinas' death, provide the most elaborate contributions to the medieval debate on weakness of will. They represent two opposite tendencies in discussing weakness of will, as a result of their fundamentally different views on the will's relation to the intellect. For Aquinas, the will's desires and choices are strictly proportional to the practical judgments of what is worth desiring or choosing. Accordingly, he does not admit "clear-eyed" or "synchronic weakness of will": that is, like Aristotle, he denies that at the moment of weak-willed action, the person actually acknowledged the better judgment that he or she generally holds. According to Aquinas, even deliberate evildoing (*peccatum ex certa malitia*) involves at least "ignorance of choice" (*ignorantia electionis*), which is the ignorance that in truth it is not worth sinning for the sake of whatever gain (*Summa theologiae* 1a2ae q. 78 a. 1 ad 1 and a. 4 ad 1). Deliberate evildoing characterizes the intemperate, who wrongly consider self-indulgence to be choiceworthy. In contrast, the incontinent correctly believe that self-indulgence should not be pursued. They act incontinently, however, because their vehement passions distract them from dwelling on their moral convictions, drawing their attention toward considerations that speak in favor of the desired act. When tempted, someone who normally admits that adultery is to be avoided is temporarily dominated by the thought that immediate pleasure is worth pursuing. Thus, incontinence is like momentary intemperance. When the passions calm down, the incontinent tend to regret the act, whereas the intemperate, whose disposition is stable, see nothing bad in their action. Aquinas maintains the parallelism of intellect and will in incontinence; in his view, incontinence involves not the refusal of the will to follow a correct practical judgment, but rather a momentarily mistaken practical judgment that presents the action as choiceworthy. Nevertheless, the will is also at fault, because it failed to counteract the effect of the passions by directing the attention of reason away from tempting pleasures. Like Albert, Thomas blames the incontinent for their momentary lack of acknowledgment that their action is sinful. It is only

because of this voluntary cognitive failure that they can act contrary to their better judgment (for concise accounts of Thomas's theory of incontinence, see Kent (1989), Denis (2008), and Müller (2005, 2009: 512–547); for the contrast with deliberate evil-doing, see Kent and Dressel (2016) and McCluskey (2017)).

Henry of Ghent reverses Aquinas' explanation. Rather than holding that incontinent action presupposes ignorance or unawareness of what is best to do here and now, Henry argues that ignorance follows upon incontinent action. For Henry, the possibility of synchronic weakness of will is inherent to the will, whether or not passions are involved. But normally, passionate desires have a part in weakness of will, that is, typically, weakness of will takes the form of incontinence. Yet for Henry, the passions or the cognitive deficiency they might cause do not by themselves entail the corruption of the will. The passions that assail the incontinent cause the will to delight in them, and if the will freely consents to the object of delight, it pursues the incontinent action and causes reason erroneously to judge it as good. Over time, repeated evil choices destroy practical knowledge entirely: someone who initially thought that theft is bad comes to think that it is good. Thus, an evil will corrupts reason, rather than vice versa (Eardley 2006; Hoffmann 2008; Müller 2009: 569–617).

While Duns Scotus repeatedly defends the possibility of acting contrary to one's practical judgment, he shows little interest in the Aristotelian notion of incontinence as passionate weakness of will, as in fact he is generally not very interested in the role of the passions in human agency. He agrees with Henry that the will can depart from reason. But he rejects Henry's view that an evil will can corrupt the judgment of practical reason, for the activity of practical reason is ultimately rooted in self-evident practical principles. Rather than corrupting reason, the will can either turn it away from a correct practical consideration or it can command it to find the means to an evil end (see the chapter by Noone in Hoffmann et al. (2006) and Müller (2009: 636–672)). William of Ockham follows Duns Scotus on this point.

These theories leave us in a dilemma. On the one hand, if one considers the will to be capable of

willing contrary to practical reason, as the voluntarists do, it is hard to see why someone would will to act contrary to what he or she has subjectively judged to be best (e.g., pursuing pleasure if abstinence is judged best, or avoiding pleasure if self-indulgence is judged best). On the other hand, if one asserts that the will must act in conformity with practical reason, as the intellectualists do, it seems that moral failure is caused by a cognitive mistake, and it appears implausible to fault a person for such a mistake. In order to avoid both alternatives, John Buridan denies that the will's desire or choice can be contrary to an unambiguous judgment of reason, but he grants that when the judgment is uncertain, the will can abstain from willing, postponing its decision until the ambiguity is resolved. For Buridan, weakness of will presupposes weak practical judgments, allowing the will to be divided between following what is pleasurable and avoiding what is immoral (Saarinen 1994: 166–187).

## Cross-References

- ▶ [Albert the Great](#)
- ▶ [Bernard of Clairvaux](#)
- ▶ [Emotions](#)
- ▶ [Henry of Ghent](#)
- ▶ [John Buridan](#)
- ▶ [Peter Abelard](#)
- ▶ [Thomas Aquinas](#)
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- ▶ [Will](#)
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## William Arnaud

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### Abstract

William Arnaud was a Master in the Arts Faculty of the University of Toulouse in the South of France at the end of the thirteenth century.

He wrote a course on logic that was published under the name of Giles of Rome and a very interesting commentary of Peter of Spain's *Tractatus*. His views are deeply influenced by Thomas Aquinas' semantic and ontological positions and very often opposed to those of Peter of Spain.

### Life and Work

William Arnaud is principally known in medieval philosophy for two reasons: he wrote a very interesting commentary on Peter of Spain's *Tractatus* and a course on *logica vetus* ascribed to Giles of Rome under whose name they have been published. According to L. M. De Rijk, William Arnaud was a Master in Toulouse who taught in the 1240s or in the 1250s. This view has been challenged by Gauthier (1989a:52\*, 69\*sq) because William quotes Thomas Aquinas' commentary on the *Peri hermeneias* (as "expositor"), as well as other works from Thomas and Giles of Rome when commenting on Aristotle's logic. His activity is therefore to be situated in the late thirteenth century. This date has now been generally adopted by scholars (except Lahey 2005). William's commentary on the *Liber de six principiis* has been attributed to "Master Vital" (i.e., Vital du Four) and so edited separately (Gondras 1975). He also wrote a commentary on the *Analytics* (*Prior* and *Posterior*). Not much of his life is known except for these pieces of information on his logical production as a Master in the Arts Faculty of the University of Toulouse, since he is no longer identified with the Archdeacon of Lanta, who died in 1255, with William of Saint Amour or with the inquisitor beaten to death in 1242. A list of his works, manuscripts, and editions are to be found in Weijers (1998).

### The Course on Aristotle's Logic

William's course on the *Logica vetus* (*Isagoge*, *Categories*, *Peri hermeneias*, *Liber VI Principiis*) has been edited under the name of Giles of Rome. It is known in two manuscripts from Avignon

(BM 1078 and BM 1089); there is a third manuscript (Vatican, Bibl Apost. Barberini, lat. 433) that is perhaps a copy of the ancient edition, and a fourth manuscript concerning the commentary on the *Liber De six principiis* (Berlin Staatsbibl. Preussischer Kulturbesitz, Fol.624, ff 51ra–62ra). The set of commentaries on *Logica vetus* is headed by a prologue called “*principium*” (Tabarroni 1988:374) or “*divisio logice*” (Gauthier 1989a:70\*). This division is influenced by John of Dacia’s division of sciences (Tabarroni 1988:372). The attribution of the whole course to William can be based upon an ascription in one manuscript (Avignon 1089), but the most serious arguments are derived from the doctrinal content of the work, which is very close to the *Lectura Tractatum* on Peter of Spain’s *Tractatus*, which is unquestionably by Arnaud. Quotations from Thomas Aquinas can be read in all parts of his work (Gauthier 1989a:71\* for the *Peri hermeneias*’ commentary, as an example).

A. J. Gondras has given an edition of William Arnaud’s commentary of the *Librum de six principiis* though he does not attribute this work to him, but discuss in detail the attribution to Vital du Four. He sees the commentary as the work of a young Master because he does not quote the Fathers nor the theologians and also because he is far from being an expert in the Arts (Gondras 1975:187). The last point seems rather inaccurate considering the vast amount of quotations from Aristotle’s works on natural philosophy contained in the commentary, and the first one can probably be explained by the nature of the text commented upon and by the fact that the course belongs to the Arts Faculty, and not to theology. Gondras’ edition is based on two manuscripts from Avignon (BM 1078 and BM 1089), that is, from those manuscripts containing the whole course of William Arnaud on *Logica vetus*. Another version of the commentary on the *Liber* is mentioned in an other manuscript (Toulouse Arch. Dep. 4, F2, see Gauthier 1989a:71\*, note 2).

One can gain an idea of William’s unpublished commentary on the *Categories* thanks to the study of R. Andrews (Andrews 2001:299–300) who listed his questions and published one on quantity, together with some similar questions written by

other thirteenth-century masters (Andrews 2001:305–307). William follows Albert the Great’s solution with regard to the definition of quantity (Andrews 2001:284).

William’s commentary on the *Peri hermeneias* has been thoroughly examined by A. Tabarroni, elaborating on the discoveries of R. A. Gauthier (who mentions two other fragmentary manuscripts, Gauthier 1989a:71\*). William is very faithful to Thomas Aquinas, whom he calls the “Expositor” not only in the sections where Aquinas’ *Expositio* is extant, but also in the final part of the treatise on which Thomas did not comment. This shows that William had access to an anonymous *Continuatio* otherwise partially transmitted in two manuscripts. His own exegesis is so dependent on his source that A. Tabarroni considers it a very good testimony for the reconstitution of that work (Tabarroni 1988:373–374). This anonymous *Continuatio*, strongly influenced by Herveus Natalis’ commentary on the *Peri hermeneias* was thought to be authentic by William. A partial edition of the *Continuatio* is given by A. Tabarroni, followed by the parallel text of William (Tabarroni 1988:420–427).

William’s commentary on the *Analytics* is found in one manuscript (Barcelona, Arch de la Corona de Aragon Ripoll 109). It has been studied by R. A. Gauthier in his introduction to Thomas Aquinas’ *Expositio*: it is based upon Thomas but also upon Giles of Rome’s commentary on the same treatise, so that it should be dated after 1290 (Gauthier 1989b:65\*–66\*). A partial edition of his commentary on the *Prior Analytics* has been made by Grabmann (1928).

### **The Commentary on Peter of Spain’s *Tractatus***

The text is known in five manuscripts and has been partially edited by de Rijk (1969). The author is quite critical towards the text on which he is commenting and develops original positions in his theory of supposition (see Brumberg-Chaumont 2010). It has been thought that William’s teaching in logic should be understood within the new general framework introduced by

the modists in logic. Envisaged in this way, his commentary could be seen as a very interesting testimony of the encounter between the new paradigm and the revival of the interest in the theory of the properties of terms observed elsewhere at the end of the thirteenth century (see Pinbord and Ebbesen 1984). Nonetheless, the immediate inspiration of the text is to be found in Thomas Aquinas' logical and ontological works on a philosophical point of view. William introduces into the analysis of the theory of signification and supposition Avicenna's theory of essence as interpreted by the Dominican on a semantic point of view (especially in the *De ente et essentia* and in his commentary on the *Peri hermeneias*). Conversely, R. A. Gauthier has shown how Thomas Aquinas was dealing with the same referential problems as the terminist treatises did when analyzing the signification and the scope of universal nouns as subject and as predicate, but that Thomas used different tools, though he knew the terminist tradition (Gauthier 1989a:55\*–56\*). Similar examples are used, studied in detail by R. A. Gauthier who mentions the defense William gives of the Thomistic interpretation against Peter of Spain (Gauthier 1989a:54\*–56\*). One can say that William translates Thomas Aquinas' approach into the language of terminism, as can be seen in the analysis of the supposition of the predicate, a very interesting case from the philosophical point of view. According to Peter of Spain, the predicate “man” is in simple supposition, the supposition the term can also have in a subject position in propositions such as “man is a species.” But this is impossible in a Thomistic approach inspired by the Avicennian paradigm, because the property of being a universal predicable as a species cannot be possessed by the essence itself, but by the essence as it is thought, the intention, whereas it is the essence itself that is predicated of the thing in which it has its being, so that “man” in the two propositions (“Socrates is a man,” “man is a species”) cannot have the same supposition. For William, simple supposition is the supposition for the intention in the soul and cannot be the supposition of the predicate because propositions such as “all men are animals” would always be false (*Lectura tractatum*, p. 147). The

predicate is in personal supposition and the proposition is about things, not concepts. The proposition can all the same remain true even if there is no man left, because William favors the signification of the thing as thought, so that nouns do not lose their signification if the things named are destroyed, and because he sees natural supposition as the supposition for the form as preserved in particulars whether they exist or not (*Lectura tractatum*, p. 146).

## Cross-References

- ▶ [Giles of Rome, Political Thought](#)
- ▶ [Peter of Spain](#)
- ▶ [Thomas Aquinas](#)

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## William Crathorn

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### Abstract

William Crathorn (fl.1330s), Oxford Dominican whose unique epistemology fueled controversies during Oxford's "Golden Age" of theology. Crathorn's thought emerged from the epistemically oriented Ockhamist approach, but it incorporated an older account, in which the perceived object projects "species" which are received in the act of perception and interpreted by the understanding as the basis for formulating ideas about the perceived object. Crathorn argued that the ideas we formulate about the species projected by the object take on the physical characteristics of the object, so that perception of a black cat results in the formulation of an idea that is black, possessing felinity, and so forth. Crathorn's position was the object of great scorn from his contemporaries, notably Robert Holcot. This led to increased attention of the

relation of perceived appearances to the substance behind the perception, and Crathorn recognized that his position entailed a difficulty in a certain distinction between the Aristotelian categories of substance and quality.

## Biography

Very little is known of the Dominican William Crathorn, save that he entered the O.P. around 1315, and active in Oxford in the early 1330s. Crathorn was a contemporary of Robert Holcot, O.P., and appears to have been engaged in heated debate with Holcot for a time. There is no record of his presence at Oxford after this period, although his unique positions continued to attract comment in the 1360s. Crathorn's commentary on the first book of Lombard's *Sentences* is the sole source of our knowledge of his thought, although a manuscript in Vienna contains quodlibetal questions that may also be his.

Oxford theology in the early fourteenth century was very heavily influenced by Ockham's philosophical emphasis on the relation of logic and philosophy of language on epistemological questions, demoting ontology from the pride of place it had enjoyed in thirteenth-century thought. It by no means follows that all Oxford thinkers were thereby Ockhamists; the so-called "Modern" approach lent itself to great variation within philosophical speculation, of which William Crathorn proves a very good example. (It should be understood that the term *moderni* was understood to mean thinkers roughly contemporary to whoever was using it. Before the condemnation of Wycliffism in the late fourteenth century, when the term was used to mean positions opposed to Wyclif's realism, the term was not used to refer to one specific philosophical position. Everyone from Thomas and Scotus onward could count as "modern.") Crathorn's *Sentence* commentary is characterized by the epistemologically oriented approach of the *Moderni*, but his philosophical conclusions were sufficiently divergent from the mainstream as to lead Robert Holcot to comment that one should only read Crathorn for amusement. In an age when it was common to make

few personal references to proponents of opposing philosophical viewpoints, this kind of comment is remarkable. It is very likely that Crathorn's thought was very widely discussed in Oxford from the 1330s through the 1370s, as is evidenced by Wyclif's hostile references to positions associated with him.

The hallmark of Crathorn's philosophy was a development of the then common notion that human knowledge is reliant on the species of objects perceived, a position developed initially by Roger Bacon, whose model of perception was inspired by medieval optics. When we perceive a given object, what we perceive is a result of the emitted appearances, or species, of the object. This is analogous to the refraction of an object through a lens; given the medium of light, when a lens is held up to an object, an image of that object is produced on the other side of the lens. This image, the species of the object, is what we perceive with our senses. It has a lesser form of being than the substance that produces it, but it has sufficient being as to convey likeness of that substance. Crathorn adopted this optically oriented epistemological model, but added a significant limitation: he eliminated the mental act normally associated with receiving the perceived species in the mind from his account. That is, he believed there to be no grounds for distinguishing between the cognitive power and the acts it might produce. Aquinas' model of cognition, in which there are four elements at play (soul, powers, acts, and species) typified thirteenth-century epistemology. Ockham had eliminated the distinction between soul and powers, identifying the two, and had done away with species, emphasizing the cognitive power's direct perception of the object. Crathorn agreed with Ockham in identifying the soul and its powers, retained species in the formula, and arguing against the distinction between a power and the acts that arise from it. This left the Soul, or mind, and the species. The mind receives the species, which reflect the qualities of the object perceived, which results in the mind acquiring the qualities of the object perceived. Hence, when I perceive a black cat, the species of the cat contain the qualities of felinity, blackness, quadrupedality, and so forth; when the species

enters my mind, my mind becomes a substantial foundation for felinity, blackness, quadrupedality, and so forth. In effect, my idea of the black cat is, to a very real extent, black cat-like in all the qualities associated with the being of the cat. It is this aspect of Crathorn's thought that led Holcot to his derisory comment; considered charitably, it is unique to scholastic epistemology.

The first question to arise from such a remarkable position is whether the species we perceive is veridical. That is, how can we be certain that the species of the black cat that is identical to our idea of the black cat we perceive is the same as the qualities as they exist in the black cat itself? Obviously, the species is not identical to the qualities that produce the appearance, so the question stands: what is the grounds for certainty that the species fully embody the qualities of the substance in question? Ockham's position adroitly avoids this question by eliminating the intermediary species in favor of our direct perception of the object itself, but Crathorn's departure from Ockham leads him to a position familiar to anyone familiar with Descartes. The species of skepticism Crathorn faces is different, then, from that arising from Ockham's conviction that God can cause us to perceive objects that do not exist. Ockham's arises from a consideration of God's absolute power, while Crathorn's arises naturally from his epistemology. Crathorn's response is similar to Ockham's, depending on the unlikelihood of God's leading people into error, but it plays a much greater role in Crathorn's thought than it does in Ockham's. Elsewhere, Crathorn argues against skepticism by relying on Augustine's *si fallor, sum*, a then widely known counter to traditional skepticism.

While his epistemology represents a remarkable departure from the *Moderni* norm, Crathorn's ontology is slightly more commensurate with Ockhamist conceptualism. Ockhamists generally had reduced the ten Aristotelian categories to just two, substance and quality; the latter serving as ontological basis for the remaining eight. Crathorn's position, arising from his epistemology, prevents him from distinguishing with certainty between species of substance and species of quality, leading him to suggest that the categories

are primarily conventional. There are objects, and the species we perceive suggest Ockham's division between substance and qualities, but we lack the certain evidence we would need to construct a complex ontological account of things in the world. Crathorn was among the Oxford indivisibilists, or atomists, who argued for the existence of fundamentally indivisible constituents of a continuum. Opinions varied regarding the nature and number of these atomic units; some argued for a potentially infinite number of indivisibles in a finite continuum, while others stipulated that a finite continuum must be composed of a finite number of atomic units. Crathorn was among the latter, and he seems to have advocated a somewhat richer atomism than others, holding these indivisible elements to be discrete, kind-defined beings.

Given Crathorn's skepticism regarding the categories, and the uncertainty about the similarity relation holding between the species we perceive and the objects behind the species, one might well ask what Crathorn believed there to be that we perceive. Crathorn argued that when we perceive a black cat, there is more involved than simply the perceiving subject and the perceived object; when we make a judgment like "the cat is black" we are referring to a complex that serves as the basis for our proposition. Crathorn's position is different from Wodeham's complex significable in that he does not seem to have worked out the philosophical arguments need to account for what might correspond to statements about nonexistent object, or assertions like "man is not an ass." Crathorn's account of propositions is further complicated by his rejection of the mental language that many of his contemporaries believed to be the primary mode of formulating mental propositions prior to their semantic articulation in a conventional language. Because there is no distinction between the mental power and the mental act, there is no space in Crathorn's philosophy of mind for the distinction between the cognition of the species and the translation of the cognition into a conventional language. Further, the linguistic apparatus by which complex propositions are formulated, including verbs, substance-terms, syncategoremata, and so forth are not contained

within the cognition. Hence, when we translate the cognition into the semantic expression of the proposition, we use the conventional language that has been developed by the linguistic community in which we have been raised.

## Cross-References

- ▶ [Atomism](#)
- ▶ [Epistemology](#)
- ▶ [John Wyclif](#)
- ▶ [Robert Holcot](#)
- ▶ [Skepticism](#)
- ▶ [William of Ockham](#)

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His work had some influence on the development of early modern science, though he cannot be said to have been doing empirical science, his work being much closer to mathematical analysis.

William was born before 1313, probably in Wiltshire, Salisbury Diocese. He served as the first bursar in his college in 1338–1339. He had become a Doctor of Theology by 1348, and was chancellor of the university in 1371–1372. He died in the winter of 1372/1373. Heytesbury was one of the second generation of the Mertonian school, building on Richard Kilvington's Sophisms (*Sophismata*) (before 1325), and Thomas Bradwardine's Insoluble Sentences (*Insolubilia*) and Treatise on Proportions (*Tractatus de proportionibus*) (1328). Heytesbury's work deals chiefly with "sophisms," statements occurring within formal disputations, the truth of which was at issue given specified assumptions. The respondent must agree to or deny the sophism, and then answer his opponent's questions, granting whatever follows deductively from his admissions, without falling into contradiction. All of William's works would have been written during his regency in the Arts at Merton, approximately 1331–1339. Most influential is the Rules for Solving Sophismata (*Regulae solvendi sophismata*). A work supplementing the Rules, On the Proofs of Conclusions from the Treatise of Rules for Resolving Syllogisms (*De probationibus conclusionum tractatus regularum solvendi sophismata*), which may not be by William himself, appears with it in early printed editions and manuscripts. William also wrote a number of more elementary pieces, focusing chiefly on logical and semantical issues rather than paradoxes involving the continuum. These include a collection of 32 Sophismata, and a second collection of 39 sophisms purportedly proving that the respondent is a donkey (*tu est asinus*), entitled *Sophismata Asinina*. He produced a number of short works at the more elementary level as well, including On the Compound and Divided Senses (*De sensus composito et diviso*), and Concerning the Truth and Falsehood of Premises

## William Heytesbury

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### Abstract

William Heytesbury (before 1313–1372/1373) was a fellow of Oxford's Merton College from 1330. Developing the work of Richard Kilvington and Thomas Bradwardine, he applied supposition theory to the logical exposition of "sophisms," attending in particular to scope problems and compounded and divided sense. His chief work is the Rules for Solving Sophismata (*Regulae solvendi sophismata*). He is particularly noted for applying his methods to puzzles about motion and the continuum, and is best known for the mean speed theorem concerning the distance covered over a period of time under uniform acceleration.

(*De veritate et falsitate propositionis*). All of these appear in the 1494 edition of Locatellus. Works found only in manuscript include a treatise on consequences, another on obligations, one on future contingents, and a beginner's book of definitions and divisions in natural philosophy. For these, see Weisheipl (1969).

The Rules contains six chapters. The first deals with insoluble sentences, self-referential paradoxes such as "what I am now uttering is false." The second deals with intensional contexts. For instance, it presents the sophisma "you know the king is seated," given that the king is seated, and you know that sentence A, in fact asserting this, is true, but do not know what A says. The third chapter deals with problems connected with relative pronouns, and the fourth with paradoxes involving the terms "begins" and "ceases." Here Heytesbury notes that if something begins to have a property at a given moment, then it might either have the property for the first time at that moment or lack the property for the last time at that moment, and tries to set forth rules as to which "exposition" to adopt in any particular case. In the fifth chapter of the *Regulae*, on maxima and minima, Heytesbury considers the limits of capacities. He assumes that every active capacity is measured by the resistance (the passive capacity) it can overcome. Thus an active capacity to lift weights will be measured by the weight (a resistance) that it enables one to lift. It is natural to assign as one's weight-lifting capacity the greatest weight one can lift, the limit of one's capacity. But in some cases, there will be no greatest passive capacity by which the active capacity can be measured. Still, as long as the active capacity has some limit there will then be a least passive capacity that the active capacity cannot overcome. Thus, any given active capacity will divide the range of passive capacities on which it is measured into two sets, every element of one of which is greater than every element of the other, and the limit of the capacity will be that unique capacity which is at the boundary between the two sets, either the greatest in the first set, or the least in the second. The situation is parallel to that with beginning and ceasing, where it turned out that two different expositions

were needed for "A begins to be F," one assuming a first instant at which A is F, the other a last instant at which A is not. Heytesbury lays down some rules as to which of these options to choose in any particular case. He also tries to determine when the limit of a capacity in fact exists, and his work here is strongly reminiscent of Dedekind's definition of real numbers in terms of rationals. The sixth chapter deals with change and motion.

Heytesbury's central interest is the logic of continua and infinite divisibility, a pursuit nowadays identified as part of mathematics. His puzzles are logical, and Heytesbury works, like other logicians who treated sophisms, "according to imagination," allowing any consistent set of propositions whatever to be assumed for the presentation of a sophism, regardless of metaphysical or physical possibility. He treated qualities such as heat and whiteness as measurable on a continuous range and accustomed thinkers to the notion that any quality varying in "intension" could be conceived quantitatively. Ancient physics envisioned quantitative treatments only of spatial dimensions, time, and motion, and so Heytesbury's work helped lay the logical groundwork for sixteenth- and seventeenth-century breakthroughs in such areas as the physics of heat and temperature. In the sixth chapter of his *Rules*, Heytesbury developed the mathematics of uniform acceleration, proving that uniformly accelerated bodies will, in a given period of time, cover the same distance they would have covered traveling at a uniform velocity one half the sum of initial and final velocities. Domingo de Soto noted the theorem's application to free fall in 1555, and Galileo benefitted from the medieval discussion of uniform acceleration to which William contributed, though he probably was not directly acquainted with his work.

## Cross-References

- ▶ [Domingo de Soto](#)
- ▶ [Insolubles](#)
- ▶ [John Dumbleton](#)
- ▶ [Natural Philosophy](#)



- ▶ [Oxford Calculators](#)
- ▶ [Quantification](#)
- ▶ [Richard Kilvington](#)
- ▶ [Richard Swineshead](#)
- ▶ [Sophisms](#)
- ▶ [Supposition Theory](#)
- ▶ [Syncategoremata](#)
- ▶ [Terms, Properties of](#)
- ▶ [Thomas Bradwardine](#)

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## William of Alnwick

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### Abstract

William of Alnwick was a Franciscan theologian who became Bishop of Giovinazzo at the end of his life. He is known primarily for his close association with John Duns Scotus as a secretary and a collaborator. Alnwick's own work shows a reliance on Scotus as a starting point, but shows independence in the conclusions he draws. He is notable for his positions on the univocity of being, the epistemic status of theology, as well as being conversant with many of the main voices of the early fourteenth century. His work as a whole provides helpful clarifications into the mind of Scotus, and raises influential objections that helped shape the ongoing conversation of the fourteenth century.

William of Alnwick (1275–1333) was a Franciscan theologian who at the end of his life was consecrated as the Bishop of Giovinazzo. His name is derived from his birthplace of Alnwick in Northumberland, England, and it is believed that he was born sometime around 1275. As a Franciscan friar, he must have spent time studying theology at a Franciscan *Studium* – most likely at the nearby *Studium* in Newcastle. What he did next is less clear, but we know that at least by 1303, he was licensed as a Doctor of Theology at the University of Paris (he is listed as one of the masters who sided with Phillip IV against Pope Boniface VIII). There is little doubt that by this time, Alnwick was in close dialogue with the famous thinker with whom he would always be associated in posterity – John Duns Scotus. When exactly Alnwick later left Paris is unknown, but we do know for sure that he eventually found his way back to England to teach at Oxford. He is listed as the forty-second regent master at Oxford,

which situates him chronologically around 1316 during the Oxford chancellery of Henry Harclay.

Alnwick's relationship and interaction with Scotus consisted initially in the form of assistance that he could provide to the latter. Alnwick was a collaborator in the completion of Scotus' *Ordinatio* and functioned as secretary for one of Scotus' *Collationes*. He likewise went on to compile what are called the *Additiones Magnae* or long additions, which were compiled by Alnwick from Scotus' lectures in both Oxford and Paris. These additions soon became attached to Scotus' *Ordinatio* as an appendix and then eventually became inserted directly into the *Ordinatio* to fill in what were perceived of as holes in books one and two. Alnwick was, no doubt, incredibly indebted to the influence of Scotus in his life, and he is certainly remembered primarily for his relationship to Scotus. But Scotist studies are equally indebted to Alnwick because, through his close association with Scotus, he has been able to offer key points of clarification at otherwise frustratingly ambiguous places in Scotus' corpus.

Moreover, it is not entirely fair to reduce Alnwick to a mere personal assistant of the great John Duns Scotus. To focus on this relationship exclusively is to overlook the fact that Alnwick was a significant thinker in his own right, often distancing himself from Scotus' views at critical points. As various scholars have often echoed, while Alnwick's work in philosophy and theology most often began from the foundation laid by his early work under the tutelage of Scotus, this foundation was only the starting place for his own independent thinking. He cannot, therefore, be reduced to a blind student imitating a former teacher.

Besides his cooperative work with Scotus, Alnwick has left us with his own commentary on the *Sentences*, of which select questions have been edited in journals. We also have a selection of questions from his commentary on Aristotle's *De anima*, a lengthy list of questions in his *Determinationes*, an independent sermon on the beatific vision, and finally his *Quodlibet* questions and his *Quaestiones de esse intelligibili*, which were edited and published in full in 1937.

Perhaps one of the most visible examples of Alnwick's reliance on the thought of Scotus as a starting place and his simultaneous independence with regard to the conclusions reached is found in Alnwick's discussion of the univocity of being.

There are two halves to Scotus' doctrine of the univocity of being. The first is that a common concept of being is shared between God and creatures and therefore being is a univocal predicate, having a *ratio* or meaning that means the same thing in all of its applications. The second is that this univocal concept of being cannot be predicated essentially (*in quid*) of everything to which it is univocally said. That is, for Scotus it appeared to follow logically from the premise that being is said univocally, that other irreducible concepts like ultimate differences and the transcendentals cannot include the concept of being essentially. If they contained being and yet were not merely the same thing as being, but distinct from being, then they would not be irreducibly simple, for they would contain being and something that differentiates them.

Alnwick argues vigorously on behalf of the first half of Scotus' position. He, like Scotus, agrees that there is one single univocal *ratio* for being, and he defends this position against the criticisms of Robert Cowton and Richard of Conington. But Alnwick, equally as vigorously, argues against the second half of Scotus' position. Alnwick does not think it follows that being can be excluded from certain intelligible concepts. He insists that being must be predicable of all intelligible things with no exceptions. So he argues for the essential predication of being to extend to the transcendental attributes of being and ultimate differences. At one point, Alnwick poses the question: if the transcendental attributes of being and its ultimate differences do not essentially contain being, then how can they be anything at all? (Alnwick in Noone 1993 ll. 359–363, 398–404). While the Scotist position is able to offer its own answers to such a question (and did so), Alnwick at least presented an objection that later thinkers found interesting and at the very least were obliged to refute. Peter Aureoli and Walter Chatton are two subsequent thinkers who took

up and addressed directly this question posed by Alnwick.

Alnwick's status as "independent Scotist" is also seen in his questions on intelligible being. Faced with the question of the ontological status of an object *as known*, William is perplexed by what he perceives as Scotus' answer. While Scotus was willing to say that such an object attains a relative status of being (*esse cognitum*), William finds this merely confusing. His own answer is to say that the being of the object known is nothing other than the being or existence of the knowing intellect. An accompanying consequence of this position pertains to the status of divine ideas. Since no separate existence is granted to what is in the mind, William denies any existence, created or produced, of the divine ideas distinct from the existence of God.

Besides his views on univocity and the status of intelligible being, Alnwick opposes Scotus' belief that the immortality of the soul is truly demonstrable. He asserts instead that it is something that can only be held by faith. Also, contra Scotus, he maintains that God is the subject of metaphysics and not being. Since, according to Aristotle, no science proves the existence of its subject, Alnwick concurs with Averroes that God's existence cannot be proven by metaphysics, but only through the science of physics and motion. Scotus sides with the position of Avicenna, holding that being is the subject of metaphysics, and therefore God's existence can be proven through the science of metaphysics. Finally, Alnwick is noted for bringing his own clarification and specification to the well-known and often ambiguous Scotistic doctrine of the formal distinction. In his *Determinatio* 14, he argues for a gradation within the context of real distinctions. In conversation with Henry of Ghent and the later work of Scotus, he posits three kinds of real distinctions: *simpliciter*, *secundum quid*, and *formaliter*. Thus, the formal distinction is freed from any confusion with a mere distinction of reason existing only in the mind. Likewise, it is ensured the status of having a reality in the nature of things themselves, though it remains the weakest of all three real distinctions.

Within the realm of natural philosophy, Alnwick has been associated with a debate over an early and peculiar form of atomism known as “indivisibilism.” This position, as it was first advanced by Henry Harclay, took aim specifically at Aristotle’s assertion that a line could not be composed of indivisibles, and more broadly the position opposed Aristotle’s suggestion that time, space, and even motion could not be constructed out of indivisible units. Alnwick is documented as developing a response – in terms of terminist logic or *logica moderna* (Murdoch 1982) – in opposition to Harclay and later proponents such as Walter Chatton and Gerard of Odo.

Finally, Alnwick’s role in the developing conversation about the compatibility of faith and science is worth mentioning. Setting the stage for the discussion is Thomas Aquinas’ position that faith and scientific knowledge regarding the same thing are incompatible. No one can scientifically know something to be true and still have faith in it. The objection had been raised against Aquinas that if faith and scientific knowledge are incompatible, then theology itself could not be a science. Wanting to preserve the scientific status of theology – once again in distinction from his teacher Scotus who argued that theology strictly speaking is not a science – Alnwick took issue with the problematic premise. Alnwick claimed, contra Aquinas, that faith and scientific knowledge were not incompatible. Rather, he insisted that someone could continue to have faith regarding a particular truth even while having scientific evidence of its validity. The major hurdle in his reasoning was to show, through fine distinctions, how evidence and nonevidence can be had simultaneously without contradiction. With a certain innovation and originality of his own, Alnwick departs from the position of his teacher and attempts to find a unique way to preserve the scientific status of theology.

Toward the end of Alnwick’s life, he found himself caught up in an ecclesiological controversy that prompted his departure from England. In 1322, Alnwick joined a contingent of Franciscan theologians who drew up the decree, *De paupertate Christi*, written in opposition to Pope John’s XXII’s position on apostolic poverty. The

Pope insisted that Christ and the Apostles had indeed owned property and this contingent of Franciscans insisted that Christ and the Apostles had not, thus legitimizing their call for poverty within the Franciscan order against the dissenting voices of rival Franciscans. Alnwick, while he may not have been involved in the drafting of the decree itself, nevertheless gave a public defense of it found in the last question of his *Determinationes*. Alnwick must have left Oxford by this time, for his *Determinationes* are said to have been held at Bologna in 1322–1323. In this final question, William argued that Christ and the Apostles had owned nothing privately or even in common, and this direct opposition to the Papal decree caught the Pope’s attention. John XXII ordered that action be taken against Alnwick, who subsequently fled to Naples. In Naples, he fell favorably under the hospitality of King Robert of Sicily, who, in 1330, made Alnwick the legitimate Bishop of Giovinazzo. He died three years later in Avignon.

## Cross-References

- ▶ [Henry Harclay](#)
- ▶ [Henry of Ghent](#)
- ▶ [John Duns Scotus](#)
- ▶ [Peter Auriol](#)
- ▶ [Walter Chatton](#)

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## William of Auvergne

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### Abstract

William of Auvergne was one of the first thinkers in the Latin West to offer a positive reception to the Greek and Aristotelian thought pouring into Europe through the new translations. He was deeply influenced, especially by Avicenna with regard to his understanding of God, the proofs for his existence, the structure of the created world, and the nature of the human soul. He said that Aristotle, by whom he most often meant Avicenna, should be upheld wherever he was correct, but rejected wherever he was in conflict with the faith (*De anima* 2, 12). Accordingly, he rejected and refuted Avicenna on many points opposed to the Christian faith.

### Biographical Information

William of Auvergne, also known as William of Paris, was born c. 1180–1190 in Aurillac in the

former Province of Auvergne, southwest of the present Clermond-Ferrand. Little is known of his early life, but after studying at Paris, he became a canon of the cathedral and was a master in theology at the University of Paris by 1223 (Marrone 1983). When Bartholomaeus, bishop of Paris, died in 1227, William was displeased over the man chosen by the canons to replace him. Accordingly, William went to Rome where he persuaded Gregory IX to ordain him bishop and place him over the see of Paris in 1228; here he remained bishop until his death in 1249 (Valois 1880). Although he was strongly reprimanded by Gregory for failing to settle the strike at the University during the years 1229 to 1231, William soon returned to the good graces of the pope for whom he carried out several diplomatic missions. During the strike of the masters and students at the university, he appointed the first members of the mendicant religious orders to chairs in theology at the university, the Franciscan Alexander of Hales and the Dominican, Roland of Cremona, thus giving entree to members of these orders from which would come some of the greats of medieval philosophy and theology (Switalski 1976). William strongly opposed a plurality of benefices and condemned various theological errors in 1241 or 1244, thus setting a pattern for more significant condemnations in the future by bishops of Paris (Bianchi 2005). He also issued strong condemnations of the Talmud in 1248. William was on good terms with the royal family, first with the regent, Blanche of Castille, and then with Louis IX, the future saint. William strongly discouraged Louis against undertaking a crusade, which he vowed to do upon recovering from a fever, but to no avail. By the time Louis returned to Paris, William was dead and was buried at Saint Victor's.

### Philosophy

William was one of the first in the Latin West to give a favorable reception to the Greek and Arabic philosophy that was rapidly becoming available through the recent translations and presenting to Christian Europe a new and scientific view of the world that was often at odds with the Christian

faith. Though the teaching of Aristotle was repeatedly condemned by ecclesiastical authorities during the early thirteenth century, William, the bishop of Paris, clearly read and appreciated the thought of the Greek and Islamic philosophers, especially of Avicenna. He, of course, could not and did not completely accept such philosophy, but upheld it where he could and rejected it where the Christian faith required.

His *Teaching on God in the Mode of Wisdom* (*Magisterium divinale et sapientiale*), which has generally been viewed as one huge summa-like work in the author's intention, but also more recently simply as a way of philosophizing (Corti 1968), was begun in the years before his episcopacy and was continued until his death. The *magisterium* is usually said to consist of seven works: *On the Trinity, or First Principle* (*De trinitate, sive primo principio*), *On the Universe of Creatures* (*De universo creaturarum*), *On the Soul* (*De anima*), *Why God Became Man* (*Cur Deus homo*), *On the Faith and the Laws* (*De fide et legibus*), *On the Sacraments* (*De sacramentis*), *On the Virtues and Morals* (*De virtutibus et moribus*). Thus the whole *magisterium* has the full sweep of the emergence from God of the world, the creation of human beings, as well as their return to God through the redemption, sacraments, virtues, and final reward in heaven. In that respect the *magisterium* has the same plan of emergence from and return to God as works of the later thirteenth century, such as the *Summa theologiae* of Thomas Aquinas. Viewing the *magisterium* as a way of doing philosophy rather than as one huge work has the advantage of allowing one to include other works of William, such as *Divine Rhetoric* (*Rhetorica divina*) and *On Grace* (*De gratia*) under that rubric, for which there seem to be good reasons.

William's works were treated simply as individual works in the *Opera omnia* and were recognized as forming the huge *magisterium* only early in the twentieth century (Kramp 1920, 1921). His extant works, manuscripts, and translations have been recently listed (Ottmann 2005), and advances have been made in their relative and absolute dating (Corti 1968). The *magisterium* contains a more philosophical *primum*

*magisterium*, which aims at demonstrative proofs, within the more theological whole *magisterium*, which aims at the glory of God through the perfection of human souls and their attainment of eternal life, although the two parts of the *magisterium* are not sharply distinguished either in terms of the time of their composition or of their intended order within the *magisterium*.

The present article is limited to four of William's works that contain his main philosophical teachings on God, the created world, the human soul, and ethics. *On the Trinity, or First Principle*, the first work in the *magisterium* in terms of temporal composition and intended order, contains a philosophical approach to God as the first principle of creatures as he is known through reason and as the triune God of the Christian faith. The influence of Avicenna on William's thought is clearly seen in his distinction between essence and existence in creatures and in his argument from beings possible in themselves, although actually existing, to God as a being necessary through himself. William, however, rejects and argues against both the Aristotelian and Avicennian arguments for the eternity of the world and argues for the freedom of God in creating the world. William's metaphysics combines an Avicennian account of the structure of the world with Avencebrol's emphasis on the divine will as the explanation of why there is a created world at all (Caster 1996). The Trinitarian part of the work may have been intended more as a demonstrative proof of the Trinity than as a faith-based understanding of the Christian mystery. It, for example, appeals to an Avicennian principle to show that God could generate only one Son (Teske 2006).

The second work in the *magisterium* in terms of the intended order, but not of its time of composition, *The Universe of Creatures* is divided into a first principal part on the universe in general and more specifically on the world of bodily creatures and a second principal part on the spiritual universe, that is, of the separate substances or intelligences, including the good and bad angels. In the first principal part, William takes up some questions on the universe in general. For instance, he argues that there is only one world, rejects the

dualism of good and evil found in the Carthar or Manichaeist view of the world, where he adapts arguments from Avicenna rather than borrows from Augustine (Teske 2006).

William argues against Avicenna's doctrine that from the first intelligence or God only one second intelligence can proceed, and so on with the third, fourth, and others. Although he agrees with the truth of the Avicennian principle that from one as one only something one can proceed, he insists that from God or the first intelligence other things proceed not from the unity of God, but from his will. Against Avicenna William appeals to Avencebrol, a Jewish philosopher, but one whom he takes to be Christian, who held that God created through his word.

William argues against the eternity of the world and develops a concept of divine eternity as all at once, distinguishing it from the sort of eternity that the Aristotelians claimed for the world (Teske 2006). He also employed the sort of arguments ultimately derived from the Greek philosopher, John Philoponus, but perhaps more proximately from kalam arguments of various Islamic thinkers, for the finiteness of past time (Teske 2006). In this respect he anticipated the position of Bonaventure as opposed to that which Aquinas was going to defend.

The three sections of the second part discuss the intelligences, which William understood in terms of Avicennian metaphysics as pure spirits or incorporeal substances, thus clearly departing from the Augustinian view that the angels were composed of matter and form, albeit spiritual matter. William, however, insisted that, unlike the nine Avicennian intelligences that cascaded forth successively after the first, there are many more than nine intelligences or angels in the heavenly court since, as William argues, nine courtiers are far too few even for a respectable royal court on earth. He also holds that they do not necessarily proceed from the first and that they are certainly endowed with wills and are not merely intellects. For otherwise they could have no goodness or virtues. With such important qualifications the separate intelligences are according to William pure spirits ontologically on a par with the angels and demons, to which the remainder of the second

part is devoted, although further discussion of them will be omitted here.

In psychology William is greatly indebted to Avicenna's *De anima*. He endorses the latter's conception of a human being as a spiritual soul, but he expresses his amazement that philosophers have classified the study of the soul as a natural science as opposed to a divine science (*De anima, Prologue*). He critically examines Aristotle's definition of soul as the first act of a body potentially having life, which he fails to understand, and borrows Avicenna's "floating man" argument, quoting it twice, to prove that a human being or soul is not a body (Teske 2005). William divides the powers of the soul into cognitive and moving powers. The cognitive powers include the five external senses, various internal senses, such as the memory, imaginative and estimative powers, and the intellect, while the moving or appetitive powers are divided into a higher moving power, namely, the will, and the lower moving powers, namely, the concupiscible and irascible appetites. William's arguments for the soul's immortality in *On the Soul* closely parallel those found in *On the Immortality of the Soul (De immortalitate animae)*, which had once been attributed to Gundissalinus, but is now accepted as William's work. Hence, the bishop has been cleared of the charge of plagiarism.

William strongly argues against the role of Avicenna's agent intelligence in the acquisition of knowledge. For he saw the agent intelligence, the tenth intelligence, as simply pouring knowledge into souls and, hence, making the acquisition of knowledge an entirely passive reception that does away with all study and effort at learning. He also rejected the Platonic archetypal world of Forms or Ideas, which he knew only through Cicero's translation of part of the *Timaeus*, because he was convinced that such a really real world led to a reduction of the sensible world to something less than real, though like the real world. He also greatly reduced the role of divine illumination, which Augustine had given as a source for our knowledge, to only a few ideas found in both God and creatures, such as being, one, true, and good (Marrone 1983). Despite a common view to the contrary, William did not



have God play the role of the agent intellect (Teske 2006).

Up until the fifth of the seven parts, William treats the essential properties of the soul, such as its incorporeality, indivisibility, and immortality. But then William takes up the fallen nature of the soul, which he argues is a penal condition, of which he claims that Aristotle had no knowledge, although he says that he should have been able to infer it from our present state. Our present state of misery is clearly, William claims, one of punishment that must stem from the first parents' sin. As one of the first Christian thinkers to come into contact with the Aristotelian concept of nature, William was faced with the challenge of trying to reconcile the Augustinian and the Aristotelian concepts of nature. He attempted to combine a philosophical conception of the nature of the soul derived from Avicenna, which remains unchanged in its essentials, with an Augustinian concept of nature, which changed over time. He speaks of the original state of our nature, its present fallen state, which may be somewhat healed by grace, and its future state in glory. According to William our present state of misery is due to our bodies rather than our souls since he claims that God could not and does not create damaged souls; rather, souls suffered damage through their union with bodies. The original condition of our first parents, however, contained many elements that later theologians labeled as preternatural or supernatural (Teske 2006). Clearly William is struggling to integrate an unchanging Aristotelian concept of nature with an Augustinian nature that has changed and will change.

In ethics, William's knowledge of the *Nicomachean Ethics* was limited to the books two and three contained in the *versio vetissima* (Jüssen 1995). In his *On the Virtues*, William criticizes Aristotle's definition of virtue from the *Nicomachean Ethics* and finds fault with other ideas of his, such as that a virtue stands in the mean between two extremes and that a person can have one virtue without the others. He clearly prefers Augustine's account of the cardinal virtues from *De moribus* as four forms of love. He distinguishes three sorts of virtue: natural virtues such as Adam's soul and, it seems, our soul had when

created; consuetudinal or moral virtues, such as those of which Aristotle spoke; and gratuitous virtues, such as Christian faith, hope, and charity, which are infused by God. William compares the consuetudinal virtues to crutches or wooden legs insofar as they repair to some extent the damage done to our natural powers or virtues, but do not completely restore them to their original condition.

William expresses amazement at the fact that Aristotle, by whom he usually means Avicenna, said so much about intellect and little or nothing about will. He argues that the will is most free in its act of willing and refers to it as the king and emperor over the other powers of the soul (Teske 1994). The intellect acts merely as a counselor to the will, and the senses serve as messengers that seek out and bring back information to their king.

## Cross-References

- ▶ [Aristotelianism in the Greek, Latin, Syriac, Arabic, and Hebrew Traditions](#)
- ▶ [Augustine](#)
- ▶ [Avicenna](#)
- ▶ [Being](#)
- ▶ [Boethius](#)
- ▶ [Bonaventure](#)
- ▶ [Dominicus Gundissalinus](#)
- ▶ [Epistemology](#)
- ▶ [Essence and Existence](#)
- ▶ [Ethics](#)
- ▶ [Form and Matter](#)
- ▶ [Ibn Sīnā, Abū 'Alī \(Avicenna\)](#)
- ▶ [John Philoponus](#)
- ▶ [Metaphysics](#)
- ▶ [Thomas Aquinas](#)
- ▶ [Trinity](#)
- ▶ [Virtue and Vice](#)
- ▶ [Will](#)

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## William of Auxerre

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### Abstract

William of Auxerre, (d. 1231), was a secular master, scholastic theologian from the University of Paris, author of the *Summa aurea*, an early, influential "summa" of Christian theology/doctrine, and a *Summa de officiis ecclesiasticis* (*Summa of Ecclesiastical Offices*), a commentary on the mass, was appointed by Pope Gregory IX in 1231 to head a committee charged with examining for errors the "books of Aristotle," later became archdeacon of Beauvais.

## William of Auxerre

Author of the first scholastic *summa* of theology and early *magister* at the University of Paris, William of Auxerre (d. 1231) is a seminal figure in thirteenth-century scholasticism. From the uncertain theological and philosophical climate of the preceding century, William's thought and writing emerge with impressive originality. Both traditional and innovative, his *Summa aurea* incorporates into many traditional theological

topics the methods and teachings of the full scope of Aristotelian philosophy rapidly gaining currency in the early University of Paris. In particular, William breaks new ground in medieval intellectual culture by attempting to give a genuine and considerable role to reason and philosophical argument within the discipline of theology, thus establishing theology as a legitimate science (*scientia*), while also retaining its revealed and supernatural character. On various other fronts, William is a pioneering figure in the development of medieval scholasticism.

Though often overshadowed by such later scholastic luminaries as Aquinas and Scotus, William of Auxerre was a highly regarded university theologian throughout the later Middle Ages, as the nearly 120 surviving manuscripts of his entire *Summa aurea* ("Golden Summa") – not to mention abridgements – manifestly attest. (William also wrote *Summa de officiis ecclesiasticis* (*Summa of Ecclesiastical Offices*), a commentary on the mass.) Later Parisian scholars remembered William for his facility in disputation and his profundity in preaching. Surprisingly little, however, is known with certainty of his life, except that he occupied a prominent place among the theological masters of the nascent University of Paris in the first three decades of the thirteenth century, and was involved in various high-level negotiations between the university and church authorities. Most notable of these was his appointment by Pope Gregory IX in 1231 to head a committee charged with examining for errors the "books of Aristotle" (*Natural Philosophy* and *Metaphysics*) that had already been prohibited at Paris in 1210. William's death in the same year brought this task to naught. A letter of Pope Gregory IX indicates that William was also an archdeacon of Beauvais.

Though it roughly follows the structure of Peter Lombard's *Sentences*, William's *Summa aurea* (so-called by, and reflecting the esteem of, later generations) is arguably the first high-scholastic "*summa*," whose independent structure and dialectical style reflect, respectively, his distinctive theological vision (developed over

decades of university teaching and disputation) and the increasing influence of Aristotelian philosophy on university theology. The work is divided into four books (I – God's existence and nature; II – creation, free will, and sin; III – Christ, salvation, and the virtues; IV – sacraments and eschatology). One of the most intriguing features of the *Summa aurea* is its subtle and implicit engagement with contemporary authors and discussions in the course of explicit treatment of traditional questions and topics. The result for modern readers is the tantalizing sense of being able to hear only one voice in a lively, multilateral debate over the most important issues of the day.

William is one of the first medieval thinkers to grapple with the fuller presentation of Aristotle's philosophy, rapidly emerging at that time. Though he is acquainted with Aristotle's *Physics* and *Metaphysics* and with a partial translation of the *Ethics*, William is especially influenced by the so-called *logica nova* (especially the *Posterior Analytics*), whose conception of genuine *scientia* inspires and informs his attempt to establish theology as a genuine scientific discipline (see below). At the same time, William is also in the vanguard of medieval thinkers, whose appropriation of Aristotelian philosophy is mediated and accompanied by the Stagarite's later Arabic commentators, such as Avicenna and Averroes, whom William clearly knows, though only infrequently quotes by name. Subsequent scholastic generations will assimilate these Arabic interpretations more fully and systematically, but William inaugurates this monumental trend.

William made important contributions, both innovative and influential, on several theological fronts, regarding both scholastic method and content. Perhaps his most far-reaching achievement is in methodology, where he provides a point of departure for subsequent thinkers (e.g., Alexander of Hales, Albert the Great, Bonaventure) in his attempt to provide a crucial and clearly conceived role for reason in the theological enterprise, and thereby to establish its genuinely scientific character. For William, theology begins with the supernatural gift of formed faith, which cannot

be arrived at by prior reasoning. But once established in faith, reason can play a vital role, not merely in refuting heresies and providing a reasonable defense against objections from non-believers, but in extending and deepening the knowledge (*scientia*), and understanding (*intellectus*) of what is believed. William's analogy here is the above-mentioned Aristotelian conception of genuine *scientia*, which begins with first principles that are themselves not proven, but axiomatically self-evident (*principia per se nota*), which are the basis for further knowledge derived logically therefrom. So, for William, the creedal articles of faith (*articula fidei*), given through revelation and embraced with supernatural certitude, are not rationally provable, but once accepted by faith become the basis for further theological knowledge derived logically from them. Rational argument is never the basis of faith, but nonetheless plays a crucial, necessary role in the pursuit of theological truth. Later scholastics will appropriate and develop William's pioneering approach in this regard. William also made important contributions to the theological method in relation to the form of theological discourse, especially its written form. William's *Summa* reflects his pioneering skills at systematic organization, and clear and concise formulation of the abundant and diffuse theological material accumulated by the end of the twelfth century. This is particularly evident in his treatise on the Incarnation, whose topical ordering, clarity of presentation, and precision of analysis marked a new point of departure for later scholastic Christology.

Regarding content, William is something of a Janus-figure in relation to the development of medieval thought. On most topics, he is rather traditional, much indebted to the Augustinian tradition, mediated by intervening figures, such as Boethius, Anselm, and the Victorines. So, for example, William's arguments for God's existence include Anselm's so-called ontological argument, though William identifies that being "than which nothing greater can be conceived" not simply as "God," but as the highest good (*summum bonum*), thus reflecting his proclivity

for a metaphysics of goodness, which seems to have inspired contemporary thinkers, such as Philip the Chancellor's *Summo de Bono*. In general, William's treatment of such divine attributes as the good, being, and unity influenced later thirteenth-century discussions of the so-called transcendentals. On issues of epistemology, moreover, William is an illuminationist in the Augustinian tradition, yet even here he reformulates this teaching in the Aristotelian terms of assimilation of the knower to the known.

Yet, in other respects, William initiates new trends. He was one of the first medieval thinkers, for example, to deploy the distinction between God's absolute and ordained powers, which would be so central to later scholastic debates regarding the divine nature. William also writes the first treatise devoted in its own right to the topic of free will (*liberum arbitrium*). Similarly, William's treatment of the virtues in Book III of the *Summa aurea* sets important developments in train. This massive, systematic analysis of the virtues, constituting nearly the whole of Book III, brings medieval moral theory to a new level of philosophical and theological sophistication and also previews similar attention to virtue among later scholastics. William originated the theological distinction between the perfect happiness proper to God and the imperfect happiness appropriate to created beings, a distinction which Aquinas will later employ in his *Summa theologica*. Again, reflecting his employment of Aristotelian thought within theology, William appears to be one of the first to use the distinction between form and matter in his analysis of the sacraments. Finally, William's teaching on the spiritual senses of the soul draws on the philosophical tradition of the internal senses of the soul.

## Cross-References

- ▶ [Alexander of Hales](#)
- ▶ [Anselm of Canterbury](#)
- ▶ [Aristotelianism in the Greek, Latin, Syriac, Arabic, and Hebrew Traditions](#)

- ▶ Augustine
- ▶ Boethius
- ▶ Divine Power
- ▶ Epistemology
- ▶ Ethics
- ▶ Form and Matter
- ▶ Happiness
- ▶ Ibn Rushd, Muḥammad ibn Aḥmad al-Ḥafīd (Averroes)
- ▶ Ibn Sīnā, Abū ‘Alī (Avicenna)
- ▶ Internal Senses
- ▶ Logic, Arabic, in the Latin Middle Ages
- ▶ Philip the Chancellor
- ▶ Proofs of the Existence of God
- ▶ Thomas Aquinas
- ▶ Virtue and Vice

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## William of Champeaux

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### Abstract

William of Champeaux (d. 1122) is best known as the leading master of dialectic (which included logic, grammar, and rhetoric) at Notre Dame when his more famous student, Peter Abelard, came there to study. William allegedly stopped teaching at that centre around 1108, shortly after his realist defenses on the controversial topic of the status of universals were attacked by Abelard, and he took up as a canon regular at the monastery at Saint Victor (Abelard, *Historia calamitatum*, ed. Monfrin J. Vrin, Paris, 1967); there is no historical evidence to support the oft-repeated claim that William founded that famous monastery and school, his name is not found among the writings of the Victorines, and upon his death he was buried elsewhere, at Clairvaux (Mews, Abelard and his legacy. Ashgate, Variorum, Aldershot, 2001). William’s educational background in dialectic is unknown, but he studied under and taught with Anselm of Laon, and their theological work is preserved in the *Liber pancrisis* (William of Champeaux, *Sententiae. Psychologie et Morale au XII<sup>e</sup> et XIII<sup>e</sup> siècles*, ed. Lottin O. Duculot, Gembloux, pp 190–227, 1959), the first known work to publish together the writings of both modern, practicing theologians and patristic sources. After his retirement from teaching, William eventually became Bishop of Châlons-sur-Marne, and belonged to circles of ecclesiastical influence (Mews, *Logica in the service of philosophy: William of Champeaux and his influence on the study of language and theology in the twelfth century*. In: Rosier-Catach I (ed) *Les Glosulae super Priscianum*, Guillaume de Champeaux, Abélard: arts du langage et théologie aux confins des XI<sup>e</sup>-XII<sup>e</sup>, les conditions enjeux d’une mutation, forthcoming).

Although none of his writings has been thought to survive, recently a number of anonymous commentaries and tracts on dialectic datable to the early years of the twelfth century have been either attributed to William or said to contain his teachings (Iwakuma 1993, 1999, 2003, 2008). None of these claims has been definitely proven, and scholars recognize that more work is yet to be done to sort out the authorship of these materials and their relationships to one another and to known masters. Complicating this project is that explicit references to a master's view are normally given by abbreviating a name to a sole initial, and given fluid spelling and orthography it is difficult to judge whether every "W," "G," or "V" should apply to the same person (i.e., William), especially when the variety of initials can be found in one and the same text (e.g., Abelard's *Dialectica*, which also contains references to "My teacher (magister noster)").

William's realist theories of universals are the best known part of his philosophy. The defeat of these two positions led, according to Abelard, to William's lectures on dialectic "falling to pieces" (Abelard 1967); John of Salisbury, writing years later, reports that William "is convicted of error by his own writings" (John of Salisbury 1991). William's first theory is known as "Material Essence Realism": each existing thing possesses a material essence, which William identifies as the species of the individual, or genus of the species. What makes one individual different from another individual that shares the same material essence (i.e., is of the same species) is the addition of particular, accidental forms. Abelard launched a series of arguments against William's theory, after which William took up anew with what is called "Indifference Realism": individuals (x, y) of the same species (A) are indifferently the same insofar as they do not differ in being (A) (Abelard 1919; Spade 1994; King 2004). This second position, too, was crushed by Abelard, and no further theories on this question by William are known. Abelard's attacks on William took place during William's lectures on rhetoric. It is possible that William's rhetorical teachings have been identified (Fredborg 1976).

The details of William's theory of signification are unknown, although it is certain that he distinguished between literal and figurative locutions, appealing to the latter to resolve problems such as the signification of expressions containing apparently contradictory terms (e.g., "dead man," where "man" means "rational, mortal animal"). In his theological writings, William advocated the view that terms used to refer to God are to be taken in a sense that is transferred from their usual meaning, namely what they were imposed (on things in the created world) to signify. Abelard, followed by other twelfth century figures, developed William's improper or figurative signification into a doctrine of *translatio* in order to determine the signification of expressions that are affected by their context (Rosier-Catach 1999).

William likely borrowed the notion of improper signification from the discipline of grammar. References to a Master G and W in a set of notes on a widely copied commentary on Priscian's *Institutiones grammaticae* have suggested William's important role in the development of grammatical theorizing at this time (Rosier-Catach, forthcoming). William believed that grammar and dialectic present two different theories about the sense of propositions and predicative questions, based on the answers that each discipline's authorities give to the question of the proper relation between the subject, predicate, and copula. "Snow is white," according to the grammarian, means that snow is a white thing, and the terms "snow" and "white" thereby co-refer; according to the dialectician, it means that whiteness inheres in snow. Mocked by one scholar for thinking that meaning is determined according to disciplinary boundaries (where the author wonders whether there is not also an ethical and a physical sense), the view is criticized at length by Abelard who urged that propositions and predicational questions have a single sense.

Several of William's opinions are given in anonymous discussions of Boethius treatment of topical reasoning, and a number of these are criticized by Abelard elsewhere (Green-Pedersen 1974; Martin 2004). William seems to have held that the force of a topical argument is the thing referred to or understood itself, such that in the



consequence “if Socrates is man, Socrates is animal,” *man* provides the force. The *locus differentia* is the relation (*habitus*), for example, speciality, generality, equality, and so on, that holds between the things referred to. Each maximal proposition generates a multitude of meanings, for example, “Whatever is predicated of the species is predicated of the genus” contains as its meanings “if it is man it is animal,” and “if it is pearl, it is stone” (Green-Pedersen 1974). This view is variously criticized by the anonymous commentator reporting it and by Abelard. William also added additional *loci* to Boethius’ list, including the *loci* from the predicate and the subject, and from the antecedent, consequent, or either of these through contraposition. An anonymous logic primer, the *Introductiones secundum Wilgelmum* (Iwakuma 1993) includes some but not all of these additional *loci*. Possibly associated with William’s teachings or his followers, this primer exemplifies several features of topical theory of which Abelard was deeply critical, such as the failure to distinguish between the rules for syllogistic and topical reasoning (Abelard 1969; Martin 2004).

William of Champeaux is an important figure whose dialectical views provoked much response during the volatile period of the early twelfth century. Snippets of William’s other views can be found throughout the anonymous commentaries from this period (Iwakuma 1999). We will be in a better position to understand his theories once more of the anonymous commentaries and tracts from this period are critically edited and studied.

## Cross-References

- ▶ [Peter Abelard](#)
- ▶ [Realism](#)
- ▶ [Universals](#)

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## William of Ockham

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### Abstract

William of Ockham, most famous for “Ockham’s Razor,” was an English Franciscan theological and philosophical author whose academic work was mostly done in England. He never became a Master of Theology, but he did teach at Oxford from 1317 to 1319, commenting there on the “Sentences of Peter Lombard.” He earned in the Middle Ages the title “Venerable Inceptor,” so it is presumed that he began the early ceremony (the *inceptio*) that formally initiated entry into the rank of Master. However, he was stopped en route. “Ockham’s Razor” is essentially the principle of parsimony. This principle, established long before Ockham, gained its name from him because of his more frequent appeal to this device in all the areas of his theology and philosophy.

William of Ockham, an English Franciscan theologian and philosopher, was born around 1287 in Ockham, a hamlet in Surrey that is southwest of London. He joined the Franciscans as a teenager and began his studies at their convent in London. Although this house of studies was a provincial *studium*, not a general or international *studium*, it had a faculty that traditionally had trained in theology at the University of Paris. There William received his preparatory studies in the seven

liberal arts and philosophy and did his first studies in Bible and the *Sentences* of Peter Lombard. He pursued his advanced studies in theology at Oxford and commented as a *baccalarius sententiarum* (Bachelor of the *Sentences*) on Peter Lombard’s work from 1317 to 1319. His honorific title “Venerable Inceptor” suggests that he had taken the first step toward becoming a Master of Theology at Oxford. However, he never went beyond the *inceptio* ceremony or formal university initiation rite. Quite likely he was prevented from becoming a Master of Theology by some of the masters who challenged his teachings or by John Lutterell, the chancellor of the university who later accused Ockham of heresy. At this point he returned to teach in London at the Franciscan *studium*.

Although the details of Ockham’s coming to Avignon are not all clear, we know that Pope John XXII summoned Ockham to Avignon and appointed a commission to examine the erroneous and heretical charges that masters of theology had brought against him. No formal condemnation was ever issued by the pope; Ockham simply was forbidden to leave Avignon. At this point, however, the direction of Ockham’s life was about to change. The chief superior of the Franciscans, Michael of Cesena, who had been feuding with Pope John XXII over the nature of Franciscan poverty, was summoned to Avignon. He ordered Ockham to study previous papal documents regarding the Franciscan rule to see if John XXII’s stance violated them. Ockham concluded that the pope in fact had contradicted earlier papal constitutions, held false views concerning the nature of Apostolic poverty, had thus fallen into heresy, and thereby surrendered his right to the throne of Peter. When Pope John XXII called a chapter of the Franciscans to elect a new superior to lead the Order, Michael of Cesena, Ockham, and two other Franciscans fled Avignon on May 26, 1328. They were automatically excommunicated.

Ockham and the other three Franciscans arrived in Pisa in September, 1328 and there joined up with a strong enemy of Pope John XXII, Ludwig of Bavaria. Ludwig, whose election as the Holy Roman Emperor was not

recognized by the pope, invited them into his service. When the emperor returned to Munich in 1330, they went with him and Ockham stayed there until his death. Ockham's first writings in this period were produced with an eye to Pope John XXII (d. 1334), and then to his successors, Benedict XII and Clement VI. Gradually, however, they took on a broader scope. He always claimed to be a faithful Christian and stood willing to submit to the legitimate authorities of the Franciscan Order and the church. He died on April 10, 1347 in Munich and was buried in the Franciscan church there, without ever finding the legitimate authorities that could rescind his excommunication.

## Works

The writings of Ockham are many and were produced in different places. Most of his philosophical and theological works date from his teaching in London and Oxford. His *Quodlibets* were begun in England but completed in Avignon. His political writings all were produced during his late years in Munich. The philosophical writings were works mainly focused on logic and natural philosophy or physics. Some of his logical works were traditional commentaries connected with Aristotle's treatises: (1) *Exposition on Porphyry's "Isagoge"*; (2) *Exposition on the Book of Categories*; (3) *Exposition on the Two Books of the Perihermeneias*; (4) *Exposition on the Two Books of the Sophistical Refutations*. The other logical works are independent of the texts of Aristotle's *Organon*. The most impressive is (1) the *Summa logicae*, a very lengthy unified treatise on the whole of logic. The previous general logic works of Peter of Spain, William of Sherwood, Roger Bacon, and Lambert of Auxerre are in reality collections of logical treatises on different subjects. In contrast, the *Summa logicae* is an integrated whole. Two other works on logic attributed to William are (2) *The Compendium of Logic* and (3) *An Elementary Logic*. The *Compendium* is not a summary text of the *Summa logicae* but a short rendition of the basic positions of Ockham's logic. The *Elementarium* is a beginner's logic

text that is in agreement with Ockham's authentic work. It is a work that leaves out any theological applications, so in this way it differs noticeably from the *Summa logicae*. The last two works have had their authenticity challenged, but they contain nothing that contradicts Ockham's teachings. The author of the *Elementarium* refers to his own *Logica* and it is hard to find someone other than Ockham who holds the positions that the *Elementarium* and the *Summa logicae* hold in common.

The attention that Ockham gave to philosophical matters centered on natural philosophy. All such works were based on the doctrine of Aristotle's *Physics*. He has four works in this area of study: (1) *Exposition on the Books of the Physics*; (2) *Questions on the Books of the Physics*; (3) *A Summula of the Books of the Physics*; and (4) *Brief Summa of the Physics*. Ockham's *Exposition* is a long, detailed study of the text of Aristotle's *Physics*, the largest of his philosophical works. The *Questions* follows the alternative form of a commentary: it just poses the questions that arise from the text and presents them in a form that suggests they are William's questions rather than Aristotle's. The *Summula* is an incomplete work covering only the materials of the first few books of Aristotle's *Physics*. It provides the essence of Ockham's positions in the form of an exposition. Remarks made in the prologue have led a recent specialist in Ockham's Avignon period (*Franciscan Studies* 46 [1986]: 70–71) to suggest that it was written there. The *Brief Summa* is a sketch of each of the books of Aristotle's *Physics* that one might consider a digest of the *Expositio*; however, it provides a summary of the whole of Book VIII which stops after chapter 2 in Ockham's own *Expositio*.

William's theological writings are likewise numerous: (1) *Scriptum in primum librum sententiarum* (*Written Commentary on Book One of the Sentences*); (2) *Reportationes in libros II–IV sententiarum* (*Student Accounts of His Lectures on Books II–IV of the Sentences*); (3) *Seven Quodlibets*; (4) *Treatise on the Sacrament of the Altar*; (5) *Treatise on the Body of Christ* (also called *The Treatise on Quantity*); (6) *Treatise on*

*Predestination and on God's Foreknowledge and Future Contingents*; (7) *Quaestiones variae* (*A Collection of Various Questions*). The *Scriptum* or *Written Commentary* is the text of Ockham himself. Though it is a single work, William made changes to his text which are indicated as additions or clarifications in the recent Latin edition of his works. The *Reportationes* for Books II, III, and IV of the *Sentences* are the reports or accounts of very able students. Some of the *Seven Quodlibets* certainly are based on disputes carried on in England but other elements and the final redaction of this work indicate that it was formally completed in Avignon. The next two works, on the Eucharist, are *A Treatise on Quantity*, since a great deal of the discussion in these works centers on issues of quantity related to the Eucharist, and *On the Body of Christ*. It is possible that these works also might have ties to Avignon. At one time both treatises together were called *On the Sacrament of the Altar*. The *Treatise on Predestination and Foreknowledge* covers much the same material as is found in discussions of God's knowledge and power in the late distinctions of Ockham's *Scriptum on Book I of the Sentences*. The *Various Questions* were disputed questions that were edited as parts of the *Reportationes in II–IV Sententiarum* back in 1495. For the most part they are found in manuscripts of the *Reportationes*, but they really do not belong there. In the recent edition of Ockham's *Opera theologica* they are published separately along with an independent question *On the Connection of the Virtues* which is not found among the manuscripts that have the *Reportationes*.

Ockham's political and polemical writings, dating from his years in Munich, are also many: (1) *The Work of Ninety Days*; (2) *A Letter to the Friars Minor*; (3) *A Dialogue*; (4) *On the Teachings of Pope John XXII*; (5) *Compendium of the Errors of Pope John XXII*; (6) *Letter Against John XXII*; (7) *Letter Against Benedict XII*; (8) *Allegations Concerning Imperial Power*; (9) *Eight Questions on the Power of the Pope*; (10) *Treatise on the Power of Emperors and Pontiffs*; (11) *Consultation on a Marriage Case*; (12) *A Brief Declaration on Tyrannical Power*.

## Philosophy and Theology

By the time of William of Ockham, the university view of the nature of theology had long been debated. Key figures, such as Thomas Aquinas, Henry of Ghent, Godfrey of Fontaines, John Duns Scotus, and Peter Auriol, had pushed the discussion concerning the nature of theology to the point that the term "theology" came to mean either the study of the Scriptures, or deductive theology or declarative theology. The last two technical expressions pointed to different ways of studying the contents of the Christian scriptures. Each approach used philosophy in different ways. Deductive theology received its name from its primary role: a deductive theologian assumed as true certain basic teachings of the Scriptures, such as the truths summarized in the creed of the church. Reason or philosophy could not prove such truths; they were accepted by faith. However, once the theologians accepted them as true, they could assume them as premises and search to see if they could find other premises that might allow them to draw further conclusions. When they found a suitable necessary premise, then they could draw a conclusion that would also be necessary. When they found a strong contingent premise, their drawn conclusion would be contingent, but a strong theological conclusion. In short, the first option would produce theological certainty; the second option would develop theological opinions. Deductive theologians aimed to have their theological opinions to be as strong as possible, so they tended in lieu of certainty to pursue premises that were most probable. The deductive approach thus demanded the strongest arguments and modeled its procedures on the *Posterior Analytics*, Aristotle's book on demonstration. Pursuing this method, theologians realized that if they started with premises that were accepted on faith, they differed from Aristotle who started with self-evident or evident premises. Still, their method itself was similar and they could claim that they were at least doing "a science of the faith." They could go further and see what kind of arguments would bring them even closer to science as Aristotle saw it. They could

try to find arguments that would demonstrate things about God and his attributes, so that even in an Aristotelian sense they would have demonstrated or necessary naturally known conclusions about God or the works of God. This made the logic of demonstration and the study of metaphysics and physics very important to the deductive theologian.

The declarative theologian approached things differently. He too started with the main truths of Christian faith. However, he did not deduce further conclusions. He tried to bring understanding to the articles of the Creed. Following St. Augustine and St. Anselm, the declarative theologian concentrated mostly on truths the church accepted on faith and then asked if he could find supporting or confirming arguments for the believed truths. He knew that many of the things Christians believed could not be demonstrated; still he knew that if God were not contradictory, then what he revealed in the Scriptures could not contradict his gift of reason when it was used properly. The declarative theologian still proceeded according to logic, but he did not take the model of demonstration in the *Posterior Analytics* as his primary guide. Like Augustine and Anselm, he aimed at bringing understanding to the truths accepted on faith. He asked: what causes misunderstanding? He realized that there were many things that could confuse believers. Sloppy definitions cause misunderstanding. Weak analogies cause misunderstanding. Lack of supporting reasons leads to hesitation regarding things that are believed. Opponents, attackers, and heretics also cause confusion. The declarative theologian knew then that his task was to find clearer definitions that help understanding. He needed to discover better analogies and supporting arguments gained mainly from a knowledge of the natural world that might bring some recovery from doubt and confusion. Finally, he needed to show the weaknesses in positions that opposed or distorted what he knows by faith must be true. These are the main tasks of the declarative theologian as a theologian. Like the deductive theologian, he might also examine what about God and creation might be demonstrated, but he would call it metaphysics

rather than theology. He might want to discover what new necessary truths of faith he might deduce; but realizing how limited is the knowledge of necessary evident truth that might help in this endeavor, he tended to concentrate on whatever probable or confirming arguments would help him best to refute heretics and critics. William of Ockham, like many of his predecessors mentioned above, was both a deductive and a declarative theologian. To achieve the goals of both approaches to theology, he had to pursue logic in all its areas and dimensions, metaphysics as a science that searches for what is necessary and certain, and physics as a scientific portrait of creation.

## Logic

The *Summa logicae* (*Opera philosophica* I) is Ockham's text dealing with the whole of logic. Its principal positive aim is to produce scientific thinking. It sets the necessary directions for doing so, but at the same time, most explicitly in its treatment of fallacies (*Summa logicae*, 749ss.), it indicates that the Scriptures, the writings of the fathers and even the writings of the philosophers often speak rhetorically rather than logically. St. Augustine at the very beginning of his *De trinitate* cautions his readers about speech that says that God remembers or forgets, even though the Scriptures (*Psalms* 13, 1) say: "How long, O Lord? Will you forget me forever?" St. Anselm, in chapter 16 of his *Monologion*, following the lead of St. Augustine in the opening chapter of VII *De trinitate*, corrects the language coming from the church fathers that says "God has wisdom" or "God has justice" instead of "God is wisdom" and "God is justice." Ockham tells us that Aristotle himself in his natural philosophy stressed that it is necessary to clarify the meanings of statements such as "motion and time differ" and "a statue is composed of iron and its shape" before agreeing or disagreeing. Ockham's message is that even philosophers and theologians at times speak according to a common parlance. It has to be noted, however, that there is a common

parlance which is that of the broad community and there is also a common parlance (*usus loquendi*) among philosophers and patristic and medieval theologians when they speak or write. According to Ockham, his readers at times realized that this was the case; often, however, they did not. Logic, when dealing with philosophers and theologians of the past, had to teach readers how to decode or reconstruct statements to render them accurate. First, they had to put the statements into their proper form, and then they had to judge the proper form in terms of their truth.

### Ockham's Theory of Supposition

Ockham inherited significant contributions from Walter Burley's *Treatise on Suppositions*. However, the criticism of Ockham's *Summa logicae* by Burley in his *De puritate artis logicae* shows their dramatic differences. For both, supposition is the characteristic of a term as it functions in a proposition, whereby it refers to a thing (Personal Supposition), to a concept in the mind (Simple Supposition), or to itself as a spoken or written term (Material Supposition). The supposition of a term tells us for what it stands or supposits. In the proposition "A man is running," "man" stands for any man who is presently running. In the proposition "Man is monosyllabic," "man" supposits for the word "man." In the proposition "Man is an animal," "man," according to Walter Burley, supposits or stands for the universal essence of man. For Ockham, in the same proposition "man" stands for concrete individual men. For William, there is no universal essence or reality in men, as Burley contends. Men are, for Ockham, essentially alike, and they are essentially alike prior to any action of our minds; yet, there is no essential "likeness" in them. Ockham's theory of supposition in this case presupposes his theory of universals. He denies the exaggerated realism he found in Burley's early writings. It is the same exaggerated realism that Walter also defends in his later *De puritate* where he admits that universal essences are in individuals. Ockham's theory of supposition extends to all areas of scientific study.

### Ockham's Portrait of the Categories

There are for Ockham, as was just said, no universal substances. There are only individual substances. Such individual substances, then, are realities, whereas universal substances are concepts. For Ockham, some qualities are also realities. However, some are not. If the grass you see is green, it is because green is an inhering quality of the grass. If two white men are white, each has whiteness as a quality in them. They are thereby also alike or similar to one another insofar as each is really white. Yet, even though they are really alike according to the accident of whiteness that each has, this does not mean that there is a quality of "likeness" in them. Twins also are alike, really and essentially alike, because both are human beings; but they do not have "twinness" in them as an inhering real quality expressing that they were born of the same mother within a short period of one another. Men also are really tall and really short, but when we speak of the tall one being taller than the short one, the relation between them does not demand that we admit a quality of tallness in a man whom we might describe in common parlance as "really tall." When, then, we deal with the Aristotelian categories and want to speak scientifically or precisely, we have to ask for what realities do our terms expressing substances, qualities, quantities, relations, and the other categories supposit. They do not all supposit for directly corresponding realities.

### The Realities of Natural Philosophy

As a general point, Ockham notes that when we use nouns we are tempted to think that there are realities that directly correspond to them. Due to common parlance, we might believe that there is a reality called "weather," "a cold spell," or "a day." Ockham noted that according to the common parlance of natural philosophers, "motion" and "sudden change" are spoken of as if they were actual realities in themselves. We might be led to think that when we have nouns for them we must reify



all things spoken of in natural philosophy. This is not how Aristotle proceeds. If we follow him, we have to search for what exactly nouns or noun-expressions like “motion” or “sudden change” supposit when we, in our common way of speaking in natural philosophy, say that motion and sudden change exist. According to Ockham, Aristotle’s portraits of motion or of sudden change are such that one could best represent the realities corresponding to them by substituting the following descriptions for them. “Motion” is a mobile thing that now coexists at a part of a place where it did not coexist before. “Sudden change” is that which signifies that some form is acquired all at once. Many expressions of natural philosophy thus must be decoded, if we are to understand them precisely and not create fictional realities representing them.

### Ockham’s Razor

Ockham is most famous for using the principle of parsimony in his writings: denying universal realities, reducing the realities often associated with the categories, employing his razor wherever relevant. In its original presentation the razor or principle of parsimony was a principle enunciated by Aristotle in Books I and VII of his *Physics* (188a 17–18 and 259a 8–15): “Plurality must not be admitted without necessity.” William appealed to it in the very first question of his Prologue to *Book I of the Sentences* in his discussion of the distinction between intuitive and abstractive cognition (*Opera theologica* I, 74–75). We can see from the discussions above concerning supposition, the categories and natural philosophy that he was ridding the world of extra realities he considered unnecessary. One of his chief targets was John Duns Scotus and the metaphysical principle of *haecceitas* (thisness) that Scotus employed to explain the distinctness of individuals within a species. In the *Summa logicae* (*Opera philosophica* I, 772) William tells us that the proposition “The ‘thisness’ of Socrates is something” can be understood in two ways: it can mean

that the “thisness”, which is a thing distinct from other “thisnesses”, is something or it can mean that Socrates who is this man or this creature or this being is something. Ockham thinks it is so evident which is correct, that he does not explicitly tell you which choice is his. If it was evident to him which was the correct choice, it was not evident to Walter Chatton. Walter, a great defender of Duns Scotus, was teaching at London with Ockham, in the years before Ockham was called to Avignon. Chatton’s challenge to Ockham was his “rule” or “anti-razor” which he formulated in this way: “If three things are not enough to verify an affirmative proposition about things, a fourth must be added, and so on.” In brief, he was arguing that one must not posit less than are necessary. In response, in *Quodlibet VII*, q. 1 (*Opera theologica* IX, 704, 17–19) Ockham casts his razor in corresponding new terms: “When a proposition is verified of things, if three or two things suffice for its truth, it is not necessary to posit a fourth,” etc.

### Metaphysics and Theology as a Science

The deductive theologian, as explained above, had reason to pursue philosophy in the strongest possible way: he aimed at gaining certainty. Even if his subject matter could deliver only probable conclusions, he aimed at the highest type of probability. His greatest helper, then, was metaphysics. If he wanted to deduce further certain truths from a faith premise that was certain, such as an article of the Creed, then he needed either another certain faith premise or a metaphysical premise. If he wanted to demonstrate by reason some truth about God and his attributes, then he was actually doing metaphysics. Ockham, in his role as a deductive theologian, also was a metaphysician. This is evident in his defense of the univocal concept of being as providing the necessary common ground for arguments concerning the existence of God and the divine attributes. Ockham denies any univocal reality between God and creatures, but he admits a univocal concept that

is a common concept, not a proper one which would include the differences of “infinite” and “finite” that distinguish God from creatures. Often he is accused of nominalism, but certainly he is not a nominalist in the sense of Hobbes’ non-spiritual nominalism. Ockham denies that there are universal essences or realities, but he does admit that there are universal concepts in the mind, so he might justly be labeled a conceptualist. He is, nonetheless, not an idealistic conceptualist like Kant, where universality comes from the mind and the way it organizes. Ockham’s concepts have their source in the objects. Men are essentially alike, even though they do not have, according to Ockham, a further common human likeness in them beyond their actually being men. He might more accurately be called a realistic conceptualist.

### The Absolute and Ordained Power of God

Among the attributes of God that Ockham discusses is divine omnipotence or the power of God. There is a traditional distinction regarding God’s power that Ockham inherits: God’s absolute power and God’s ordained power. He discusses this distinction at length in *Book I of the Sentences*, and particularly in the context of talking about grace. In the *Summa logicae* (*Opera philosophica* I, 777), he gives a brief helpful way of understanding God’s so-called “two powers.” “This proposition ‘God by his absolute power can accept [for eternal life] someone who does not have grace but not by his ordained power’ is ambiguous. One meaning is that God by one power, which is absolute and not ordained, can accept someone without grace, and through one other power, which is ordained and not absolute, cannot accept him, as if there were two powers in God and that through one of them he could do this and not through another. This way of understanding it is false. In another way, the original proposition is taken improperly as though it were substituted for this statement: ‘God can

accept someone who does not have [created] grace informing his soul, because doing so does not entail a contradiction, and yet God ordained that this would never take place.’” Here we see Ockham using his razor, we watch him decoding the original statement, and we thereby come to understand that there are not two competing powers in God.

### Ockham’s Moral Theory

Within the context of natural morality, Ockham joins the many medievals who, following Aristotle, thought of ethics as being a practical science where man pursues the fulfillment of his nature that brings happiness. Motivation, however, also plays a major part in his moral philosophy. In his question *On the Connection of the Virtues*, William stresses that no one acts virtuously if he does not act with knowledge and freedom. The basic virtuous act is one where “the intellect dictates that a particular just work should be done at such a place and time for the sake of the intrinsic worth of the deed or for the sake of peace or some such thing, and the will elicits an act of willing such deeds in conformity with the dictates of the intellect” (*Opera theologica* VIII, 335). William judges that one would deserve more respect if beyond this basic expectation one were to do this act when it costs a price, e.g., death in honor for one’s country, which right reason would tell us we should be willing to pay. An even higher level of respect is due when one acts for no other motive than that right reason demands it. Taking into account theological motives, there can be even higher motives, e.g., doing something for the love of God. Motives are important for Ockham’s doctrine of morality, but they are not the only determinants of morality. Ockham’s theological considerations will also deal with further dimensions of the moral life – going beyond what human nature demands. This leads him into discussions of obedience in regard to the divine laws revealed in the Bible and theological

discussions of merit, which consider the conditions necessary for moral actions to be also meritorious actions, i.e., worthy of eternal beatitude.

## Political Writings

William's political interests were primarily stimulated by Michael of Cesena, who, as head of the Franciscan order, was feuding in Avignon with Pope John XXII over the Franciscan view of poverty. Michael and his Franciscan followers believed that their vocation was to imitate their vision of the poverty of Christ and the apostles. They appealed to the bull *Exiit qui seminat* promulgated by Nicholas III in 1279. This bull set up the arrangement that the papacy held ownership of the goods that were not owned but simply used by the friars. In various bulls in the 1320s, John XXII rejected this arrangement and also declared it heretical to deny that Christ and the apostles had rights of ownership in regard to the things they used. Asked by Michael to examine the documents and to judge the legitimacy of John XXII's claims, William wrote the *Letter to the Friars Minor* in 1334, where he concluded that many of John's pronouncements were "heretical, erroneous, silly, ridiculous, fantastic, insane and defamatory" (*Letter...*, 3). In *The Work of Ninety Days*, written at the same time, William criticized in detail John's errors which he listed in the previous letter, and also challenged John's claim that Christ, both as divine and human, was universal king and lord of all things. In this work, Ockham provided the basic definitions and distinctions that he would unfurl later, in the *Dialogus*, as a full-blown treatise that would discuss the government of the church and lay political authority. His treatment of both types of government is extensive and shows that William in his theory concerning governments goes far beyond the immediacy of the political struggles between Pope John XXII and Ludwig of Bavaria. He basically defends the position that ecclesiastical and political societies should, except in prudently defined instances, operate independently of one another.

## Cross-References

- ▶ [Anselm of Canterbury](#)
- ▶ [Aristotelianism in the Greek, Latin, Syriac, Arabic, and Hebrew Traditions](#)
- ▶ [Augustine](#)
- ▶ [John Duns Scotus](#)
- ▶ [Natural Philosophy](#)
- ▶ [Supposition Theory](#)
- ▶ [Thomas Aquinas](#)
- ▶ [Universals](#)
- ▶ [Walter Burley](#)
- ▶ [Walter Chatton](#)

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## William of Sherwood

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### Abstract

William of Sherwood was an English logician of the thirteenth century, whose *Introduction to Logic*, covering the standard logical syllabus of the day, presented a version of supposition theory that, unlike that of Peter of Spain, made no ontological commitments unfriendly to nominalism. He also wrote discussions of syncategorematic words, insolubles, and obligations, which develop their teaching from the consideration of sophisms. His work quickly sank into obscurity after his death, but it marks the point at which the new elements of medieval logical thought coalesced into a coherent and stable whole made independent of metaphysical considerations.

William of Sherwood, born between 1200 and 1205 in Nottinghamshire, taught as a Master of Theology at Oxford from 1252, and died between 1266 and 1271. Only his logical works have survived. Though praised by Roger Bacon as a finer logician than Albert the Great, no doubt in part because he agreed with Bacon's own theory of supposition, William quickly sank into obscurity after his death. His work marks the point at which the new elements of medieval logical thought coalesced into a coherent and stable whole, a whole made independent of metaphysical considerations.

William's *Introduction to Logic* contains six chapters covering the standard logic syllabus of the day. The first corresponds to Aristotle's *On Interpretation*, concerning the structure of statements, logical opposition, immediate inferences, and modal terms. The second deals with the five predicables, genus, species, differentia, property, and accident, the topic of Porphyry's *Isagoge*. The third, on syllogism, answers to Aristotle's *Prior*

*Analytiks*. The fourth, on “dialectical” reasoning, draws on Boethius’ *On Different Topics* (*De differentiis topicis*). It deals with the application of principles specific to no particular science, involving such terms as “part” and “cause.” The sixth, on fallacy, is developed from Aristotle’s *Sophistical Refutations*.

The fifth chapter discusses the “properties of terms,” signification, supposition, copulation, and appellation. This represents an entirely medieval development. In William’s version, the signification of a term, the presentation of its signified form to the understanding, is independent of its occurrence in any particular sentence. The meaning of the subject or predicate within the context of a categorical statement is its supposition there. A term “supposits a form” in a given context if its supposition depends on that form. But to know a term’s supposition we must also know what it supposits *for*, roughly, what it refers to. It is what is true of what its terms supposit for that makes a sentence true. For instance, if we were to say “an animal is walking,” the form of animal would be signified by the term “animal,” and the term would supposit the form, but the term would supposit *for* individual animals, since it would only be in virtue of an individual animal’s walking that “an animal is walking” is true.

The term “animal” may signify the the form of animal, but not supposit it. In “Animal is trisyllabic” it supposits itself, the term making the sentence true. If we say it does supposit the form it signifies, it may supposit for what it signifies as well, in three ways, in “animal is a genus,” “humanity is the noblest of creatures,” and “pepper is sold here and at Rome.” If it supposits what it signifies for what falls under what it signifies, this is formal, personal supposition, as in “an animal is walking.” Personal supposition may be confused, when a term supposits for more than one thing, as in “every animal perceives,” or for one (undetermined) thing, as in “an animal is running.” Confused personal supposition is mobile if one can apply the predicate truly to each item supposit for, as in “every animal perceives,” from which it follows that “*this* animal perceives,” or immobile (or merely confused) if one cannot, as in “every donkey is an animal,”

from which we cannot conclude that “every donkey is *this* animal.”

Copulation corresponds to supposition, but belongs to terms such as “white,” which signify accidents. William argues such terms mean only “of this sort,” “of every sort,” or “of some sort,” and signify only in conjunction with a substantive term. One cannot say that “of every sort perceives,” but only “animals of every sort perceive.” If one wants to say something about perceiving, say “perceiving is an accident,” then “perceiving” has supposition, not copulation.

This allows reference to real universals, but William himself assumes that a particular must enter into every actual state of affairs, so a sentence can only be made true by what is true of particulars. His discussion of genus suggests we read “animal is a genus” as “animal is predicable of several particulars differing in species in respect of their essence.” His theory of supposition differs from Peter of Spain’s realist theory in that it can be used within either a nominalist or realist context.

Appellation occurs when a term is taken to supposit only for things that actually exist at the present time.

The theory of supposition did much of the work done in modern logic by quantification theory. It is built around Aristotle’s account of the syllogism, but no artificial logical language was envisioned within which the syntax precisely mirrored the semantics. Logic was done in ordinary Latin, and in the quest to make Latin itself an ideal logical language logicians introduced artificial semantic rules to cover the necessary distinctions and allow exceptionless rules of validity within a Latin syntax. William, at the beginning of this development, is often satisfied simply to note an ambiguity and give an account of it in terms of the properties of terms.

In his *Treatise on Syncategorematic Words*, William considers words other than the subject and predicate terms that alter the supposition of “categorematic” terms. Such “syncategorematic” terms may have no signification of their own, and include “whole,” “all,” “but,” “only,” and others of this sort, as well as such terms as “begins” and “ceases.”

In his discussion, William often introduces “sophisms,” problem statements occurring in the course of a disputation. A set of background conditions is proposed, which must be granted as long as it is consistent, and then the sophism is proposed. The student must respond to it, and all further statements proposed by his opponent, by affirming it if it follows from what he has granted, denying it if it is inconsistent with what he has granted, and assigning it its truth value, or declaring it uncertain if that is unknown, if it is logically independent. The questioner aims to drive the respondent into contradiction, the respondent to avoid this. Sherwood’s smaller treatises, *Obligations*, *On the Assumption of Contraries*, and *Insolubles*, concern such sophisms.

“Insolubles” are self-referential paradoxes, such as “I am now uttering a falsehood.” This sentence cannot be true, for if it is, it is false, but it cannot be false either, since then it must be true. William rejects the suggestion that the one who utters such a sentence “says nothing,” for the statement is grammatical, and its meaning is clear enough so that we can argue from it. One might hold that the statement has to refer to some statement other than itself, because a term cannot supposit for a whole of which it is a part, so that the term “falsehood” in the statement must refer to some other sentence than the sentence it is in. But this rule rejects perfectly harmless sentences, such as “every name signifies some substance,” in which the term “name” surely must be taken to supposit for itself. William himself agrees that the term “falsehood” in the problem sentence cannot refer to the sentence it is in, but for another reason. He invokes the principle of charity, holding that the sentence should be read so that at least it *could* be true. The sentence is false because one is not uttering some other falsehood while uttering it.

The treatise on obligations (i.e., the obligations of the respondent in a logical disputation) deals with a variety of sophisms, among them paradoxes that depend on the influence of the pragmatic context on the meanings of or logical relations between the statements granted. For instance, it is assumed that you have never granted that God exists, but instead hold this to be uncertain. The questioner now asks you if God exists.

The proposition is logically unrelated to what has been granted already, so one must assign it its known truth value. Ordinarily no contradiction is created from following this rule, but here, if you grant that God exists, you are then asked if it is the case that you have never granted that God exists.

## Cross-References

- ▶ [Albert the Great](#)
- ▶ [Boethius’ \*De topicis differentiis\*, Commentaries on](#)
- ▶ [Insolubles](#)
- ▶ [Obligations Logic](#)
- ▶ [Peter of Spain](#)
- ▶ [Quantification](#)
- ▶ [Roger Bacon](#)
- ▶ [Sophisms](#)
- ▶ [Supposition Theory](#)
- ▶ [Syncategoremata](#)
- ▶ [Terms, Properties of](#)

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## William of Ware

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### Abstract

William of Ware was a Franciscan theologian who flourished in the 1290s and into the first years of the fourteenth century. He is remembered primarily as a teacher of John Duns Scotus, and many of his positions on the nature of theology, the subject of metaphysics, ontology, and the will share striking resemblances to the more precise and more complete views ultimately found in Scotus. Moreover, William is also often engaged with the work of Henry of Ghent making him a figure of great importance as a mediating bridge in the well-known intellectual rivalry between Henry and Scotus.

From the town Ware in Hertfordshire near London, William of Ware (fl. 1290–1305) is thought to have flourished primarily in the 1290s. At a young age, he joined the Franciscan order and it is believed, but remains difficult to confirm, that he first read the *Sentences* in the Franciscan *Studium* in Oxford. He may also have lectured on the *Sentences* there, but he is, however, not listed as a *magister* at Oxford and therefore probably never began to teach there as a master of theology. Shortly thereafter, he is thought – but again it is hard to confirm – to have gone to Paris to teach. Throughout the

fourteenth century, William is remembered as the teacher of Scotus, and the inscription on his tomb reads “Magister Gulielmus Varro Praeceptor Scoti.” Despite the inscription, it is not yet clear where and when Scotus, as student, would have encountered William. William is referred to under several titles in scholastic literature, but he is most commonly called the *Doctor Fundatus*.

William's commentary on the *Sentences* is not a commentary in the strictest sense, treating every distinction thoroughly, but is instead a series of major questions occasioned by the text of Lombard. No complete edition currently exists, but several small selections of the text have been edited in various journals.

The work of William is of interest not only because of its inherent value and intense rigor, but also because he is situated within a pivotal moment of late-scholastic thought. He is frequently engaged with the work of his contemporary Henry of Ghent, and when he departs from the views of Henry he shows his value as an innovator, often putting forth positions new to the scholastic tradition. Moreover, William clearly exerts an influence over the thinking of John Duns Scotus, the extent of which is not yet fully known. In light of the amount of attention Scotus gives to the work of Henry of Ghent, the importance of William's mediating role cannot be underestimated. His work is also of preeminent value because of the time and attention he gives to surveying the thought of his immediate predecessors and contemporaries. He dialogues regularly with thinkers as important as Thomas Aquinas, Godfrey of Fontaines, Giles of Rome, and Richard of Mediavilla. He therefore is integral in the preservation, interpretation, and transmission of the scholastic thinking into the fourteenth century and beyond.

William's status as an innovator at a critical juncture is particularly evident in his position taken on the status of theology as a science. After surveying several opinions, William makes a distinction regarding theology that later wins the acceptance of Scotus. There can be theology proper (*theologia in se*) and theology from a human vantage point (*theologia quoad nos*). William maintains that *theologia in se*, from the perspective of God, angels, and the blessed, is indeed

a science. However, contrary to the opinion of Aquinas and Henry of Ghent, *theologia quoad nos* is not a science. William asserts that a science must proceed from principles that are known perfectly in themselves. And while *theologia quoad nos* does proceed from first principles, they are not known evidently, but are only believed. Thus, for the pilgrim, theology is not a science. William, however, is quick to point out that this is in no way due to some fault in the object of such a science. Rather, he explains that God is like the sun; in itself the sun is the most visible thing, but it cannot be looked at with human eyes. God in himself is the most knowable and most evident thing, but to the human eye he remains obscure and unclear on account of his own brilliant clarity.

Such a position further necessitates a strong distinction between the science of metaphysics and theology. William takes the position that while God is not excluded from the science of metaphysics, he is not the exclusive concern of metaphysics. Rather God is only considered in metaphysics inasmuch as he can be known from the natural light of reason. And under this light, God can only be considered as a being among other beings. Theology, on the other hand, considers God as its proper subject, but can do so only through the supernatural light of faith. William's exclusion of a strict definition of theology from the realm of natural reason presents real doubts about what can be known about God without the supernatural light of faith and anticipates restrictions about what metaphysics can ultimately tell us about God.

Despite his cautiousness, William continues to uphold many of the standard metaphysical positions, but at the same time he continues to add nuance and raise questions. For example, William asserts, with tradition, that though the proposition that God exists is not self-evident, it can still be demonstrated by natural reason. However, he claims that the argument from motion is the weakest argument because reason has not shown that God is the only thing that can be self-moved. He notes that nothing prevents the angels from being self-movers, and, owing to his position on the primacy of the will, William suggests that the will could also be self-moved. Consequently, the argument from motion does not show that there

can only be one unmoved mover, but opens up the possibility of several unmoved movers.

Concerning the attributes of God, William presents a position that is at once open to the possibilities of reason, but cautious about its reach. He affirms that we can indeed know something of the "what" of God from his effects. However, he makes a threefold distinction between knowing God through his essence, through his proper concept, and through the concept of another. It is only in this third and removed sense that we can know about God. Every simple perfection found in creatures is able to tell us something about God, not about his perfection simply, but of the modes of his perfection. Here William anticipates Scotus' insistence on our ability to know something about God from the univocal perfections common to both creatures and God.

William demonstrates at once both his willingness to put forward new opinions and his cautiousness with regard to natural reason perhaps nowhere more clearly than in the question regarding the oneness of God. In contrast to the established scholastic tradition of affirming that reason can indeed prove that God is one, William is one of the first scholastics to claim that natural reason is not in fact able to demonstrate such a claim. This position is subsequently adopted by many later scholastics, including William of Ockham, Adam Wodeham, Robert Holcot and Peter of Ailly. Even Scotus, who on this point does not accept his conclusion, alludes to and refutes William's position in his own treatment of the question (*Opus Oxoniense* I, dist. II, q. iii).

His contribution to ontology is also evident in the manner in which he distinguishes the divine attributes. Here, his importance for Scotus is unmistakable. William denies any real distinction between the attributes of God, but he also denies that any distinction between attributes is merely generated by an intellectual act, whether of humans, angels, or God. This is a different kind of distinction, one that has its foundation in the object itself, but is not, strictly speaking, "real." This peculiar type of distinction, while not explicitly named by William, is an evident precursor of the formal distinction made famous by Scotus.

William likewise holds, contra Aquinas, that there is no real distinction between being and essence, but nor is it merely a distinction of reason. The distinction of being and essence is similar to that of the distinction between being, truth, and goodness in creatures. It is found rather than produced, despite the fact that there are no “really” distinct composite parts.

The notion of an objective, but non-real distinction, is also important for William as he rejects the idea that matter is the principle of individuation. In contrast, he asserts that just as an essence has its own existence – that is not “really” distinguishable – so an individual essence has its own individuality through itself. Such ideas on individuality clearly foreshadow Scotus’ full theory of the ultimate formal distinction (the so-called haecceity) as the principle of individuation.

Finally, it would be remiss to ignore altogether William’s position on the will. He asserts the primacy of the will over the intellect, since, as he claims, the object of the will is nobler than the object of the intellect. William holds a position of high respect for the will, stating that the greatest nobility of the human being is in the freedom of the will. Consequently, he claims that nothing determines the will, neither the intellect, nor its object, nor even God. Here again we can see William’s formative influence upon the ultimate position of Scotus, who holds a strikingly similar view.

## Cross-References

- ▶ [Henry of Ghent](#)
- ▶ [John Duns Scotus](#)
- ▶ [Metaphysics](#)

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## Wyclif in the Early Fifteenth Century, Reception of

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### Abstract

The reception of the thought of John Wyclif in Prague in the late fourteenth- and early fifteenth-centuries is important both for understanding late medieval realism, and for appreciating the role Wyclif played in the genesis of the Hussite movement. Stanislaus of Znojmo and Stepan Paleč, along with Jerome of Prague and Jakoubek of Střibro, were profoundly influenced by Wyclif's realism, as was Jan Hus. In addition to the Oxford Realist school, these thinkers are the most important late medieval thinkers to have engaged with Wyclif's philosophy as a viable alternative to Ockhamism and the Aristotelian syntheses of Aquinas and Scotus.

Prague experienced a relatively brief but historically important period in which John Wyclif's thought captured the attention of a large number of Bohemian intellectuals. Charles University had been founded by Charles IV in 1348 in Prague, the first university in Central Europe. The School of Theology was divided into four groups of masters and students: Bavarians, Saxons, Poles, and Bohemians. The former three groups, "the Germans," dominated the curriculum, so the Bohemian group, including scholars from Bohemia, Moravia, and Hungary, sent advanced students to the University of Paris for doctoral study, to expand the Bohemian theological faculty. While at Paris, several Bohemian students developed a strong interest in the Latin Neoplatonism of the twelfth century,

particularly the thought of **William of Conches**. The philosophical realism he described appealed to the Bohemians' interest to present a response to the Ockhamism, Thomism, and Scotism of "the Germans," so copies of William's works, along with the Latin *Timaeus* and Calcidius's commentary, came to Prague in the 1360s.

Among these Bohemian students were Adalbert of Ranconis and Matthias of Janov, who became leaders of this realist school among the Bohemian students in Prague. Matthias composed a landmark critique of the ecclesiastical *status quo* in his *Regulae Veteri et Novi Testamenti* (ca. 1390), grounded thoroughly in a conception of the relation of God to creation evocative of Latin Neoplatonism. Matthias ran afoul of the church in Prague and in 1389 was forced to retract some of his ideas. Adalbert had also studied in Oxford in the 1360s and appears to have met **Richard Fitzralph**. He brought Fitzralph's *De Pauperie Salvatoris* back to Prague in the 1370s. Among the characteristic positions the Bohemians adopted at this point included a hostility toward scholastic thought after the period of **Thomas Aquinas** and **Bonaventure**, a conviction that Scripture was the primary source and authority for all human reasoning, and a preference for the thought of **Augustine**, **Chrysostom**, **Bernard**, and **Anselm**.

By the mid-1380s, Bohemian scholars like Nicholas Faulfisch and Jerome of Prague began to bring John Wyclif's writings to Prague. The appeal was immediate: Wyclif's philosophical realism evoked the Latin Neoplatonism of the School of Chartres but was presented in a semantic-logical language that could engage in dialogue with *Moderni* thinkers. Further, many of his theological criticisms of the church were consonant with the thought of Matthias of Janov, including apocalypticism, frustration with the papacy, and the abuse of ecclesiastical office. Wyclif's thought quickly became identified with the nascent Bohemian theological movement.

It is important to recognize that only a portion of Wyclif's thought took hold in Prague. Wyclif's

atomist physics, his monarchist *dominium* theory, his antifraternal polemics, and the greater part of his logical and hermeneutical thought were copied there but appear to have attracted little attention. His revised *Sentences* commentary, compiled into 13 interrelated treatises entitled *Summa Theologie*, initially attracted the most attention. Of these, two treatises enjoyed great popularity, *De Ideis* and *De Universalibus*. They feature arguments connecting the divine ideas to real universals in a “great chain of being” evocative of the twelfth-century conception and were the subject of many *disputationes*, *quodlibeta*, and *quaestiones* in the 1390s and 1400s. In 197N Frantisek šmahel compiled a catalogue of extant literature from this period, from extended commentaries on Wyclif’s treatises to brief *quaestiones*, containing over 200 separate entries.

The three significant figures for Wyclif’s reception in Prague are Stanislaus of Znojmo (d. 1414), Stephan Paleč (1367–1423), and Jerome of Prague (1378–1416). Later, Stanislaus and Palec would renounce Wyclif in 1409, while Jerome renounced Wyclif under duress at Constance in 1415 and then recanted his renunciation and was executed in 1416. Of the three, Stanislaus has left the most extensive and philosophically interesting analysis of Wyclif’s metaphysics, with a long commentary on *De Universalibus* (1400), a later, shorter commentary on the same topic (1408), and a treatise on the relation of propositional truth values to ontological reality, *De Vero et Falso* (1404). In the first, Stanislaus pursues Wyclif’s reasoning about part-whole relations, the relation of generic and special characteristics within substantial essence, and reframes Wyclif’s discussion of identity and difference by replacing identity with composition. The complexity of this treatise led the nineteenth-century editors of the Wyclif Society to assume that the commentary was actually Wyclif’s *De Universalibus*. *De Vero et Falso* tests the “propositional realism” Wyclif had developed in his logical works, in which individual states of affairs are ontologically isomorphic with the subject-predicate structure of our descriptions of them. Stanislaus teases out tangled questions regarding

the relation of the divine ideas to true statements, ascribing modal operators to true and false statements, and problems about privative or negative propositions’ relations to reality. Stanislaus explores philosophical problems arising from Wyclif’s discussion of mental acts and states, mental and spiritual change over time, and their relation to the nature of morality in his *De Felicitate*, dating from the same decade. Stanislaus’s works are perhaps the fullest philosophical exploration of Wyclif’s thought until contemporary scholars began to analyze it in the late twentieth century.

Stephan Paleč later gained fame for his zealous efforts to oppose Wycliffism, and the bulk of his extant writings fall into this grouping. His earlier works include several *Quaestiones* on the nature of universals, and on the causal power of the divine ideas, and logical treatises in the English logical tradition of **William Heytesbury**, **Richard Billingham**, and other notable figures from Oxford. These include *De Suppositionibus*, *Notabilia confusionum terminorum*, *Notabilia consequentiarum*, and *Notabilia in Richardi Billinghami Tractatum de propositionibus*. Paleč has also been credited with a running summary of the first nine chapters of Wyclif’s *De Universalibus*, but his authorship has recently come into serious question. Jerome of Prague was an active proponent of Wyclif’s philosophy during this period but wrote considerably less than Stanislaus or Palec. His extant *quaestiones* address many of the same issues that characterize the disputations from the period at Prague. Among these are questions on the relation of general truth to specific true propositions, on the convertibility of terms, on the form of universals, and on the relation of universals to the harmony of the perceptible world.

By 1408, Gregory XII had become alarmed at the discussion of Wyclif’s remanentist Eucharistic theology in Prague. Wyclif had argued that transubstantiation was physically and logically impossible and that the bread and wine remained after consecration. Stanislaus and his students did not fully embrace Wyclif’s position but advocated for a refined remanentism that the Archbishop of

Prague was willing to tolerate. Stanislaus and Palec were called to Rome to explain themselves, and 45 articles condemning Wycliffism were published in Prague in May 1408. When Stanislaus and Palec returned, having abjured their Wycliffism, the university had dramatically changed. The emperor had declared that the Czech students' voice was equal to the combined voices of the Saxons, Poles, and Bavarians, and a large number of the "German nation" left the university for Leipzig and Vienna. Of the 45 articles, 3 were directly related to Wyclif's philosophy, while the other 42 were against his theological ideas. A group of six young theologians staged a public defense of Wyclif's thought in 1410, with Hus defending his *De Trinitate*, Jakoubek of Stribro for *De Mandatis Divinis*, Zdislav of Zviřetice for *De Universalibus*, Jan of Jičín for *De Materia et Forma*, and in what was certainly the most comical defense, Simon of Tišnow for *De Probacione Propositionis*, in which Simon engaged in a dialogue with the logic text regarding the dangers a work on propositional semantics posed to Catholic orthodoxy.

Academic drollery came to an end shortly thereafter, when Jan Hus expanded his preaching to include a ringing condemnation of the church based on Wyclif's *De Ecclesia*. The atmosphere for philosophical analysis of Wyclif's thought had vanished, and his ideas were subsumed into the Bohemian reform movement Hus was leading. Wyclif's name and some of his ideas continued to be associated with Hussitism after 1412, but after Hus's death, Wyclif's influence dwindled; with the onset of hostilities between the Hussites and the Church and the Emperor, Wyclif's name was used as a blanket reference for the reform movement, but only in the most general sense.

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# Y

## Yaḥyā ibn ‘Adī

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In the tenth century Baghdad, during the decay of the ‘Abbāsīd Caliphate and in the following Buyid age, the translators were still at work translating into Arabic the last Syriac versions of Greek philosophical works, and revising some of the already available Arabic versions. In addition, an increasingly autonomous and original philosophical discussion was moving its first steps. In this context, we meet Yaḥyā ibn ‘Adī.

Abū Zakariyyā Yaḥyā ibn ‘Adī ibn Ḥamīd ibn Zakariyyā al-Takrītī al-Mantiqī (893–974) is well known through the works of the ancient Arab biographers. Those who mention Yaḥyā b. ‘Adī are al-Mas‘ūdī (d. c. 956) in his *Kitāb al-Tanbīh wa-l-Ishrāf*, Ibn al-Nadīm (990) in the *Kitāb al-Fihrist*, Abū Ḥayyān al-Tawḥīdī (d. 1023?) in the *Muqābasāt* and in the *Kitāb al-Imtā’ wa-l-mu‘ānasa*, al-Bayhaqī (d. c. 1169) in his *Tatimmat ṣiwān al-ḥikma*, Ibn al-Qifṭī (d. 1248) in the *Ta’rīkh al-ḥukamā’*, Ibn Abī Uṣaybi‘a (d. 1270) in the *‘Uyūn al-anbā’ fī ṭabaqāt al-a‘ibbā’*, Ibn al-‘Ibrī, or Barhebraeus (d. 1286), in the *Ta’rīkh*

*mukhtaṣar al-duwal*, the Christian Abū l-Barakāt b. Kabar (d. 1324) in the *Miṣbāḥ al-zulma wa-īḍāḥ al-ḥidma*, Ibn Faḍlallāh al-‘Umārī (d. 1349) in his *Masālik al-abṣār*, and Ḥājji Ḥalīfa (d. 1657) in the *Kashf al-zunūn ‘an asāmī l-kutub wa-l-funūn*.

Yaḥyā ibn ‘Adī belonged to a Jacobite Christian family of Takrīt, an old metropolis of the East, situated on the right bank of the Tigris to the north of Samarra, between Mosul and Baghdad. Later on he moved to Baghdad aiming at studying logic, philosophy, and theology: from Ibn al-Nadīm – who was in close contact with him – and from Ibn al-Qifṭī, we know that in Baghdad Yaḥyā b. ‘Adī had as his teacher the Nestorian Abū Bishr Mattā ibn Yūnus and then Abū Naṣr al-Fārābī. Al-Bayhaqī ascribed to Yaḥyā b. ‘Adī a compendium of the whole corpus of al-Fārābī’s works. Probably he also got in touch, for a short time, with Muḥammad ibn Zakariyyā al-Rāzī: al-Mas‘ūdī reports that Yaḥyā b. ‘Adī’s thought was rooted in al-Rāzī’s metaphysical theory based on the doctrine of the “Pythagoreans” about first philosophy.

He seems to have worked as a professional copyist and bookseller, a job he inherited from his father; in addition, he was a collector of manuscripts. Ibn al-Nadīm himself tells us that he read many books in the handwriting of Yaḥyā b. ‘Adī, and that he got acquainted with many texts in the catalogue of his books, written by his own hand.

He became after Abū Bishr Mattā ibn Yūnus and Abū Naṣr al-Fārābī the *ra'is* (the chief) and the *ustādh* (the teacher) of the *majlis* in Baghdad. This *majlis* was a sort of informal circle in which the participants were motivated by a shared interest in the sciences of the Ancients. The school consisted of a teacher, his home, books, colleagues, pupils, and occasional visitors. On special occasions, large assemblies were convened for discussions. The teacher often dictated texts, usually adding his own comments. In discussion sessions, a question was initially proposed and then theses and antitheses stated in turn (Kraemer 1986).

According to al-Tawḥīdī, in this *majlis* the members were of different religious affiliation: the predominant Christians – Abū 'Alī 'Īsā ibn Ishāq ibn Zur'a (d. 1008), Ibn Suwār ibn al-Khammār (d. 1017), Ibn al-Samḥ (d. 1027), and the Muslims – Abū Sulaymān al-Sijistānī (d. 985), and Abū Ḥayyān al-Tawḥīdī himself (d. 1023).

Following the teaching of Abū Bishr Mattā ibn Yūnus and Abū Naṣr al-Fārābī, the members of the *majlis* were involved in copying and translating ancient philosophical and scientific texts as well as in editing them, as we see testified by the MSS Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale, *ar.* 2346 and Leiden, Universiteitsbibliotheek, *or.* 583, containing respectively Ibn Suwār's edition of the *Organon* and Ibn al-Samḥ's edition of the *Physics*. They were also involved in philosophical speculation about the problem of the relationship between philosophy and religious doctrine. This relationship in the thought of Yaḥyā b. 'Adī and more in general in his school was the object of a debate between G. Graf and A. Périer. In the opinion of Graf, Yaḥyā b. 'Adī conceived of philosophy as the *ancilla theologiae*; on the contrary, Périer maintains that also in his theological works Yaḥyā b. 'Adī was first and foremost a philosopher, and only secondarily a *defensor fidei* in favor of the Jacobite Church. Following the teaching of al-Fārābī, Yaḥyā b. 'Adī considered the theological notions as symbols of philosophical concepts (Périer 1920). In any case, Yaḥyā b. 'Adī

was a prime order apologist of the Christian dogma: he wrote in favor of the monophysite doctrine of the incarnation of Christ, presented a strong critique of Nestorianism, and was a fine exegete of the Scripture.

Ibn Abī Uṣaybi'a tells us that Yaḥyā b. 'Adī had an excellent knowledge of the technique of translation, and translated from Syriac into Arabic. He is credited with the following translations of Aristotelian and related works: the Arabic version of Ishāq b. Ḥunayn's Syriac translation of the *Topics*, together with the commentary of Alexander of Aphrodisias on books I and V–VIII and Ammonius' commentary on books I–IV; the Arabic version of the *Sophistici elenchi* from the Syriac translation of Theophylus of Edessa; the version of a Syriac translation of the *Physics*, book II, together with the commentary of Alexander of Aphrodisias; the version of Alexander's commentary on the *Meteorology*, and finally the versions of books *Lambda* and *My* of Aristotle's *Metaphysics*. According to Ibn al-Nadīm, Yaḥyā b. 'Adī translated book *Mi* of Aristotle's treatise on first philosophy, and Averroes quotes in his *Tafsīr* the translation of book *Lambda* by Yaḥyā b. 'Adī (1070a2–7).

If we give a look at the knowledge of the Aristotelian philosophy in Yaḥyā b. 'Adī's school and at the specific role played by Yaḥyā b. 'Adī in promoting it, the overall picture is impressive. Aristotle's *Organon*, which incorporated Porphyry's *Eisagoge*, was well known. From the *Fihrist* we learn that Abū Sulaymān al-Sijistānī al-Mantiqī, Yaḥyā b. 'Adī's eminent pupil, had asked him to translate the *Categories* and the commentary of Alexander on them. From the Paris MS of the *Organon* mentioned above, we know that Ibn Suwār made use of Yaḥyā b. 'Adī's copy of Ishāq b. Ḥunayn's translation, and Yaḥyā b. 'Adī himself composed a commentary on the *Categories*, based in part on Simplicius' one (quoted by Ibn Suwār in his critical notes). Yaḥyā b. 'Adī also made use of the commentary of his teacher Abū Bishr Mattā ibn Yūnus on the *Prior Analytics*, as appears from the notes included in the Paris MS. According to a colophon

of the Arabic translation of the *Posterior Analytics*, Ibn Suwār used for his edition the copies of the Arabic versions made by Yaḥyā b. ‘Adī and Abū ‘Alī ibn Zur‘a. Yaḥyā b. ‘Adī wrote also a commentary of his own on the *Topics*. He probably wrote a commentary on the *Sophistici elenchi*, and finally he revised the version of the *Poetics* by Abū Bishr Mattā ibn Yūnus.

Yaḥyā b. ‘Adī revised an earlier translation of the *Physics*, book I. Ibn al-Nadīm in the *Fihrist* says that he translated or revised the Arabic translation of Themistius’ commentary on *De caelo et mundo*. He also corrected the Arabic translation of Olympiodorus’ commentary on *De generatione et corruptione* made by Abū Bishr Mattā ibn Yūnus. Al-Qifṭī notes that Yaḥyā b. ‘Adī wrote a commentary on *Alpha elatton* of Aristotle’s *Metaphysics* in Ishāq b. Ḥunayn’s translation: this commentary is extant and is known as the *Tafsīr li-l-maqāla l-ūla min kitāb Aristūṭālīs al-mawsūm bi-Māṭāfūsīqā ay fī Mā ba’d al-ṭabī‘a wa-hiya l-mawsūma bi-Alif al-ṣuḡrā*.

Yaḥyā b. ‘Adī did not limit his interests only to the Aristotelian philosophy: he is credited with the Arabic translations of Plato’s *Laws* and *Timaeus* and wrote many other works on mathematics and physics – especially on the critique of atomism, on the infinite magnitudes, and on the theory of motion – on ethics and on *kalām*. But we get from the accounts of Yaḥyā b. ‘Adī’s activity given by the biographers the impression that he was first of all a commentator and a translator of Aristotle, sharing in his editing and commenting the texts of the ancient Greek philosophers the same critical attitude of the circle of Ḥunayn b. Ishāq, although he did not have any direct access to the Greek sources (Platti 1983).

## Cross-References

- ▶ Abū Bakr al-Rāzī, Muḥammad ibn Zakarīyā’ (Rhazes)
- ▶ Abū Bishr Mattā ibn Yūnus
- ▶ Abū l-Barakāt al-Baḡdādī
- ▶ Abū l-Faraj ibn al-‘Ibrī (Barhebraeus)

- ▶ al-Fārābī, Abū Naṣr
- ▶ Ibn al-Samḥ
- ▶ Ibn Suwār (Ibn al-Khammār)
- ▶ Ibn Zur‘a, ‘Īsā ibn Ishāq
- ▶ al-Tawḥīdī, Abū Ḥayyān

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